



Old age in primary school readers: a journey through the end of the 19th century to the start of the 21st century in Argentina

La vejez en los textos de lectura de la escuela primaria: un recorrido entre fines del siglo XIX y los inicios del siglo XXI en Argentina

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ABSTRACT This article presents the content (discourse) analysis of messages transmitted by primary school readers in the period between 1880 to 2012. This study allowed us to explore the image of old age and aging that society has and passes on to new generations as well as the role assigned to this generational group. The historical periods that provide the context for the data were defined according to the continuity of or the turning points in the social values transmitted in the reading materials. The role assigned to elderly people and the image of old age that the Argentine society passed on and continues to pass on to younger generations demonstrate that each period described has its own model of aging.

KEY WORDS Aging; Social Values; Intergenerational Relations; Textbooks; Argentina.

RESUMEN En este artículo se presenta el análisis de contenido (discurso) de los mensajes emitidos por los libros de lectura para la escuela primaria editados en Argentina, en el período comprendido entre los años 1880 y 2012. Este estudio nos permitió profundizar sobre la imagen de la vejez y el envejecimiento que la sociedad tiene y transmite a las nuevas generaciones y el papel que se le asigna a este grupo generacional. Los períodos históricos que dan contexto a los datos fueron definidos a partir de los ritmos marcados por la permanencia o los puntos de cambio (*turning point*) de los valores sociales transmitidos en las lecturas. El papel asignado a los ancianos y la imagen de viejo que la sociedad argentina transmitió y transmite a las generaciones jóvenes muestra que cada período descripto tiene su propio modelo de anciano.

PALABRAS CLAVES Envejecimiento; Valores Sociales; Relaciones Intergeneracionales; Libros de Texto; Argentina.

INTRODUCTION

This article is a continuation and an update of the articles "Los medios de comunicación social y la imagen de vejez: los libros utilizados en la escuela primaria" [Social communications media and the image of old age: primary school readers] (1) published in 1983, and "La vejez en la educación básica argentina" [Old age in the Argentine primary education] (2) published in 1998. In the first article, the period between 1880 and 1980 was considered, and in the second, texts up until 1997 were included in the analysis. In the present study, the research incorporates into its results data up to the year 2012; images and photos have also been added in order to supplement the analysis of the texts.

In this research study, initiated many years ago and continued over the course of time, the underlying idea is that language is not only an important premise of social action insofar as it is based on the communication of meanings, but that speaking and writing are also forms of social behaviors in themselves. In what they write or say, humans express their intentions, their attitudes, their interpretations of situations, their knowledge, and their tacit assumptions regarding their environment.

These intentions and attitudes are co-determined by the sociocultural system to which the people that write or speak belong, and therefore not only reflect the personal characteristics of the authors, but also the attributes of the society that surrounds them (norms, values and definitions of socially established situations, among other attributes). Hence, the analysis of linguistic materials allows for the inference of non-linguistic phenomena, both individual and social.

In daily life, content analysis allows people to understand meanings and make inferences from what is said or written. This intuitive phenomenon for understanding language must be converted into a systematized object of scientific analysis. In this context, content analysis may be defined as a research technique that describes in a systematic and objective way properties of actors and social aggregates. In this sense, the text can be either written or spoken and, more broadly, content analysis may be carried out with materials that are not purely linguistic, such as images.

This article presents an analysis of the books used especially in the second grade of primary school at the national level, among which the most widely used books in State schools were selected. It is understood that society systematically transmits its thought and ideology to new generations by these means. In this way, content (discourse) analysis of the messages transmitted by primary school readers in the period between 1880 and 2012 allows us to profoundly explore the matter of old age, in relation to the image that society has and transmits of this generational group and the role assigned to it.

The historical periods that provide the context for the data were defined according to the continuity of or the turning points in the social values transmitted in the reading materials.

END OF THE 19TH CENTURY AND BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY (a)

According to the political and social context at the end of the 19th century, in this period the values of Argentina as an exporter of agricultural products and the liberal ideals of the so-called *Generation of the 1880s* were transmitted. We can see this reflected below:

Argentina is a big, powerful and beautiful country [...] Our fields are huge, at the same time supporting the most numerous herds on earth and opening their breast to provide splendid harvests to all the working men who wish to form a tranquil home in this land of freedom.

