

THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER, AGE AND PROFESSION-RELATED DIFFERENCES ON THE VERBAL BEHAVIOR OF THE SUBJECTS OF ASSOCIATION



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Gordienko-Mytrofanova Iya V., Sypko A. O., Sukhan V. A. THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER, AGE AND PROFESSION-RELATED DIFFERENCES ON THE VERBAL BEHAVIOR OF THE SUBJECTS OF ASSOCIATION // ФУНДАМЕНТАЛЬНЫЕ И ПРИКЛАДНЫЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ В ПРАКТИКАХ ВЕДУЩИХ НАУЧНЫХ ШКОЛ. – 2014. – № 5; URL: fund-issled-intern.esrae.ru/5-63

This paper presents the results of the free association test with the stimulus word «playfulness». The respondents (2,902 people) gave 13,817 separate response words, including 2,493 words that occurred only once, 551 word combinations or full sentences. The analysis of the received response words (reactions) allowed us to create an associative field of the word “playfulness”. The association patterns prove convincingly that in terms of its functioning, “playfulness” is a relevant lexeme in the bilingual linguistic consciousness of

Ukrainian people. At the current stage of the experiment, the representative statistical sample of 1,600 people chosen by the criteria of “gender”, “age” and “profession type” revealed both common and peculiar features in the verbal behavior of different groups of respondents. A big number of singular individual reactions (1,101) points out the necessity to take into consideration individual perceptions of the denotative meaning of the stated word when defining its psycholinguistic meaning. The prospect of further research in this field suggests the interpretation of the obtained associative reactions as linguistic representations of semantic components of the stimulus word “playfulness”.

Keywords: playfulness, free association experiment, stimulus word, response words, associative field.

Introduction. The present article continues a series of articles devoted to the issue of defining and describing the psycholinguistic meaning of the word “playfulness” 1]. Previous publications have suggested a hypothesis that *playfulness* can become one of the core personality traits that facilitate successful functioning of the subject of activity under the condition of cultural universalization [2].

The above stated hypothesis leads to the overall reconsideration of the very phenomenon of a play within the cultural and historical paradigm, as a specific kind of subject’s activity, which therefore causes the notion of *playfulness*, as a fundamental personality trait, to be thoroughly introduced into the psychological science [3].

The latter calls for a psychological experiment, whose aim is to outline and describe the psycholinguistic meaning of a given word, which is localized in human psyche [4]. The necessity to conduct this experiment has already been justified in the works published earlier [2].

The method of free association experiment is used at the current stage of the research in order to establish the psycholinguistic meaning of the word “playfulness”, as it is the most advanced technique of semantic analysis available so far.

The aim of the paper. The aim and objectives of the present paper is to demonstrate the influence of gender, age and profession-related differences on the verbal behavior of the subjects of association on the materials of the stimulus word “playfulness”.

Experimental part. Free association analysis, which is the main stage of the psycholinguistic experiment, whose aim is to outline the psycholinguistic meaning of a certain word, is preceded by its lexicographic description (preparatory stage of the psycholinguistic experiment) performed by I.V.Gordienko-Mitrofanova, relying on the methodology developed by I.A. Sternin and A.V.Rudakova [4]. The analysis of the generalized definitions of the

lexicographic meanings of the adjective *playful* shows that this particular word represents a rather complex structure, which comprises lot of closely-interrelated components, whose meanings sometimes overlap. First of all, it is explained by the fact that any word “allows a certain freedom of correlations with other concepts and under some circumstances it can denote something beyond its usual meaning” [5, 23-24].

At the current stage of our research, the method of generalizing dictionary definitions made it possible to outline a minimum set of indications for recognizing the meaning of the word “*playful*”. The psychological interpretation of the lexicographic description enabled us to define *playfulness as a stylistic feature of the subject of activity* and to outline further strategies of research into the concept of a *cognitively-playful individual*. A stylistic feature of the subject of activity is a term introduced by E.A.Klimov, and it means a stable system of ways and methods of activity which is influenced by certain personality traits and proves to be an effective way of adapting to objective requirements [6, 74].

