

Daria Lazić

## LEXICOGRAPHIC TREATMENT OF VOCABULARY RELATED TO AGE

### The Example of Croatian and Danish

**Abstract** The paper deals with vocabulary related to age and age groups, its semantic and pragmatic characteristics, and challenges it can pose for lexicographic description. The inventory and treatment of lexical items from the domain of age in contemporary Croatian general dictionaries and in the most comprehensive contemporary Danish dictionary are analysed regarding the semantic and pragmatic information provided, as well as the presence of age stereotypes or strategies to mitigate them. In Croatian dictionaries, many terms denoting older people or phenomena relevant to them are not listed. Semantic and pragmatic information, such as connotations or appropriateness, is incomplete and inconsistent, and examples reflect common stereotypes of young and old people. In the Danish dictionary, the inventory of lexical items is more comprehensive, the descriptions are more detailed, and pragmatic information is commonly provided. The examples are mostly realistic and neutral. However, a comparison with entries related to some other social groups indicates a slightly higher tolerance for age-related stereotypes.

**Keywords** critical lexicography; social stereotypes; age; Croatian; Danish

## 1. Introduction

The fact that dictionaries are inseparable from the socio-cultural context in which they are compiled is especially pronounced when it comes to vocabulary related to social groups. Nowadays, following an increase in social sensitivity, dictionaries are often criticized for stereotypical or negative portrayals of social groups, which has incited research interest in the matter. Moreover, the meaning and use of lexical items related to social groups are usually tightly connected to the socio-cultural context. To facilitate proper understanding and use of these items, in addition to describing their denotative meaning, other information might be considered, e.g., pragmatic information such as appropriateness and situational constraints. Potentially offensive content, such as offensive terms or stereotypes that are contained in the typical context of use, is a common issue when dealing with vocabulary related to social groups (Cloete, 2014; Schutz, 2002). The problem is emphasized by the fact that contemporary dictionaries are commonly corpus-based. Corpora can offer valuable information on contexts in which words are used and aspects of meaning stemming from them (e.g., McEnery & Hardie, 2011), but the language use attested in corpora often reflects negative attitudes and stereotypes which exist in society.

Numerous studies on the lexicographic representation of social groups have been conducted within English lexicography, and they have regarded various social

groups and bases of discrimination, e.g., gender (Fournier & Russel, 1992; Moon, 2014), ethnicity and age (Moon, 2014), illness and disability (Norri, 2019). In Croatian and Nordic contexts, studies have mainly covered gender stereotypes (Fjeld, 2015; Pišković, 2017) and editorial practices regarding social sensitivity in particular dictionary projects (e.g., Jensen et al., 2018; Petersson & Sköldbberg, 2020; Trap-Jensen, 2020 for Danish and Swedish). The treatment of lexical items denoting older people in Swedish dictionaries was analysed in Nikula (2008), while in the context of Croatian and Danish lexicography, the representation of age groups in dictionaries has not been investigated.

In the present paper, the inventory and treatment of lexical items related to age and age groups in Croatian contemporary general dictionaries and in the Danish web dictionary *Den Danske Ordbog* (DDO; <https://ordnet.dk/ddo>), the most comprehensive dictionary of contemporary Danish, will be analysed regarding the semantic and pragmatic information provided and the presence of age stereotypes or strategies to mitigate them. The following Croatian dictionaries will be analysed: *Rječnik hrvatskoga jezika* edited by Jure Šonje (RHJ; Šonje, 2000), *Veliki rječnik hrvatskoga standardnog jezika* (VRH; Jojić, 2015), the most recent comprehensive general dictionary, and the online dictionary database *Hrvatski jezični portal* (HJP; <https://hjp.znanje.hr>).

Previous research (Lazić & Mihaljević, 2021) has shown that the representation of social groups, such as gender and ethnic groups, in contemporary Croatian dictionaries is often biased, and improvements could be made to render the descriptions more socially sensitive and inclusive. The comparison with the Danish dictionary DDO has been motivated by the fact that it is continuously expanded and updated, and its articles are revised for stereotypes and outdated perceptions of social groups (Jensen et al., 2018; Trap-Jensen, 2020). It can thus offer insight into alternative lexicographic solutions in that regard.

