

BAZI SÖZCÜKLERİN ÇAĞRIŞIMSAL MANALARI: ANLAMSAL FARKLANDIRMA ÜZERİNE BİR UYGULAMA

CONNOTATIVE MEANINGS OF SOME SIMILAR WORDS: AN APPLICATION OF SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL

АССОЦИАТИВНЫЕ ЗНАЧЕНИЙ НЕКОТОРЫХ СЛОВАРЕЙ: СМЫСЛОВЫЕ РАЗЛИЧИЯ И РАЗНОГЛАСИЯ¹

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ÖZ

Çağrışım ve düzenlam anlam bilimin önemli iki ana başlıklarıdır. Sözcüklerin çağrışimsal manaları sözde farklandırma teknikleri uygulayarak incelenebilirler. Bu da bize sözcüklerin duygusal manalarının yanısıra metaforik manalarını da tanımlamamızı ve onlar hakkında fikir yürütmemizi sağlar. Bu araştırmada, "mum", "mother", "home", "house", "man", ve "person" sözcüklerinin bu türden manaları çalışıldı. Zıt manalı sıfatlardan oluşan yedili likert ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Anket Saraybosna Üniversitesinde 21'inin erkek, 55'inin de kızların olduğu 76 öğrenci üzerinde uygulanmıştır. "mum" sözcüğü "mother" ile karşılaştırıldığında kulağa "daha genç, güçlü, güzel ve samimi" gelmektedir. "Home"sözcüğü "house" ile karşılaştırıldığında "daha sıcak, yumuşak, aktif, güzel, yakın ve belirgin anlaşılmalıdır. Çağrışimsal manalar göztergebilim ve anlambilimin ilginç konularıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Anlamsal farklandırma tekniği, anlambilim, eşanlam, düzenlam, çağrışım.

ABSTRACT

Connotation and denotation are two important topics in semantics. Connotation of words can be examined by applying so-called semantic differential technique. It can help us to describe and estimate metaphorical as well as emotional meanings of words. In this study, we estimated the meaning of the following words: "mum", "mother", "home", "house", "man", and "person". We used a seven-point Likert scale, with ten pairs of opposites (adjectives). This scale was distributed among 76 students at the University of Sarajevo, where 21 of them were males and 55 were females. Our results pointed out the three following things. First, the word "mum" compared to the word "mother" sounds "younger", more "active", "stronger", more "beautiful", and "closer". The word "home" compared to the word "house" was somehow "hotter", "softer", more "active", more

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"beautiful", "closer", and more "clear". Connotative meanings seem to be a very interesting subject of semiotics/semantics.

Key words: semantic differential technique, semantics, synonyms, denotation, connotation.

АННОТАЦИЯ

Ассоциативное прямое значение являются двумя важными понятиями в языкознании. Ассоциативные значения слов в словарях могут исследоваться при помощи методов, способствующих различению слов. Это дает возможность нам размышлять об эмоциональных смысловых наряду с метафорическими значениями слова, данными в словарных статьях. В этом исследовании рассмотрены и раскрыты значений слов «mum», «mother», «home», «house», «man», «person», данных в разных словарях. Использована шкала Лайкерта из семи прилагательных с антонимичными парами. Анкетирование проводилось в Сарайбосна университете. В нем приняли участие 21 респондентов-мужчин, 55 респондентов-женщин, всего – 76 студентов. Анализ анкет показал различное понимание и объяснение смыслов сравниваемых слов. В итоге мы убедились в том, что ассоциативные значения слов в контексте внешних и внутренних пониманий являются очень интересной темой.

Ключевые слова: метод различения смыслов, семантика, синоним, прямое значение, ассоциация.

Introduction

Semantic differential is a technique which serves for examining the experience of different words. Participants differ in their emotional response to some words (especially nouns and adjectives) as well as in attributing connotative meanings to a presented word, concept, or term. Of course, there are some average tendencies and similarities between people, because some connotative meanings are common for a particular group of people.

