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TEMPORAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE TRANSMISSION OF LIFE EXPERIENCE IN SENILITY

Abstract: The article presents the relationship between temporal perspective and wisdom transmission of the people in late adulthood to the younger generation. The participants were asked to write a short "Letter to a grandchild". The letters written by 119 participants aged over 60 years old were analyzed qualitatively in terms of content and form, using categories from previous studies (Dryll, Tokarska, Cierpka, 2016). In order to assess temporal perspective the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI) by Philip G. Zimbardo and John Boyd was used (adaptation by Aneta Przepiórka, Małgorzata Sobol-Kwapińska and Tomasz Jankowski, 2016). A number of relationships between

transmission characteristics and temporal perspective scales was observed. The results follow a characteristic pattern where instead of the focus on timing (past, present, and future), an attitude (positive or negative) seems to be more important. The results do not support the concept of a balanced temporal perspective, which can be explained by cultural differences as well as developmental characteristics of the participants.

Keywords: transgenerational transmission, generativity, letter to a grandchild, temporal perspective, late adulthood, grandparents and grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

Late adulthood, starting after the age of 60, usually associates with withdrawal from one's working life (retirement), considerable decrease in family duties (adult children), often also with deterioration of one's health and general social situation. However, according to Erik Erikson (2012), it is also the time of wisdom, achieved when one reaches an effective solution of the crisis typical of that age. According to Lars Tornstam (2011), in their late adulthood, people head to the last phase of their develop-

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ment – gerotranscendence. This involves rather radical change of the perception and the evaluation of events – from egocentric to “cosmic”, which is related more to universal values, rather than one’s own interest or even well-being. Usually, at the beginning of this period people take stock of their own life (Oleś, 2011). They reflect on the life events and choices made, draw conclusions based on these reflections – they look at many things differently, which enhances their resources of personal wisdom. The paradox of senior age is that this wisdom will not be used in one’s own life anymore, because “nothing happens twice”.

Luckily, people communicate – culture is created by accumulation of experiences gathered by hundreds of generations. One man’s reflections might and should inspire others. Hence the importance of the transgenerational transmission. The transmission occurs spontaneously during the process of interaction and being together of people of different ages and different experiences, and above all, within the process of upbringing. In everyday life, personal wisdom manifests itself in the choices one makes, goals, activities one engages in, but also in the comments to events and stories about what happened in the past, as well as plans and direct indications of the most important issues. It might also appear as a one-off life statement *credo* – written, for instance, in the form of a letter.

Formerly, letters were mainly a tool for communication, used to exchange current information between the dear ones who were temporarily away from each other. Nowadays these functions are realized by calling one another and in younger generations – by Facebook, e-mail or SMS. But letters have always existed also as a short literature form, characterised by the author’s personal attitude towards its content and explicit addressing. Letters could be persuasive, yet, it was not their key feature, because their main role was to express one’s own opinion on some crucial issues – the message resulting from the author’s reflections on his or her life experiences (different types – historical, personal, artistic). There is one particular type of such letters, “a letter to a grandchild”, which constitutes a separate form both in the historical literature, as well as in the modern Internet production. It refers to existential issues (“how and why shall we live?”), focusing on values. Using such form of expression in psychological research allows for reaching the resources of the author’s personal wisdom.

Following the prevailing definitions of wisdom (e.g. Ardel, 2004; Baltes, Staudinger, 2000), it refers to the individual’s experiences, yet, it is not a simple reflection of one’s biography, or loosely related memories. The phenomenon of wisdom shall be defined as a profound and reflexive understanding of life as such (process) and as a deliberate, internally accepted and emotionally saturated knowledge resulting from the experience (the effect of that process). According to Ursula M. Staudinger (2001), the knowledge is acquired throughout the entire adulthood, not only in the last phase, even though, people might differ as regards their preference for reflection on what happens to them. The reflection that leads to wisdom includes two types of processes: recalling life events and their later analysis. Reminiscing is an active process (*re-construction*) involving selection, reorganization or various transformations of memory records (see: Pillemer, 1998). The analysis, in turn, includes *explanation* and *evaluation*. The explanation involves comparing, categorising the events, describing the event details using abstract terms, whereas evaluation involves mainly identifying the emotional and motivational attitude towards the objects of reflection (*emotion/motivation regulation*).

The possibility to share the reflections resulting from the analysis of one’s own life enhances the wellbeing of a senior (Edmondson, 2015; Kotre, 2000; Kuch et al., 2014;

Pratt, Fiese, 2004; Westerhof, 2011; Williams, Nussbaum, 2012). It is also valuable to the recipients, especially adolescents, just entering their adult lives. This gives them the sense of “being rooted” – the relationship with previous generations, which facilitates the formation of so called intergenerational self (Budziszewska, Dryll, 2013; Fivush, Bohanek, Zaman, 2011; McLean, 2015; Tabuchi et al., 2015). Moreover, the intergenerational transmission enhances social integration and the maintenance of universal values (Cierpka, 2013; Dryll, 2013; McAdams, St. Aubin, 1992). Therefore, the research on factors influencing the process of intergenerational transmission of life experience might not only facilitate the theoretical knowledge, but also optimize this process.

PROBLEM

What influences the content and form of the “letter to a grandchild” written by contemporary seniors? Some of the determinants include age, gender and education of the authors of the letters (see: Dryll, Tokarska, Cierpka, 2016). Considering psychological categories, the quality of life is of considerable importance (Cierpka, Dryll, Tokarska, 2017). Temporal perspective seems to be another factor that plays a role in this process. Reflections about life are based on memories. Therefore, this might become important whether the past remains constantly present in the authors’ thoughts, whether it seems good or bad to them, whether and what they think about the future events, how they perceive their current situation.