The purpose of the study is threefold: (1) to outline pragmatic and semantic characteristics of lexical items related to age and their implications for lexicographic description, (2) to identify shortcomings in the treatment of such vocabulary in the existing dictionaries, and (3) to propose guidelines and improvements for future lexicographic work. Regarding the last point, solutions to some issues discussed in the paper which were applied in *Mrežnik* (<https://rjecnik.hr/mreznik>), a new Croatian web dictionary, will be presented.

## 2. Age and Ageism in Society and Language

Age is one of the main criteria for categorising people, along with gender. Gender and age groups appear in all cultures, and they are – unlike some other groups, such as ethnic or religious – based on both biological and social factors. Age is associated with various milestones in our lives (e.g., legal age for driving, parenthood, retirement), and it can affect certain aspects of our lives such as friendship patterns, career, or interests (Schneider, 2005, pp. 466–467). Unlike gender and some other social groups, age is a continuous category. Our perception of age is based on segmenting the life

course into discrete age categories, or age groups. Examples of such groups are baby, toddler, child, teenager, young adult, middle-aged, older adult, and elderly (Swift et al., 2018, p. 2). However, age categories vary in number and age range within a particular category, and category boundaries are often not clear-cut. Age categorisation can also vary by context (e.g., healthcare, sports, family relations), culture, or over time. For example, Swift et al. (2018, p. 2) mention a new age group, centenarians, which has emerged because of extended life expectancy and a growing number of people living to the age of 100.

As with other social categories, certain stereotypes are associated with age groups. Attributes ascribed to group members are both descriptive (e.g., character traits) and prescriptive (e.g., expected behaviour). Some of them are motivated by maturation and biological ageing processes or social structures, while others are mere generalisations (Swift et al., 2018, p. 2). However, although ageing is inevitable, its course and effects can vary greatly, and groups determined based on chronological age measured in years since birth include individuals of very different physical and psychosocial statuses. As pointed out by Schneider (2005, p. 467), the group of people older than 60 is quite heterogeneous – people in their 60s are normally still working, and they are “at the point where energy, income, and wisdom are at their peak.” A decade later, people are usually retired, and health problems are more common. The most negative stereotypes are usually associated with very old people, those over 80.

Stereotypical beliefs can encompass negative, neutral, and positive characteristics. When it comes to age stereotypes, those about older people are most pronounced, given that old age is often viewed negatively as a period of decline in physical and mental abilities, and older people as a group that loses its role in society. However, although negative stereotypes about this social group prevail, some of them are positive (Chasteen, 2002). According to the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002), in which stereotypes are viewed along two dimensions: warmth and competence, perceptions of older people are usually evaluated positively for warmth and negatively for competence (Fiske et al., 2002; Swift et al., 2018). Regarding specific characteristics, some negative ideas about the abilities, personality, and physical condition of older people that appear in the research literature are reduced ability to acquire new skills, lack of creativity, reduced adaptability, poor technological skills, poor driving, sluggishness, despondency, alienation, vulnerability, grumpiness, and intolerance. Positive perceptions include, among others, kindness, understanding, self-motivation, productivity, and reliability (Swift et al., 2018).

Although less pronounced and discussed than stereotypes of older people, negative stereotypes of younger people also occur. For example, research in the American context<sup>1</sup> has shown that they are sometimes perceived as spoiled, lacking respect, inexperienced, and prone to adopting radically progressive views. Among other things, such perceptions might affect their financial and business situation and security.

<sup>1</sup> Friedman, Harvey A. “Kids these days”: *Why youth-directed ageism is an issue for everyone*. Retrieved May 15, 2024, from <https://publichealth.wustl.edu/kids-these-days-why-youth-directed-ageism-is-an-issue-for-everyone/>.