In particular, semantic differential is used in the field of semantics, because this scientific area deals with denotative and connotative meanings of words. It is also a powerful tool in cognitive linguistics. Denotative meaning is the strict (literal) meaning of a word, which can be found in dictionaries of a language (e.g. Sternberg, 2012:375; Crystal, 1987:418). Connotative meanings are emotional, metaphorical, allegorical or indirect meanings of a word (e.g. Larson, 1984:80; Barthes, Lavers, & Smith, 1967:90). For instance, "fox" is a word which refers to a wild animal (which is its denotative meaning), but we also use it to describe someone who is cunning, shifty, and sly.

Snider and Osgood (1969:55) discovered that we can evaluate one word based on the three following dimensions (aspects): evaluation (e.g. as good or bad), activity (e.g. active/dynamic or passive/static), and potency (e.g. strong/powerful or weak). Furthermore, Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957:342) stated that these dimensions are cross-cultural universals.

Interestingly, people also have some "distant" associations and feelings about a particular word. It can be experienced as bitter or sweet, sharp or rounded, soft or solid/hard... We will give an example of it. Suppose participants are presented with a noun "father". Our fathers are usually firm, strong and unforgiving, unlike our mothers. Hence, participants will "experience" this word as "sharp", "strong", "powerful", and "bitter".

Semantic differential is a set of rating scales and at the top of it we place a particular word (e.g. "politics", "TV", "school", "man", "classical music", "homosexuality", "family", etc.). These scales are of a bipolar type, and at their ends are two opposite adjectives (e.g. strong – weak, rough – gentle, pleasant – unpleasant, interesting – boring, easy – difficult, etc.). Between every pair of adjectives there is usually a five- or seven-point scale. It can be presented in the form of Likert scale (e.g. from 1 to 5 or from 1 to 7), or in the form of bipolar scale (e.g. -3 to +3, or -2 to +2). In the first example, "3" and five respectively are considered as midpoints of these scales. In the last example, the value of "zero" is actually the average value (i.e. the midpoint of the scale). If participant "feels" that the presented word can be described better by using one of the adjectives, he picks the number on the scale which is closer to that adjective. There are several variations of semantic differential forms: numeric, graphical, and verbal (Garland, 1990:20). In our research, we chose the first one, because it is the most frequently used format of this technique.

Reviewing the literature in this field, we found several interesting applications of the semantic differential technique. Gargante, Meneses and Monereo (2013:9) used it to examine university professors' attitudes towards teaching. The triggering words (phrases) were as follows: "motivation for teaching", "evaluation of oneself as a teacher", and "performance of teaching". They used these pairs of adjectives: negative – positive, demanding – undemanding, hard – soft, complex – simple, tense – peaceful, superficial – deep, incomplete – complete, inopportune – timely, heavy – light ... On the other side, Norbergh, Helin, Dahl, Hellzen, and Asplund (2006:264) examined nurses' attitudes towards people diagnosed with dementia. We will give some examples of the adjectives used in their study: calm – aggressive, reliable – unreliable, warm – cold, good – evil, significant – insignificant, joyful – sad, harmonious – desperate, valuable – valueless, cared for – rejected, and smooth – rough. Weed and Nicholson (2014:1) investigated social evaluation tendencies towards pregnant teens, teen mothers and fathers. Their semantic differential form consisted of the following pairs of adjectives: involved – uninvolved, mature – immature, moral – immoral, active – inactive, fun – boring, sensible – foolish, loving – hostile, warm – cold, etc.

Keller and her colleagues (2013:71) used it to compare US and German sample on their connotations regarding spirituality and religion. The emotional aspect of these two abstract terms is estimated by using the following pairs of opposites: awful – nice, little – big, powerless – powerful, rough – smooth, hellish – heavenly, dirty – clean, empty – full, etc. First of all, their study revealed significant differences in perceiving and experiencing religion and spirituality. According to their participants, spirituality is nicer, more fine, more heavenly, cleaner, lighter, and milder than religion (in both of the samples). Further, US participants had slightly different feelings (compared with German participants). They think spirituality is nicer and cleaner whereas religion is lighter and more powerful. On the other side, German participants did not think spirituality is so nice and clean, neither religion is so light and powerful (Keller et al., 2013:94).