Perception of time is determined by individual neuropsychological differences in the valence of stimuli, sensory modality, personality structures (e.g. extraverts underestimate the flow of time whereas introverts overestimate it) or particular disorders (e.g. in autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, schizophrenia, Parkinson’s disease or deafness; Kossewska, 2016a, 2016b). Individual temporal competences are also associated with cultural factors (Hall, 2004), such as strategies of storing memories on the timeline (James, Woodsmall, 2011), educational strategies (Mischel, Ayduk, 2014; Mischel et al., 2011) or individual sense of coherence, self-concept and self-actualization style (Tucholska, 2007).

The authors define the concept of the dominant temporal perspective (Sędek, Bedyńska, 2010; Zimbardo, Boyd, 2008) as “often nonconscious process whereby the continual flows of personal and social experiences are assigned to temporal categories, or time frames, that help to give order, coherence, and meaning to those events” (Zimbardo, Boyd, 1999, p. 1271). Temporal perspective might be also considered a process (also including the type of activity that a person is engaged in) or the effect of a particular habitual focus on one of them (i.e. individual difference).

Previous studies show that habitual focus on one of the perspectives is related to various features of emotional regulation – depressiveness, aggression, conscientiousness, tendency to risk-taking, drugs or addictions (Budnikov, 2016; Stolarski, Ledzińska, Matthews, 2013; Stolarski, Zajenkowski, Zajenkowska, 2016; Temple, 2016), it impacts the efficiency of executive functions, mindfulness and other cognitive competences (Zajenkowski et al., 2016), enhances or debilitates satisfaction with interpersonal relationships (Stolarski, Wojtkowska, Kwiecińska, 2016). Nevertheless, researchers agree that, in many ways, the balanced perspective is the most beneficial. This refers to a precisely defined combination of scores of the questionnaire assessing the temporal focus (Stolarski, 2016). This combination shall involve a dominant past-positive perspec-

tive (the highest scores), the average scores in: *present-hedonistic* and *future* perspectives, whereas the lowest scores shall occur in: *past-negative* and *present-fatalistic*.

Researchers show that this combination of scores in particular scales perceived as the balanced temporal perspective is associated with well-being (Temple, 2013), realistic self-esteem (Ortuno, Echeverria, 2013), it enhances the effectiveness in professional life (Lukacs, Orosz, 2013), promotes health and health behaviors. Considerable disturbance of the balanced temporal perspective, in turn, is perceived as one of the mechanisms responsible for the development and persistence of disorders (e.g. PTSD – Zimbardo, Sword, Sword, 2013). Such results are not surprising, yet, this raises the question – which of the two factors influences these relationships to a greater extent. Is it the focus on time itself or is it the positive or negative attitude towards events, regardless of the time when they occurred?

Temporal competences might be modified in therapy (including so called *time line therapy*, James, Woodsmall, 2011, or in treatment for addiction, for example cocaine addiction Zimbardo, Sword, Sword, 2013). It is also possible to support the development of time perception or the balance between particular perspectives (Popiołek, Chudzicka-Czupała, 2010; Tokarska, 2010) with the use of educational-preventive activities (Ishii, 2016; Tokarska, 2016; Tucholska, Tylikowska, 2016).

Given that so many detailed psychological functions are related to the way an individual experiences and perceives his or her life time, it is impossible to ignore it when investigating the process of developing one's own experiences. Yet, it might be assumed that it is not only the fact of being anchored in one of the perspectives (the past, present or future) that will differentiate the content and the form of the inter-generational transmission of seniors, but also optimistic or pessimistic outlook on the events from the past, as well as those current and future ones.

METHODS

The presented study was correlational as regards the main research problem, yet, it was preceded by a thorough qualitative analysis of the text material, including elements of frequency analysis. Considering the expected bilateral (mutual) relationship between the variables the correlational model was chosen. The content of the “letters to a grandchild” could depend on the dominant temporal perspective of the authors, their anchoring in a particular period of life. Moreover, the temporal perspective itself could be shaped by the life experiences of the author, including the ones that were seen as the most important in the current life or social situation (the grandchild – the addressee) or persuasive aspect (what should be said to a grandchild, in the grandparent's opinion). The measurement also included selected demographic variables: age, gender, education, occupation performed before retiring, place of residence (village, small town, city), family status (bachelor, husband, widow, divorced or maiden, wife, widow, divorced), children (age and gender), grandchildren (age and gender), great-grandchildren (age and gender). The project was accepted by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology, University of Warsaw.

To assess temporal perspective we used the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI) by Zimbardo and Boyd, adapted by Przepiórka, Sobol-Kwapińska and Jankowski (2016). The tool is commonly-used to assess five types of perspective – two oriented to the past: *past-negative*, *past-positive*, two oriented to the present: *present-*

hedonistic, present-fatalistic and one *future*. Each scale includes from 9 to 15 questions (some of them are reversed). The respondent answers the questions using 5-point scale. The result in each scale is expressed with the use of mean values.

Past-positive perspective scale includes questions on good memories and nostalgia for the old times. *Past-negative perspective* refers to bad experiences from the past and the mistakes that the respondent cannot or do not want to forget. *Present-hedonistic perspective* includes questions on the present pleasures and the preference for strong emotions and taking risk. *Present-fatalistic perspective* refers to the belief that it is impossible to influence one's own life situation. On the contrary, *future* perspective includes questions on planning, punctuality, emotional control, caution and conscientiousness.

As can be seen, the questions of the questionnaire refer not only to timeline, but also to psychological features perceived as positive or negative. Thus, in general, they can be perceived as optimistic, for example, sense of control over one's life, being calm and happy about the previous experiences, consent to spontaneous pleasures or reasonable plans for the nearest future and pessimistic – bad memories, current poor well-being, lack of control and influence over one's own situation.

