

**MODIFICATION OF IDENTITY CONCEPTS: MOTHERLAND AND FOREIGNER\***

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**Анотация**

**Мирена Пацева, Митко Момов. Модификация на концепцията за самоличност: родина и чужденец.** Статията представя част от данните на лонгитюдно изследване на динамиката в лексикалното значение. То е илюстрирано с анализа на концептите родина и чужденец. Проследяват се някои аспекти на модификация на техните значения от 1989 – годината на началото на демократическите промени в България. Нашите данни сочат умерена консолидация на реакциите и редуциран емоционален градус на досъзнателно ниво на асоциациите.

**Ключови думи:** идентичност; значение на думата; психолингвистика; лонгитюдно изследване.

**Abstract**

**Mirena Patseva, Mitko Momov. Modification of identity concepts: motherland and foreigner.** The paper present the part of the data of a longitudinal study of the dynamics of the lexical meaning. It is illustrated by the analysis of the concepts motherland and foreigner. Some aspects of the identity modification, since 1989 - the beginning of democratic changes in Bulgaria, are considered. Our data show change in the direction of moderate consolidation and decrease of emotional strength of reactions on a subconscious level of associations.

**Key words:** identity; word meaning; psycholinguistics; longitudinal study.

**Анотація**

**Мірена Пацева, Мітко Момов. Модифікація концепції ідентичності: батьківщина і чужинець.** В статті представлена частина даних поздовжнього дослідження динаміки лексичного значення. Це ілюструється на прикладі аналізу понять Батьківщина та іноземець. Розглядаються певні аспекти модифікації їхньої ідентичності, починаючи з 1989 року - початку демократичних змін в Болгарії. Наші дані засвідчують зміни у напрямку помірної консолидації та зниження емоційної реакції на підсвідомому рівні асоціацій.

**Ключові слова:** ідентичність; значення слова; психолінгвістика; поздовжнє дослідження.

**The word meaning?**

According to Ferdinand de Saussure the language sign consists of *signifier* and *signified*

(Saussure). They correspond to its form and content or meaning. The German philosopher and logician Gottlob Frege introduced the distinction between the reference or denotation (Bedeutung) and the designate (Sinn). In a broad sense they correspond to the core and periphery of the word meaning– denotation and connotation

The denotative or referential meaning defines the main attribute of the object or denotate. For example the denotative meaning of a word pencil is *writing implement or art medium*. The denotative meaning is the comparatively more stable part

The connotative meaning or the connotation includes subjective evaluations, emotions and attitudes. They can be positive or negative. For example if someone likes to draw he has a special attitude towards pencils. These art mediums are especially important in his life and are associated with different aspects of his activity, which fills up the connotation of the word. But our negative experience with pencils (due to too ambitious parents or teachers) can charge the connotation with negative emotions and attitudes. Connotations can be common for the speech community or characteristic for the individual. The connotative meaning is dynamic: it varies according to culture, ideology, individual experience. Variations can be revealed in semantic analysis

### **Dynamics and modifications of word meaning**

The diachronic aspect of language represents changes in both denotates and significates of the language signs. The first one can be illustrated with the naming of new artifacts like *ipad, tablet ets*. We would like to focus on the later one. Significates or our understanding of words are less stable than the outer form. The main processes are extension and *narrowing*. An example of the later is the word *лято* meaning year in old Bulgarian, which narrowed its meaning to one season only – the summer.

Walter Kindt distinguished several kinds of changes of word meaning in his Dynamic semantics: plurality of meaning, local changes, changes into interpretations, interference processes and new aspects of meanings (Kindt 1985). Alexandra Zalevskaya traced the dynamics of word meanings in scientific terminology and common knowledge words and prognoses a new understanding of what's there beyond the word (Zalevskaya 2014).

### **How to define the word meaning and the tendencies in its modifications?**

An influential paper by Katz and Fodor suggests that the word meaning can be broken into components or minimal semantic feature (Katz & Fodor 1963). The ***semantic components*** should be necessary and sufficient to define the core meaning (Field 2004). So in order to define the meaning of the word *pencil* we have to list the features of the concept or semantic components like:

- create marks, leaving behind a trail
- the marks can be easily erased
- constructed of a pigment core inside a casing.
- The case prevents the core, and also the user's hand from marking.
- Most pencil cores are made of graphite ...

