Gendered and 'Ageed' Language and Power Inequalities: An Intersectional Approach

Jasna Mikić, Aleksandra Kanjuo Mrčela, Monika Kalin Golob

Abstract: A great deal has been written about the causes of gender inequality, and much of this literature has tackled the role of language as a mechanism of social exclusion. More recent analysis of gender inequalities indicates how vital it is that we understand the impact that different social characteristics, including age, can have simultaneously on a person's life situation. These factors should be examined together and at the same time, and as such they invite the kind of approach that is made possible by the concept of intersectionality. The aim of this article is to bridge the gap that exists between different streams of research. It approaches the analysis of gender and age from an intersectional perspective. It also draws on work on the reinforcement of gender inequalities through gendered language and engages with research on age-related social inequalities and especially on the specific gender bias of ageism and ageist language. We propose that an intersectional approach be brought to bear on the analysis of sexist and ageist language in order to draw these lines of inquiry together. In doing so we hope to contribute to a better understanding of the social position of women and men of different ages and the role of language in reproducing and reinforcing the inequalities of power created by attitudes to differences of gender and age. It is our belief that an intersectional approach has huge potential for future work in gender studies, sociolinguistic theory, and other avenues of research.
Keywords: Intersectionality, language, age, gender and social inequalities

Introduction

Most research on social differences, unequal opportunities, and discrimination has comprehensively tackled questions of race, ethnicity, class, and gender[22]. Only recently has attention shifted to the question of age. More and more researchers have recognised the pressing need for a theoretical and empirical consideration of a problem that has a heavy bearing on the lives of millions of older adults (Nelson 2011: 37). Analysis of the interplay between gender and age is a newly developing area in social sciences, and one in which **the concept of intersectionality has an important role to play.** An intersectional approach moves on from understanding gender and age as separate social dimensions and shows how the interconnection between them produces a complex system of inequality. It provides a better understanding of 'the ways people construct gender over their lifetimes' (Calasanti 2010; Lorber, Farrell 1991).

The aim of this exploratory paper is to contribute to research that uses an intersectional perspective to analyse the distribution of power between women and men of different ages. It will make that contribution by channelling different streams of research. We build upon previous elaborations of an intersectional perspective (e.g. Crenshaw 1989, 1991; etc.) with a view to developing a greater understanding of the complex formation of social inequalities based on gender and age. Additionally, we propose that these strands of research can be combined with analyses of **language as a means of exercising power and reproducing social inequalities** in society. Previous research has shown that language often supports both ageism (Coupland, Coupland, Giles 1991; Nussbaum et al. 2005; Gendron et al. 2015; etc.) and sexism (Mills 2008; Menegatti, Rubini 2017; etc.).

The main method used in our research was an ongoing literature review. We surveyed the research currently available to create the summary and synthesis of various sets of sources that follows here. Our goal was to establish **how an intersectional perspective could be used in the analysis of gendered- and what we shall define as 'ageed'-language** by bridging the gap between feminist, gerontological and sociolinguistic lines of inquiry. We first analysed feminist gender studies and gerontological literature. We approached these fields with the aim of learning more about how an intersectional perspective has already been used and of then identifying the gaps in the theoretical treatments of the ways that gender and age interact. Our next step was to obtain an overview of the sociolinguistic literature that has

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[22] For the purposes of this article we have analysed literature dealing with only two genders (female and male). Nevertheless, we are aware of the need to overcome gender binarism when addressing gender-related topics.

addressed the role of language in sustaining gender- and age-based discrimination in society. We analysed studies that approach the way gendered language reinforces gender inequalities. We also investigated literature offering information about social inequalities based on age and how the use of ageist language is connected to such inequality.

Our main theoretical contribution, as we envisage it, will be in the fields of **gender studies** and **sociolinguistics.** It will indicate the possibilities for cross-fertilisation between existing intersectionally-oriented research on gender, age, and sociolinguistic research. We found that analyses of gender tend to overlook the question of age (e.g. Calasanti, Slevin 2001; Calasanti 2004; Twigg 2004; Krekula 2007; etc.), while sexism (Mills 2008; Menegatti, Rubini 2017; etc.) and ageist language (Nussbaum et al. 2005; Gendron et al. 2015; etc.) are for the most part considered separately. Adopting an intersectional approach in the study of language could stimulate and guide some much-needed empirical research on this increasingly relevant topic. Meanwhile, we are confident that our diverse professional and academic backgrounds (in sociology, linguistics and communication studies) have enriched and deepened the observations we offer here as co-authors of the following article.

An intersectional perspective in the analysis of gender and age inequalities

The concept of intersectionality was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) within gender theory to describe power relations as dynamic interactions. In earlier theoretical work, the idea of the collective identity of all women was central to establishing their neglected importance as a strong political subject. Women's experiences were seen as uniform and opposed to the experiences of men, who were seen in similar homogeneous terms. Just as men were defined as embodying a cultural norm while women were given the status of 'the other', the definition of an absolute image of a 'woman' has led to the marginalisation of women whose experiences and perspectives differed from those whom that image represented (Krekula 2007: 156–157). Critiques of a uniform concept of a 'white, middle class and heterosexual woman' urged researchers to expand their attention to encompass the specific social positions of women of different races, classes, and ages, and to take into consideration their sexual identities and other personal circumstances (Kimmel, Hearn, Connell 2005). The focus was turned so that subsequent investigations making use of an intersectional approach could recognise and account for the differences between women of diverse social identities (Wodak 2015).

