Kim S. Grego
Research Fellow in English Linguistics and Translation,
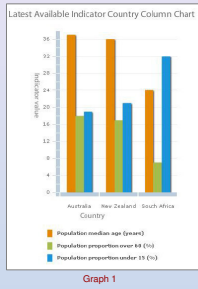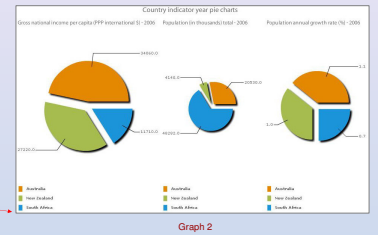University of Milan (Italy)
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The Young and the Ageing:
ethical aspects in the representation of age groups in healthcare websites.
The cases of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Australia (AU) – **New Zealand** (NZ) – **South Africa** (ZA):
Comparable Countries?

Southern Hemisphere **English**-speaking **Developed** countries

But compare:

Data analysis

Latest Available Indicator Country Column Chart

Graph 1

- Population median age (years)
- Population proportion over 65 (%)
- Population proportion under 15 (%)

Country Indicator year pie charts

Graph 2

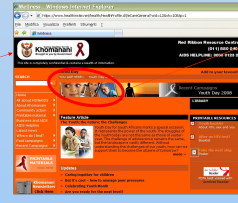**Sample Corpus:**
Official websites of Health Ministries, sections:

Homepages | Programmes/Policies | Any webpage about age-related issues

Method for text analysis derived from:

Discourse Analysis
- Professional to professional
- Professional to non-professional
- ESP

Genre Analysis
- Intraspecialist level
- Popular/Didactic level

Lexical Analysis
- Corpus Linguistics
- Lexicology

New web genres, new/more tools for analysis
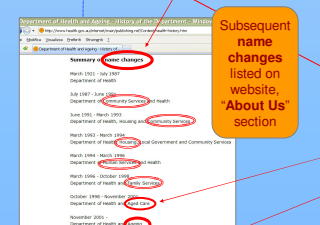Layout, Images, Colour use, Text distribution, ...

Young, unhappy: **unhealthy**?

(Over)**abundance** of **pictures** throughout website, including Homepage > Visually friendly > User **Inclusiveness**.

Child

Infant

Young, **unhealthy**: unhappy?

A **child** is the **core** (central) **image** in the graphics in the ZA DoH webpage

Only **children** depicted in the **pictures** on homepage; **no elderly** people, as **expected** from demographic statistics

Ministry, policies *and* website strictly **reflect political climate**, including current website: **new government** > website editing.

ZA Department of Health
http://www.doh.gov.za

Department of Health

Governmental programmes include **2** concerning **children** in particular (**Nutrition** & **Immunisation**). **No** programmes for the **elderly**

Khomanani – Youth Day related website: strong focus on youth > **Institutions**' campaign to communicate with **majority** of **population** > Proudly Young?
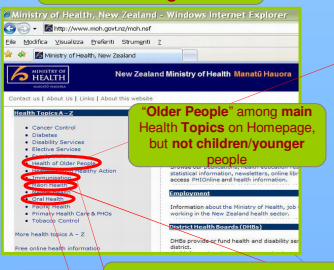
Department of Health
Programmes

Subsequent name changes listed on website, **"About Us"** section

AU Department of Health and Ageing
www.health.gov.au

Department of Health and Ageing

Few or **no pictures** on website > **Text** only > **Formal** aspect > No direct visual communication > Some **distance** from users

Inter/Intraspecialist level

Popular level

FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS | ABOUT US

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
- Ageing
- Conditions and Diseases
- Education and Prevention
- Ethical Issues
- Gene Technology
- Health Priorities
- Health products and medicines
- Healthcare systems
- Rural Health
- Services
- Sport

More **captivating**, user-oriented material with **pictures** only available for download (in .doc or .PDF), not on HTML pages > Implies **voluntary retrieval** action is necessary

Only **photos** of **elderly** people available in **popular/didactic** level material (brochures, leaflets) for download

Only actual image of a **young** and an **old** person **together**!

Still **good-looking**

Still **active**

Still in contact with the **young**

Still **healthy**!