Despite linguists provided lots of examples of semantic differential technique, we could not find real empirical studies where this powerful technique is used in investigating specific topics in semiotics/semantics. Thus, our study can be seen as an attempt to promote this kind of technique and to show its usefulness in determining differences between words with more literal meaning and those which can trigger connotative meanings.

Hence, our research questions are defined as follows:

- 1) Is there a difference between words "mother" and "mum" in their emotional tone?
- 2) Is there a difference between words "house" and "home" in their emotional aspect?
- 3) Shall we find a difference in emotional meaning of words "person" and "man"?

In accordance with our research questions, we proposed the following hypotheses:

- 1) The word "mum" is experienced as a significantly different term (with respect to its emotional component), compared to the word "mother".
- 2) The word "home" has significantly higher emotional tone than does the word "house".
- 3) Participants' feelings about the words "person" and "man" are significantly different.

Therefore, we examined and compared three pairs of synonyms, in order to investigate differences between their connotational meanings.

Methodology

Participants

Our sample consisted of 76 students from the University of Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina). There were 55 females (72.4%) and 21 males (27.6%), as it is displayed in Figure 1.

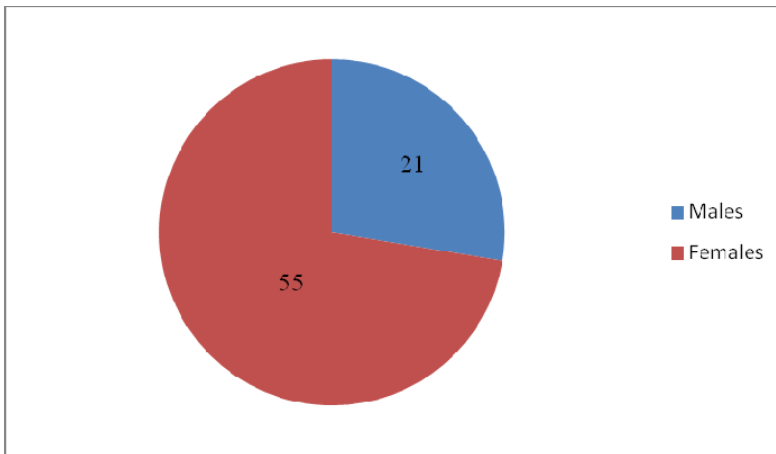


Figure 1. Gender distribution of the sample

All students were chosen based on their English language knowledge. Hence, all of them could understand the content of our survey.