While some intersections, such as the intersection of gender, class or ethnicity, have been examined relatively often, the intersection of gender and age has received

surprisingly little attention (Jyrkinen 2014). We shall consider why this is from the perspective of gender studies and gerontology.

Gender studies as an interdisciplinary field focuses primarily on theorising and researching the influence of cultural, historical, and social events on gender identity and the ways gender is portrayed in different social contexts. The field of gender studies ('women's studies' as it was called at first) was always closely connected to feminism and women's rights activism. Many feminist writers in this field placed their emphasis on defining the attributes and differences between women and men. The initiative for studying gender came first from the revolution brought about by universal suffrage; it then gained fresh impetus with the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s, as women strove to improve their position within patriarchal society (Alcoff 2006: 152). It was during this second main phase that the concept of sexism gained real currency, describing as it did any discrimination based on sex, particularly with regard to women. Sexism derives from the definition of different, sometimes opposing, sometimes complementary 'traditional' roles for women and men on the basis of gender. The standard typology describes women as emotional, passive nurturers, and thus as better suited to domestic work and childcare, while men are seen as active, rational providers, better qualified as such for leading roles in public life. Those roles are based on a stereotypical understanding of femininity and masculinity, one that ascribes a higher social status to men, and that consequently creates an imbalance of power in society between a 'superior' and 'subordinate' gender. More recently, gender studies have also dedicated considerable attention to research on men and masculinities (Kimmel, Hearn, Connell 2005).

Gender is inseparably linked to age and the resulting constellation of power relations has always led to those factors weakening or strengthening each other when they combine. In practice this means that the interaction of gender with age can end either in the mutual neutralisation of social hierarchies or the formation of new types of marginalisation (Krekula 2007: 167). By the term 'gendered ageism' we note an instance of the latter, marginalising pattern, and more specifically refer to discrimination on the basis of gender and age taken together (Jyrkinen 2014: 176). Although it has been acknowledged that gender and age do need to be examined as a set, theoretical work on gender has rarely covered the perspective of age and the process of ageing has been overlooked almost entirely in the central debate (e.g. Calasanti, Slevin 2001; Calasanti 2004; Twigg 2004; Krekula 2007; etc.). Insofar as ageing has featured in feminist argument it has for the most part appeared only as an afterthought, an add-on to existing theory on the subordination of (mainly older) women. Most of the research on older women has been carried out of the field in social gerontology, and gender study theory has so far failed to follow up the implications of these studies, a fact that highlights the lack of connection

between these two areas. The relative neglect of older women by gender studies is the result of a number of other questions having taken priority. One sees firstly a marked 'selection of arenas and themes' in gender theory, with emphasis on fertile women of working age. There is also a 'model monopoly,' which is to say, a preoccupation with the concepts of 'family' and 'parent,' both of which in most discussions gravitate towards the concept of 'motherhood' (motherhood in turn is frequently presumed to be synonymous only with 'having small children'). Then there is a 'lack of problematisation of age', namely the commonly seen restriction of the upper age range to 64 years in sampling procedures (Krekula 2007: 158). In studying older women, feminists have also had difficulty in singling out purely ageist instances of oppression when they have in practice overlapped so obviously with instances of sexism. Beauvoir (1977), Sontag (1978), Arber and Ginn (1991) are just a few of the feminists, meanwhile, who have done a great deal to clarify the relationship between sexism and ageism. By focusing on male domination in patriarchal society they illustrate the ways in which the oppression of women is carried out; typically they observe it occurring alongside a cultural emphasis on reproduction chronologies, on the one hand, and sexualised images that promote the youthful appearance of women on the other (Bytheway 1995: 36).

When considering manifestations of ageism and sexism that mutually reinforce one another, studies have shown significant differences between women and men (Duncan, Loretto 2004). As shown above, the majority of research supports the thesis that older women face greater challenges because of both gender and age, while older men face only ageism and even then to a lesser degree than women. Earlier studies especially (Sontag 1978) stressed that women feel the burden of getting older more explicitly because they are more likely to be judged on their appearance, while men's social position in old age is usually linked to the worth placed on their accomplishments, which lend them power, prestige, and often high professional status. Sontag's research has been predominantly oriented towards aesthetic aspects of the body, but in considering other bodily aspects of ageing, Öberg and Tornstam (1999) have actually found more evidence of older women feeling satisfied and content with their bodies in comparison to the way younger women and older men feel about theirs.

Meanwhile the thesis that men are less affected by ageism is not uniformly supported by research and theory. Research has shown that in some cases, bias against ageing men could be even more dramatic than that experienced by ageing women, since the definition of masculinity is derived so often from physical strength, versatility in work, and practical independence. Thus, although age could increase the status of some men, older men may still be discriminated against because they are seen as becoming weaker, more passive, and dependent (Sinclair 2011).