Stereotypes that exist within a certain community are reflected in language and expressed, shared, and maintained through communication. Stereotypical notions can be observed in the labels used to refer to a certain social category and in the characteristics and behaviours attributed to it (Beukeboom & Burgers, 2019). The relationship between the perception of (old) age and language has been the subject of several studies by Frank Nuessel (e.g., Nuessel, 1982; 1984; 2002). Nuessel (2002) discusses designations for older adults, vocabulary about older adults and ageing, metaphoric language, proverbial language, slogans, names, and forms of address, and concludes that the lexicon related to older adults is “overwhelmingly negative” (Nuessel, 2002, p. 25).

In languages, there is commonly a variety of expressions available to refer to age groups. This is especially pronounced with designations for older people; since old age can be regarded as a social and linguistic taboo (Saporta, 1991), various euphemisms (e.g., *golden age*, *senior citizen*) and dysphemisms (e.g., *old codger*, *fossil*) have emerged. Moreover, as old age is frequently discussed in negative contexts such as illness, dependency, or economic burden for society, even seemingly neutral labels can acquire negative connotations (cf. Nuessel, 1984, p. 18, the example of *elderly*). In addition to differences in style and connotations, labels can be general age-group designations (*over-60s*, *older citizens*), or regard additional characteristics (*pensioner*, *grandpa*, *hag*). Finally, labels can differ in linguistic form (e.g., *oldster*, *the aged*, *older adult*). The use of adjectival and descriptive labels together with general nouns such as *people*, *person* can be preferred over noun labels as a means of avoiding essentialism and promoting individual differences and diversity within the group (Beukeboom & Burgers, 2019, p. 16; APA1). In English, preferred general terms are adjective and noun combinations with the comparative *older*: *older people*, *older adults*, etc., or descriptive labels such as *persons 65 years and older* (APA2). The comparative *older* is also used in Croatian (*stariji*) and Danish (*ældre*) – alone or with nouns denoting people – as a neutral reference to this age group.

### 3. Vocabulary Related to Age in Dictionaries

The perceptions of age and age groups discussed in the previous section, and their reflection in language and communication, have implications for how vocabulary related to age is treated in dictionaries. The first issue to address is the selection of headwords which will be included in the dictionary. Additionally, given the different designations available, their semantics and pragmatics (e.g., appropriateness, function) should be clearly described. Finally, a strategy for handling potentially offensive content, such as language reflecting negative and stereotypical ideas about age groups, should be established. In what follows, the treatment of age-related vocabulary in selected dictionaries will be analysed with respect to: (1) selection of headwords, (2) definitions, (3) collocations and usage examples, and (4) pragmatic information.

#### 3.1 Selection of Headwords

In contemporary Croatian dictionaries, some common designations for age groups are not listed, and information on neutral and preferred labels for older people cannot be

found. This might be because these designations are multi-word expressions, which are usually not included as headwords in Croatian dictionaries. However, they are not listed within entries of constituent words either.

The designation most commonly used in official contexts (such as healthcare, legal, and academic communication) is *starija osoba* ‘older person’. A similar expression is *osoba starije (životne) dobi*, which literally translates to ‘a person of older age (in life)’. In the analysed Croatian dictionaries, the comparative *stariji* ‘older’ is neither listed as an independent entry nor accounted for within the entry *star* ‘old’.

Substantival labels *starac* ‘old man, oldster’ and *starica* ‘old woman’, which are listed in dictionaries, do not denote the general population of older adults defined as people over 60 or 65 years, but very old people exhibiting negative characteristics associated with ageing (except for the positive stereotype *wise*). It is evident from the definition of the word *starac* in VRH – *a man who is many years old, who is at an advanced age* [“muškarac koji ima mnogo godina, koji je u visokoj životnoj dobi”] – and the examples that are provided: *grey / decrepit / wise / ailing old man; This knight was an old man of 90 years.* [“sijedi / oronuo / mudri / bolujući starac; Ovaj je vitez bio starac od 90 godina.”].