Intergenerational transmission of wisdom resulting from one's life experience was studied with a method previously used in earlier works by the Authors – a method called: “a letter to a grandchild” (Dryll, Tokarska, Cierpka, 2016). It is a narrative technique thanks to which researchers obtain a text that can be further analyzed using various qualitative methods, supported with some elements of quantitative analysis, mainly frequency analysis. The instruction was as follows:

Psychologists from the University of Warsaw and the Pedagogical University of Cracow are conducting a study on the transmission of experience from older generations to younger. We would like to ask you to take part in it.

Your task is to:

WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR GRANDCHILD (a real one or an imaginary one). A man, who has lived for several decades might say that “life taught him a lot” – he found himself in different situations, gathered experience, drew conclusions, gained wisdom. And it is the kind of wisdom that cannot be learnt at any school – an individual, personal one. Please, try to communicate it in your letter to your dear ones (grandchildren), for them to be able to reap benefits from the older generation's experiences. Due to the scientific character of the study, we assure you anonymity. You would be only asked to provide some formal data (see below). Please, write your letter at home and bring it back for the assigned meeting. The results will be analysed together. Those willing to view the report after the study or to contact the authors regarding any other issues, feel free to write to the address:.....

*Yours sincerely,
Researchers*

Similarly to previous studies (Dryll, Tokarska, Cierpka, 2016), also in this study the “letters to grandchildren” were analysed using categories (tab. 1) derived from the texts and initially prepared in the form of a set later assessed by three independent coders. In the case of lack of full agreement between the judges, two consistent assessments were considered¹⁾.

¹⁾ In previous studies, the incidence of disagreement between all three coders was observed only for one category – text mode. Initially, two types of mixed mode were distinguished

TABLE 1. Coding form – qualitative analysis

CODING SHEET: one table is dedicated for one person (one letter). Please mark the proper spaces or count the incidences. The definitions of categories can be found below.

participant number	gender F / M	age	education lower / secondary / higher		number of words	
LETTER TYPE						
current issues	good memories	bad memories	wisdom transmission	lack of transmission*		
TEXT MODE						
narrative mode (story)		mixed mode (story with a moral or advice with examples)		argumentative mode (life advice)		
NARRATIVE MODE: LIFE PERIOD THAT THE TEXT IS FOCUSED ON						
Prezent	past				future	
	grandparent's childhood	grandchild's childhood	period of the author's life	further in the past	common future	grandchild's future „afterlife”
NARRATIVE MODE: TOPIC OF THE DESCRIBED EVENTS						
professional, social, political			family and personal			
NARRATIVE MODE: MAIN CHARACTERS						
family members	family members, older than the author.....				non-family	
NARRATIVE MODE: PERSUASIVE FUNCTION OF THE STORY						
it was better in my times	it was worse in my times	take me as an example	take X as an example	don't take me as an example		
ARGUMENTATIVE MODE: ADVICE (please count all mentions)						
recommendations	warnings	indications of values	wishes	blessings		
ARGUMENTATIVE MODE: JUSTIFICATIONS						
None	egocentric justification	exocentric justifications				
	another person	a group of people	common good	God		

* If the letter does not include the wisdom transmission, the following categories shall not be used.

Participants were recruited from the University of the Third Age and senior clubs in Warsaw, Krakow, several towns near Warsaw and in the villages of the Podkarpackie voivodeship. At the meeting with the group the researcher presented the project and distributed research materials (a manual, demographic questionnaire and sheets of blank paper to write the „letter”) to those who volunteered to participate. After two weeks, at the next meeting, the researcher collected the texts and asked the participants to fill in three questionnaires. These included the previously described ZTPI, Questionnaire of Quality of Life (Straś-Romanowska, Oleszkowicz, Frąckowiak, 2004) and the Portrait Values Questionnaire (Schwartz, 2006).

About 50% of those who had initially declared participation in the study did not fulfill the first task. Since the instructions contained information that withdrawal from further participation (without giving reasons) was possible at every stage, the reasons for such decisions remain unknown. Perhaps the task occurred too difficult for some participants (either cognitively, emotionally, or physically – writing requires the efficiency of the hand, eyes).

Complete sets of materials were obtained from 119 people. These were 72 women and 47 men. Sixty-four participants could be classified as younger – their age ranged between 60–70 years – whereas 55 were classified as older (over 70 years old). Moreover, 36 people had higher education, 48 – secondary education, and 34 people received basic or vocational education. Based on the obtained data, it was found that 73 people were married, 41 were widowed, 3 single and 2 divorced. Nearly all participants had children and grandchildren, and some – great-grandchildren. The average number of children was 1.91, the average number of grandchildren 2.48, and the average number of great-grandchildren 0.17.

RESULTS

First, the mean results of the questionnaire scales (tab. 2), internal correlations between the scales (tab.3) and the differences as regards the selected demographic variables will be presented (tab. 4, 5, 6 and 7).

Mean scores for all scales are higher than the arithmetic mean, and the score of *present-fatalistic* perspective is the closest to this mean. The highest mean scores were achieved for two scales perceived as “optimistic” – *future*, and *past-positive*. The majority of the respondents reported the focus on the past-positive (t-test for dependent samples $t = 3.830$; $p < 0.000$) and present-hedonistic perspectives ($t = 4.910$; $p < 0.000$). Considering the participants’ age and the resultant existential situation of seniors, it is also worth noting the strong concentration on the future. Probably, this results mainly from the character of the questions in the questionnaire scales – *future* perspective, similarly to the *past-positive* and *hedonistic*, includes questions indicating good general well-being. Such interpretation is also supported by the observed correlations between the scores in particular scales (tab. 2).