The outlined definitions were later used in order to simplify the classification of associative responses to the stimulus word *playfulness* received during the free association experiment.

The main stage of describing the psycholinguistic meaning is a free association experiment which is used as a tool for defining the structure of a set of associations of the stimulus word.

According to N.V. Ufimtseva, the associative field derived in the course of the association experiment is “not only a fragment of a person’s verbal memory, but also a fragment of the world image of some particular ethnos, reflected in the consciousness of an “average” representative of this particular culture, as well as their motives, values and, consequently, their cultural stereotypes” [7]. The nature of responses within the associative field illustrates the usage patterns of this word, revealing the content which is psychologically relevant for the speakers of this language. This must be the reason why association experiments have not lost their validity and are still widely used today.

The procedure of selecting a group of respondents in each association experiment has its own inner logic.

Thus, a free association experiment with “*playfulness*” as a stimulus word has been conducted. The aim of the association research is to describe the psycholinguistic meaning of the word “*playfulness*”, which would help us derive its systemic meaning and outline its peculiarities as a phenomenon of linguistic consciousness. In its turn, it will enable us to determine primary components of *playfulness* as a fundamental personality trait. The content of primary components and their interpretation are expected to present *playfulness as a stylistic feature of the subject of activity*. In the context of the present research the statistical population involves Ukrainian citizens aged 18-60, whose linguistic

consciousness is characterized by bilingualism. This age group represents 55.5% of the entire population of Ukraine (over 42 million people). Ukraine has 459 cities, 490 administrative districts, 885 small towns and 28,450 villages. The country is divided into 24 regions (“oblast”). Urban population amounts to 64%, and rural population is 36%. Ukrainians make up 77.8 % of the country’s population, whereas Russians represent 17.3 % of the population. Ukraine is also home to other nationalities: Byelorussians, Moldavians, Crimean Tatars, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Romanians, Poles, Jewish people, Armenians, Greeks, Tatars, etc.

At the current stage of our research, the total number of respondents amounted to 2,902 people, which made it possible to cover all the 24 regions of Ukraine, as well as all types of settlements, including 40 cities.

The respondents were asked to respond to the stimulus word “playfulness” with any other words that first occurred to them.

The respondents were supposed to work in the framework of visual modality (a written survey).

Originally, the statistical sample was selected according to the requirement of homogeneity, first of all by the criteria of “age” and “gender”.

Let us say a few words about the “age” criterion. The present research uses the following age periodization: infancy (from birth to 1 year), toddler age (1-3 years); pre-school age (3-6 years); primary school age (6-10 years); adolescence (10-15 years); youth: first period (high school age, 15-17 years), second period (17-21 years); maturity: first period (21-35 years), second period (35-60 years); elderly age (60-75 years); senile age (75-90 years); long-livers (90 years and more). In accordance with this periodization we formed 2 age groups. Age group 1 includes the second period of youth (18-21 years) and the first period of maturity (21-35 years), whereas age group 2 includes the second period of maturity (35-60 years).

Thus, a group of respondents numbering 500 people was exposed to free association experiment with the stimulus word “playfulness”. Altogether, there were 250 men, including 189 people aged 18 –35 and 61 people aged 36-60; and 250 women, including 192 people aged 18-35 and 58 people aged 36-60.

When we counted the number of various responses given by the respondents (500 people altogether), it turned out that one stimulus word “playfulness” triggered 2,573 words, including 749 words which were not repeated, as well as 80 word combinations or full sentences, 403 singular individual responses, and total absence of refusals.

The very fact that the respondents produced so many responses to one stimulus (“playfulness”) makes it possible to assume that in terms of functioning “playfulness” is a relevant lexeme which is actively used and well-known to Ukrainian citizens who are either Russian native speakers or fluent in it. However, from the semantic point of view, “playfulness” is interpreted primarily via

synonyms. Being semantically vague and non-differentiated, it has no precise semantic composition.

