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A DIACHRONIC STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF YOUTH IN THE ENGLISH LINGUACULTURAL CONTEXT

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Abstract: The article analyzes stylistically neutral units of the English language within the lexical field of "age," focusing on the concepts associated with early youth and youth. The study aims to investigate the etymology, trace the historical development, and elucidate the semantics of the lexemes representing these age periods and individuals characterized by them. The article examines the distinct English national portrayal of these age periods and conducts a semantic analysis of how the concepts of "early youth" and "youth" are verbalized over time and in the present context.

Introduction

Language serves as a mirror reflecting and a tool for exploring reality, thus constituting what is referred to in cognitive linguistics as "The linguistic representation of the world." Some aspects of this linguistic representation are closely tied to human life stages, such as the concepts of age, life, time, and space. The concept of age has been a common focus of study across various languages, with researchers like Benjamin Lee Whorf, [1] Anna Wierzbicka, [2] Vyvyan Evans, [3] Lera Boroditsky, [4] and William Labov [5]. Studies have also examined the concepts of "young" and "new" in relation to their synonyms, as well as explored the representation of time in a comparative analysis of English and Uzbek. This current research analyzes stylistically neutral English language units that serve as dominant neutral lexemes

within the lexical field of "age," specifically focusing on the segments related to youth and early youth.

Methods and principles

When gathering language material from lexicographic sources, the method of continuous sampling was used. Other methods such as that of word-formation analysis, the method of dictionary definitions, as well as the etymological method were applied in the analysis of the data collected. In the work we also relied on the descriptive-analytical method, which involves observation of the language units with subsequent generalization of the results, as well as the method of paradigmatic and component (seme) analysis of these lexical units.

Literature review

In gathering literature from lexicographic sources, we utilized the continuous sampling technique. Alongside this, we conducted word-formation analysis, examined dictionary definitions, and delved into etymological analysis to scrutinize the collected data. Our research also encompassed the descriptive-analytical approach, which involves the observation of language units for subsequent generalization of results. Moreover, we applied the method of paradigmatic and component (seme) analysis to comprehensively examine these lexical units.

Whorf was an American linguist known for his work on linguistic relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis [1]. He suggested that the structure of a language can influence the way its speakers perceive and conceptualize the world, including concepts of time. Whorf's ideas have sparked debates about how language shapes our understanding of time and other abstract concepts. Wierzbicka is a Polish-Australian linguist known for her research on the semantics of language and the universality of human concepts. She has explored how different languages express concepts of time and how these linguistic differences reflect cultural attitudes and perceptions of time. Wierzbicka's work has shed light on the diversity of temporal concepts across languages and cultures [2]. Evans is a British cognitive linguist who has conducted research on language and cognition, including the conceptualization of time. He has explored how language structures our understanding of time, including the metaphors and expressions we use to talk about temporal concepts. Evans' work highlights the complex relationship between language, thought, and time perception [3]. Boroditsky is a cognitive scientist and linguist known for her research on language and cognition, including the influence of language on temporal reasoning. She has conducted studies on how different languages encode and express concepts of time, showing how linguistic differences can impact cognitive processes related to time perception. Boroditsky's work has contributed to our understanding of the interplay between language, culture, and temporal cognition [4]. Labov is an American

linguist known for his work on sociolinguistics and variationist linguistics. While not specifically focused on the concept of time, Labov's research has explored how language reflects social and cultural attitudes, including temporal orientations. His studies have provided insights into how language use can reveal underlying beliefs and values related to time and temporality [5].

The research is grounded on the theoretical notion that a word-focused methodology can be utilized in language analysis, where a word is viewed not just as a naming unit but also as a component of the lexico-semantic system of the language. The significance of this study lies in the interconnectedness of the youth phenomenon and its categorization with fundamental concepts and cognitive frameworks such as "age," "time," and "life," which hold relevance in contemporary national and international economic, political, and social contexts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Age is depicted as a concept symbolizing the progression of human growth, encompassing distinct stages with unique characteristics represented in the language vocabulary aligned with the segmentation of the age spectrum. The research highlighted that within the English language worldview, the enduring semantic-pragmatic contrast of "ascending/descending line of life," "youth/old age" has endured across centuries and remains pertinent.

In modern English and its historical evolution, distinct stages of human life are easily recognizable: infancy (babyhood) – the initial years following birth, essentially early childhood; childhood – the phase of being a young person between infancy and youth; puberty (teens), adolescence – early youth; youth – broadly, the interval between childhood and maturity, specifically as a period spanning from adolescence to maturity; maturity – adulthood, middle age; and old age (elderliness) – the final phase of the typical lifespan [11]. Upon delving into the meanings of terms representing these stages, it becomes apparent that the boundaries between age periods are somewhat ambiguous. Age categories are often defined in relation to each other, or in reference to the start, end, or entirety of life, with precise numerical demarcations rarely observed.