Moreover, many figurative and euphemistic expressions used to refer to old age without mentioning it directly are also in the form of multi-word expressions and are thus not listed as headwords in dictionaries. While some of them are included as subentries or examples in the related single-word entries, others are not recorded. For example, one of the senses of the headword *dob* ‘age’ is exemplified by the following collocations: *younger / middle / maturer / elderly / advanced / third age* [“mlađa / srednja / zrelija / staračka / poodmakla / treća dob”]. The expressions such as *starija dob* discussed above or *zlatna dob* ‘golden age’ are not listed. A similar euphemistic expression *zlatne godine* ‘golden years’, which is well-attested in names of institutions, associations, initiatives, media programmes, etc. aimed at older people, is listed as a subentry in VRH, but only the sense *years of abundance, accompanied by the growth and development of everything* [“godine u kojima vlada obilje, koje prati rast i razvoj svega”] is accounted for, and not the old age.

Finally, some concepts relevant to older people are insufficiently represented. An example is care/retirement home. The expression *starački dom* ‘old people’s home’ appears as an example under the entries *starački* (a relational adjective derived from the noun *starac* ‘old man’) and *dom* ‘home’. The expression is used colloquially, but as it contains the negatively connoted adjective *starački*, more neutral terms such as *dom za starije osobe* ‘older people’s home’ are used in official contexts and names of such institutions. However, they are not listed in the dictionaries.

In the Danish dictionary DDO, both the adjective *gammel* ‘old’ and its comparative *ældre* ‘older’ are listed as separate entries. In both entries, adjectival (e.g., *gammel kone* ‘old woman’) and substantival (e.g., *de gamle* ‘the old’) usages are recorded. When referring to people, they are defined with an approximate age range; *gammel* ‘old’ is defined as *a person of a relatively high age (more than approximately 80 years)*

[“person med en forholdsvis høj alder (mere end ca. 80 år)”]; *ældre* ‘older’ is defined as *of an age of more than approximately 60 years; relatively old – about people* [“med en alder på mere end ca. 60 år; forholdsvis gammel – om menneske”]. For both adjectives, similar examples with nouns denoting people are provided (*ældre medborgere* ‘older citizens’, *ældre dame* ‘older lady/woman’, *ældre ægtepar* ‘older married couple’, *ældre herre* ‘older gentleman/man’; *gammel dame/kone* ‘old lady/woman’, *gammel mand/herre* ‘old man/gentleman’, *gamle mennesker* ‘old people’). Even though the adjective *gammel* denotes an older age group than its comparative *ældre*, similarly as in Croatian, the comparative is often used for older individuals regardless of age as a more polite term to avoid negative connotations of the adjective *old* (cf. Wien, 2006; Blaakilde, 2004). Although this is not explicitly commented on, compounds cross-referenced at the end of the article can signal usage in official contexts: *ældrebolig* ‘elder housing’, *ældreorganisation* ‘organisation for older people’, *ældrepleje* ‘eldercare’, *ældrevenlig* ‘elder-friendly/age-friendly’, etc. These examples also show that unlike the Croatian dictionaries, DDO contains many entries which relate to the experience and living conditions of older people, e.g., various types of accommodation: *plejehjem* ‘care home’, *dagcenter* ‘daycentre’, *ældrekollektiv* ‘senior collective’, *pensionistbolig* ‘retirement housing’. In addition, the *Danish Thesaurus* is integrated in the dictionary entries (Nimb et al., 2018), so a list of different words and expressions from the domain of old age can be found in one place. The expressions are hyperlinked to the corresponding articles in the dictionary if they exist.

### 3.2 Definitions

Phenomena can be defined in different ways and from various perspectives, thereby reflecting values and norms within a particular community or among some of its members. This is evident from an often-quoted example in the Croatian context: in a dictionary published in 2000 (RHJ), a man is defined as a *male person* [“muška osoba”], while a woman is defined as a *human being of the opposite sex to a man, capable of giving birth to children and taking major responsibility for their upbringing and education* [“ljudsko biće po spolu suprotno muškarcu, koje može rađati djecu i preuzeti glavnu brigu za uzgoj i odgoj djece”]. Here, a man is presented as an absolute category, while a woman is defined in relation to a man, with her role as a mother being central (cf. Bratanić, 2005).

