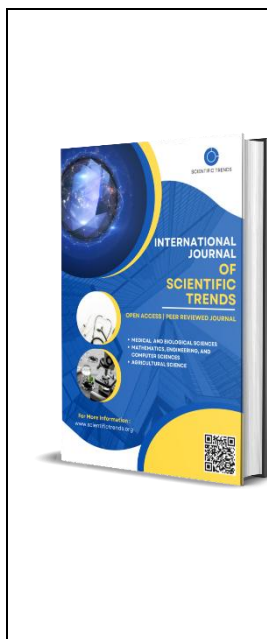# The Concept of Age in The English Language: Definition, Varieties, and History of Development

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of the concept of "age" in the English language, its essence, varieties and history of development. The work considers the concept from the point of view of cognitive linguistics, where age is interpreted as a multi-level mental formation that includes both objective and subjective aspects of the perception of time and life stages. Particular attention is paid to the lexical and semantic means of expressing age, such as words and phraseological units, as well as metaphorical models through which the symbolic perception of the life path in English-speaking culture is manifested. The article analyzes the key stages of the historical study of the concept of "age", starting with lexicographic studies of the 19th century and ending with the cognitive -linguistic and sociocultural approaches of the present.

Keywords: Age concept, English language, cognitive linguistics, lexical-semantic analysis, metaphorical models, cultural stereotypes, history of development.

Introduction

The concept of "age" in linguistics is a complex mental formation reflecting a person's perception of age stages of life, taking into account biological, psychological and cultural factors. It includes both objective knowledge of age and emotional-evaluative components that are formed in a specific linguistic picture of the world. In English, this concept has clearly expressed features that manifest themselves through vocabulary, metaphors and cultural stereotypes.

Age in English is perceived not only as a sequence of stages of life, but also as a symbolic journey, often expressed through metaphors and idiomatic expressions. The metaphorical model of life as a path or cycle is a characteristic feature of the concept, giving an emotional and symbolic connotation to different age periods. The perception of age is also linked to social norms and cultural traditions, which is reflected in ideas about adulthood, aging, and life values.

The cultural determinacy of the concept of "age" is manifested in positive and negative assessments of individual age periods, as well as in gender differences in the perception of youth and old age. These features form a rich linguistic system in which the concept of "age" reflects not only physiological reality, but also the social perception of time, personality, and life path in English-speaking culture.

The concept **of age** in English is an interesting and multi-layered category, reflecting the cultural, social and linguistic features of society. Let us consider the main aspects of this concept from the point of view of **lexical composition** , **semantics** , **cognitive characteristics** and **cultural conditioning** .

1. Lexical and semantic features of the concept "age"

The English language has a rich set of age-related words and expressions. They denote both **the stages of life** and **the psychological characteristics** inherent in these stages:

a) Age stages

- **Infancy** – infancy (0-1 year)
- **Toddlerhood** - early age (1-3 years)
- **Childhood** – childhood (3-12 years)
- **Adolescence** – adolescence (13-18 years)
- **Youth** – youth (19-25 years)
- **Adulthood** – maturity
- **Middle age** – middle age (40-60 years)
- **Old age** – old age

b) Words and expressions to indicate age characteristics

- **To come of age** – to reach adulthood
- **Age gracefully** – to age gracefully
- **Over the hill** – "old", behind the hill (negative)
- **In one's prime** – in the prime of life
- **Golden years** – years of old age

2. Cognitive aspects of the concept "age"

From the point of view of cognitive linguistics, the concept of **"age"** is based on **metaphorical models** of perception of time and life. For example:

a) Metaphor of life as a path

Age is seen as **stages** in life:

- **The spring of life** - spring life (youth)
- **The autumn of life** - autumn life (old age)

b) Metaphor of life as a cycle

Perception of age as **a cyclical process** that has a beginning, peak and end:

- **To be in full bloom** - to be V in bloom forces
- **The twilight years** – twilight years (old age)

3. Socio-cultural features of the concept "age"

- In English society, **the age of majority** (18 or 21) is of particular importance. It is associated with rights and responsibilities.
- In English-speaking cultures there is a positive attitude towards **active ageing** and the ideal of "aging with dignity" (**aging gracefully**).
- At the same time, terminology can also express a negative perception of old age, for example:
  - **Old fogey** – old grumbler
  - **Grumpy old man** - a grumpy old man

4. English idioms and phraseological units related to age

1. **You can't teach an old dog new tricks** - old dog new tricks Not you will teach .