*The component analysis* has been widely used but it also bears problems: We can ask:

*Which of the semantic components are sufficient? Should we continue with physical characteristics of graphite?* According to Wittgenstein the word meaning cannot be exhausted with a list of semantic features. One other problem of the approach is that it takes no account of the affective or connotative meaning. The emotional and imaginative association "surrounding" the core meaning, rooted into the body and cognitive experience with the real-world objects has been investigated by associative test. It has been used to define the individual, group and national peculiarities of word meaning. We explore it to trace the tendencies in its modification.

### **The psychological association**

The psychological associations refer to a connection between conceptual entities or mental

states that results from the similarity or proximity in space or time. The idea stems from Plato and Aristotle, and was carried on by philosophers Locke and Hume among others.

The notion is used in contemporary psychology in *neural network models*. Semantic network theory proposes that a word's meaning is represented by a set of nodes and the links between them. The semantic information in the network is accessed through spreading activation. This mental process is thought to be automatic. So word associations are activated quickly without conscious effort, and outside of control (Trakslar 2012). These characteristics of the associations give us the opportunity to obtain information from deeper structures of mental activity.

### **The associative test**

Associations have been investigated by means of associative test which measures the implicit or subconscious content of concepts. Association tests are a common procedure in psychoanalysis and are used to investigate personality and its pathology.

In the **free-association test**, the subjects are told to state the first word that comes to their mind in response to a word-stimulus. We have used free-association test with the aim to investigate the tendencies in the dynamics of word-meaning of political concepts compared with everyday words in a longitudinal test.

### **The longitudinal study**

We would like to present a part of a longitudinal study, started in 1989 – the beginning of democratic changes in Bulgaria and provided in several stages since then – in 1992, 1995, 2007 and 2015. The first stage was part of a comparative study of national specifics of word meaning, provided with Bulgarian and Russian students. We use the cross cultural data as an additional dimension for tracing the tendencies. During the last trials gender differences were also taken into consideration.

Here we'll present some comparative data mainly between the first and last stage of the study. Other stages were presented in Patseva, Momov 1998 and Patseva 2009 among others.

### **Procedure**

Participants were students from Sofia University *St. Kliment Ohridski*, South-West University *Neofit Rilski* and Veliko Turnovo University *St. Cyril and Methodii* from 19 to 29 years old. Their number was minimum 100 in each stage, 50% boys and girls. They received a list of 19 stimulus words with the task to state the first word that comes to their mind in response to a word-stimulus. The time was not restricted but it did not exceed 20 minutes. The stimulus words were political concepts such as *democracy, security, property, freedom* and everyday words like to *work, family, holiday*.

We obtained as a result 100 answers – associates for each stimulus in each trial.

The analysis is qualitative and quantitative. It includes:

1. semantic analysis,
2. level of stereotype, and
3. level of abstractness and evaluation component.

We'll present here the first two illustrated by the data of two stimulus words. The gender analysis is provided during the last two trials.

### **Semantic analysis**

The reactions are distributed into semantic groups. The semantic groups are analogous to semantic components – *semes* but they don't reveal the entire structure of meaning but mainly its connotation. The semantic groups give information about the actual *focuses* in the semantic field. The particular configuration of semantic groups on each stage is informative for the changes and modifications of the word meaning. It is important for us that this information is not declarative but it reflects an automatic level of mental life which is out of control.

The analysis will be illustrated on the examples of the stimulus words: *motherland* and *foreigner*. The new data reflecting the present days trends are discussed in comparison between men and women reactions and in comparison to the previous stage.

### Motherland

Motherland is the most stereotypical stimulus word – one third of all reaction in 2015 stage (and nearly one half of the previous trial in 2007) are *Bulgaria*. The difference with the first trial is statistical – only 13% in 1989 and 31% in 2015.

Other repeated reactions are also neutral - *country* and synonymic – *fatherland*. Women express emotions like *love* and *affection*, man give more evaluations such as *value*, *sacredness*, *wealth*.

