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Adolescents and adults' structure and content of associative fields of keywords of an advertisement text: An experiment of associations

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Abstract

The article offers a comparative research of the influence advertising texts have over linguistic conscience of adolescent and adult respondents. The process of learning a language occurs in close interaction with comprehension and perception of the surrounding world. Linguistic conscience of an adolescent as part of the universe is determined on one hand, by her/his social environment, educational system and social life, and on the other hand, by the details of development of a child's psychics. Here lies the main difference from adults whose linguistic conscience is already formed. We find it inspiring to compare the degree of influence of an advertisement on the content of words' association fields in adolescents, for whom a word is not yet a concept, is not definitively shaped in conscience, to that in adults whose linguistic conscience is already developed. By influence we mean the presence of reactions, caused by the text of advertisement, in respondents' linguistic conscience. Contemporary adolescents are the most active part of the information community. Advertisement, a specific impersonalized type of communication, is an integral component of the modern communication process in which adolescents are deeply involved.

Keywords: linguistic conscience; experiment of associations; word's association field; late ontogenesis; influence of advertisement on linguistic conscience

1. Introduction

When describing a phenomenon of conscience, scientists talk about its system and structure which includes meaning, personalized notions and a universe of feelings which makes conceived world images real. "Conscience acts as a movement, which ties the most complex matters: the reality of the world represented by feelings, human experience presents in meaning, and the bias of existence of a living being which forms a "meaning for me" (Leontiev, 2010). Conscience, as a superior form of psychical reflection, is led by purposeful processes (actions) and by the language as a medium of communication (Vivas et al., 2019).

Introducing the term "linguistic conscience" leads to a need of distinguishing between linguistic and non-linguistic conscience. The definition introduced by E. Tarasov and N. Ufimtseva (2009) determines linguistic conscience as "knowledge associated with language cues for introducing primary

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and secondary images of conscience in the process of communication". Here primary images refer to "knowledge accumulated by a person in a process of perception of the real world's objects" and secondary images "primary images used as etalons on further stages of perception". Hence the "image of conscience" is knowledge associated with a word, its psychological representation. The problem of distinguishing linguistic and non-linguistic conscience is a complex one as images of the linguistic conscience are formed in a process of an individual perceptional activity, using no linguistic signs as intermediaries, and only become linguistically expressed in the process of external communication, through texts. "Linguistic conscience is a reflection of an external speech represented in its ties to images of a non-linguistic conscience" (Tarasov, 2013).

The introductions of a term "linguistic conscience" makes possible building a realistic model of a linguistic image of the world and investigating the content of the linguistic conscience of representatives of different cultures. This model consists of an associative-verbal network built upon results of massive associative experiments and it is based on a psychological perception of a link between perceptional units in a human conscience. The quantitative results of free association experiments reflected in dictionaries of associations allow judging upon strength of these links in a common conscience of a native language speaker. "The thesaurus of associations, represented in a form of a multidimensional network of associations, provides a clear concept of structure and functioning of the linguistic conscience and hence of an image of the world of an average native speaker of any given language. (Ufimtseva, 2011; Kang, 2018).

The associative-verbal network created by association dictionaries reflects a pre-speech readiness of a speaker which cannot be identified and formalized by other research methods. "A dictionary of associations represents the language in its pre-speech readiness by uncovering the hidden way of holding the language in the memory of its speaker" (Karaulov et al., 2002). This model of a linguistic conscience, represented in dictionaries of associations (thesaurus of associations) is built upon a material which "immanently contains and thus reflects a structure objectively associated with an image of the world of a given naïve language speaker, with culture as a system of learning, since the world is presented to an individual through a system of substantiated meanings which "overlap" with the perception of the world" (Ufimtseva, 2013).

Besides, the associative-verbal network is systemic and integral. "Each element of the associative-verbal network has its meaning and is at the same time important, which confirms that it is part of a system and its value depends on its place in the system as a whole" (Ufimtseva, 2013).

The systemic character of meanings is a reflection of a systemic character of the culture itself, of the image of the world which it creates. From a systemic and integral character of the associative-verbal network is deduced the notion of a "nucleus of an internal lexicon" (a nucleus of a linguistic conscience), which consists of linguistic units with "a concrete, sensual meaning". The presence of a nucleus of lexicon is "one of the bases for a complex overlap of association fields of different words which otherwise seem to have nothing in common" (Zalevskaja, 1981). The nucleus of linguistic conscience as a combination of words with a maximum number of links with other words in an associative-verbal network, is a stable construct which confirms the systemic character of the image of the world.

As mentioned above, the thesaurus of associations is a reflection of mental and emotional state of an average language speaker. It is not constructed but rather deduced, extracted from the memory of a speaker and is fixed by thesaurus compilers in the means of investigation. As a result of a free association experiment raises the possibility of gathering information about psychological equivalents of "semantic fields" and of discovering syntagmatic, not just semantic, links between words which exist in a conscience of a language speaker. Foreign researchers such as R. Brown (Brown & Berko,

1960), D. McNeil (1966), H. Clark (1977), G. Kiss (Kiss et al., 1972), among others, touch in their work upon linguistic associations as irregular, probable links.

The data accumulated by an association experiment can be considered as conscience images, representative for a given language and culture, which combine mental and sensual knowledge of a given population. "The usage of materials of the dictionary of associations allows finding new ways of investigating the mechanism of language interaction and behavior, as well as understanding the semantic principles in a language as a whole, the laws of socialization of individual semantic shifts and establishing new typical associative links". (Ufimtseva, 2011).