2. **At the ripe old age of...** – in venerable age .

3. **Young at heart** – young soul .

4. **A coming of age story** - history growing up .

5. Psychological and social shades of the concept

• The English language emphasizes the difference between **biological age** (**chronological age**) and **age perception** :

o **Mental age** – mental age

o **Feel one's age** – to feel your age

o **Look one's age** – to look your age

The history of the study of the concept of "age" in English includes several periods associated with the development of linguistics, cognitive sciences and cultural studies. This concept has been studied through the prism of vocabulary , metaphors , cognitive structures and cultural features . Let's consider the main periods and scientists who contributed to the study.

1. Lexical-semantic period (19th – first half of the 20th century)

During this period, scholars focused on describing words and expressions that denote age. These were mainly traditional studies related to the history of words and their meaning in language.

• James Murray (1880s)

In his work on the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) , Murray recorded the historical development of age-related lexemes: *childhood , youth , adolescence , middle age , old age* .

o Conclusion : Age-related vocabulary reflects biological and social stages of life, as well as changes in the perception of these stages at different times.

o Ernest Klein (1900s) Researched the etymology of age-related words and showed their origins in Latin, Greek and Old English. Conclusion : Age terminology has deep historical roots and borrowings from ancient languages.

2. Structural-semantic period (1950–1970s)

Linguists began to analyze the structural features of linguistic units and their semantic functions. Attention was paid to the denotative and connotative meaning of vocabulary.

o John Lyons (1960s) In his work on semantics and structural linguistics, Lyons showed how words denoting age are organized into lexical-semantic fields . Conclusion : The concept of "age" consists of interrelated units representing different stages of life: *baby – child – teenager – adult – elderly*

• Zelig Harris Conducted an analysis of the contexts of use of words related to age, identifying their syntagmatic and paradigmatic connections.

3. Cognitive -linguistic period (1980–2000s)

The emergence of cognitive linguistics changed the approach to studying the concept of "age". Scientists focused on metaphorical and conceptual modeling.

o George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) In their book , Metaphors We Live By " they proposed a theory of conceptual metaphor. Conclusion : Age is often conceptualized through metaphors:

▪ Life is a journey path): "childhood", "middle age", " twilight years".

▪ Life as a cycle : "spring of life" (youth), "autumn of life" (old age).

o Eva Koveshes (1990s) Developed Lakoff's ideas by showing cultural differences in the perception of age. Conclusion : In English, age metaphors reflect a positive perception of aging (eg , *aging gracefully*) and emphasize the cyclical nature of life.

4. Sociolinguistic and cultural period (2000s – present)

Contemporary research examines how the concept of "age" is related to social and cultural stereotypes, as well as gender aspects.

o Susan Sontag (2001) Studied cultural stereotypes of aging in English-speaking society. Conclusion : In English, old age often has negative connotations (*over the hill , grumpy old man*), but there are also positive images (*golden years*).

o Anna Vezhbitskaya (2007) Analyzed concepts in various languages from the point of view of semantic primitivism . Conclusion : The concept of "age" in English includes universal elements (infancy, youth, old age), but its perception is culturally conditioned.

• David Crystal (2010s) In his work on modern English lexicography, Crystal described how new words related to age appear in the language, such as:

o Boomer – older generation (sometimes negatively).

o Millennial – generation of the 1980s–2000s.

Modern research

In recent years, scientists have focused their attention on:

• A study of gender differences in age perception.

• An analysis of social networks and media discourse, where the concept of "age" acquires new connotations.

• A cross-cultural comparison of the concepts of "age" in English and other languages.

Conclusion

Thus, the concept **of age** in English includes both objective characteristics (life stages, physical changes) and subjective perception (mental and emotional aspects). It is formed through **lexical units**, **metaphors** , **cultural stereotypes** and **psychological associations**. The study of the concept of "age" in the English language has gone through several stages: from lexical-semantic studies to cognitive and sociocultural approaches . Key findings:

1. Age is structured as a linear path or cycle .
2. Metaphors and cultural stereotypes play an important role in the perception of age.
3. Contemporary English reflects both traditional and contemporary realities of perception of life and ageing.

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