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Vieillesse, old-age and lǎonián
Analysis of a discursive construction of care in the context of Alzheimer disease

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Alzheimer's disease is not a direct consequence of ageing, but it mainly concerns older people. In France, it affects one in 5 people over the age of 80. The carers of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's therefore have to deal with people who are gradually losing their abilities as a result of both old age and disease. We invite here to look at the lexical representation of old age, in particular, in French, English and Chinese Mandarin, on the basis of their respective definitions in language dictionaries, in order to understand how the different languages take account of this period of life through this denomination and how these representations rooted in a language-culture can say/act on the ability of family carers to look after their relative. We then illustrate the discursive (de-)construction of this representation in French, as carried out in the Accmadial corpus (Accompagnants des Malades diagnostiqués Alzheimer) AAP 'handicap et autonomie, IRESP 2020-2022, CPER DI2L2S MSH 2018) consisting of semi-directive interviews conducted with spouses/partners, children and grandchildren of people affected by this neurodegenerative disease in Western France.

This is to be done from two perspectives : a linguistic one, in order to illustrate the semantico-pragmatic and semantico-discursive mechanisms of meaning construction; and an intercultural one, in order to explore, on the basis of linguistic clues, representations of the world perceived and modalised across three language-cultures.

Drawing on the distinction set forth by the philosopher of language John Searle (1990, 1995) between brute facts, such as illness and death, which require no human institution, and institutional facts, which result from a collective intention, such as the way in which they are accompanied, and its associated definitions of regulatory and constitutive rules, we start by identifying what, in old age and its consequences, are natural facts or social constructions, over which institutions, in the broadest sense, have leeway.

Secondly, we describe the words "vieillesse", in French, "old-age", in English and "老年" (lǎonián), in Chinese Mandarin on the basis of the definitions, collocations and associated examples by, in French, the Grand Robert de la langue française (2009), the Grand dictionnaire des Lettres Larousse (1989), the Petit Larousse (2023), the dictionnaire érudit de la langue française Lexis (2014), the Quillet dictionary (1990) and the TLF-i [on-line], as far as concerns English, the Oxford English Dictionary [online], the Cambridge English Dictionary [online] and The Collins English Dictionary [online] and for the Chinese part, the Xiàndài Hànyǔ cídiǎn, electronic version and 7th paper edition, as well as the Hànyǔ dà cídiǎn. To do so, we rely on the theoretical framework of the Semantics of Argumentative Possibilities (Galatanu, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2013, 2017), whose strata-based modelling (core, stereotypes, argumentative possibilities and argumentative deployments) allow, among other things, to isolate what constitutes the essential properties of the word from its less stable properties, "argumentative associations of the essential properties with other semantic representations, more kinetic because rooted in cultural kinetics" (Galatanu, 2021).

This step provides clues about the recurring properties in the language dictionaries, as well as it does about the differences that the latter reflect between the semantic representation of the

word in the 3 languages and the anchoring of the notion of old age in its natural and/or social dimensions.

Finally, we look at the discourse mechanisms used in France, particularly by carers of Alzheimer's patients, as evidenced by the Accmadial corpus (184 texts; here, 102 texts, 1,026,781 occurrences, 18,421 forms and 7,577 hapaxes). Based on a textometric analysis, using the Iramuteq software developed by P. Ratinaud and P. Marchand, and a contextual analysis of occurrences of "vieillesse" (old-age)", "maladie" (illness), we identify how they put the experience of help into words, and how they describe care in relation to old age, illness and dependency. More specifically, we focus on two observations : (i) the overall weakening of physiological functions and mental faculties and the difficulties in carrying out the tasks relating to these functions and faculties are, in this corpus and on the basis of this approach, minimized by their relationship not to an exceptional situation but to the normal development of the relative over which the carers have no control ; (ii) in comparison, the carer who becomes aware of the gradual dependence of his or her relative suffering from Alzheimer's disease says this care mainly in relation to the disease. "If old age, an ontological fact, is said to carry very negative values, which subjectivize its expression, it is also used to attenuate the seriousness of the symptoms of the disease, to minimize the "abnormal" behaviour of the patient due to illness. The description of the semantic representation of the denomination of a raw, ontological fact leads us to distinguish what, in the analysis of discourse, can provide elements of an answer to the relationship between the argumentative links constructed by speakers and their capacities for adherence" (Rochaix, à paraître).

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