The analysis of the associative field and individual reactions shows that association patterns depend not only on the respondents' gender and age, but also on their education and professional background. That is why, another criterion was introduced, i.e. "profession".

It is not surprising that association patterns depend on respondents' education and professional background. As V.V.Kabakchi rightly points out, the complicated structure of meaning of any word is fully accessible only to highly-educated people, while in everyday communication people are most likely to use very simple notions and ideas. The more complicated the meaning of the word is, the fewer people are fully aware of it [10, 55].

As for the "profession" criterion, we rely here on the typology developed by E.A.Klimov, where all professions are classified according to the object of labor the worker deals with, the instruments of labor (if the worker uses machines or manual tools), etc. Thus, all the professions are divided into the following types: "person - nature", "person - technology", "person - person", "person - sign systems", "person - artistic image" [9, 158-198].

Table 1 shows the distribution of our statistical sample according to the "profession" criterion.

Table 1

Profession type	Respondents			
	Men (age)		Women (age)	
	18-35	36-60	18-35	36-60
person-nature	3	1	6	1
person-technology	42	12	16	6
person-person	96	34	110	41
person-sign systems	34	6	44	3
person-artistic image	8	1	11	3
not stated	6	7	5	4

Considering the preliminary results, as well as the number of responses, the decision was made to enlarge the total statistical sample.

Finally the experiment involved 2,902 respondents who gave 13,817 separate words, including 2,493 words which occurred only once, 551 word combinations or full sentences, 1,101 singular individual responses, and one refusal. As for the nature of the statistical sample, there were 1,187 men (including 755 people aged 18-35, 412 people aged 36-60, and 20 people who are over 60 years old) and 1,715 women (including 1,310 people aged 18-35, 381 people aged 36-60, and 24 people aged 60-75). Table 2 shows the obtained data in correlation with "profession".

Table 2

Profession type	Respondents			
	Men (age)		Women (age)	
	18-35	36-60/ over 60	18-35	36-60/ over 60
person-nature	22	8	47	16/ 2
person-technology	134	118/10	51	39/2
person-person	337	229/5	774	238/13
person-sign systems	173	22	252	42/1
person-artistic image	33	15/1	69	20
not stated	56	20/4	117	26/6

At the current age of the research there has been only one refusal, which testifies to the fact that the stimulus lexeme “playfulness” is irrelevant for the linguistic consciousness of the respondents in terms of its meaning. This assumption is also indirectly proved by the fact that the number of responses was increasing alongside with the number of respondents: as the number of respondents increased 6 times as much, the number of reactions tripled.

Women represented 60% of this statistical sample. However, not evidence was found to prove that they had their “own” female associations.

This quantitative material formed the “ideal” statistical sample, or at least, almost ideal.

The representative sample included 1,600 people with the equal number of men and women (800 people). All the men formed two age groups numbering 400 people each, whereas women were divided into three age groups (400 people aged 18-35, 381 people aged 36-60, and 19 people aged 60-65).

Having counted the number of different responses to the stimulus word “playfulness”, it was revealed that the respondents (1,600 people) produced 7,942 separate words, 1,710 words out of which were not repeated, including 281 word combinations or full sentences, 826 individual responses, and not a single refusal.

The analysis of associations by parts of speech revealed the dominance of paradigmatic associations over syntagmatic ones: nouns – 7,029, adjectives – 428, verbs – 94; adverbs – 35. Paradigmatic associations are known to follow the principle of “minimal contrast”, meaning that the less different the stimulus is from the reaction in terms of its semantic components, the more likely the response word will be actualized during the process of association.

Table 3 demonstrates the obtained data in correlation with “profession” criterion.

Fig. 1 shows the way how association patterns depend on the type of respondents’ profession. 95 respondents per each profession type were taken out of the total statistical sample (2,902 people), making altogether a statistical sub-sample of 475 people. A separate association field was built for this statistical sample. The graph displays the first 50 responses.