– narrative mode, with a summary in the form of an abstract thesis, and argumentative mode, illustrated with examples of events. Yet, because of the difficulties in classifying mixed texts into one of these two categories, eventually one more general category was created – both “mixed” modes are combined into one type named “Mixed mode”.

TABLE 2. Descriptive statistics – ZTPI scales

Time perspective	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
past-positive	119	1.78	4.56	3.6137	0.55246
past-negative	118	1.10	5	3.2797	0.83465
present-hedonistic	117	1.93	4.40	3.3113	0.50815
present-fatalistic	118	1.33	4.25	2.9958	0.65426
Future	117	1.46	4.77	3.6835	0.55936

TABLE 3. Internal correlation between the ZTPI scales

Time perspective	Present-hedonistic	Present-fatalistic	Future
past-positive	r = 0.212 p = 0.022		r = 0.371 p < 0.000
past-negative		r = 0.480 p < 0.000	r = 0.255 p = 0.006
present-hedonistic		r = 0.194 p = 0.037	

Internal correlations between the scales (in the studied group) indicate the importance of emotional attitude towards the events arranged on the timeline. The strongest relation occurs between the two „pessimistic” perspectives, referring to the past and to the present. Both concern unpleasant memories and pessimistic views on the current situation, i.e. manifestations of low mood. Also a strong correlation can be observed between the “optimistic” scales – *past-positive* and *future*. As mentioned earlier, the *future* scale refers to behaviors such as diligence, balance, calm planning of upcoming events etc. The relation between such functioning and the preference for good memories, especially childhood memories, can be mediated by good mood and the sense of fulfillment in life – high quality of life. Similarly, a weaker correlation: *past-positive* and *present-hedonistic* – are manifestations of the “optimistic” attitude.

However, the two weaker correlations are puzzling. One of them is the relationship between two present perspectives – *hedonistic* and *fatalistic* and the other – between the *past-negative* and the *future*. In fact, the first one shall come as no surprise – the tool aims at identifying the time perspective, i.e. focus on one of three periods: past, present or future – though, the above relationships seem to indicate that the content of the questions in terms of their optimism-pessimism is more important.

But how shall we understand the relationship between the *future* perspective and the *past-negative* one? This relationship is weaker, yet, significant. Further in the text we interpret this fact using qualitative data. However, the inclusion of the *future* perspective in the “optimistic” rather than “pessimistic” cluster is supported by insignificant, yet, negative correlations between the following scales: *past-negative* and *past-positive*, *fatalistic* and *past-positive* and *fatalistic* and *future*. These three negative correlations indicate opposites (in pairs), and at the same time – similarities. Noticeably, the *past-negative* and *fatalistic* perspectives are on one side of these opposites, whereas the *past-positive* and *future* are on the other.

In the studied group of seniors, we found particular relationships related to the selected demographic variables: gender, age, marital status (married vs. widowed or divorced) and the level of education of the participants.

The results indicate that women are more „pessimistic”, especially when perceiving their current situation (tab. 3). This seems to be confirmed by the common belief that women, especially in late life, show more tendency to “complain”. Similarly, older people (the comparison between those aged 60–70 and. 70+) are more pessimistic (tab. 4), which seems justified considering the objective characteristics of life situation in older and younger seniors (health status, fitness, orientation). The effect of being married (tab. 6) also confirms the relationships reported in previous studies (e.g. Wojciszke, 2000) – people who are not lonely generally feel better. Interestingly, we observed systematic differences due to the level of education (tab. 7). „Pessimism” is more typical of people who are less educated, whereas „optimism” – of people who are better educated. Unexpectedly, the results showed negative correlation between the *hedonistic temporal perspective* and the number of grandchildren ($r = -0.222$; $p = 0.016$). Possibly, this could be explained by the effect of age – the older the grandfather or grandmother, the greater the chance for more numerous offspring. Yet, perhaps *hedonism*, in this technique defined as the pursuit of strong emotions, risks and personal pleasures, competes against raising large number of children and thus, as a consequence, having a lot of grandchildren.

TABLE 4. Differences in ZTPI scores depending on the respondent's gender

Scale	<i>M</i> women	<i>M</i> men	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
present–fatalistic	3.1583	2.7415	12.512	0.001
past-negative	3.4001	3.0913	3.939	0.05

TABLE 5. Differences in ZTPI scores depending on the respondent's age

Scale	<i>M</i> older	<i>M</i> younger	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
present – fatalistic	3.156	2.856	6.461	0.012

TABLE 6. Differences in ZTPI scores depending on the respondent's marital status

Scale	<i>M</i> married	<i>M</i> single	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
present – fatalistic	2.8800	3.1709	5.819	0.017
past-negative	3.1465	3.4811	4.688	0.032

TABLE 7. Differences in ZTPI scores depending on the respondent's education

Scale	<i>M</i> lower education	<i>M</i> secondary education	<i>M</i> higher education	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
past-negative	3.6000	3.271	2.9629	5.385	0.006
present-fatalistic	3.1526	3.0529	2.7491	3.813	0.025
past-positive	3.5194	3.5313	3.7958	3.093	0.049

LETTER TYPE AND TEXT MODE

The term “letter type” describes its basic function and answers whether: the letter contains wisdom transmission, the sender refers to the current situation treating the letter as a tool for communication, or the author reminisces the times when the grandchild was taken care of by the grandparents. One text could have several functions. Comparison of this classification with the questionnaire aimed at answering the following questions: Do people focused on the present write letters referring to the current events linking the grandfather and the grandchild more often? Are people focused on the past more eager to write about memories? What kind of people (in terms of their temporal characteristics) write letters containing wisdom transmission? Are they focused on the future – the common, their own future or the future of the grandchild (tab. 8)?