The most absolute equality prevails among us and no more distinctions exist than those that naturally lead to *virtue, knowledge and talent*.

(3) [Italics added] [Own translation]

Dedication to work and savings are transmitted as great virtues and, added to honesty, make it possible for fortune and progress to be obtained. Saving permits a peaceful old age in a historical context in which pensions do not exist.

Love of the nation and pride in dying for it are expressed as values in the texts; in this way, death becomes productive. For this reason, the

deeds and events that took place during the war of Paraguay are to be remembered vividly, and consequently respect and admiration are owed to the veterans of the war.

Later on, during the 1930s, some changes in the messages related to the idea that “to govern is to populate” can be observed. By this time, the massive phenomenon of European immigration has occurred, while the liberal values of the Generation of the 1880s are maintained: “The Argentine land is a land of freedom and equality for those who work it” (5 p.98).

Work appears as a guarantee of social mobility, especially valid for the European who arrives as a “tramp” and through his work ascends to the status of “rancher”:

He remembered that many foreigners had arrived with nothing but the clothes on their backs. But since they were hard-working and had good customs, they looked for occupations all over this great and beautiful Argentine Republic. They then settled and, under the protection of good laws, they built their fortune and their children’s happiness. (5 p.99)

Mr. Juan Cardona, yesterday an immigrant and today a powerful capitalist, shows practically that perseverance and honesty along with intelligence and savings are factors as powerful as wings to get to the top of the mountain. (5 p.188) [Own translation]

It was the conquest of the desert, carried out by *criollos*, which initiated the civilization and the progress the immigrants should continue with the help of the law (b).

We see that old age appears as a central topic both in terms of the number of times it appears and the depth of the reflections found in the reading materials. Indeed, in this period, rich and varied layers can be observed for our analysis of old age and the aging process. In the school readers it is common to see elderly people with different roles and in situations in which they transmit social norms of the time based on tradition and experience. Moreover, the texts provide profound reflections regarding aging.

In the reading materials, the elderly are a source of respect, even in situations of social

marginalization as is the case of the “old people who are poor and abandoned.” This can be observed in the composition exercise in Figure 1.

In this period, the word “elder” [*anciano/a*] is used to refer to the older adult. The word “old” [*viejo/a*] is used as a qualifying adjective and is not used in a pejorative way. That is, the word “old” has no negative connotation.

Ejercicios de composición y de elocución.



Elocución = Describir la escena representada en la lámina, mencionando todas las figuras. Indicar lo que parece pensar ó sentir cada uno de ellos, deduciéndolo de su actitud y de la expresión de su rostro = Formular algún pensamiento sobre la suerte de los pobres viejos abandonados.

Composición = Redactarla, tomando como asunto el de la presente lámina.

Composition and diction exercises

Diction = Describe the scene shown in these pages, including all of the figures that appear in the scene. Indicate what each of them appear to be thinking or feeling based on their posture or facial expression = Formulate your thoughts about the fate of the old people who are poor and abandoned.

Composition = Write your description based on the present drawing.

Figure 1. Old age in the first decade of the 20th century. School reader *El nene* [The child].

Source: Andrés Ferreyra and José María Abuín (3 p.46).

Ejercicios de elocución y de composición.



Elocución = Descripción de la escena, indicando qué parentesco pueden tener los personajes que en ella intervienen, y la actitud y expresión de cada uno. Formular algún pensamiento sobre el respeto debido a los ancianos.

Composición = Redactarla, tomando por sujeto el de la lámina.

Composition and diction exercises

Diction = Describe this scene, indicating what relationship the characters in the scene might have and the attitude and expression of each. Formulate your thoughts about the proper respect of elders.

Composition = Write your description based on the present drawing.

Figure 2. Old age in the first decade of the 20th century. School reader *El nene* [The child].

Source: Andrés Ferreyra and José María Abuín (3 p. 116).

The predominant type of family is a large extended family, defined as a family where three or more generations live together. People age within the family, and it is seen as normal for children to take care of their elder relatives.

Different models of elderly people appear throughout the studied texts. In the position of *adviser-patriarch* (3), the older adult has different roles such as war veteran, old servant, old teacher, and so on, and is the person who *acts as educator and transmitter of the fundamental values* that, in the Argentina of the beginning of the 20th century, are: love of the nation and of one's

parents, the importance of education as necessary for the sustained progress of the nation, and *due respect for the elderly*. This last value entails the acceptance – without argument – of the advice the elder offers the child as well as the protection the child must offer the elderly. Here it is important to highlight that the role of transmitter of cultural values is occupied primarily by men that clearly follow the traditional paradigms of gender roles.