An intersectional approach in research on ageism provides a more detailed and expansive view than an unvariegated comparison of men and women's experiences of ageism. It includes the specific social positions of women and men of different ages within the overall frame of reference. It should be mentioned here, meanwhile, that while gender studies approaching the question of ageism have mostly been concerned with the experiences of older women and men, a number of studies do acknowledge that younger people also experience age-based discrimination in everyday life; in places of education and, especially, in the working environment when it comes to gaining employment in the first place and then to obtaining rewards or promotions. Age-related discrimination occurs when young people (especially younger women) aspire to higher-ranking, decision-making positions. Younger women also often suffer discrimination because they are seen as a risky sector of the labour force, more burdened as they often are with family obligations than younger men and older women. Research shows that the labour market is however one sphere in which older women can also receive benefits on account of their knowledge, experiences, and perceived seniority (Jyrkinen 2014).

The term ageism was defined by Roger N. Butler in 1969 and has until recently been used to address three main social phenomena: (1) – prejudices towards old age, ageing, and older persons; (2) – discrimination against older people; and (3) – institutionalised practices driven by stereotypes about older people (Wilkinson, Ferraro 2002: 339). A newer definition has expanded the understanding of ageism by recognising discrimination not only against older people, but against those of any age group (Palmore 1999: 4). Nevertheless, in a society that glorifies youthfulness, and by contrast generally regards ageing as a process of physical and mental deterioration, ageism is still mostly oriented towards older people (Duncan, Loretto 2004).

Ageist attitudes are based on strong negative stereotypes that are deeply connected to our fear of ageing and death and that are automatically activated in the course of social contact (Nelson 2011: 42). The most common of these negative stereotypes reflect preconceptions of older people's uselessness, ugliness, isolation, poverty, impotency, mental decline, illness, mental illness, and depression. Those are accompanied by negative myths ('being old is being sick', 'older people are not able to learn new things', 'older people are weak, uninterested in sex', etc.) and negative attitudes and/or outright discrimination (in employment, family, housing, and health care). However, the perception of old age can also be positive and work from stereotypes about the happiness, kindness, wisdom, freedom, eternal youth, affluence, and political power of older people (Palmore 1999: 20–34).

As a science of ageing, **social gerontology** has had much to contribute to the study of ageism, where the topic of gender has featured regularly as a part of gerontology studies. This has led to the discipline often being regarded as 'feminised' (Russell 2007:

173). Gerontology derives from biology, sociology, and psychology and focuses on discovering forms of age-based discrimination and the subtle ways ageism manifests itself of society (Palmore 1999; Wilkinson, Ferraro 2002). Ageing, once considered merely a natural process, has become a major social, economic and political issue and one of the greatest social challenges of the 21st century (Lowenstein, Katz 2010). In spite of its multidisciplinary framework, social gerontology is still underdeveloped theoretically and thus often identifies and describes the life problems of older people rather than theorising them. This is also the case when the question of gender is taken into consideration. The first studies on ageism used gender as a supplement to existing theories or research on age and ageing in order to gain a better understanding of ageing processes (Krekula 2007: 160). As this research strategy has been pursued, women and men have been examined independently, as comprising two separate dimensions, in which older women have been compared to older men (McMullin 1995). An approach based on this kind of differentiation supports the creation of a double standard in perceptions of women's and men's experiences of ageing.

Although social gerontology has made an immense contribution to research on older women, it has been dominated by the 'misery perspective', which presents the ageing process as having solely negative consequences in women's lives. The reason for that is explained at least partly by the **double jeopardy thesis**, which describes how two forms of subordinate status (being a woman and being an older person) are combined and result in the prejudices and discrimination commonly experienced by older women (Krekula 2007: 159–161). A perspective that simultaneously measures the effects of ageism and sexism suggests that getting older is a bigger issue for women than it is for men and finds that older women are stigmatised (Matthews 1979). An intersectional perspective to an extent rejects the double jeopardy thesis. An intersectional approach suggests that combining one subordinate position with another does not simply 'double' the state of oppression in which someone might live, but rather creates a complex interplay of power relations, the result of which is a different and unique structure of oppression. The double jeopardy thesis has been criticised for oversimplification.

On the other hand, social gerontology and its 'levelling hypothesis' suggests that getting older is more traumatic for ageing men. This conclusion is based on various theories, one of which identifies a reversal of roles taking place in which women gain control and men increasingly lose it. From this perspective ageing is easier for women because it is perceived as beginning earlier and lasting longer, and thus taking place as a more gradual process than in the case of men (Beeson 1975). Women are also socialised to combine a range of activities (in paid and unpaid work) and social contacts (within and out of working organisations). As a result, women are better equipped to accept life changes after retirement.

Gender and age in language and discourse

You heavens… touch me with noble anger,
And let not women's weapons, water-drops,
Stain my man's cheeks.
(Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 2, Scene 4)

Language is not only a reflection of reality, but also constitutes what we experience as reality. It influences our view of the world around us and the view we have of ourselves. Language, therefore, has a great influence on social and power relations, values, and social change (Litosseliti 2006).