TABLE 8. Differences in temporal perspectives (ZTPI) depending on the type of the “letter”

Scale	Occurs	Does not occur	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
CURRENT ISSUES				
present-hedonistic	3.40	3.20	4.515	0.036
MEMORIES				
present-fatalistic	3.0626	2.9414	2.855	0.040
COMMUNICATION OF WISDOM				
present-fatalistic	2.9492	3.3414	4.567	0.035

The results indicate that there is no direct translation of the focus on the past, the present or the future into the letter type. People writing to a grandchild about what is currently happening (current issues) achieved higher mean scores in the *present hedonistic perspective*, but they did not focus on the *present-fatalistic*. Thus, it is rather not about the property of the scale that is directly related to the temporal perspective, but the aspect related to emotionality (powerful experiences, exciting adventures, preference for pleasure and risk-taking). Totally different types of letters are associated with the *present-fatalistic* perspective. The more people are focused on what is wrong with their lives at the moment, the more they are likely to turn to memories. Writing about what happened in the past (either good or bad) is not associated with being anchored in the past. Unlike such people („fatalists”), those who rarely think fatalistically are more likely to construct the wisdom transmission. Considering what is worth transmitting to the younger generation, they focus on the future. The presented results indicate that „pessimistic” thinking about one’s own current life situation inhibits the wisdom transmission. Yet, also “pure” hedonism does not facilitate it, either.

The term „text mode” refers to the basic dimension of its form – whether it is a story with a plot and characters (usually about the authors themselves) expressed in the narrative mode, or whether these are some abstract notes about life, in which the author formulates a set of tips and presents them in the argumentative mode. As shown in Table 9, the letter mode is associated (at the level showing statistical tendency) with the scores of the *present-hedonistic perspective*. *Hedonists* rather do not use plots. Letters in the mixed mode (a plot with a moral) are less frequent for them, whereas more often they communicate their “good advice” directly – they make recommendations and warnings, indicate what is valuable in life, form wishes and blessings (the moral itself).

TABLE 9. Differences in temporal perspectives (ZTPI) depending on the text mode

Scale	Occurs	Does not occur	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
MIXED TYPE				
present-hedonistic	3.5090	3.6949	3.381	0.068 t
ARGUMENTATIVE TYPE				
present-hedonistic	3.7239	3.5442	3.036	0.084 t

THE ANALYSIS OF LETTERS IN THE NARRATIVE MODE (STORIES)

Letters in the narrative mode were analyzed in the context of the period described in the plot, the period of the narrator's life that the story is focused on, characters and the topic of the presented events as well as the persuasive function that the story was supposed to perform. The time range was described by four categories of texts: saga, biography, one period in life, one meaningful event. Saga refers to a story of many generations. These were the rarest letters and, similarly to the letters presenting only one event in life, they were not related to the temporal perspectives. Biography, being the complete story of one's life, was the form preferred by *hedonists* (tab. 10). People focused on the present, experiences and exciting adventures are also concentrated on themselves.

TABLE 10. Differences in temporal perspectives (ZTPI) depending on the time range of the narration

Scale	Occurs	Does not occur	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
BIOGRAPHY				
present-hedonistic	3.6645	3.2746	6.127	0.015
ONE PERIOD OF LIFE				
past-positive	3.4500	3.6641	3.277	0.073 t
future	3.5178	2.7332	3.138	0.079 t

The texts depicting one particular period of the narrator's life prevailed among all the letters to a grandchild formulated in the narrative mode. It was frequently the time of war or difficult post-war years. It might seem that such letters were written by people focused on the negative aspects of the past. However, they were slightly more frequently written by grandparents characterised by the dominant *future* perspective as well as those who hardly focused on the *positive-past* (both relationships at the level of statistical tendency). Quite often the stories depicting one particular, difficult period of the narrator's life took form of comparisons – perhaps, that is why, for persuasive purposes, a grandfather or a grandmother juxtaposed the times of their own childhood with the current times, persuading the grandchild that life is better nowadays and that he or she shall make use of it. The past, difficult events are recalled with a specific intention – for the sake of the grandchild's future. Thus, in a way, in this type of letters the future orientation is manifested.

The clearest relationships were assumed as regards the relationships between the temporal perspective and the period of the narrator's life depicted or referred to in the story described in the letter to a grandchild. Yet, the results of the analysis

did not confirm the importance of being anchored in any temporal period. Again, the dimension of positive versus negative attitude towards the events occurred more important (tab. 11). People who are not focused on bad memories (lower scores in *past-negative*, i.e. grandparents-optimists) write about the events expected in the nearest future, in which they themselves (grandfather or grandmother) and their grandchild will participate. They wrote “come over for coffee”, “we’ll play chess”, “I’m looking forward to our meeting during holidays” etc. This relationship is very clear ($p = 0.013$). Such result is supported by similar, weaker relationships (showing statistical tendency): also grandparents-optimists (not focused on the *negative-past* nor *present-fatalistic*) write about the grandchild’s future – what person he or she will become soon. Those who write about the future they will not participate in (“I will be looking after you from the above”), in turn, achieve lower scores in *hedonism* scale.

