

The characteristics of intergenerational communication both within and outside of the family are examined in two empirical studies. Following an extensive literature review, the studies are presented which explored connections between features of the dyadic relationship between elderly and middle-aged adults and aspects of verbal communication within this relationship. Study A (quasi-experimental design) examined whether evaluative perceptions of a fictitious intergenerational dialog depend on its relationship context. As part of a between-subjects design, young adults ($M = 22$ years, $n = 164$) and elderly adults ($M = 74$ years, $n = 139$) read written vignettes containing a dialog between an elderly woman and her middle-aged daughter or a professional female caregiver. The middle-aged woman either used patronizing speech or task-oriented speech when addressing the elderly woman. Generally, the daughter's behavior was judged as more respectful and as expressing more positive regard than the caregiver's behavior. In the elderly sample, this was especially true for patronizing speech, in the younger sample for task-oriented speech. Moreover, in accordance with existing studies, elderly subjects' ratings were more lenient than those of young subjects, and patronizing speech was evaluated negatively compared to task-oriented speech. However, the functional status of the elderly woman portrayed in the vignettes was irrelevant for ratings of the verbal behavior addressed to her. Study B (exploratory questionnaire study) analyzed the content aspects of intergenerational communication and their associations with indicators of relationship quality within the family. Independent samples of middle-aged adults ("children", $M = 45$ years, $n = 299$) and elderly adults ("parents", $M = 71$ years, $n = 244$) reported on the perceived frequency of 15 topics (e.g., "social and political questions", "habits of child") during verbal exchanges with one of their parents (children) or their oldest child (parents). Based on exploratory factor analyses, the ratings were aggregated into two dimensions of communication between parents and adult children, termed "narrative exchanges" and "regulative exchanges". Multivariate analyses revealed that frequent narrative exchanges proved to be a sign of a "good" parent-child relationship characterized by affection and a feeling of being highly valued. On the contrary, frequent regulative exchanges signaled a slightly conflict-prone parent-child relationship, especially when paired with few narrative exchanges.