In the role of *grandparent*, the elder appears in the company of grandchildren, in an activity of entertainment or play (grandmothers), giving a wise piece of advice (grandfathers), or feeling their transcendence in the new generations (their grandchildren). In this period, it is common to highlight the family role of older adults as cohabitation facilitates the grandparent-grandchild relationship, which produces less anguish about death at an individual level. The existence of children and grandchildren guarantees the continuity of the surname and the bloodline: “the tree I plant today will be used tomorrow by my grandchildren.” This death-birth archetype allows people to better prepare for death (Figure 2).

For the poor elder there is no possibility of voluntary retirement, which until the 20th century will be a benefit exclusive to the privileged. The poor must work as long as their strength allows them and, after that, the family community will support them as they can. However, if they are unfortunately on their own, they will immediately be situated in the category of beggars. Included in the mass of the “poor,” the elderly are not differentiated from their equals in misfortune: they belong to the most general history of poverty. Many of the workers that occupied low-level work positions had to resort to begging when they grew sick or old in order to survive. This was common at that time and can be observed in the image of the *elderly beggar* (3 p.46); monetary help is offered to the old man, thus creating an awareness of charity with the purpose of alleviating this social problem, given that in this historic period the solution is individual and not an object of social policies (c).

The reader “Los ancianos” [The elderly] (3), quoted in the following paragraphs, presents *reflections on old age* and death that will not reappear in any of the following periods until the beginning of the present century, as seen for example in the text “Sandía, maestro guardián”

[Watermelon, guard dog teacher] (7). This means that almost 100 years will have to pass for a reflection upon the aging process and generational succession to be incorporated again in school-based knowledge transmission.

In reference to this topic, the reader says:

None are more worthy of respect than the elderly. Their white hair shows that they have lived; their bent bodies are proof of a mission accomplished; and their expression, sweet and serene, is typical of those who, at death's door, see clearly and plainly the dawn of that new life called eternity.

The forehead of an elder is like a mirror in which the young person may read or discern the experiences of life.

We take our hats off when we meet in passing a veteran in whose face the enemy's weapon has left its mark.

In contemplating him, we evoke the battles in which he must have taken part in and we do not deny the dangers he must have faced.

An elder is a veteran of life; he has suffered misfortunes, countless sorrows; he has seen people he loved die; perhaps he has found his home to be sad and lonely; and yet he has not despaired, he has kept in mind that life is passing and that the end of every sorrow is in the great beyond, with God.

Oh child, just starting out on the path of life! If you ever happen to meet an elder on your way, greet him politely; if you see that he is not strong enough to carry on, give him your arm; if you see him in despair, be kind, relieve his sorrow and wipe away his tears.

Honor and respect him; remain standing with your head uncovered before him. In his presence, think about your grandparents, your parents, and all those people to whom you owe love, protection and care; and especially remember that just as he is today, so you will be tomorrow. Your energy will be diminished, your head will go white, your hopes and ambitions will fade and you will be just like him: a helpless and strengthless being without any other shield but the respect, affection and reverence of those just beginning to enjoy life when you are at the threshold of eternal death. (3 p.114-115) [Own translation]

This text reflects upon the aging process and the nearness of death that old age signifies, promoting religiousness as the passage to eternity and a way to calm the anxiety produced by the awareness of death.

Moreover, we see that the image of old age transmitted is not that of an active old age. On the contrary, it tends to be represented as a "poor old man," weak, sickly and passive, who nevertheless should be and is respected and whose advice is followed. The vitality of the elderly lies precisely in their experience; the physical being disappears as such. Far from being a stigma, the worn-out body is a sign of respect (Figure 3).

In synthesis, the elderly should be respected because they are people who have lived and who now wait for death, because they are predecessors and thus are the future image of what the child will become, and because years have given them experience, which is valued in the agro-exporting society of the early 1900s that seeks to repeat itself. They appear as transmitters of fundamental values, those which have always existed and always will exist, becoming an *archetype of upholders of the culture*. They fulfill their family role of grandparents, but they are more than that. They dictate and transmit values, which allow



Los ancianos.