TABLE 11. Differences in temporal perspectives (ZTPI) and focus on the future

Scale	Occurs	Does not occur	F	p
THE NEAREST COMMON FUTURE				
past-negative	2.6222	3.334	6.322	0.013
THE GRANDCHILD’S FUTURE				
past-negative	2.9333	3.3302	3.011	0.085 t
present-fatalistic	2.7093	3.0376	3.362	0.069 t
AFTERLIFE				
present-hedonistic	2.7767	3.3254	3.481	0.065 t

Moreover, we observed relationships between “pessimism” (*past-negative* and *present-fatalistic* perspectives) and the characters of the stories described in the letters. The correlations are negative. These are the narrator’s family members that are most commonly present in the stories. The lower the tendency to concentrate on bad memories ($r = -0.181$; $p = 0.050$) and difficulties related to the present ($r = -0.206$; $p = 0.025$), the more family members included in the stories. Also the lower the tendency to perceive the present in a *fatalistic* way ($r = -0.212$; $p = 0.021$), the more frequently the stories include the family members also from older generations. There were no relationships between any other characters occurring in the stories (friends, fellow resistance fighters, teachers, superiors and subordinates at work, well-known figures or literature characters). There were also no relationships with the subject of the described events.

Considering the persuasive function, fulfilled in the letter to a grandchild by the described event or the whole story, the following categories were distinguished: “it was better in my times”, “it was worse in my times”, “take me as an example” (these were the most numerous letters), “take X as an example”, “don’t take me as an example”. The most common type was not related to the dominant temporal perspective, either was the quite common type “it was worse in my times”. Two participants who wrote “it had been better in their times” were characterised by the focus on the *hedonistically* perceived *present* (tab. 12). The same refers to those who wrote about their flaws and failures to warn their grandchild against making the same mistakes. However, peo-

ple who gave others, not themselves, as examples (mainly family members from the generation older than the author's of the letter), focused on the *positively* characterized *past* less often.

TABLE 12. Differences in temporal perspectives (ZTPI) and the function of the stories

Scale	Occurs	Does not occur	F	p
„IT WAS BETTER IN MY TIMES”				
present-hedonistic	3.7588	3.2784	7.003	0.009
“DON’T TAKE ME AS AN EXAMPLE”				
present-hedonistic	3.5845	3.2829	3.590	0.061 t
“TAKE X AS AN EXAMPLE”				
past-positive	2.9500	3.6489	9.799	0.002

THE ANALYSIS OF LETTERS IN THE ARGUMENTATIVE MODE (RECOMMENDATIONS AND WARNINGS AND THEIR JUSTIFICATIONS)

The letters written in the argumentative or mixed modes included advice formulated in a variety of ways. These included recommendations – how to behave, cautions – what to avoid, direct indications of value without showing how to achieve them („family is the most important”) and wishes and blessings – indicating the state of affairs that would be desirable, but its occurrence is beyond individual's control.

We observed two correlations between the number of indications in particular categories of advice and dominant temporal perspectives. Number of recommendations is negatively correlated with the *present-fatalistic* scale ($r = -0.275$; $p = 0.003$), whereas the number of wishes and blessings is associated with the *future* scale ($r = 0.214$, $p = 0.021$). Thus, the less pessimistic is the person about the present, the more willingly he or she is to tell the grandchild what to do. And on the contrary – the less people think about the future, the more willingly they formulate wishes, not indicating the subject of activities („I hope this would be that way”) instead of recommendations („do this and this”). The more optimistic attitude seems to be associated with the belief that it is possible to shape one's future.

The last important characteristic of the letters to a grandchild is the way of justifying the formulated life advice – why it is worth or necessary to follow them. The justifications that occurred in the material were classified into two general groups: egocentric and exocentric, the latter were further divided to specific categories: another person, one's own group – family or homeland, common good, God. Egocentric justifications turned out to be the most common. They showed the reasonableness of acting on the recommendations and warnings for the addressee's own good. According to such understanding, the beneficiary of individual's good deeds is the individual himself or herself, however, the rule: “do not hit the girl because you might sweat” is presented here in a more elegant form: “the good you do comes back to you”, “if you respect others, they will also respect you”, “do not steal, because you can go to jail and lose your friends”. Exocentric justifications appeared in longer letters, containing in-depth analysis, written primarily by people with higher education. The categories of

“common good” and “God” prevailed there. The last category was usually used by the authors who focused on good memories – *positive past perspective* (tab. 13). Combining two categories of exocentric justifications – “common good” and “God” also revealed that these are *hedonists* focused on the *present* who use them more often (yet, the association is weaker). The analysis indicate that people who generally feel better about their lives, base their life wisdom on the recognition of the necessity to do good for the very fact of doing good as well as for God, not because of one’s own interest or even a particular interest of another person or one’s own group (one’s own family or the country one lives in).

TABLE 13. Differences in ZTPI scores depending on the justification for the advice given

Scale	Occurs	Does not occur	F	p
GOD				
past-positive	3.7343	3.2844	5.353	0.022
COMMON GOOD AND GOD				
present-hedonistic	3.902	3.5758	2.945	0.057 t

DISCUSSION

The analysis of a “letter to a grandchild” allows researchers to learn what makes the essence of the narrator’s life experience (the content). It also allows to investigate the form of expression of these thoughts and thus, identify the features that make the message more or less communicative. It is important because a formally adequate letter might encourage the addressee’s reflection and, as a consequence, fulfill its role – the intergenerational integration in terms of values.

Temporal perspectives occurred to be one of the determinants of the content and the form of the letter. Seniors look at their lives coming to an end, and from this perspective, they re-approach many problems and they recognize the opportunities to learn. They might also think ahead wishing to make use of the acquired wisdom – share it with someone, communicate it. Therefore, it could be assumed that the dominant temporal perspective of a senior might somehow influence the content and the form of the “letter to a grandchild”. Yet, despite confirming many detailed relationships, the obtained results did not follow this pattern and thus, did not confirm the presented reasoning.