The form and content of definitions are especially important when defining potentially sensitive lexical items, such as items related to social groups. For that reason, stereotypical and possibly offensive ideas are sometimes addressed in dictionaries aiming to be socially sensitive. This can be illustrated by the definition of the word *pigefornærmet* ‘offended as a girl’ from DDO: *the one that is offended or hurt by something someone has said or done, and reacts in a way that is perceived as characteristic of an immature teenage girl, for example, by refusing to talk about it or rolling one’s eyes. USAGE the usage of the word can be perceived as problematic because it builds on stereotypical notions of girls and women* [“som er fornærmet eller såret over noget en anden har sagt eller gjort, og reagerer på en måde der opfattes som karakteristisk for en umoden teenagepige, fx ved at nægte at tale om det eller himle

med øjnene. SPROGBRUG Brug af ordet kan opleves problematisk fordi det bygger på stereotype forestillinger om piger og kvinder”].

However, the definition of an expression based on the stereotypic view of old people as conservative, old-fashioned, and irrelevant in their reasoning – *gammelmandssnak* ‘old man’s talk’ – does not contain a similar comment on possible offensiveness or distancing expressions such as *perceived as characteristic*. The definition reads: *expressions of opinions that reflect resistance to change, and are based on bygone circumstances, values, etc.* [“meningstilkendegivelser der afspejler modstand mod forandringer, og som bygger på tidligere tiders forhold, værdier el. lign.”]. On the other hand, a comment on gender and age stereotypes is included in the description of the meaning and usage of the word *tante* ‘aunt’ in the sense of ‘older woman with a snarky or grumpy demeanour’ and the adjective *tantet* ‘aunt-like, aunty’ derived from it.

It should be noted that comments on underlying stereotypes are not used extensively in DDO and have so far been included only in a small number of entries reflecting gender, sexuality, and ethnic stereotypes (Sanni Nimb, Senior Editor of DDO, personal communication, July 31, 2024). Stereotypes are pervasive in language. While exposing stereotypes can be desirable, particularly for very offensive terms, it would be excessive to comment on them in every instance. When discussing various categories of sensitive items and their lexicographic treatment, Cloete (2014), following Hartevelt & Van Niekerk (1996), links the appropriate treatment of sensitive lexical items to the category they belong to since not all categories of items are equally sensitive. For sensitive lexical items indicating stigmatised physical or mental conditions and phenomena, the author concludes that generally speaking, “the sensitive items in this category, e.g., *hunchback*, *mongoloid* and *water head*, are not experienced as hurtful and demeaning as racist and sexist terms because they are used to a lesser extent to deliberately insult those involved. Reference plays a larger role here than typification and insult. However, within the category, items can vary in their degree of sensitivity.” The differences in the lexicographic treatment of lexical items related to social groups discussed above might indicate that age stereotypes are not currently perceived as equally problematic as, for example, gender stereotypes.

Croatian dictionaries do not have a tradition of exposing and commenting on stereotypes (cf. Lazić & Mihaljević, 2021). For example, the idea that old women engage in useless activities has been lexicalised in several expressions containing the disparaging and/or colloquial word for an old woman – *baba* – or the adjective derived from it – *bapski*. Some of them are listed in the analysed Croatian dictionaries, such as *bapski lijek* ‘old woman’s remedy’, *bapske priče* ‘old woman’s tales’, and *bapska posla* ‘old woman’s business’. The stereotypes are not commented on, as is evident from the definition of the expression *bapski lijek* in VRH: *DEROGATORY home remedy that cannot be believed to help, a remedy that old women prepare and only they believe in* [“POGR domaći lijek za koji se ne može vjerovati da pomaže, lijek koji babe pripravljavaju i u koji samo one vjeruju”].