Figure 3. Old age in the first decade of the 20th century. School reader *El nene* [The child].

Source: Andrés Ferreyra and José María Abuín (3 p. 114).

them to perform a social function: they have a place in society.

The elderly immigrant is also seen as a wise, polite man who transmits fundamental values within the rural community as well as in the family, his advice being highly valued and his word being respected and obeyed in both contexts.

The values transmitted by the elderly are “universal”: humility, charity, labor, savings, honesty, and respect for elders. Hence, they are neither opposed nor contradicted in the cultures of natives and immigrants:

The past should not be discounted, it is not always useless. It is true that we elderly people cannot plough, but that does not mean we cannot provide advice on how to do it. *Old age that has been seasoned with labor is a book rich with experience.* It is true that I am unable to run with these frail legs, but I can tell Humberto the best way to go. (5 p.95) [Italics added] [Own translation]

The elderly carry real weight within the extended family: they are informed and consulted and they give their opinion about the family’s activities (d).

In the “reflections upon old age, we see that the elderly who are distressed by their imminent death will carry on in the children as an example of experience” (5 p.148). The purpose of the text “Vida y ensueño” [Life and daydreams] that refers to these reflections is symbolized in the following aphorism: “Venerable old age is always a page of history or an example of experience that is good for children” (5).

These roles assigned to old people will continue in the reading materials until the 1940s. We can observe that the role given to old people requires them to be sensible, without mistakes or weakness. The elderly must be saints; condemned to be venerated, they have no right to make even the slightest mistake. They, who have experienced so much, cannot succumb to the merest temptation. They, worn out and wrinkled as they are, have to be perfect, an example of all virtues. The sublimated image they are offered of themselves is that of the wise man surrounded by a halo of white hair, rich in experience and revered, dominating the human condition from high above. If they veer away from this image,

they will fall into misfortune: they will disappear from humanity and from the texts, as we will see in the thirty-year period that starts in the 1960s, when a negative image of old age is transmitted.

IN THE 1940S AND 1950S

This period is characterized by a continuous reference to national values, the interior regions of the country, and the Latin American context. A process of growth in the country’s economic infrastructure – public works, State companies and national industries – can also be observed.

Other social sectors of the community also start to have relevance. Therefore, images of *working-class and retired grandparents* (e) appear, while there is a disappearance of the image of the old beggar common in the readers at the beginning of the century. The poem “Yo anhelo” [I wish] states the following:

May they always be happy,
those who protect children,
the workers and the old,
whether on top of the mountain
or in the valley below! [Own translation]

The main type of family in this period continues to be the large extended family, both in rural and urban areas, although the book *Girasoles* [Sunflowers] (9) features the nuclear family, which will predominate from the 1960s to the present.

As in the periods analyzed previously, the large extended family takes care of its elderly, what we call “aging within the family.” However, it is in this period that the image of the “institutionalized elderly person” appears, that is, the elderly person living in an old people’s home (10). We can see this in the following text:

The grandma

Tito and Susana’s grandma is much loved because of her kindness. “When you can,” she says, “you have to help others.”

The good lady enjoys doing good deeds. She often sends eggs, poultry and vegetables to the old people’s homes and hospitals of the city. (10 p.47) [Own translation]

We also see this reference in the text about the character “Enriqueta Veranito” (Figure 4), who is a heater:

She was sold to an old people’s home. There, everybody always thought of her; all the little old men and women warmed up their hands and feet around her. Enriqueta Veranito lives so happily now! (10 p.47) [Own translation]

The image that appears most often is that of the grandfather. He appears in the texts providing affection to his grandchildren and transmitting the prevailing moral values of the period. Thus, the image of old people as transmitters of the culture continues, expressed in this period in this way: “the family is the base of national unity and of the people, study and work are the base of the nation...” This function is also represented by the elderly in other roles, such as the “old teacher.”

An *active elder* that should and must make use of his spare time – he cannot live without working – appears along with a marked valorization of work (11 p.4) (Figure 5). At the same time, the image of the *disabled elder* appears, an elder who needs help and “must be helped” and protected by the members of the entire community (12).

“Grandpa,” his grandchildren say to him, “you never rest.”
 And he answers:
 “I can’t live without working, children; work gives joy and health to human beings; work is the enemy of misery, vice and sadness.”
 (11 p.4) [Own translation]

(Adaptación de un cuento de Edith Alina Barbaglia.)