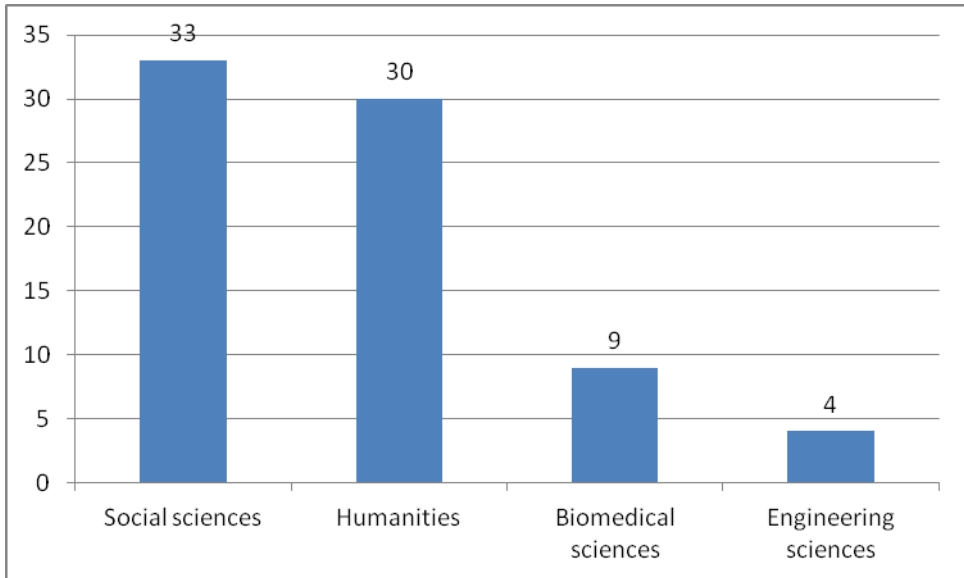


Figure 2. Studying programs of our participants

As can be seen in Figure 2, 33 of them (43.42%) studied social sciences, 30 participants (39.47%) studied humanities, nine of them (11.84%) studied biomedical sciences, and four participants (5.26%) studied engineering sciences. Participants' mean age was $M = 20.05$ and the standard deviation of their age was $SD = 0.85$.

Instruments and procedure

We designed a form of semantic differential where the following ten pairs of adjectives were included: cold – warm, old – young, soft - hard, active – passive, big – small, strong – weak, beautiful – ugly, far away – close, bad – good, and clear – unclear (obscure). Next, we added a seven-point Likert scale to every pair of adjectives. Every participant was presented with six words: "mother", "mum", "house", "home", "person", and "man" and their task was to estimate connotative meanings of these words with regard to ten aforementioned adjectives. It takes them approximately 10 minutes to fulfill this scales. We also have to mention that this study was conducted according to ethical principles and the respondents were guaranteed anonymity.

Data processing

The collected data were analyzed in MS Excel 2010 and SPSS for Win 16.0. We applied non-parametric statistical procedures. First, descriptive statistical values were calculated and after that we applied Wilcoxon's test of equivalent pairs. This test is used for examining differences between two sets of answers (scores) in the same sample of participants.

Results

We displayed descriptive statistical values in Table 1. Mdn is a label of median, which is a central value of a ranked set of data. IQR is the abbreviation of interquartile range,

which represents the range where fall 50% of participants' scores (results). These scores fall around the median value of data.

Table 1. Descriptive statistical values

Words	MUM		MOTHER		HOUSE		HOME		MAN		PERSON	
Adjectives	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR	Mdn	IQR
Hot-cold	1	1	1	0.75	2	3	1	1	4	3	4	3
Old-young	4	2	3	3	4	3	4	3	4	1	4	1.75
Soft-hard	2	2	2	2	4	5	3	4	6	3	4	3
Active-passive	2	2	3	5	4	4	4	3.5	2	3	3	3
Big-small	3	4	4	4	3	3	2	3	3	3	4	3
Strong-weak	3	4	4	5	2	3	2.5	3	1.5	1.75	3	4
Beautiful-ugly	1	1	2	3	2	3	2	1.5	3	2	4	2.25
Far away-close	6	3	5	4	5	3	6	3	4	3.25	4	2
Bad-good	7	6	7	2	6	2	7	2.25	5	2	4	2
Clear-unclear	3	6	3	3	4	2.5	2	3	4	2	5	3

We can see (Table 1) that median values for pair of adjectives "old – young" in the case of words "mum" and "mother" are different (Mdn = 4 vs. Mdn = 3). If we consider pair of adjectives "far away – close", we can notice that participants (on average) said that they "feel" the concept "home" closer (Mdn = 6) than the term "house" (Mdn = 5).

In order to investigate whether there are significant differences, we conducted Wilcoxon's test. This is a non-parametric substitute of t-test for paired samples. The results are shown in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

Table 2. The results of comparisons between "mum" and "mother"

Pairs of adjectives	Comparisons	Number of ranks	z	p
Hot-cold	mother<mum	15	-1.465	.143
	mother>mum	7		
	mother=mum	54		
Old-young	mother<mum	41	-4.096	.000
	mother>mum	9		
	mother=mum	25		