It is not the focus on one out of the three time frames that is the crucial aspect in perceiving the events composing the story of senior’s life. It cannot be concluded that “balanced” or unbalanced perspective is decisive, either. Our results form some specific clusters, identifying the emotional attitude towards the events (either past, present or future) as the main factor in this context. The “pessimistic” scales measuring the focus on the *negative past* and the *negative (fatalistic) present* are strongly related with each other. They are the opposite to two “optimistic” scales, also strongly interrelated – the perspective focused on the *positive past* and the *future* perspective. Beside this pair of opposites, there is also the fifth dimension – *hedonistic* attitude. Analysing the questions of the questionnaire scales it might be stated that what is defined as the *hedonistic present* differs from the *future* perspective or pleasant memories, even though, it is also filled with positive

emotions. Yet, the hedonism diagnosed by the ZTPI technique is slightly “predatory” – hardly reflective, rather youthful. It is rather the future scale that includes the reflection, emotional balance and some meticulousness – a more mature regulation. The questions of the *past-negative* scale might be, therefore, considered the opposite to *past-positive*, and the questions of the *present-fatalistic* scale – the opposite to the *future* ones.

The relationships between the perspectives and the features of the “letters to a grandchild” revolve around the above mentioned dimensions. The majority of them are observed in the context of the “pessimistic” scales. Pessimistic attitude manifests itself in parallel relationships between the characteristics of the letters and the focus on the *negative past* as well as between the letter characteristics and the focus on the *fatalistic-present*. Both of these types of pessimistic focus are more typical of women, older seniors, singles (widows and widowers), people with lower education. Such people write letters full of nostalgic memories rather than wisdom transmission more often than other participants. Their letters refer to the times when their grandchild was little and was looked after by a grandma or a grandpa. They are often accompanied by slight regret that the good times have passed and the child that they took care of, now being older does not maintain contact with them.

Yet, when, apart from writing memories, “pessimists” write a letter including wisdom transmission in the narrative form, they are not eager to talk about people – companions of their lives (fewer characters, in their stories the author usually is the only figure). They are also not willing to construct a “generation chain”, which would require referring to their own ancestors and, at the same time, focusing more on the past. Forming such a “chain” indicates the developing gerotranscendence (Tornstam, 2011), which such people do not have, since they cannot change the attitude from the egotistic to the “cosmic” one, characteristic for the gerotranscendence. Seniors-pessimists focused on their sorrow are also reluctant to look into the future: they do not plan the nearest events (e.g. to invite the grandchild to chat or to have a plum pie together), they do not create visions of the grandchild’s future. Thus, perhaps, when they write a letter of wisdom in the argumentative form, they do not formulate many recommendations. They are convinced that it was bad, it is still bad and there is nothing that can be done about it. Brooding over bad experiences and noticing only bad things around them, thinking fatalistically (“I cannot control it”), pessimists do not devote much attention to their offspring’s future. Or maybe, they do not feel they know “how to live one’s life” and feeling lost in their own troubles they believe they have nothing valuable to communicate.

Also people focused on the *present hedonistic* perspective demonstrate a clear characteristics. The group includes younger as well as older seniors, women and men, and as a group, they have no particular education level nor typical family situation. There is, though, one thing typical of this group: *hedonists* have few grandchildren. Is it because they did not want to have several kids or is it because too many grandchildren suppress the joy of life? *Hedonists* are eager to write letters about the current issues. When forming recommendations they prefer argumentative mode, yet, when they write stories, they depict their complete biography. They do not avoid writing about their failures – they persuade their grandchildren not to make the same mistakes. They also indicate that they had good, fulfilling life. They do not think about the future. They are particularly reluctant to think about the time when they will no longer live (“afterlife” category). There were not any dominant categories in the letters with recommendations – all of these letters included a lot of categories. Yet, people who are focused on the *present-hedonistic* perspective refer to the idea of common good and

God when justifying their advice. With all their love for experiencing the moment and wild joy they are not egocentric. They know and they want to tell their grandchild that it is not the ultimate goal – you do not live for your own pleasure or for benefits.

“Optimists” prevailed in the studied group. Their scores in the *future* and *past-positive* scales were the highest, and standard deviations the lowest. Yet, it is worth underlining that the achieved mean scores in ZTPI scales might have been distorted in reference to the general population of the modern Polish seniors (even though the sample was quite numerous and heterogenous as regards demographic features). The study involving this tool was preceded with the task to write the “letter to a grandchild” and many people, initially willing to participate, did not perform the task. The instruction said that during one’s life one acquires wisdom. Perhaps, those who wrote nothing were pessimists (they did not believe they accumulated any wisdom) or hedonists (they did not have time to do that). Besides, writing itself – “putting thoughts on paper” could have been troublesome for many seniors. People having higher education undoubtedly did it with more ease, and these were the ones who were characterised by optimism (correlation between education and the score in the *past-positive* scale).

There were not many relationships between the scales describing optimists (*past-positive* and *future*) and the studied features of the texts, yet, it might be stated that factors not associated with the scales typical of pessimists and hedonists formed the characteristics typical of the optimistic majority. Due to the fact that pessimists wrote memories, whereas hedonists wrote about current issues, it might be concluded that optimists formulated their wisdom transmission without any additional threads. They wrote both, narrative texts (stories) as well as sets of advice (argumentative mode). *Past-positive* scale is associated with avoiding stories describing only one period of life. Thematic analysis indicates that if a narrator writes about one period of life, it refers to particularly difficult times. Therefore, it is no surprise that people who want to perceive their past as positive, do not focus on it. However, writing stories depicting only one period of one’s life is associated positively with the *future* scale. Grandparents who write about war, frequently make comparisons. They express their concern about the grandchild’s future: “you have good possibilities to develop, learn and you will achieve what you desire”. In the case of optimists, recalling bad moments is determined by their orientation towards the future. Thus, this also explains, surprising in the context of this reasoning, significant, yet weak, correlation between the *future* and *past-negative* scales.