Figure 5. Old age at the end of the 1950s. School reader *Los teritos* [The little birds]. Elma Elena Barbaglia, Edith Alina Barbaglia (10).



Figure 5. Old age at the end of the 1950s. School reader *Mañana de sol* [Sunny morning].

Source: Juana Baila de Ronco (11 p.4)

The images referenced are related to the contents of articles 1, 8 and 10 of the Rights of the Aged (f), in existence during this period, whose points are the right to assistance, work and respect, respectively. Let us remember that the Rights of the Aged were submitted to the United Nations in 1948, which was the first time the topic was discussed at an international level, and they were incorporated into the Argentine Constitution in 1949 (13).

In this period, reflections upon old age take into account the physical decline of the elderly and the protection that should be given to them (14). Old age is not seen as a future projection of what children will become – the elderly are the others. Death and religion as transcendence are not discussed, unlike in the previously analyzed period.

Old age appeared in 10% of the total of reading materials, so that in order to make a qualitative analysis we have used numerous readers.

We should highlight that the terms most used in this period to refer to the older adult are elder or grandparent; the word “old” usually has a pejorative connotation. As we can see:

Differences

- Becoming an elder is venerated.
- Old age is feared.
- Saying old refers to age.
- Saying elder implies: respect, discretion, prudence.
- An old person may be impious.
- An elder is always virtuous. (8) [Own translation]

In this period, the words “grandfather” and “grandmother” are used to refer to the elderly, even those who do not fulfill the corresponding family role.

FROM THE 1960S TO THE 1990S

The 1960s is remembered as a period of great changes in the system of values. In terms of the topics that concern us in this article, we can observe that the external aspects of young people (physical beauty, fashion, and so on) are valued.

Children are transmitted a “spatial” or “cosmic” worldview: an Argentina that is a little piece of the planet, a corresponding reality that tells us that man has made it to the moon and that children think about the future: “It was the year 3000 and Earth was one of 300 inhabited worlds,” goes the reading “ZP=2” (15).

It is the space era and the era of technological changes; elements such as technology and research gain importance. In the texts, images appear of children who invent, use chemistry, and imagine themselves constantly progressing into the future.

In this context, the topic of old age is not included in most of the analyzed readers. In those in which old age does appear, it is in just one or two readings per book (g). From a qualitative analysis, “grandparents” have a secondary role, although they are “indeed” respected and loved by the children, to whom they give affection. They are often represented as unable to take care of or transmit knowledge to their grandchildren, as they often have hearing and visual impairments or, even worse, lack criteria with which to solve problems or issues (Figure 6).

The family model is nuclear (h) and thus grandparents do not make decisions regarding family matters anymore; these are addressed by parents. The role of the elderly person is that of “relative” or “grandparent” that simply visits or is visited by their grandchildren.

Reflections upon old age have disappeared, as have teachings regarding the respect and protection the elderly should be given. Old age is ignored as such and is especially ignored as nearness to death.



Figure 6. Old age in the 1980s. School reader *Los libros del Tamandúá, cuentos y cantos* [The books of the Tamandúá, stories and songs].

Source: María Teresa Forero (16 p.21)

In a culture where the technological changes are fast and a space-based future is projected, the values transmitted by the elderly are outdated. Thus, they are replaced in this function by younger and updated models: the aunt or uncle.

In the period between the 1960s and 1990, the elderly are excluded from the public sphere with no social roles and are defined by the family role of grandparents situated in the private sphere.

FROM THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY (i)

As in the period analyzed previously, values of space technology and a globalized culture are transmitted. For example, children fly over the neighborhood within a periscope. At the same time, the world of fictional characters is mixed with characters from real life, constructing daily life in the context of an ideal world.

In agreement with Bell (26), we can see that the most important thing for a society is its system of values:

The modern Western society has given importance to material growth and the increase

of wealth above any other consideration. However, this has brought with it great social costs. No society can ignore the problem of balance and leave the most important decisions entirely to the market or the bureaucratic domain. These are some of the most arduous problems of current political theory; they are value judgments, communal judgments. And technology does not provide answers, whatever direction it may take. (26) [Own translation.]

What underlies the author's words is the lack of paradigms for the transmission of values in the postindustrial society that is beginning to realize that technology and the market are not enough to develop sustained and equitable socioeconomic progress, as had seemed possible in previous periods.