Soft-hard	mother<mum	22	-1.752	.080
	mother>mum	17		
	mother=mum	35		
Active-passive	mother<mum	5	-4.348	.000
	mother>mum	36		
	mother=mum	31		
Big-small	mother<mum	19	-1.657	.098
	mother>mum	30		
	mother=mum	24		
Strong-weak	mother<mum	13	-2.506	.012
	mother>mum	32		
	mother=mum	29		
Beautiful-ugly	mother<mum	6	-3.876	.000
	mother>mum	31		
	mother=mum	38		
Far away-close	mother<mum	25	-2.184	.029
	mother>mum	12		
	mother=mum	37		
Bad-good	mother<mum	17	-1.628	.103
	mother>mum	12		
	mother=mum	45		
Clear-unclear	mother<mum	17	-0.503	.615
	mother>mum	19		
	mother=mum	38		

We can notice (Table 2) that participants "experience" the meaning of a word "mum" as more "young" ($z = -4.096, p < .001$), "active" ($z = -4.348, p < .001$), "strong" ($z = -2.506, p < .05$), "beautiful" ($z = -3.876, p < .001$), and "close" ($z = -2.184, p < .05$) than the meaning of a word "mother". This is the case because we used to call our mother "mum" when we were children and we usually call her "mother" when we are adults. Hence, we confirmed the first hypothesis.

Table 3. The results of comparisons between "home" and "house"

Pairs of adjectives	Comparisons	Number of ranks	z	p
Hot-cold	home<house	32	-4.575	.000
	home>house	6		
	home=house	35		
Old-young	home<house	25	-0.529	.597
	home>house	20		
	home=house	27		

Soft-hard	home<house	40	-4.625	.000
	home>house	7		
	home=house	24		
Active-passive	home<house	28	-2.297	.022
	home>house	13		
	home=house	28		
Big-small	home<house	21	-0.046	.964
	home>house	16		
	home=house	32		
Strong-weak	home<house	18	-0.545	.586
	home>house	16		
	home=house	36		
Beautiful-ugly	home<house	29	-3.404	.001
	home>house	9		
	home=house	31		
Far away-close	home<house	15	-2.731	.006
	home>house	28		
	home=house	26		
Bad-good	home<house	9	-1.561	.118
	home>house	23		
	home=house	36		
Clear-unclear	home<house	29	-3.438	.001
	home>house	11		
	home=house	28		

As can be noticed (Table 3), there is a pattern in respondents' assessments of "home" and "house" emotional tone. They perceived "home" as hotter ($z = -4.575, p < .001$), softer ($z = -4.625, p < .001$), more active ($z = -2.297, p < .05$), more beautiful ($z = -3.404, p < .01$), closer ($z = -2.731, p < .01$), and more clear ($z = -3.438, p < .01$). This results was expected, because the word "home" sounds more intimate and is related to the place where our family lived. On the other side, a word "house" sounds like a material object (e.g. just like building, apartment or similar thing). Therefore, the second hypothesis was confirmed, too.

Table 4. The results of comparisons between "person" and "man"

Pairs of adjectives	Comparisons	Number of ranks	z	p
Hot-cold	man<person	28	-0.336	.737
	man>person	29		
	man=person	17		

Old-young	man<person	13	-3.702	.000
	man>person	33		
	man=person	26		
Soft-hard	man<person	19	-1.952	.051
	man>person	34		
	man=person	18		
Active-passive	man<person	27	-0.785	.433
	man>person	16		
	man=person	29		
Big-small	man<person	41	-3.992	.000
	man>person	11		
	man=person	22		
Strong-weak	man<person	40	-4.134	.000
	man>person	7		
	man=person	25		
Beautiful-ugly	man<person	33	-1.264	.206
	man>person	19		
	man=person	18		
Far away-close	man<person	29	-0.297	.767
	man>person	26		
	man=person	16		
Bad-good	man<person	14	-3.645	0,000
	man>person	35		
	man=person	22		
Clear-unclear	man<person	37	-3.602	0,009
	man>person	16		
	man=person	19		

With respect to the data shown in Table 4, we can conclude that participants perceive "man" as younger ($z = -3.702, p < .001$), bigger ($z = -3.992, p < .001$), stronger ($z = 4.134, p < .001$), better ($z = -3.645, p < .001$), and more clear ($z = -3.602, p < .01$) than "person". It seems that our respondents gave their answers regarding the stereotype of a strong, big and young man. A person can be a women, too. But the word "man" produces clear associations which are more related to strength, height, and other positive physical characteristics. Based on this findings, we can say that we confirmed our last hypothesis.