The core terms in the lexico-semantic groups for individuals in these two age categories are as follows:

• For puberty, adolescence, or the teen years (early youth) – an adolescent, a teenager;

• For youth – a youth, a young man, a young lady (girl), collectively referred to as youth for both sexes.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The transition stage immediately following childhood is termed puberty. Nevertheless, in the English language worldview, the concepts of "puberty," "adolescence," and "youth" embodying early youth and youth are somewhat intricate and nuanced. "Puberty" signifies:

- "a phase or age range distinguished by the emergence of secondary sexual traits, indicating reproductive capability"; the onset and specific boundaries of this phase are stipulated in medical, educational, and social contexts: 13-16 years for boys and 11-14 years for girls.

In broader terms, puberty symbolizes the initial phase of the maturation process ("encompasses the early stage of adolescence") [11]. Alongside "puberty," "adolescence" is frequently employed, with the following interpretations:

- "the state or process of general growth; a period spanning from childhood to maturity: ages 14-25 for boys and 12-21 for girls"[10];

- "the phase from puberty to maturity, i.e., until reaching adulthood" – with "youth" considered a synonymous term. From these explications, two insights emerge: firstly, adulthood or maturity in the English context follows reaching the age of majority, and secondly, amid childhood and maturity, individuals pass through two phases: firstly, puberty, succeeded by adolescence or youth[11].

Reflecting on these analyses leads to two key observations: firstly, adulthood or maturity is perceived in the English worldview as following the legal age of majority; and secondly, in the trajectory from childhood to maturity, individuals experience two distinct phases: beginning with puberty and later progressing to adolescence or youth.

It is important to highlight the conflicting nature of the concepts of adolescence and youth. In a single article in the Webster Dictionary [11], the term "youth" is initially defined as "the period between childhood and adulthood," while later on, in the definition of "a young person," it is specified as "a young male individual between puberty and maturity." This discrepancy in defining age periods versus naming individuals of different age groups adds complexity to the understanding of age categorization.

On one hand, the stages of a person's life can be categorized as childhood, youth (equivalent to adolescence), and maturity (when considering "youth" as a stage of life). On the other hand, this classification can also be viewed as childhood – puberty – youth (equivalent to adolescence) – maturity, with "youth" representing a "young man." Furthermore, the interchangeability of terms like "adolescence," "puberty," and "pubescence" as synonyms for "youth" in the context of a "period of life" adds to the confusion.

In English, these terms are often used interchangeably, with "youth" serving as a more general concept that can refer to the entire span from childhood to adulthood or solely from puberty to maturity. The term "adolescence," which generally denotes the same period as "youth," carries an additional connotation of greater immaturity compared to youth, implying inexperience, awkwardness, and mental and emotional instability.

Therefore, for an English speaker, the staging of this life period is likely to appear as: childhood – puberty – adolescence – youth – maturity, where "youth" can be used to describe and name each phase between childhood and maturity.

The term "puberty" originates from Latin. Middle English "puberte," meaning "ability to reproduce," was borrowed from Latin and passed through the French "puberté," signifying "adulthood" or "maturity." In Latin, "pūbertās" encompasses the concepts of "manhood," "age of maturity," and "puberty," deriving from the word "pūbēs," which denotes "manhood," "maturity," "ripeness," "facial hair," "hair growth in the genital area," and refers to "adults," "men," or "people."

The direct definition of "puberty" can be traced back to its first recorded usage in 1382. Synonyms like "pubescence" and "pubescency," formed with different suffixes, emerged much later, around the mid-17th century. The term "pubescent," referring to a young man who has reached puberty, did not appear in dictionaries until the 19th century (1894). On the other hand, the adjective "pubescent," indicating having reached the age of puberty, has been in use since the mid-17th century. This adjective, formed with the suffix "-ent" denoting a subject of an action or an instrument, has preserved its original meaning without alteration or deviation in modern English.

The term "adolescence" is derived from the Latin word "adolēscentia," which made its way into English through French. The Latin noun "adolēscentia" is known to have been constructed from the verb "adolēscere," meaning "to grow." Morphologically, the verb comprises the prefix "ad-" signifying direction, initiation, complementarity, attachment, addition, and the stem "-alēscere," derived from the verb "alere," meaning "grow" or "increase."

The original and direct meaning of the word "adolescence," denoting an age period as "the state or process of growing up in general; the period covering the time from childhood to maturity, typically from ages 14 to 25 for boys and 12 to 21 for girls," was formally documented in dictionaries in 1430, a century after the appearance of the term "adolescency," which refers to the characteristics or traits associated with the period of growing up. The term "adolescent," identifying a person in this age group, was recorded even later, in 1482. Similar to "pubescent," this term is created by appending the suffix "-ent" and signifies "a person in the period of

growing up, a youth between childhood and adulthood." Notably, this definition has remained consistent since the late 15th century.