The construction of daily life from the perspective of an ideal world reflects this lack of paradigms for guiding social action, as opposed to what was seen from the beginning of the 20th century to the start of the 1990s, where social change was established upon defined guiding principles.

The analysis of the texts shows – starting from 1995 – a positive change in terms of the image of old age and the roles assigned to the elderly. In the second grade readers, it is possible to observe (as the result of a quantitative analysis) an increase in the number of related reading materials, which doubles and triples the number of appearances of older people in comparison with the previous period.

The role of grandparent appears in the different texts studied in the context of the nuclear family, although children are taught about different types of families such as: large extended families (part of the history of their ancestors), tribal families (characteristics of the indigenous communities), and one-parent and blended families. These grandparents sometimes “collaborate with the family” and therefore are once again assigned an active role within it, or their grandchildren write to them and tell them things.

The terms *don* and *doña* [title of respect for elderly men and women, respectively] reappear in a neighborly context to refer in some cases to characters such as the greengrocer or the shopkeeper, or to a beloved character such as Doña Muñeca. In the same way, the word *old* reappears

as a noun [*viejo/a* as used to mean old man/woman] or as an adjective. For example, “Roque, the librarian, was a very intelligent and kind little old man” (20), or in the study of rhymes in Language class. It is expressed there:

Well he was old, my grandad,
And whiskers of a rabbit indeed he had (21
p.49) [Own translation]

Starting in 1995, old people again become figures of reference for children to the same degree as the other generations that “had replaced them” in the previous period. An example of this may be observed in the following activity: “Find out how to prepare a dessert and write it in your notebook. [...] Ask your mother, an aunt or your grandmas” (21). This change can also be seen in an image (about which students are asked to make conclusions) that depicts Pedro, Joaquín's grandfather and Sergio's father. All three men (who are shown together) love to fish.

The elderly start to take on – in addition to their family role as grandparents – social roles, as they did prior to the 1960s. In this way, we see that one of the central characters in the reader *Patitas 2* [Little paws 2] (21), “Doña Muñeca,” appears repeatedly throughout the stories about “dog walkers.” Muñeca turns sixty and celebrates her birthday within these stories, reaching the age at which old age begins according to the World Assembly on Ageing (27). The text “Chocolate para todos” [Chocolate for everyone] is suggestive in this regard:

Muñeca's birthday is coming. How old will she turn? Sixty...
That's a lot!
And José thinks about giving her a drawing.
The cake will have to be very big.
Who's going to bake it?
In the meantime, Muñeca prepares chocolate for everyone, in a huge pot.
Will there be sixty guests? (21) [Own translation]

The image of the elderly presented by the analyzed reading materials corresponds to active, physically strong older people. These appearances of elderly people with different roles, as well as the reappearance of the words *don* and *old* (used in a

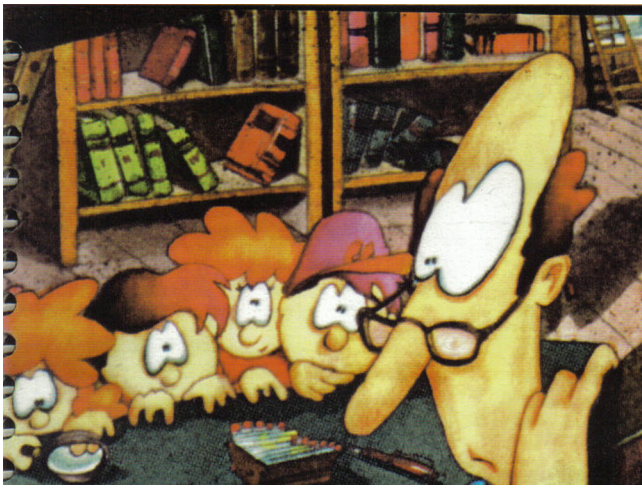


Figure 7. Old age at the end of the 1990s. School reader *Viajeros 2: los detectives* [Travelers 2: the detectives].

Source: Graciela Skilton (20 p.79)

non-pejorative way) in the texts, show that a change in the image of old age that society transmits to new generations has occurred. In Figure 7 we see the image of Roque, the old librarian.

These changes will be consolidated as we move into to the 21st century. In fact, it will be



- This is my family.
- I'm Grandma Raquel.
- I'm Juan, the father.
- My name is Manuel and I'm the older brother.
- I'm the mother and my name is Mónica.