Table 3

Profession type	Respondents			
	Men (age)		Women (age)	
	18-35	36-60	18-35	36-60
person-nature	14	8	15	18
person-technology	80	116	24	41
person-person	193	223	248	249
person-sign systems	81	19	78	43
person-artistic image	22	15	20	20
not stated	10	19	15	29

On the whole, such responses as “joy”, “fun”, “flirting” or “laughter” “game” is considered to be a mere echo-reaction, and therefore it is not subject to analysis) take leading positions in the way how representatives of various profession types perceive the stimulus word *playfulness*.

The data analysis proves that all profession types associate playfulness with a carefree joyful state of mind, lively noisy entertainment, as well as the person’s ability to detect comical situations. However, even considering the periphery of the associative field (not reflected on the graph), the representatives of the “person-person” profession type tend to associate playfulness with flirting, which is perceived rather like a manipulation based upon the creative use of the situation, as well as a variety of communication where one can try certain roles or models of behavior and relationships. As for the representatives of the “person-sign systems” profession type, again considering the periphery of the associative field, their responses clearly define playfulness as enjoying oneself. However, these people do not associate playfulness with these meme “animals”, i.e. the play behavior of animals, characterized by a very high level of positiveness and emotionality.

Now let us proceed with the analysis of association patterns influenced by gender and age-related differences between the respondents. Table 4 shows a fragment of the association field with the frequency of responses being more than 12. All the responses (column I) are arranged in the decreasing order of their frequency. Column II contains figures that reflect the share of the given response within the total number of responses. Column III reflects the frequency of responses given by the male part of the statistical sample, divided into two age groups, whereas column IV shows the frequency of responses given by the female part of the statistical sample, also divided into two age groups.

Fig. 1. Dependence of association patterns on the type of respondents' profession