A great deal of research over the last few decades has suggested that language in various ways supports the existence of social inequalities in society. The power of language is connected to the power of discourse, as displayed in our thinking, actions, and reactions, and it is responsible for representing, preserving, or reconstructing social identities and practices. Power is present in all social situations and it manifests itself every time people enter a discourse (Fairclough 1989); as such there can be no 'neutral' discourse. Thus, in any kind of human interaction, the use of language is important, not just in terms of the way we use our words for writing and speaking (its linguistic features), but also with respect to our intentions and to the meanings that create power relations between social groups (Tannen 1994), including gender- and age-based groups.

Sociolinguistics is a field that concerns itself with the ways that language is shaped by the context in which it is used and how its use, reciprocally, shapes social relations and the makeup of society itself. The field developed in the 1960s with the work of William Labov, Dell Hymes, Joshua Fishman, John Gumperz, and others (Wodak, Johnstone, Kerswill 2010: 1–4). By definition, sociolinguistics covers multiple social dimensions and variables, including gender and age. Age and gender are both socially constructed, and that makes them interesting topics for research on language use and forms of communication. Language changes with age, but is also differentiated according to changing social roles and gender identities over a lifetime (Hamilton 1992). Despite the interest it technically has in both gender and age, sociolinguistics has placed the topic of gender at the core of its research, as one of the most important aspects in the study of language. On the other hand, age has not received the same attention. Most of the sociolinguistic research on age has generally focused on sociolinguistic variation.

Systematic research on **gender and language** gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s (Sunderland 2006: 33) and was first linked to the women's liberation movement in the United States before spreading quickly to the rest of the Western

World (Wodak 2015: 699). Although the majority of authors at that time studied gender and language from a feminist perspective, not all studies approaching gendered language were feministic as such. Some focused on describing gender and linguistic characteristics, often relating them to the processes of language change or language variation (e.g. Labov 1966; Trudgill 1974).

Starting from different ideological positions, many diverse theoretical and methodological viewpoints were formed in these 'pioneering' years. However, three main models emerged in studies of gender and language: the 'deficit', 'difference', and 'dominance' models.

The ***deficit model*** was introduced in the 1970s in the work of Robin Lakoff and notably in *Language and Woman's Place* (1975)*.* According to Lakoff's theory, 'woman's language' is characterised by weakness and subordination and deviates from the norm the language of men supposedly constitutes. As with the deficit model, proponents of the ***dominance model*** of discourse shared the hypothesis that men's language dominated the language of women. This theory was based on the view that power belongs to men, and that men used their power to dominate women. Zimmerman and West (1975) focused, for example, on the way that men interrupt women in conversation, Maynard (1980) observed topic change, and Fishman (1983) noted that men have a greater amount of control in conversations with the opposite sex (in comparison to women). The ***difference model*** offered various explanations for the differences between genders, considering ideas about 'natural differences' (e.g. 'women are less competitive than men'), different cultural backgrounds, and different forms of socialisation.

One of the newer approaches to language and gender, a ***dynamic or social constructivist model***, has broken somewhat with these earlier theories. Since the 1990s, changes in the conceptualisation of gender have sparked an entirely new way of understanding gendered language. This new focus was influenced by the poststructuralist idea that gender is constructed, performed, enacted, and affected through and by language (Wodak 2015: 699). Gender identities and the speech characteristics of individuals therefore came to be seen as social constructs and not as 'given' social categories (Coates 2013: 6). Studies of gender and language became more complex and in-depth and more theoretically developed, and at the same time attracted criticism for the supposedly one-dimensional perception of women they advanced (Tolmach Lakoff 2010: 164–165). Some authors have thus modified their research on gender and language to include other categories, such as social class (Labov 1990), and other aspects or focuses such as power (Hall, Bucholtz, Moonwomon 1992) or masculinity (Johnson, Meinhof 1997).

In recent years, work on language and gender has shifted to address more complex forms of language. One of the most important writers of the most recent generation

is Sara Mills (2008, 2012), who works on the topic of gender, feminism, and linguistics (analysing courtesy, sexist language, discursive practices, intercultural interactions, etc.). In addition to scientific research in this field, an extensive range of widely read 'popular' literature also emerged (e.g. Tannen 1994; etc.).

Sexist language, ranging from its more subliminal to less subtle forms, has received a great deal of theoretical attention and has been the subject of considerable empirical research (Litosseliti 2006). The semantic content of such language, which stems from universal gender differences, has been widely discussed; writers have analysed how language reflects gender stereotypes and how commonly held ideas of femininity and masculinity are transferred into language (Tolmach Lakoff 2010). Sexist language has also been analysed from a grammatical standpoint, addressing questions of phonology, syntax, and morphology. This perspective takes in specific grammatical and lexical forms that are particular to a given language and thus do not appear in the majority of languages (Tolmach Lakoff 2010: 152–153). The most problematic feature of this kind, nevertheless, is the 'masculine form' that predominates in many languages. Having to use masculine nouns and pronouns as supposedly universal and neutral linguistic forms to refer to both women and men is a typical case of sexism in language. Such linguistic forms have been proven to influence our mental images of the world, to reinforce the dominant status of men linguistically, and to render women invisible (Menegatti, Rubini 2017: 1). Feminist theorists have put considerable energy meanwhile into proving that words denoting men and women rarely carry equivalent status for both sexes, while gender-differentiated pairings of words usually bring unflattering or less prestigious connotations for women: 'master' and 'mistress' is one classic example of such a pairing. Studies of the bearing gender has on language and the social hierarchies it involves have always paid attention to sexist language, all the more so when discussing the general nature of sexism as a form of gender-based discrimination (Plemenitaš 2014).