While many of the discussed expressions and their definitions reflect a negative view of ageing, it is interesting to compare the definition of the euphemistic expression

*the third age* in DDO and in VRH. In DDO, *den tredje alder* is defined as *the period of a person's life when they no longer work but can still be active* [“den periode af et menneskes liv, hvor det ikke længere arbejder, men stadig kan være aktivt”] and labelled as euphemistic. In VRH, it is simply defined as *a period of life after middle age, old age* [“doba života nakon srednjih godina, starost”], even though it is often used in affirmative contexts and is less negatively connoted than the word *starost* ‘old age’.

### 3.3 Collocations and Examples

Collocations and usage examples can reveal stereotypical ideas about social groups that exist in society and are communicated through language, e.g., characteristics and behaviours associated with members of a certain social category or the contexts in which they are commonly mentioned. Since modern dictionaries are usually corpus-based, the choice of collocations and examples will be influenced by corpus data.

The analysed Croatian dictionaries are either printed or based on printed dictionaries, thus containing only collocations and shorter examples. Consistent with the fact that neutral designations for older people are not listed in the dictionaries, collocations and examples mostly reflect negative aspects of ageing and undesirable traits associated with old people. As mentioned above, in VRH, adjectival collocates given for the noun *starac* ‘old man’ indicate physical decay (*oronuli* ‘decrepit’, *bolujuć* ‘ailing’), alongside the common positive stereotype *mudri* ‘wise’. Another adjective derived from the disparaging/colloquial word *baba* ‘old woman’ – *bablji* – is illustrated by collocates mostly denoting undesirable or low-value activities and behaviours such as *brbljanje* ‘babbling’, *kuhanje* ‘cooking’, *bajke* ‘fairy tales’, *slutnje* ‘forebodings’, *tlapnje* ‘fantasies’, *jezik* ‘tongue’, *posao* ‘business’. More positively connoted expressions such as *the third age* are not equipped with examples. Collocates and examples listed for expressions denoting young people also align with common stereotypes such as physical beauty and strength on one side and immaturity, naivety, and arrogance on the other, e.g., *mladić* ‘young man’: *darovit* ‘gifted’, *naočit* ‘handsome’, *neiskus* ‘inexperienced’, *snažan* ‘strong’; *mladički* ‘related to young men’: *drskost* ‘arrogance’, *obijest* ‘ingratitude’; *mladenački* ‘related to young people’ (adjective): *ljepota* ‘beauty’, *strast* ‘passion’; *mladenački* ‘like a young person’ (adverb): *naivan* ‘naive’.

In DDO, senses are exemplified by both shorter examples (collocations and phrases) and citations from corpora. Unlike the Croatian dictionaries, for items denoting age groups, collocations are mostly not provided, or they are not qualifying in nature, so they do not reflect stereotypes. An exception is the adjective *ældre* ‘older’, referring to the age of 60 or older, which is illustrated by collocations like *plejekrævende ældre* ‘older people requiring care’, *ældre og gangbesværede* ‘older and walking-impaired’, and *ældre og svagelige* ‘older and infirm’. These characteristics are not typical for the whole population over 60, but probably reflect the contexts in which older people are frequently mentioned in corpora.



While citations should also reflect typical usage, the lexicographer has greater freedom to choose examples that do not unnecessarily portray social groups in a stereotypical, negative, or one-sided manner. Examples related to old age in DDO seem to be realistic; some negative aspects of ageing are represented, for example, *gammel* ‘old’: *When a person grows old, their skin wrinkles, and the thought is not as powerful as when they were young* [“Når mennesket bliver gammelt, rynkes dets hud, og tanken har ikke den samme kraft som da det var ungt”], as well as positive aspects, e.g., *pensionist* ‘pensioner’: *As a pensioner, I myself decide how the day should be put together* [“Som pensionist bestemmer jeg selv, hvordan dagen skal skrues sammen”], or neutral, e.g., *ældre* ‘older’: *In Hanstholm, older people can decide for themselves whether they want to stay at home, or whether they want to move into one of the Care Centre’s elder homes* [“I Hanstholm kan de ældre selv bestemme, om de vil blive hjemme, eller om de vil flytte ind i en af Plejecentrets ældreboliger”].