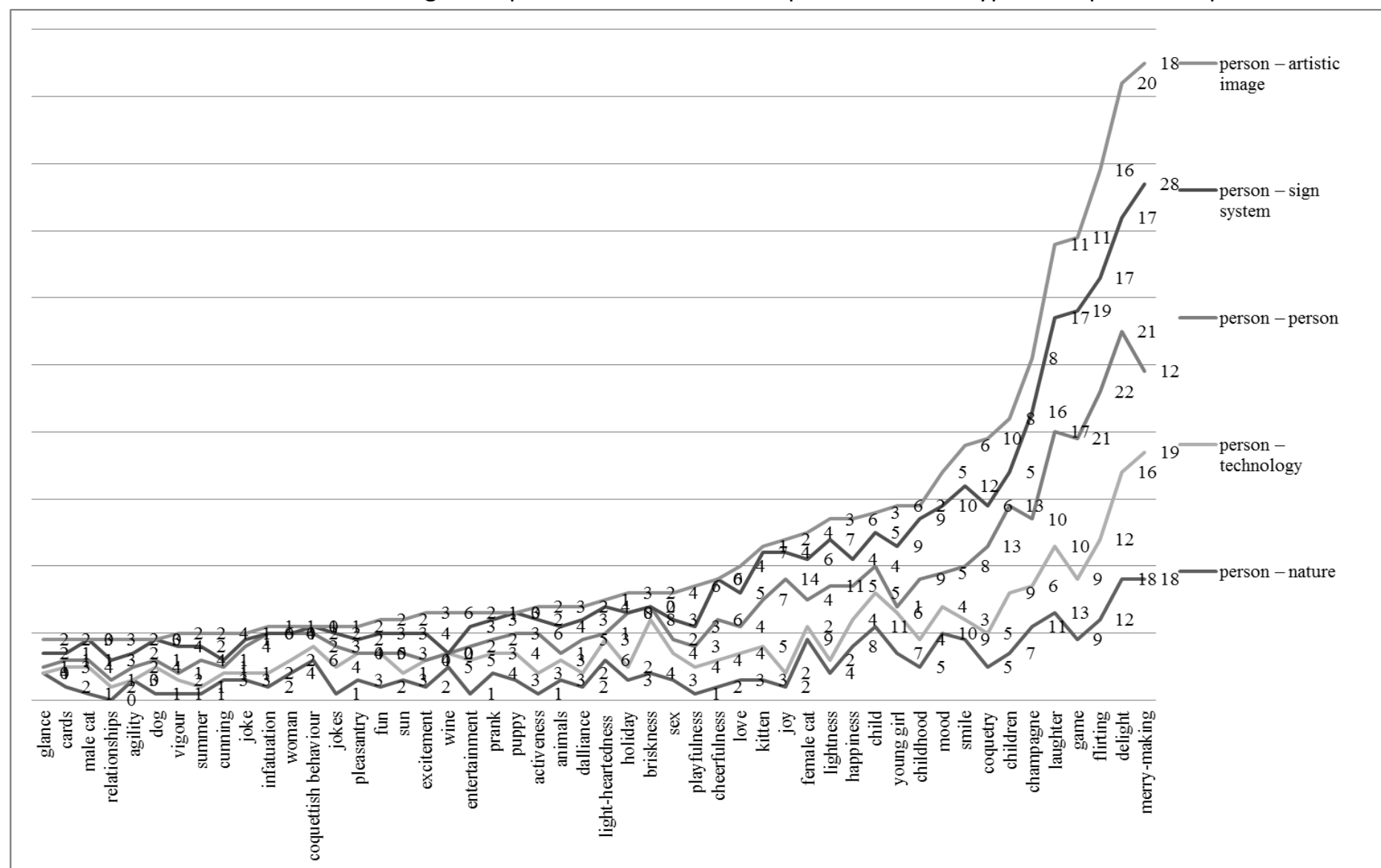


Table 4

I	II	III		IV	
Associations	Frequency and share (%)	Respondents			
		Men(age)		Women (age)	
		18-35	36-60	18-35	36-60
merry-making	276 (3,48)	62	41	94	79
delight	272 (3,42)	57	40	97	78
flirting	256 (3,22)	59	46	97	54
game	194 (2,44)	45	41	63	45
laughter	172 (2,17)	47	16	72	37
joy	125 (1,57)	19	27	27	52
children	122 (1,54)	21	26	46	29
coquetry	120 (1,51)	13	11	51	45
champagne	116 (1,46)	35	16	34	31
childhood	100 (1,26)	15	25	28	32
mood	93 (1,17)	20	11	38	24
smile	90 (1,13)	19	14	33	24
lightness	89 (1,12)	16	12	30	31
playfulness	87 (1,10)	26	24	14	23
child	86 (1,08)	20	20	22	24
kitten	84 (1,06)	15	18	30	21
briskness	81 (1,02)	21	18	21	21
prank	78 (0,98)	15	14	21	28
young girl	77 (0,97)	41	17	13	6
female cat	72 (0,91)	12	9	17	34
dalliance	69 (0,87)	13	23	12	21
love	67 (0,84)	14	21	25	7
coquettishbehaviour	60 (0,76)	13	7	13	27
sex	58 (0,73)	20	17	13	8
light-heartedness	57 (0,72)	16	3	12	26
happiness	57 (0,72)	9	9	31	8
good mood	57 (0,72)	6	12	15	24
pleasantry	57 (0,72)	19	17	9	12
excitement	53 (0,67)	14	14	10	15
holiday	51 (0,64)	13	4	18	16
mischievousness	48 (0,60)	6	15	9	17
joyful	45 (0,57)	6	14	7	18
activeness	42 (0,53)	15	8	9	10
cunning	40 (0,50)	8	15	7	10
puppy	40 (0,50)	9	11	11	9
infatuation	39 (0,49)	6	3	21	9
relaxation	39 (0,49)	6	20	7	6
wine	37 (0,47)	16	8	8	5
agility	37 (0,47)	9	6	0	22