In contemporary English, a commonly used and more informal term for the phase of life spanning from 13 to 19 years for individuals of both genders is "teens." Correspondingly, the designations for individuals in this age group are "teeners," "teensters," and "teenagers." The term "teens," serving as the central element in this synonymous cluster, currently holds three logically interconnected meanings in the English lexicon:

• Referring to numerals ending in "-teen," encompassing the range from 13 to 19.

• Characterizing the span of years in a person's life (infrequently, if ever, referring to something else), described by numerals concluding in "-teen," covering ages 13 to 19.

• Collectively indicating young individuals aged between 13 and 19.

These definitions were formally documented in dictionaries in 1885, 1673, and 1820, respectively. Despite entering common usage relatively late, these terms exemplify the word formation and inventive potential of the English language, along with the adaptability of the semantic domain of "age" in accommodating new vocabulary. This highlights the versatility and dynamism of how the English language conceptualizes the categorization of youth.

Furthermore, the term "youth," denoting the age period in contemporary English, carries the following connotations:

• The phase of life between childhood and maturity.

• An initial phase of being, growth, or development of an individual or entity.

• A state characterized by vitality, vigor, and a youthful appearance, along with the mindset typically associated with youthfulness.

"Youth" also serves to describe an individual or individuals in their younger years:

• A young man, specifically someone between adolescence and maturity.

• Young individuals collectively or generally any energetic and youthful beings.

Structurally, the term "youth" comprises a stem and the suffix "-th," generating abstract nouns indicating an action, process, or state. This suffix originates from Germanic roots and evolved from "-thu" in Old English to its variation "-the" in Middle English before adopting its contemporary form.

Etymologically, the term "youth" has its roots in Old Saxon, dating back to the Old English period with forms like "geogoþ" and "geoguþ," derived from "geong" meaning "young." In Middle English, the term evolved into forms like "viwethe," "youthe," and "youihthe." These Middle English forms correspond to similar terms in other Germanic languages like Old Saxon "juguth," qadimgi Fris "jogethe," and Old High German "jugund," all believed to stem from the

Proto-Germanic "jugunþi," which in turn traces back to the Indo-European "yuwn-ti" meaning "youth," derived from "yuwn" meaning "young." The stem "yeu-" meaning "young" is prominent in various ancient Indo-European languages such as Old Indian, Avestan, Latin ("juvensis" meaning "a young man, youth"), and Proto-Slavic ("junŭ").

The earliest meanings associated with the term "youth" were "the period from childhood to maturity" and "young people collectively" dating back to around 897.

The analysis reveals that the term "youth" originally referred to the early period of life between childhood and maturity, as well as young people collectively, before later acquiring the specific meaning of "a young man." However, in modern English, the word "youth" is not typically used to describe a young woman or girl. Instead, a girl or young woman is commonly referred to as a "young lady." While historically (around 897), the term "youth" did encompass this meaning, it fell out of use as early as the 15th century.

The word "lady," originating from Old English "hlǽfdíġe," initially denoted a "mistress of the house" or "the one producing, baking bread," reflecting a complex composition of two stems: "hláf" for "bread" and "dīg" which means "knead, knead [7]." There is an alternative view suggesting the addition of the root "dǽge" to "hláf," linking it to the meanings of "virgin" or "girl"[9], [8], [6].

A debated aspect is the word's connection to "hláford," meaning "master of the house" or "master of bread" in Old English. The challenge lies in the Old English suffix used to form feminine nouns, which seemed to be "-íc e" rather than "-í e." The word's usage in conjunction with the related term was documented in 825, during a period dominated by the feudal social system and feudal economy and production. The word's internal structure reflected the specific characteristics of that era. In the Middle English period, the word gradually evolved into its modern form, transitioning from "lafdi" to "lavede" to "ladi."

In modern English, the word "lady" retains its historical meanings but is now commonly used more broadly to refer to any woman, not just those of noble birth. However, the primary connotation of the term typically emphasizes "a woman of refinement and good manners, worthy of admiration by men."

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The neutral language units in English encompass the universal essence of concepts like "early youth" and "youth," which are recognized across various cultures and traditions, while also incorporating specific national and cultural nuances. This characteristic is evident in the etymology and historical evolution of the semantic structure of these language units, as well as in their contemporary meanings in English.

By analyzing established vocabulary units that encapsulate well-understood meanings and concepts ingrained in collective consciousness, cognitive-semantic models of "early youth" and "youth" can be constructed. In the English language worldview, the progression of the early stages of life is typically depicted as: childhood – puberty – adolescence – youth – maturity, with the term "youth" capable of encompassing and representing each of these developmental phases between childhood and maturity.

Despite the somewhat fluid and overlapping boundaries between these age periods, they can be distinctly defined concerning their relationships to one another, to the beginning, end, or entirety of life. The evolution of concepts related to the early stages of life and neutrally naming individuals within corresponding age groups began as early as the middle of the 9th century and has continued to evolve dynamically through the Old English and Middle English periods into modern times.

The etymology and meanings embedded within the semantic structures of these neutral lexemes at various points in history reflect the evolution of the English-speaking community's history, culture, and development, shaping its language worldview.

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