While people with fatalistic attitude towards the present do not make plans for the nearest future, nor do they think ahead about their grandchild’s future, and hedonistic people are reluctant to think about the time when they are gone, optimists do not avoid that. In their letters, they plan and offer various joint activities to their grandchildren. It can be observed that these meetings are not unusual and their relationship is intimate. They also consider what their grandchild’s life will look like when he or she grows up or in the future in general. Moreover, they frequently add that also “in the afterlife” they will remain their grandchildren’s allies. For “optimists”, the future is still present, if not in the answers to the questions of the scales (even though the “optimists” scales are strongly correlated), it is still observable in the letters. People who are *positive* about their *past* do not stand out from the whole sample as regards the tendency to make an example of themselves, they are even reluctant (more than others) to make an example of other people as well.

Writing letters in the argumentative mode, pessimists formulate less recommendations concerning their grandchildren’s behavior. Hedonists and optimists formu-

late much more of those. Moreover, optimists (*the future* scale) formulate less wishes and blessings, which indicated their belief that the desired state of things can be and should be achieved by one’s own effort. The qualitative analysis indicates that the most common content category of recommendations is the one advising to love – love, respect and help others. Many authors of letters justifies this with their own interest – the world will give you the love back. Yet, people with positive attitude – *past-positive*, *future* and *hedonists* – also explain these recommendations referring to the idea of the common good, especially (*past-positive*) as regards God. In their opinion, God is the ultimate justification and validation of decent behavior and life.

The presented results showing that it is important whether the author of the letter perceives his or her life as successful or not (optimists vs. pessimists) correspond with the relationships related to the quality of life, found in the same project but described elsewhere (Cierpka, Dryll, Tokarska, 2017). The quality of life was measured with the use of the scale authored by Maria Straś-Romanowska, Anna Oleszkowicz and Tomasz Frąckowiak (2004) and it was based on the four-factor model. The global quality of life in that model comprises beliefs concerning psychophysical, psychosocial, subjective and metaphysical spheres (with four corresponding scales of the questionnaire).

The results of that study showed that people with higher global quality of life are married, report higher education, formulate wisdom transmission and prefer argumentative mode – similarly to “optimists” (ZTPI scales: *past-positive* and *future*). Moreover, people expressing higher quality of life formulate more recommendations and less wishes and blessings in their letters (similarly to “optimists”). Importantly, such people justify their advice on life given to their grandchildren providing argumentation of exocentric character. They recognize the good of the group (family, homeland), but they are also eager to indicate God as the ultimate justification. Unlike these people, those experiencing higher quality of life only within the psychophysical sphere (they feel healthy), but not in other spheres, prefer egocentric justifications (“act decently for your own good”).

The analysis of the relationships between the measures of the perspectives and the quality of life constitutes the final argument for the reasonableness to interpret the revealed relationships between the scores of the questionnaire on temporal perspectives and the features of the letter to a grandchild as the derivatives of the emotional attitude towards life events (and not the anchoring in one of the three time frames). The correlations are considerable (tab. 14):

TABLE 14. Relationships between the ZTPI scales and the global quality of life

Temporal perspective (scales)	Relationship with the global quality of life	
	<i>r</i>	<i>P</i>
past-positive	+0.301	0.001
past-negative	-0.202	0.031
present-hedonistic	+0.157	0.096 t
present-fatalistic	-0.227	0.015
Future	+0.404	0.000

The two strongest correlations indicate the relationship between the two scales typical of “optimists” and the global quality of life, positive, yet insignificant correlation (showing tendency) links the quality of life with the hedonistic perspective, whereas the scales of “pessimists” correlate significantly and negatively with the quality of life.

The previously cited findings (Lukacs, Orosz, 2013; Ortuno, Echeverria, 2013; Temple, 2013; Zimbardo, Sword, Sword, 2013) indicating the relationships between wellbeing and the specific combination of the ZTPI results called the balanced perspective were not confirmed in this study. On the contrary, this study seems to question the previous results. In the balanced perspective, it is assumed that these are the mean scores in the *past-positive* scale that are to be the highest, which was confirmed in both studies. The mean scores in the two “pessimist” perspectives: *past-negative* and *present-fatalistic* are supposed to be the lowest – which was also true for our results. Yet, the mean values for the *present-hedonistic* and *future* perspectives shall be moderate. However, in our study, hedonism is actually irrelevant, whereas the *future* perspective plays the crucial role, because it forms a combination with the *past-positive* perspective – together they form an “optimistic” cluster, which is the most strongly correlated with the global quality of life. Besides, the relationship between these perspectives is confirmed not only by the correlation, but mainly by the fact that the scores of particular scales (also including the measure of the quality of life) are associated parallelly with the quality of the products made by the participants (with the features of the “letters to a grandchild”), and these, in turn, reflect the author’s considerations on their own life as well as everything they learned in life.

The fact that in the Polish study including modern seniors the results did not reflect the “balanced perspective” might be explained in two ways. The first refers to the participants’ age. Comparing the *present-hedonistic* and the *future* scales it shall be stated that it would be more adequate to associate a typical older man or older lady with balance, punctuality, conscientiousness, planning, consideration, dutifulness rather than tendency to take risks or exciting adventures. At the same time, the older the seniors, the shorter their future, thus, it might be expected that in this age people are not willing to look into the future. The second explanation refers to the cultural differences. The cited studies were conducted in the other society, in which it is perhaps not correct to be cautious, whereas it is necessary to express enthusiasm, openness to new experience (similar to preference for risk-taking) and lasting happiness. To verify which of these interpretations is closer to the truth, it is recommended to conduct an intercultural study including seniors from other countries who would write letters to their grandchildren. Such study has already been planned, including the presented results from the Polish sample.

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