sexuality	35 (0,44)	6	9	12	8
flippancy	34 (0,43)	10	11	6	7
youth	34 (0,43)	8	6	8	12
positiveness	34 (0,43)	16	3	9	6
dog	31 (0,39)	11	9	8	3
woman	30 (0,38)	8	17	3	2
games	29 (0,37)	6	9	10	4
interest	28 (0,35)	8	1	6	13
jokes	28 (0,35)	5	2	12	9
vigour	27 (0,34)	6	6	9	6
naughtiness	27 (0,34)	4	5	4	14
entertainment	27 (0,34)	8	5	8	6
animal	26 (0,33)	10	1	11	4
liveliness	26 (0,33)	4	4	12	6
spring	25 (0,31)	5	8	7	5
young girls	25 (0,31)	11	12	2	0
fun	25 (0,31)	9	4	5	7
sun	25 (0,31)	4	3	8	10
male cat	24 (0,30)	9	3	10	2
kittens	24 (0,30)	8	4	7	5
tenderness	24 (0,30)	9	3	10	2
pleasure	23 (0,29)	9	4	4	6
joke	23 (0,29)	6	3	6	8
cheerfulness	22 (0,28)	2	5	3	12
music	22 (0,28)	5	7	8	2
spontaneity	22 (0,28)	1	1	14	6
animals	21 (0,26)	3	6	7	5
restlessness	21 (0,26)	5	8	2	6
freedom	21 (0,26)	5	7	3	6
toys	20 (0,25)	3	2	12	3
caress	20 (0,25)	4	8	7	1
horse	20 (0,25)	7	1	6	6
summer	19 (0,24)	8	3	5	3
football	19 (0,24)	6	13	0	0
glance	18 (0,23)	6	2	8	2
light-mindedness	18 (0,23)	3	4	4	7
friends	17 (0,21)	5	4	7	1
sea	17 (0,21)	4	1	5	7
ball	17 (0,21)	5	6	6	0
relationships	17 (0,21)	5	2	7	3
funny	17 (0,21)	3	5	2	7
to play	16 (0,20)	3	8	2	3
intrigue	16 (0,20)	5	1	2	8
alcohol	15 (0,19)	4	5	6	0

eyes	15 (0,19)	2	3	7	3
infantilism	15 (0,19)	5	0	6	4
lack of seriousness	15 (0,19)	5	4	1	5
passion	15 (0,19)	5	6	0	4
slyness	15 (0,19)	7	2	2	4
emotions	15 (0,19)	5	2	4	4
naivety	14 (0,18)	3	1	1	9
communication	14 (0,18)	3	3	4	4
smiles	14 (0,18)	4	2	6	2
wind	13 (0,16)	6	1	2	4
vivacity	13 (0,16)	1	4	0	8
playfulness	13 (0,16)	5	4	3	1
beauty	13 (0,16)	8	1	3	1
ease	13 (0,16)	1	4	4	4
sociability	13 (0,16)	2	6	1	4
sport	13 (0,16)	2	9	2	0
good spirits	12 (0,15)	3	4	2	3

As it can be seen from the table, four most frequent reactions to the word “playfulness”, i.e. “merry-making” - 276 (3.48%), “delight” - 276 (3.42%), and “flirting” - 256 (3.22%) are inversely related with men and women: women (800 respondents) – *delight* 175, *merry-making* 173, *flirting* 151; men (800 respondents) – *flirting* 105, *delight* 103, *merry-making* 97. It should be noted here that the high-frequency response given by the women aged 18 to 35 (*flirting*, *delight* 97, *merry-making* 94) largely coincided with that given by the men aged 35-60 (*flirting* 46, *merry-making* 41, *delight* 40) with the only difference that women of this age also display cheerfulness, positive emotions and laughter (*laughter* 72), as manifestations of delight, happiness and pleasure. On the contrary, this high-level response (“laughter”) ranks only 16 among the most frequent responses with men of the same age category. It might be connected with the fact that men-hunters, as Julian Tuwim – a famous Polish writer and poet – put it, remained too long under the impression they made on women, which is a no laughing matter. It’s a joke, of course. Women aged 35-60 tend to perceive *playfulness* (*merry-making* 79, *delight* 78, *flirting* 54, *laughter* 37) in much the same way as men aged 18-35 (*merry-making* 62, *flirting* 59, *delight* 57, *laughter* 47).