Ageism and **ageist language** have an important influence on social relations and they are also shaped by them. Through the connotations of derogatory words in standard usage and the synonyms – or euphemisms – sometimes chosen for those words, language supports and influences ageism (Palmore 1999: 89). Ageism in language (describing old people as problematic or 'cranky', 'wrinkled', and ill) can be responsible for the distancing of younger from older people and it can also create a discourse of panic, fear, and anxiety about ageing and age (Bytheway 1995: 72).

Early research on age and language in the 1970s and 1980s had little to do with actual linguistic research, except where it alluded to separate studies by linguists working outside the fields of social theory (e.g. Copper 1986; Eckert 1997; etc.). Copper (1986: 52) in particular warned of the danger of 'societal ageing' or ageism, which, as we mentioned before, has become a topic of research in gerontology.

Eckert (1997: 154–167) has observed the complexities presented by age as a topic for research. She was not satisfied with explanations of ageist linguistic behaviour that leaned on a simplistically drawn concept of purely chronological age. She thus developed her own typology to differentiate between chronological, biological, and social age. Her theories have influenced the work of a number of authors; however, despite considerable and wide-ranging efforts to produce a more nuanced conceptual model, the diverse experience of ageing is still understood almost exclusively in terms of chronological age in most research on the question in Western societies (Cheshire 2006).

Up to the present time, most of the sociolinguistic research regarding age has focused mainly on language variation, i.e. the study of language change. Studies of age incorporate time as a decisive factor when talking about processes of change. Research can thus be carried out in what linguists define as *apparent time*, which involves analysing language change through the linguistic differences exhibited by speakers of different ages within a given community or group at a given point in time, or in *real time*, which involves analysing linguistic differences identified in a group over more than one point in time (Garcia Mouton 2012). The ageing process in relation to language has been analysed from two perspectives, (1) observing language changes and language use during the lifespan of a given person, and thus describing *age-specific use of language* and (2) studying the language of different groups of people living within a given speech community, and thereby referring to *generation-specific* language (Cheshire 2006). It has been observed that such studies would not be possible without drawing comparisons between certain age groups or generations, and thus without resorting to generalisations (Garcia Mouton 2012).

In the analysis of language, some stages of life have been considered in more detail than others. Priority has been given to the language of childhood and adolescence over the language of middle and later adulthood (Eckert 1997: 157). Children's language generally displays a range of universal linguistic features, while other life stages are more likely to differ culturally. 'Youth language' has been recognised as a field in its own right, concerning itself with adolescent slang among other salient features of speech in teenagers and young adults. Youth language is often exclusive by nature. It typically responds to intergenerational (power) relations and empowers the members of exclusive circles of people (e.g. those with computer skills). Adolescents are introducing new words and new meanings for old words on social media and are thus changing the way communication typically occurs (Reed 2014). Some research shows that younger people are more innovative in their use of language, that they break rules self-consciously, and that they want to distinguish themselves from adults. Nevertheless, they grow more linguistically conservative and sensitive to norms as they get older (Garcia Mouton 2012).

The language of older individuals on the other hand has only recently received more detailed attention in research on experiences of ageing. The topic still constitutes only a small proportion of all ageist language studies (Ehernberger Hamilton 1999: 3). Nevertheless, in a relatively short space of time age-related language studies have tackled many topics, examples of which include: a comparison of language associated with the ageing of healthy as opposed to unhealthy individuals (Bayles, Kaszniak 1987); the role of language in creating the social identities of older people (Coupland, Coupland, Giles 1991); and communication between generations (Hummert, Wiemann, Nussbaum 1994).

Interactions between people who belong to different generations are often shaped by ageist stereotypes and prejudices. Age has become a major social parameter because of the heavy burden of stereotypical perceptions attached to any age group; a burden that invariably threatens to unbalance communication between older and younger people in everyday life (Nussbaum et al. 2005). Intergenerational communication can be examined by means of three models: Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al. 1987), the Communicative Predicament Model of Ageing (Ryan et al. 1986), and the Communication Enhancement Model of Ageing (Ryan et al. 1995).

Sociolinguistics also addresses age-related features of speech that indicate differences between various age groups in terms of pitch, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Age discrimination occurs at all ages and it is age-specific. Ageism, age stereotypes, and ageist language create a complex composite that may be triggered by visible aspects of ageing and then cause a person to modify their speech of order to accommodate the perceiver's needs (Nussbaum et al. 2005: 289). It has been found that mostly younger people tend to speak differently to others (older people) (Nelson 2011: 41). For example, 'overaccommodation', a phenomenon identified by Communication Accommodation Theory, is a type of speech younger people exhibit when trying to be overly polite. When overaccommodating, they speak more slowly and loudly, in simple sentences, with exaggerated intonation (Giles et al. 1994). Such overaccommodation should be distinguished from the more openly condescending 'baby talk' that is characterised also by higher pitch and exaggerated intonation, by which a younger speaker will treat an older person as though he or she is infantile. While they differ in the degree to which they patronise, such styles of speech are founded equally on stereotypes that portray older people as childlike and slow in functioning (Nelson 2011: 41–42).