### 3.4 Pragmatic Information

Pragmatic information – information on the usage of lexical items – can cover a range of details related to, among other things, the communicative situation, linguistic context, or extralinguistic (encyclopaedic) knowledge. Pragmatic information facilitates the correct usage of lexical items and can thus be useful to users. Nonetheless, such information is scarce in Croatian monolingual dictionaries (Pritchard, 1999). Pragmatic information can be contained in different elements of lexicographic description: labels, definitions, usage notes, or examples. In this regard, the following issues will be discussed: (1) lexical items denoting people of a certain age being used as terms of address and (2) affective and attitudinal aspects of such items.

In DDO, the definition of the word *bessefar* ‘grandpa’ reads: *used jokingly or derogatorily when addressing or referring to an older man* [“bruges spøgende eller nedsættende ved tiltale til eller omtale af en ældre mand”]. The word *bessemor* ‘grandma’ is defined in a similar way. The usage of words for grandparents when addressing older people one is not related to is attested even in Croatian. Though such usage can convey humour or derogation, it is not always the case. For example, it is commonly used by healthcare workers.<sup>2</sup> Even though the intent behind such usage is not necessarily to denigrate the person, but rather to appear warm and welcoming, it is patronising in nature and perceived by many as offensive. The usage is attested in corpora – e.g., in the following example from the Croatian web corpus *hrWaC*: *When I got her off the road, I (...) asked her: ‘so granny, where did you go??’* [“Kad sam je maknula sa ceste (...) pitam je: ‘pa bako kud ste vi krenuli??’”]. However, while the usage of words for grandparents when referring to old people is mentioned in some of the analysed Croatian dictionaries, none of them describes the usage of these words as forms of address.

Similarly, in both languages, there are expressions denigrating people because of their young age and associated traits such as immaturity, lack of experience, or arrogance. Some of them are commonly used when addressing people, as is evident

<sup>2</sup> Tešija, Tijana. *Oslovljavanje starijih osoba*. Retrieved May 18, 2024, from <https://www.seniori.hr/stranice/psihosocijalne-teme/1511-oslovljavanje-starijih-osoba>.

from these examples: *grønskolling*: young, inexperienced (and timid) person USAGE derogatory; especially as a form of address [“ung, uerfaren (og frygtsom) person SPROGBRUG nedsættende; især i tiltale”]; *snothvalp*: young, immature (and arrogant) person USAGE derogatory; especially as a form of address [“ung, umoden (og fræk) person SPROGBRUG nedsættende; især i tiltale”]. The similar Croatian word *balavac* is defined in VRH as young, immature, and insufficiently experienced person [“mlada, nezrela i nedorasla osoba”]. It is labelled as derogatory, but no further information on its usage is provided, even though it can also be used when addressing people. Usage of the adjective *mali* ‘little’ as a form of address is recorded in HJP and VRH, but while no information on the attitude of the speaker or effect on the addressee is provided in HJP, in VRH, it is labelled as familiar. In DDO, usage of the equivalent adjective *lille* when addressing people is described as *used as affectionate, confidential, or possibly condescending term, often as a form of address* [“bruges som kærlig, fortrolig eller evt. nedladende betegnelse, ofte i tiltale”], which indicates that such usage is not necessarily intended or perceived as positive. Similar effects are mentioned for other words denoting young age or small size, especially when directed at adults. The entry *bitte* ‘very little, tiny’ contains the remark that it is used when addressing or referring to a child in an affectionate way, but it can be humorous or ironically derogatory when used to address or refer to an adult.

### 3.5 Possible Solutions

Dictionaries should reflect the way language is used at a certain time without falsifying reality. However, some lexicographic choices and strategies can have an impact on representation of social groups in dictionaries. When describing vocabulary related to age groups (and social groups in general) in the new Croatian web dictionary *Mrežnik* (<http://ihjj.hr/mreznik/>), an initiative has been taken to overcome some of the shortcomings observed in existing dictionaries. Unlike the analysed Croatian dictionaries, *Mrežnik* is born-digital, so there is no space limitation. The use of words is illustrated by a list of collocates and examples extracted from corpora, and usage notes can be added to explain the use and meaning of words in more detail when necessary.