Before 25 years motherland was associated with greater degree with the beautiful nature and the sacred land (20%), whereas now 10 % of people associate motherland with home. One possible interpretation of this result is narrowing the identity concept.

The dynamics in emotional expression of the patriotic feeling is towards increasing the neutral and moderate positive feeling. During the first stages the young people were shy in expressing their intimate feelings towards motherland. Reactions like dear were rare. Only few Bulgarian man and one girl only give mother as reaction. To compare mother is the most frequent reaction for Russians associated with the well known expression *родина – мать*. One other comparative observation is also important: among most frequent Russian answers is also the capital city Moscow - the center of the country. Bulgarians never mention their capital Sofia. So unlike Russian the Bulgarian identity concept is not centralized.

Before 1989 the totalitarian ideology imposed declarative affiliation to the motherland. It was not reflected in the test results most probably as a reaction against the official propaganda. On the contrary, in 1989 negative feelings were expressed in answers as *nonsense*, *devaluation*, *barrack*, *chaos*, *mess*, *darkness* and existential conflicts –in *accusation*, and *conscience*.

The negative attitude and tension feeling of 1989 is replaced by a more calm feeling with less skepticism and negativism in the last stage of the test.

Table 1. Distribution of reactions to the stimulus word *motherland*\*

Semantic groups	1989	2015 man	2015 women	2015 all
mother	.02	.03	.01	.04
fatherland	.10	.03	.05	.08
nature, land	.20	.06	.03	.09
home, family	.05	.05	.05	.10
center:	-	-	-	-
love	.11	.03	.07	.10
dear, heart	.01	.01	.04	.05
sacred, holy	.02	.02	-	.02
unique, one, and only one	.03	.01	-	.01
patriotism, proud	-	.03	.02	.05
social feelings: duty, conscience	.07	-	-	-
skepticism: barrack, nothing, habit	.04	.01	.01	.02
Bulgaria	.13	.18	.13	.31
Negation: nonsense, devaluation, <i>mess</i>	.05	-	.01	.01

\*The numbers represent the percentage of all reactions. The total sum is not equal 100 because not all reactions are included into the semantic groups.

### Foreigner

In 1989 the foreigner was an *interesting* and *attractive* figure (.20%). There is a significant decrease in the interest towards him after 25 years. The “magic” currency is not up to date any more. The central semantic group in 2015 is *alien* (.12%). The image of the foreigner become more concrete and his social status decreases: he is not any more the investor, the uncle from America who has the financial power to solve any problem, now he is the emigrant, prisoner, negro.

The foreigner is still more attractive for women. He is *aristocrat* and *investor*, *holder of high standard and money* (.04%) *culture* (.06%), *intellect and education*. He evokes *curiosity* (.04%) and wish for *acquaintance*. For those who are not successive women reveal empathy in reaction like *loneliness* (.02%) and *rejected*.

Men are more reserved: for some of them the foreigner is interesting, can be *friend* (.04%), but the majority of answers are indifferent: *just a man* (.04%), he can be *guest* (.04%), *tourist* (.04%) but also *emigrant* (.05%), looking for job. Men give few isolated negative reaction as well: *intruder*, *parasite* and *rubbish*.

Table 2. Distribution of reactions to the stimulus word *foreigner*

Semantic groups	1989 Bulgarian	2015 man	2015 women	2015 all
foreign, alien, different	.04	.05	.07	.12
interest, curiosity	.20	.03	.04	.07
contact	.03	.01	.01	.02
European, American, Italian	.05	.05	.03	.08
Emigrant, Gipsy, prisoner	-	.01	.02	.03
tourist	.03	.04	.03	.07
emigrant, negro	-	.05	.03	.08
guest	.01	.02	.01	.03
friend	.05	.04	-	.04
be on the alert, spy	.02	-	-	-
arrogant	-	-	.01	.01
appearance: sun glasses, nice dress	.02	-	-	-
currency	.14	.01	.03	.04
man	-	.04	.02	.06
culture, education	-	.01	.03	.04
negative: parasite, intruder	-	.03	-	.03
alone, loneliness	-	-	.02	.02

### Level of stereotypical reactions

After Zalevskaya we use two ways to measure the level of stereotypical reactions: the average quantity of different (not coinciding) reactions and the percentage of the first three most frequent reactions.