Coupland, Coupland and Giles (1991) showed that society is responsible for the marginalisation of its older members through social interaction and conversation (Palmore 1999: 89). Discrimination based on age can be very complex, and ageism is expressed in subtle forms that are often overlooked. The language of ageism can be intended undeniably positive and supportive, however it may come across

as anger and disapproval (perceived as a lack of respect or courtesy on the part of a younger towards an older person). However, certain words and phrases, although intended as positive, may accidentally perpetuate bias against older people, age-based stereotypes, judgements, and assumptions. People can thus unintentionally engage in a negative form of communication. This language-based discrimination is normalised and internalised (Gendron et al. 2015). On the other hand, it is interesting that regardless of any lack of intention or otherwise, many ageist remarks are not accidental and can be delivered in neutral or indeed positive forms of speech, such as compliments. To describe an older adult who acts energetically as being 'youthful' is most likely meant as a compliment rather than an insult. Paradoxically, though, the underlying message there is that being 'young' is a positive quality and being 'old' is not. Taking into account that age is 'body-based system of social categorization' (Ainsworth 2002: 581), it is not surprising that many ageist comments are based on physical appearances, and involve an essential identification of beauty with youth. Hence, resisting the process of ageing with skin treatments, hair colouring, and even cosmetic surgery has become essential in order to preserve a 'youngish look' (Wilkinson, Ferraro 2002).

We can see instances of age-offensive vocabulary in many everyday situations, where they may carry various ideological connotations (Bytheway 1995). In this connection, social gerontologists have identified two prevailing discourses that create and shape ageism. The first is the discourse of weakness, decline, and sickliness, portraying older people as vulnerable and in need of protection (Hurd Clarke, Korotchenko 2016), while the second promotes a positive side, describing successful ageing (Katz, Calasanti 2015). This discourse opposes traditional stereotypes associated with older people by describing them as healthy, independent, happy, and in good shape. Although the second discourse seems positive, it can put pressure on older people and create almost a sense of moral obligation about how they feel they ought to behave (LeBlanc 2017: 5–6).

Although the majority of all ageist language studies consider older age as more problematic, we should not overlook the obstacles that younger people (especially women) are facing in communication. Many women in their work environment have complained of how they were discriminated against in the early stages of their career. Discrimination is usually expressed in explicit ways, through the use of patronising or denigrating phrases, such as 'girls', by their superiors, and it can also take the form of mocking, ignoring, or not taking women (their proposals, comments) seriously, etc. The use of this kind of language is a reflection of a direct judgement, based on stereotypes in which younger women are not seen as being as mature, competent, or responsible as their older colleagues.

The new concept of ageed language/discourse

We saw that the research on gender and language is considerably more developed than that on age and language. We wanted to establish what aspects of the work done in gender-sensitive analyses of language might be usefully carried across into analyses of age and language.

In approaching this topic we identified a significant conceptual gap in the vocabulary available to theorists and researchers. Analysis of the interplay of gender, language, and power has produced concepts of 'sexism', 'sexist language', 'gendered language', and 'gendered discourse'. While the concept of ageism exists, a concept equivalent to gendered language/discourse has not yet been named. Throughout this paper we have used the term 'ageist language' when referring to language that reflects ageism, and we now propose the term 'ageed language/discourse' when describing the social construction of age as it is (re)produced more broadly through language. As with 'sexist' and 'gendered' language, ageist language is language that reflects the particular prejudice of ageism and is thus to a varying extent openly discriminatory. Ageed language, meanwhile, is a broader concept: it carries markers, diverse linguistic forms, that say something about the 'time of life' of the speaker, the person or group being referred to, or indeed (perhaps, in fact, most commonly) the person or group being addressed. The difference is essentially one of syntagm and paradigm. Ageist language offers one example of the content a certain discourse may contain; ageed language can be found potentially in *any* discourse, and the concept is thus, we suggest, a valuable *descriptive* sociolinguistic tool. As we shall discuss in more detail later on, the grammar of language is not explicitly ageed in the way that it is gendered. However, in languages such as Slovenian, the use of a third-person plural in the second person voice will almost always invoke the image of an older person. As such, it is ageed language.

An intersectional approach in research on gender, age and language

In the following part of our discussion we would like to reflect on the different streams of research discussed above and suggest how an intersectional perspective could be used to complement and deepen analyses of how language both reflects and perpetuates inequalities resulting from gender and age. Intersectionality could be used as a theoretical perspective; however, it also has great potential as a tool for analysis (and for advocacy, policy development) (Ristinmaa 2012: 4–6), as we demonstrated in the preceding sections.

In the first part of our article we analysed the intersection of gender and age from two different theoretical angles: gender studies and social gerontology. Our analysis

showed that gender studies is mostly either silent about age or mentions the topic only in passing; the field in general recognises ageism as an additional form of oppression of women. Gender theory for the most part suggests that the burden of age is harder for women than men. Similarly, social gerontology's explanation of discrimination on the basis of gender and age is mainly limited to the double jeopardy thesis, which focuses on older women as being 'doubly' discriminated against on account of their being women and being old. As in gender studies, social gerontologists have focused on the stigma older women carry as a result of their appearance, while other aspects of their experience of ageing are not taken into consideration. The experience of younger people of all sexes and older men has only recently gained more attention in gender studies and social gerontology. The analyses inspired by intersectionality as an active principle to date have mostly been in gender studies.