Among other things, the following information regarding the vocabulary related to age groups has been included:

- various designations for older people, such as the comparative *stariji* ‘older’, expressions *starija osoba* ‘older person’, and *osoba starije životne dobi* ‘person of an older age in life’, references to old age such as *treća dob* ‘third age’, *četvrta dob* ‘fourth age’, *zlatna dob* ‘golden age’;
- usage notes containing information on neutral designations for older people, differences between similar expressions in meaning, style, and contexts of use, appropriateness of certain expressions, etc.; e.g., addressing old people with words denoting grandparents is explained as follows: “In informal situations, old people are sometimes addressed as *baka* ‘grandma’ and *dida/deda* ‘grandpa’. Although speakers often use these expressions with good intentions, for example to achieve intimacy with the interlocutor, they can be

perceived as a lack of respect. Expressions *gospođa* ‘Madam’ and *gospodin* ‘Sir’ should be used as a polite way of addressing adult people regardless of age”;

- collocates in *Mrežnik* are based on corpus data; they can reflect stereotypes and negative views on ageing, for example, collocates of the expression *starija osoba* in the Croatian web corpus *hrWaC* (Ljubešić & Klubička, 2016) mostly belong to the domains of illness, care, and other vulnerable groups (e.g., *demented, immobile, lonely older people; older and infirm people, older people and children*), and it will be mirrored in the dictionary;
- examples should be neutral and illustrate different contexts in which an item is used e.g., the following examples have been chosen for the expression *starija osoba*;
- *The Croatian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare’s reference centre for the health protection of older people has issued a risk warning for the older people in Croatia due to low air temperatures.* [“Referentni centar Ministarstva zdravstva i socijalne skrbi Hrvatske za zaštitu zdravlja starijih osoba izradio je upozorenje rizika za starije osobe u Hrvatskoj radi niskih temperatura zraka.”];
- *If you are an older person and you move too little, start with regular walking, so that you can get back in good shape.* [“Ako ste starija osoba i malo se krećete, započnite sa redovitim hodanjem, tako da se vratite u dobru kondiciju.”].

#### 4. Conclusion

Given society’s negative view of ageing and old age, these phenomena are a kind of social taboo. It is reflected in the language, for example, in the existence of many euphemisms and dysphemisms denoting old people and old age. Moreover, since age is a continuous category, it can be segmented into age groups in different ways, and groups and their boundaries are context-dependent. Consequently, there are various expressions denoting age and age groups, and they can differ in connotations and appropriateness in certain contexts. Another issue which can have implications for the description of vocabulary related to age are stereotypes and attitudes which are either lexicalised in words and expressions or appear in their typical context of use. While the role of the dictionary is to accurately mirror linguistic reality, the lexicographer might want to avoid unnecessary stereotyping and stigmatizing of social groups. Although negative stereotypes of old people are more prominent, they can also concern other age groups.

The analysis of Croatian contemporary dictionaries has revealed that many terms denoting older people or phenomena relevant to them are not listed in dictionaries. For the items that are included, information on semantic and pragmatic differences, such as connotations, register, or appropriateness in certain situations, is incomplete and inconsistent. Furthermore, examples and collocations in dictionaries maintain stereotypes of old people as weak, sick, dependent, etc., while young people are associated with physical beauty and strength on one side and immaturity, naivety, and arrogance on the other. In comparison, the inventory of lexical items related to age

and age groups in the Danish dictionary DDO is more comprehensive. Descriptions of lexical items related to age groups in DDO are more systematic and detailed, and pragmatic information is more commonly provided. For example, the use of certain items as terms of address and associated attitudes have been systematically described, while such information is missing in Croatian dictionaries. The examples and citations provided in DDO seem to be realistic and neutral with reference to both positive and negative aspects of ageing. However, a comparison with entries related to some other social groups indicates that there is a slightly higher tolerance for age-related stereotypes.

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## Contact information

**Daria Lazić**

Institute for the Croatian Language

dlazic@ihjj.hr