Figure 8. Old age in the first decade of the 21st century. School reader *Mauro y Emilia 2* [Mauro and Emilia 2].

Source: Puerto de Palos (7).

possible to observe, in the stories of a family in which the parents are separated, a “young-old” grandmother collaborating in the upbringing and care of the children when their mother goes to work. Moreover, this family goes on holiday with the grandmother and not with the father, as he does not live with them. This grandmother can be seen to have authority in the upbringing of the children and their friends (Figure 8).

It is interesting to observe how the concept of diversity in old age is expressed in these readers and how they take into account the increase in life expectancy in current societies. An indicator of this is the emergence of family trees made up of four generations. Children report to have grandparents and great-grandparents in their family (Figure 9).

Furthermore, the poem “Cumpleaños” [Birthday] by Jorge Accame expresses the possibility that human beings can live over a hundred years; these are old-old people:

Today my grandma turns
one hundred seventeen
 Candles are missing on the cake
 because they have run out.
 No more in the pantry,
 no more in the supermarket.
Children, grandchildren and
great-grandchildren
 run around, fly around, worried.
 Neighbor, lend me some candles
 The party is about to start!
 (7 p.256) [Italics added] [Own translation]

Thus at the beginning of the 21st century, just as at the turn of the 20th century, children are once more transmitted reflections regarding the aging process, the exchange of knowledge among generations and the passing of generations. In the reading material “Sandía, maestro guardián” [Watermelon, guard dog teacher] (7), these topics are reflected on through the figure of a dog:

Watermelon was a German shepherd who had worked as a guard dog for a long time. Over the years, his snout turned white, his forehead grew wrinkled, he found it hard to run and got out of breath quickly. His bark was not as fearsome as before and he felt more tired, which made him lazy.

One day his owner brought a puppy called Hamburger to replace him in his work, since it was time for Watermelon to rest.

But a young dog doesn't know how to be a guard dog. So while the puppy spent the day playing and asking his owner to pet him and breaking things and chewing on shoes, Watermelon continued with his work.

Given the state of things, he realized that if he wanted to rest he was going to have to teach the puppy his work as fast as possible. So Hamburger studied with Watermelon as his teacher the tasks of a good guard dog, paying attention to the old dog's teachings and watching every move of his instructor.

"Hamburger, the work is very simple. When you hear any noise, stand up, puff out your chest and lift up your ears. Then move your head and bark to show that you are alert..." [...] Hamburger learned the work and became a good guard dog.

He began to protect the house and Watermelon could finally rest.

Long afterwards, when his snout turned white, his forehead grew wrinkled, he found it hard to run and got out of breath quickly, and when his bark was not as fearsome as before and he felt more tired, which made him lazy, his owner brought a puppy called Eggplant to replace him at his work.

When Hamburger went to meet him, the first thing he told him after greeting him was:

"The work is very simple. I know what I'm telling you. I was lucky enough to have a great teacher."

Hamburger began to give lessons to the puppy, since his time to rest was finally coming.

(Ariel Galatro) (7 p.156-158) [Own translation]

That is to say, it is possible to see in the reading material, mediated in this case through the story of the guard dogs, an expression of the aging process and of knowledge and value transmission between generations, particularly from the old to the young.

These changes coincide with the growth and dissemination of the production of the disciplines that compose Gerontology, as the result of a society whose process is precisely the



Figure 9. Old age in the first decade of the 21st century. School reader *Mauro y Emilia 2* [Mauro and Emilia 2].

Source: Puerto de Palos (7).

aging of its populations; at the same time, these changes might indicate to us that this society is going through a transition period due to the insufficiency of markets and technology to solve social problems.