At the present time it is possible to see scholars in different disciplines simultaneously studying identical topics without connecting or discussing the results obtained by the separate streams of research. We are confident that this problem can be overcome by bringing the analysis of gender, age and language together through an intersectional approach. The lesson learned from current applications of intersectionality is that this perspective allows one to get beyond methodologically unproductive comparisons of different forms of gender and/or age-based stigmatisation and their victims. In doing so, it opens the way to a better understanding of the complex systems of social power distribution, in which gender and age in different combinations and social contexts might either empower individuals or put them at a disadvantage. The lesson is also applicable in the use it suggests intersectionality could have in the study of language.

With the aim of determining how we can do better research on the dynamics of sexism and ageism in language we have attempted to get an overview of the theoretical debate on language and discourse in connection with the gender-related distribution of power. Our overview suggests that there are a number of perspectives on sexist language that could be used to a differing extent to expand the range and depth of research on sexism and ageism.

As mentioned earlier, analysis of the grammatical aspect of language shows that the subordinate social position of women is both reflected in and reinforced by language, since the masculine forms that are taken as linguistic norms are a barrier to women's visibility in language and discourse. This perspective is not, however, available to analyses of ageism in language as there is no specific manifestation of age(ism) in grammar. There are no linguistic forms that refer to individual ages or life-stages and, additionally, phonology, syntax, and morphology do not reflect age in the same way as gender. Language does not assign a 'superior' or 'inferior' position to older or younger people, as is the case with gendered language.

Nevertheless, as we also saw earlier, different theoretical models have discovered that the language used by women (i.e. women's language) is rendered deficient, subordinate, and different with respect to the language that is always considered the norm – that is, the language used by men and gendered in male terms. Regardless of the methodological and theoretical problems arising from these models, we see some potential in analysing the language used by women and men of different ages. A number of questions could be posed in such analysis along the lines suggested by analyses of gender-specific uses of language. Such questions could include the following: What variations are presented by the kinds of language used by differently socialised women and men of different generations? Which kind of language is seen as a social norm? Is there such a thing as specifically 'youth-produced language'? Do any lexical aspects of the language used by different generations express weakness or subordination? How does language 'enact' qualities associated with certain age-groups?

The semantic analysis we presented showed that language reflects stereotypes about the social roles of women and men of different ages. Most of the analysis confirmed that the more subordinate the positions they occupied, the more often women were (and still are) taken as targets for sexist language. We found that research focusing on sexist language and discursive practices, intercultural communicative interactions, and aspects of gendered language can be used to extend sociolinguistic studies on age, which are still preoccupied only with questions of language variation. On the other hand, existing studies of language variation (both those analysing the specific uses of language during a person's lifetime and those analysing the specific uses of language by people of different generations) could inspire research on the intersection of gender and age, which has been neglected until now.

We also found that while sexist comments can be quickly detected, ageist language is much harder to recognise or address because of its subtle nature and widespread cultural acceptance. It can appear in different forms and we believe that incorporating an intersectional perspective could deepen the existing analysis of the use of ageist language in a number of ways (summary in Table 1):

(1) The broader concept we advocate could be applied to analyse the use of openly or subtly offensive or vulgar words or phrases (often in jokes) to describe a younger/ older person ('girl' / 'old-timer'). Some expressions of this kind refer directly to just one gender, thus encompassing both ageism and sexism. An intersectional analysis using corpus linguistic analysis of language sources would show how the same words can be used with different results when applied to people of different ages and genders. We think that applying methodological approaches such as critical discourse analysis, which aims to uncover discourses that involve the oppression

and discrimination of certain social groups, would be appropriate for research on the intersection of sexism and ageism in language (especially when focusing on words or phrases). This could open the way to a better understanding of how dominant discourses affect the social distribution of power. Another possible method for analysing the use of sexist and ageist language is the 'Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count' (LIWC), which is a tool often used in psychological research to study age and gender through function words (prepositions, articles, pronouns, etc.). LIWC has revealed, for example, that women use more first-person singular pronouns, men are more inclined to use articles, and older people use plural pronouns more than people in younger age groups. Also, males have been found to use more formal and informational words, while females use more 'deictic language' – i.e. words and phrases whose meaning depends on the context in which they are used (e.g. 'you', 'there', 'last month') (Schwartz et al. 2013). The LIWC method has been applied to gender and age separately, but it could also be useful for identifying the specific language features used by people of different genders and ages. Another potentially useful method is data collection, with subsequent corpus analysis of (online, video, or textual) media. Using standard corpus software we could monitor the repetition and frequency with which sexist or ageist words or phrases are used to describe or report on younger/older women/men in the media, or to identify singular instances of their presence in the media. In the age of data science, social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) have become unprecedented sources of personal discourse. By using differential language analysis (DLA) to track the content of messages on social media we could distinguish demographic and psychological attributes; that is to say, an analysis of words, phrases, and topics discussed on social media could be correlated to a person's gender, age, and personality traits.