NZ Ministry of Health
www.moh.govt.nz

New Zealand Ministry of Health Manatū Hauora

"Older People" among main Health **Topics** on Homepage, but **not children/younger** people

Health Topics A – Z
- Cancer Control
- Diabetes
- Disability Services
- Elective Services
- Health of Older People
- Immunisation
- Oral Health
- Tobacco Control

Among **main topics**, 2 are **dedicated** to the **young**, though **not directly** (in name): **Immunisation** & **Oral Health**.

Immunisation

Oral Health
Child Dental Care

Oral Health
Teenage Dental Care

In **Immunisation** & **Oral Health** sections, a few pictures of **children** are present, just one per page. All children from same ethnic group > e.g. no Maori

Young, **healthy**, happy!

Health of Older People in New Zealand
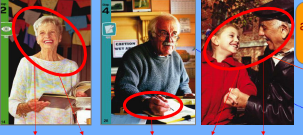
Older People in New Zealand

Entire section **dedicated** to **Older** People

One single b&w picture on all the section's pages (as in other sections) > Visual communication present but **not key factor**

Old, **healthy**, happy!

Maori Health

Maori citizens, with a **large young population** and **specific** social & **health** issues, have a **dedicated** section > Inclusiveness or **Exclusiveness**?

Maori citizens depicted are mostly **young**

Conclusions
By observing the large variety of terms and expressions encountered in the analysis and listed in Table 1, it is apparent that age representation constitutes an issue *per se* in healthcare institutional communication, with age-related medical issues being of course a key topic in any country's healthcare system, particularly in countries with an outstandingly young (ZA), ageing (AU) or mixed (NZ) population. Further investigation of the multimodal genre of websites shows how indispensable iconic resources have become in web-communicating inclusiveness / exclusiveness, to the point that omitting images may be perceived as a voluntary act of putting some distance between the author and its audience – a fact well worth considering in institution-to-citizen communication. On the other hand, an accurate terminological choice can substitute for a lack of images, e.g. the adoption of the word "Ageing" by the Australian Ministry and respective website contributes to building inclusiveness among its users – aren't we *all* ageing? In fact, to the existing and resisting social model of "young-fit-successful-rich", a fifth parameter has long been added: "healthy", as opposed to the stigma attached to its antonym "unhealthy", which is no longer just a painful and undesirable condition, it is utterly *unfashionable*. In a world where the divide between the young and the aged is increasing by the day, and where everybody else (the ageing) is striving to resist the effects of time, the mixture of ancient and recent medical issues brought forth by globalisation once again results in putting at risk every society's weakest groups: children and the very unfashionable old ones. Healthcare institutions must make sure they develop and *maintain*, at today's fast technological pace, effective communicative strategies in order to reach and include such groups, also and especially via the new media and the web.

Lexical Analysis: Occurrences per website (as returned by internal search engine)

	ZA	AU	NZ
Infant*	484	2974	213
Baby(-ies)	500	1527	186
Child*	2100	11552	750
Teenage*	171	1014	68
Youth	120	5455	296
"Young people"	220	9747	205
"Younger people"	12	902	18
	3607	27171	1746
"Old people"	408	410	
"Older people"	63	4552	187
Ageing	60	37203	108
Aged	340	30608	348
Elderly	194	3381	89
	680	80240	732

Table 1

Selected references
- Department of Health (South Africa), www.doh.gov.za, (last consulted 18 June 2008).
- Department of Health and Ageing (Australia), www.health.gov.au, (last consulted 18 June 2008).
- Garro, L. (2005), "The unjust world problem revisited: What should health providers and researchers care about?", in *Communication & Medicine* (2005) 2: 195-200.
- Kealley, J. et al. (2004), "Information empowers but who is empowered?", in *Communication & Medicine* (2004) 1: 2, 119-129.
- Ministry of Health (New Zealand), www.moh.govt.nz, (last consulted 18 June 2008).
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- Sarangi, Srikant / Roberts, Celia (eds.) 1999. *Talk, work and institutional order: Discourse in Medical, Mediation and Management Settings.* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- World Health Organization (2003), "Gender, Health and Ageing", available on http://whqlibdoc.who.int/gender/2003/a85586.pdf, (last consulted 18 June 2008).
- WHO Statistical Information System (2008), http://www.who.int/whosis/en/index.html, (last consulted 18 June 2008).
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