According to Minois:

...periods called transition periods were less unfavorable to older people than stability periods, called "classic." Times of profound change, free from the prejudices and rigid structures that characterize times of

equilibrium, are more open to the diversity of talent and more receptive to difference, and have less esthetic, moral or social taboos. Undoubtedly, they are difficult periods for everybody, but the elderly seem to be less rejected during them, as indeed uncertainty is common to all ages. The Hellenistic period, the time of the Germanic invasion and the Early Middle Ages were less hard on older people than classical Greece and Rome or the Renaissance. (6) [Own translation]

CONCLUSION

Using the reading material of primary school readers, we have traveled through the historical period that goes from the turn of the 19th century to the beginning of the current century. The role assigned to the elderly and the image of old people that Argentine society transmitted and transmits to younger generations has not been linear: every period described has its own model of the elderly. We can see how these models compare with the models corresponding to other historical periods and social contexts (28 p.395-400). Thus we observe in a hypothetical way that:

- The most favorable periods to the elderly were those based on oral tradition, experience and custom. In such periods, the elderly played the role of connecting generations and of collective memory (1880-1940). To the contrary, times of historical acceleration served to relegate them to the category of the old and out-of-date (1960-1995).
- The most structured societies (between 1940 and 1950) – in which the State and the law have more authority to make individuals respect the social order – protect the weakest from the “attacks” of the strongest. In these societies, the condition of older people will be more favorable than in the more anarchic societies based on the survival of the fittest.
- Societies that worship corporal beauty tend to scorn old age (j), while those based on a more abstract and symbolic esthetic ideal give more value to the spiritual beauty that is beyond what can be seen. Therefore, they will be more tolerant of the aging process of their social actors.

Finally, in transitional periods (crisis of the current globalized, flexibilized societies) societies tend to equalize all social sectors given the instability produced by changes in social patterns, fostering the integration of the elderly.

ENDNOTES

a. The books used for this analysis were *El nene* [The child] by Andrés Ferreyra and José María Abuin (3) and *Dos amigos* [Two friends] by Aurora Chiappe (4).

b. We recall the Saénz Peña law under which every immigrant with two years of residence in the country was entitled to vote, even without citizenship papers. However, a study carried out on the contents of plays indicates that the representations of the Theatre of the Grottesque would suggest that just the opposite occurs.

c. Minois (6) refers to this topic for the period corresponding to the Early Middle Ages, when providing alms was considered a duty aimed at assuring the salvation of those who gave, more than the salvation of those who were in need. Love of the poor was not yet spoken of, much less the poor's eminent dignity. The ideology of the age implied a division of human beings into rich and poor, powerful and weak, and this division was to be accepted.

d. Anticipating a point developed later in this article, we see that, in the period from 1960 to 1990, a new figure appears that does not annul but rather replaces grandparents: the aunt or uncle.

e. We recall that in this period the Argentine retirement system and the Rights of the Aged are established.

f. “Right to assistance: every elderly person shall receive comprehensive protection from their family. In case of neglect, the State shall provide such protection, be it directly or by means of institutions and foundations in existence or created to that end, notwithstanding the State's or other institutions' right of subrogation to bring a lawsuit against remiss and solvent relatives for the corresponding contributions. [...] Right to work: whenever the State and the conditions allow it, occupation through productive work therapy shall be provided. Thus diminishment of the personality shall be avoided. [...] Right to respect: the elderly shall have the right to the respect and consideration of their fellow men” (13).

g. The following readers were used: *Los libros del Tamandú, cuentos y cantos* [The books of the Tamandú, short stories and songs] by María Teresa Forero (16); *Páginas para mí* [Pages for me] by Zulema Cukier, Rosa María Rey and Beatriz Tornadú (17); *Manantial* [Spring] by Blanca Braña de Iacobucci and Juan P. Vitale (18); *Dulce de leche* by Carlos Joaquín Durán and Noemí Beatriz Tornadú (15); and *Sol albañil* [Builder sun] by Ernesto Camilli (19).

h. The nuclear family is composed of both parents and small children. It does not include grandparents.

i. The readers used are the following: *Viajeros 2: Los detectives* [Travelers 2: the detectives] by María G. Gerini, Graciela Skilton and María A.

D'Alessandria (20); *Patitas 2: libro de lectura para segundo grado* [Little paws 2: second grade reader] by Hebe Solves (21); *Mauro y Emilia 2* [Mauro and Emilia 2], published by Puerto de Palos (7); *Toni, Luli y Mili* [Toni, Luli and Mili], published by Santillana (22); *Antología de lecturas para 1er ciclo* [Reading anthology for primary school] from Ediciones SM (23) *Caramelos de coco y dulce 2* [Coconut and candy sweets 2] (2), published by Mandioca (24); *Los edebits 2* [The edebits 2] by Gabriel Serafini, Gustavo Sposob and Graciela Ostrovsky (25).

j. This was particularly evident in Greece and during the Renaissance (6).

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