(2) Intersectional analysis could be applied to styles or modes of speech (this could include patronising ways of speaking to older people – for example, using baby talk – or to younger people – for example, condescending styles of speech in a work environment). In order to analyse the intersection of different speech styles an observational method could be used. We could track conversations (and record them) and isolate, for example, the use of language and ways of speaking used by different age groups/genders and the typical forms and modes of communication found within and among these groups. Special attention should be devoted to the simultaneous presence of sexist and ageist language practices. Ethnomethodology, which studies the social practices of real people in real settings and is concerned with the practices by which the social order is produced, overlaps with conversation analysis, another approach that studies social interaction and verbal and non-verbal behaviour in everyday situations and that could be considered for use in the study of gendered and ageed language practices. Additionally, we could also apply standard corpus

software (as described above) to track the content of messages (detecting the use of patronising speech) and analyse the use of words, phrases and topics that are being discussed on social media.

(3) Our approach would also make it possible to analyse the use of inclusive/exclusive language (i.e. the exclusion of a group of people by using seemingly neutral language (or slang) that is used specifically by people of a certain generation or gender). We could detect the exclusiveness by employing the observational method and the ethnomethodological approach (both described above). Researchers could also consider how social experiments and case studies might be used in order to detect gendered and ageed language.

Table 1: Using the an intersectional approach to analyse language

Topic of language/ discourse analysis	The use of openly or subtly offensive or vulgar words or phrases	Styles or modes of speech (patronising, condescending)	The use of inclusive/ exclusive language
Methodology	Critical discourse analysis	Observational method	Observational method
	Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC)	Ethnomethodology	Ethnomethodology
	Corpus analysis of (online, video or textual) media	Conversation analysis	Social experiment
	Differential language analysis (DLA)	Standard corpus software	Case study

Conclusion

In this article we discussed the importance of applying an intersectional perspective when we are theorising about and researching social inequalities based on gender and age. Our analysis makes an effective argument in support of using an intersectional approach to study the dynamics of ageing and gender. Inspired by the importance and fruitful use of intersectionality in gender and (to a lesser extent in) sociolinguistic studies, we analysed how an intersectional perspective could enrich research on the role of language in reproducing the unequal distribution of power based on gender and age.

The research presented in this article has shown that language supports sexism as well as ageism. According to our reading and analysis of the literature on sexism and ageism in language, it is clear that sexist and ageist language is a powerful form of discrimination and presents invisible barriers to social equality. We found that while sexist language has been extensively researched in the frame of (feminist) sociolinguistics, analysis of age-related patterns of bias in language is less developed. For that reason, we tried to determine to what extent the research methodology used to analyse gendered language could also be employed to interpret and explore ageist and ageed language. We concluded that applying a gender-sensitive analytical approach could be useful in analyses of the semantic aspects of (ageed/ageist) language, but not the grammatical aspects.

Our research showed that the relationship between gender, age, and language is complex and that future research should address the interplay between social and linguistic factors by incorporating an intersectional approach. We think that the results of such research could substantially complement existing knowledge on the social inequalities between women and men of different ages, and highlight the important role of language in reinforcing the social distribution of power.

The conclusions presented here contribute to the understanding of:

(1) how the principles of analyses that already make use of the intersectionality perspective in gender and gerontological studies could be applied to the study of gendered and sexist language;

(2) how the existing research on sexism and ageism in language could be deepened using the intersectional perspective;

(3) how the concept of 'ageed' language that we outlined in this paper offers a potentially valuable descriptive tool for sociolinguistic analysis and indeed for the interdisciplinary matrix of approaches that we have argued here could be created using the principle of intersectionality.

As such, we see these findings as presenting a strong stimulus for further research on the role of language in the reproduction of gender- and age-based inequalities.

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MSc. Jasna Mikić is a young researcher, a faculty assistant in the field of sociology, and a member of the Research Centre for Organizational and Human Resources at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. Her work includes collaboration on two projects that directly addressed the area of gender and power in the economy – 2015, 2016: EQPOWEREC ('Gender equality in the distribution of economic power: understanding and overcoming barriers to gender equality in decision-making in the economy') and 2016: 'Accessibility of the labour market for women and men in Slovenia'. Contact email: jasna.mikic@fdv.uni-lj.si.

Prof. Dr. Aleksandra Kanjuo Mrčela is a professor of the sociology of work and economic sociology at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences. Between 1999 and 2001 she was a visiting scholar at the London School of Economics and Political Sciences. Since 2004 she has been a member of the European Commission Networks of Experts in the field of gender equality. She was Vice-Dean of the FSS. She researches and publishes on the economic position of women and specifically on positions of decision-making in Slovenia and abroad. Contact email: aleksandra.kanjuo-mrcela@fdv.uni-lj.si.

Prof. Dr. Monika Kalin Golob is a professor of linguistics and stylistics at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences. She researches and teaches in the fields of Slovene linguistics, stylistics (media language, advertising), sociolinguistics (language planning, language of universities and science) and language culture. In 2000 she was a visiting researcher in Munich, Germany. She is Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences. Contact email: monika.kalin-golob@fdv.uni-lj.si.