Discussion

As we stated before, all hypotheses were confirmed. Superficially looking at these three pairs of words (or terms), we can falsely conclude that they mean the same thing. The word "mum" is a synonym for "mother", the word "home" is a synonym for "house", and the

word "man" can be seen as a synonym for "person". However, if we dig deeper, we will realize that those pairs of words refer to slightly different emotions, mental representations, and mental images.

We found that the word "mum" is perceived as "younger", "stronger", more "beautiful", more "close", and more "active" than the word "mother". The denotative meaning of "mother" is "female parent", whereas the word "mum" comprises: love, care, emotions, protection, and support.

We also found that the word "home" has different meaning compared to the word "house". Home is a safe place, where family gathers, and where we experience positive atmosphere, sincere emotions, and a sense of belonging. On the other side, house is a type of a place of residence.

In the end, we compared the word "man" with the word "person". A person can be a male or a female and this term is more general than the term "man". Men are considered as strong and taller/bigger than women. Therefore, if someone imagines a person, it is more abstract and more unclear concept than "man". In contrast, if we imagine a man, we have an image of a male person who has particular physical traits (such as stamina, muscles, paternal characteristics, etc.).

In our semantic differential form, we mostly used the adjectives which were used by other researchers (e.g. Gargante et al., 2013:9; Keller et al., 2013:71; Norbergh et al., 2006:264; Havelka, Kuzmanovic, & Popadic, 2008:220; Weed & Nicholson, 2014:1). We added some new pairs of adjectives as well. Our results are consistent with the results of other researchers because semantic differential seemed to be a very good and useful tool for determining tiny differences in connotative meanings.

We cannot make comparisons between our and others' results in a domain-specific topics, because, as we said before, there are no the real empirical studies in linguistics concerning emotional tone of pairs of synonyms.

Conclusion

In accordance to the literature review and proposed hypothesis, we can conclude several things. First, the semantic differential technique is a widely applicable tool, especially in cognitive linguistics and semantics. It can also be applied in social psychology, educational science, personality psychology, sociology, etc. This fact was underlined by Osgood et al. (1957:342), Snider and Osgood (1969:55), Havelka et al. (2008:220), and Norbergh et al. (2006:264).

Second, the semantic differential can help us to examine some nuances in meaning space (the so-called semantic space) of words with similar meaning. We did it in our study, which was also done by Keller et al. (2013:71). We compared three pairs of similar words, whereas these authors compared the word "spirituality" with the word "religion".

Third, semantic spaces of our pairs of words are not the same. They differ in their emotional tone (i.e. they "sound" slightly different). There were statistically significant differences between the words "mum" and "mother" in the following pairs of adjectives: young – old, active – passive, strong – weak, beautiful – ugly, and far away – close. That is, the word "mum" carries more positive connotations than the word "mother". Next, we found statistically significant differences between the words "home" and "house". These differences were present in the following pairs of adjectives: hot – cold, soft – hard, active – passive, beautiful – ugly, far away – close, and clear – unclear (obscure). The word

"home" was estimated more positively than the word "house". Lastly, there were also significant differences in perceiving the words "man" and "person". These differences are detected in five pairs of adjectives: old – young, big – small, strong – weak, good – bad, and clear – unclear (obscure). In particular, participants consider the word "man" stronger, bigger, younger and better than the word "person".

Hence, some words predominantly refer to their denotative meaning whereas other words activate various connotative meanings, which are also a part of our mental schemes and representations. We learn and memorize words by ascribing them different meanings. Some of these meanings are semantically proximal (denotations), while the others are more distal (connotations).

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