On the whole, women tend to connect *playfulness* primarily with the psychological and emotional state of joy and lightheartedness (*delight* 175, *merry-making* 173, *flirting* 151, *laughter* 109), while men associate it with the form of behavior intended to attract the attention of a woman, as well as with enjoying oneself in a carefree and joyful way, alongside with the attributes of some

particular holiday that dictates certain forms of behavior (flirting 105, merry-making 103, delight 97, laughter 63).

Conclusions. The results of free association experiment prove that in terms of functioning “playfulness” is a relevant lexeme in the bilingual linguistic consciousness of Ukrainian people.

At the current stage of the experiment, certain specific features have been revealed in the verbal behavior of different groups of respondents divided by the criteria of “gender”, “age” and “profession”, being reflected in the sememes “merry-making”, “delight”, “flirting”, “laughter”.

Some peculiar features are detected at the periphery of the associative field “playfulness”. It is not surprising, as the associative field of any stimulus word is influenced by a lot of factors, including individual preferences. The discrepancy on the level of single individual responses is rather big. However, this issue deserves a more in-depth research. At the current stage, one can only talk about certain gender-related differences and their effect on the association patterns.

A large number of singular individual responses (1,101 responses for the statistical sample of 2,902 respondents) points out the necessity to take into consideration individual perceptions of the denotative meaning of the word “playfulness” when defining its psycholinguistic meaning.

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Гордієнко-Митрофанова І.В., Сипко А.О., Сухань В.А. Вплив гендерних, вікових та професійних відмінностей на вербальну поведінку суб'єктів асоціювання.

Статтю присвячено проміжним результатами вільного асоціативного експерименту зі стимулом «грайливість» (игривость). На стимул інформанти (2902 людини) дали окремих слів 13817, неповторюваних – 2493, з них 551 словосполучень або закінчених речень. Обробка отриманих відповідей (реакцій) дозволила побудувати асоціативне поле слова «грайливість». Аналіз складу й характеру асоціацій переконливо доводить, що з точки зору функціонування «грайливість» є актуальною лексемою в двомовній свідомості українців. На даному етапі експерименту виявлено універсальні та специфічні риси у вербальній поведінці різних груп респондентів за критеріями «стать», «вік», «професія». Велика кількість зареєстрованих одиничних реакцій (1101) актуалізує проблему аналізу периферії врахування індивідуальних бачень денотата слова «грайливість» під час виявлення його психолінгвістичного значення.

Ключові слова: грайливість, вільний асоціативний експеримент, слово-стимул, слова-реакції, асоціативне поле.

Гордиенко-Митрофанова И.В., Сыпко А.А., Сухань В.А. Влияние гендерных, возрастных и профессиональных различий на вербальное поведение субъектов ассоциирования.

Статья посвящена результатам свободного ассоциативного эксперимента со стимулом «игривость». На стимул информанты (2902 человека) дали отдельных слов 13817, неповторяющихся – 2493, из них 551 словосочетаний или законченных предложений. Обработка полученных ответов (реакций) позволила построить ассоциативное поле слова «игривость». Анализ состава и характера ассоциаций убедительно показывает, что с точки зрения функционирования «игривость» является актуальной лексемой в языковом сознании украинцев, основанного на двуязычии. На данном этапе эксперимента, на репрезентативной выборке объемом 1600 человек по критериям «пол», «возраст», «тип профессии» выявлены универсальные и специфические черты в вербальном поведении разных групп испытуемых. Большое количество зарегистрированных единичных реакций (1101) актуализирует проблему анализа периферии ассоциативного поля, что позволит учесть индивидуальные видения денотата слова «игривость» при выявлении его психолингвистического значения.

Ключевые слова: игривость, свободный ассоциативный эксперимент, слово-стимул, слова-реакции, ассоциативное поле.