In 1989 both methods show low level of stereotypical reactions of Bulgarians in comparison with the Russian ones (for all stimulus words in general): The average value of different reactions of Russian answers on one stimulus was 51.62, and for Bulgarians - 70.17. The percentage of the first most often repeated reaction was 32.51% for Russians and 24.14 for Bulgarians. According to Zalevskaya the level of stereotypes correlates with the quantity of syntagmatic reaction. Our data confirm this hypothesis: Bulgarian syntagmatic associates are more.

The level of stereotypes however grows up during the last two stages. The diversity of answers decreases. It seems a paradox that during the time of regimentation and leveling (*урегулировка*) of the totalitarian regime the level of stereotypical reactions was lower. Perhaps young Bulgarians deliberately distance themselves from the cliché, they were striving for originality and

gave diverse answers.

Table 3. Dynamics in the level of stereotypical reactions

Stimulus words	1989	2015
motherland	Bulgaria (.13) fatherland (.10) love (.05)	Bulgaria (.31) home (.10) country (.07)
foreigner	interesting (.09) interest (.06) friend/man/currency (.05)	culture (.04) tourist / friend / man/ other / stranger/ (.03)

### Discussion

During the years of democratic transition when the level of social freedom increases the diversity of reactions paradoxically decreases. In the time of destabilization and stratification of society the associative reactions show the opposite tendency to group together and the level of stereotypical reactions increased. This result may reflect a compensatory unconsciousness reaction of non-acceptance of the dogma of the totalitarian regime in 1989 and the same mechanism lead them to consolidation in time of plurality of opinions and crisis of ideas.

Another possible interpretation is connected with the fact that nowadays some young people occur adults earlier without any help by parents and government. The metaphorical reactions and play with words (characteristic for the data of 1989) are replaced by neutral and sober reaction.

The intensity of positive connotation to the foreigner in 1989 can be explained as a reaction of the hostile official politic of the socialist regime towards the different West. The intensive positive feeling of Bulgarians and their striving for contact with the foreign culture contrasted with the Russian reactions. For Russians the foreigner was most of all *not ours* (не наш) and evoked *irritation* and *anxiety*.

In 2015 the attractiveness of the foreign decreases. Young people's reactions are more balanced and the image of the foreign is more concrete. Now the foreigner is not any more representative of the West. He is just *human*, can be *emigrant*, *homeless*, *black*. The opening of the borders evokes new viewpoints: many students experience themselves as foreigners. The personal experience changes the view point and the distance between the own and the foreign. There is also one answer *I am a foreigner in my own country*.

During the last stage of the test the amount of the emotional reactions to the stimulus word motherland are approximately one third of all. Young people have new view towards the motherland maybe enriched through their own experience abroad. There is almost no negativism among the latest answers unlike those of 1989. Only one reaction express painful feeling – *nothing*. The strong negativism towards the government in mass media and in the public space has not affected the subconscious attitude towards the concept of motherland. Young people keep the sacred notion of motherland distinct from the evaluation of government and express some not very enthusiastic patriotism, waving national flags on the antigovernment demonstration.

### Conclusions

The semantic groups arranged in particular configuration trace the modification in word meaning characteristic for the different stages of the longitudinal test. The skeptical and critical attitude towards the own national identity is replaced by a more moderate and calm patriotic attitude. The skeptical and negative feelings expressed in 1989 are reduced and replaced by neutral and positive reactions amid unrestrained criticism in the social space.

It is noteworthy that in both phases of the test main focus of the reactions is contrary to the dominant social mood: in 1989 amid formally imposed counterfeiting patriotic pathos, young people expressed negativity. Now amid strong social critique to the state the emotional reactions are re-

lieved and even more positive

When it seems that the concept of homeland is threatened and when deficit of values is felt, it appears that the defilement does not penetrate at depth level. According to Drobnitski the very nature of the value is not in the current state but the state which "should be" (Дробницкий 1967).

As Gal Ariely pointed out in the situation of globalization two opposite tendencies can be observed in respect of the feeling of national identity: increase and reduction of the sense of identity (Ariely 2012). Our data show moderate consolidation on subconscious level.

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