2. Methods

One of recognized tools of investigation of the linguistic conscience is association experiment which helps building an association field of the stimulus word and acquiring insights into structure and functioning of the linguistic conscience of an "average" language speaker (Reyes-Magaña et al., 2019). We find it most inspiring investigating the linguistic conscience of an early stage of ontogenesis' late phase, of which adolescence is part. Linguistic conscience of an adolescent as part of the world's image is determined, on one side, by socialization processes in which the child is involved, and, on the other side, by the properties of development of child's psychics. The society causes maximum influence on this phase of ontogenesis because socialization and individualization processes occur simultaneously, and psychical processes conflict with various paths (social, intellectual, personal, emotional, physiological) of a growing up process. Various institutions of secondary socialization – school, hobbies, internet communities, network games, different media among which advertisement as a specific impersonalized type of communication – cause a massive effect on formation of conscience (Eka Pratiwiet al., 2021; Kovalevska et al., 2021).

TV advertisement is a most complex channel of communication as brief TV ads use static and dynamic images and a voice-over (Figure 1). The resulting audiovisual effect ensures a strong imprinting of transmitted information into recipient's conscience (Aue et al., 2018). Nowadays advertising is an integral part of the information field to which an individual is exposed almost constantly. Hence it is fair to speculate that the influence of advertising is independent of our intentions. For instance, most people do not purposely watch TV ads but they equally do not switch TV channels when a broadcast of such ads starts. Thus, we can speculate that advertisement texts cause a background effect on conscience, which is the subject of our paper.

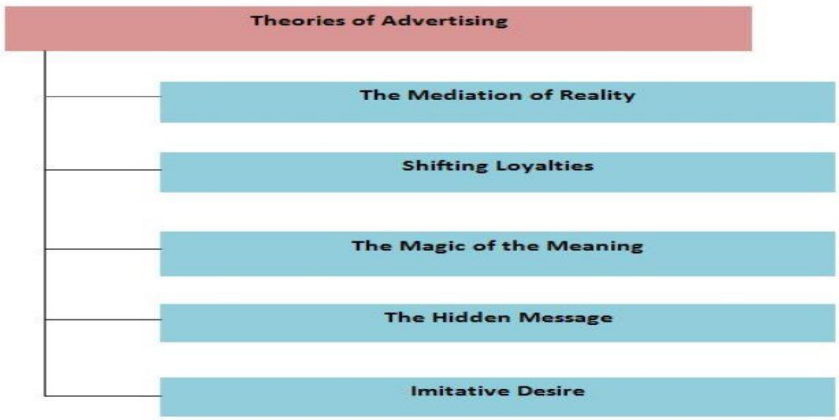

Figure 1. Five theories of advertising

One of our groups of respondents are adolescents of 13 years of age who stay on the early stage of the late phase of ontogenesis. At this stage they start to form a relatively independent and stable attitude towards themselves and the surrounding world, and to gradually evolve from concrete to abstract thinking (Vygotskij, 1934; Playfoot et al., 2018). An adolescent pass to a superior form of intellectual activity – thinking in concepts; "these concepts evolve rather than are being received as a given: when a child learns a new world, it is just the beginning of a concept development process" (Ufimtseva, 2011).

Students of grade 7 of several public schools of Moscow, aged 13, took part of an association experiment, returning 108 completed questionnaires. A control group consisted of 40-55 y.o. adults of various occupations, living in Moscow and Murmansk, returning 107 completes. A questionnaire was rejected if for "mother tongue" any language different from Russian was filled in; also, if "prefer not to answer" was filled for more than 20% of stimuli words – this never occurred to adult respondents.

For a comparison of association fields of adolescents and adults we used key words from TV advertisement texts written by adolescents as part of an association experiment aimed at identifying the influence of advertisement on linguistic conscience of adolescents (Shchennikova, 2016). For a comparison we selected 17 stimuli words with a broad representation of words which we believe to be associative reactions to advertisement texts: 8.5% to 76.5% of adolescent respondents. These 17 stimuli words were exposed to adult respondents.

3. Results and Discussion

The data collected in a course of our association experiment are presented below as % of a general number of reactions for adolescent and adult respondents (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of an association experiment

Stimuli words	Reactions caused by the influence of advertisement texts on the content of association fields in adolescents	Reactions caused by the influence of advertisement texts on the content of association fields in adults	Stimuli words	Reactions caused by the influence of advertisement texts on the content of association fields in adolescents	Reactions caused by the influence of advertisement texts on the content of association fields in adults
Aromagic	51.5	10	Nikola	54	29
Whiteness	64.5	46	Powder	65	56
Warrant	22	8.5	Springs	13	12
Gel	76.5	66	Freshness	27	11
Fungus	64.5	37.5	Syrup	28	14
Immunity	19.5	4	Spasm	56	46
Heels	8.5	1	Agent	16	14
Beverages	25	3	Crispy bread	26	13
Enjoyment	8.5	6.5			

The data from Table 1 demonstrate that the number of reactions in the associative field, triggered by the advertisement text, is higher – in some cases significantly higher – in adolescents than in adults (the difference of 7% to 41%). The difference is low for associative fields of stimuli words *enjoyment, springs, spasm, agent*. The portmanteau word *aromagic* yields 51.6% of reactions triggered by the advertisement text in adolescent respondents; this number is 5 times lower, 10%, in adult respondents.

The word *aromagic* is unknown and unclear, it only appears in advertisement texts and in adolescents' conscience it is closely related to advertisement and to a specific area in which this word is used. Hence the associative field of this word includes a high number of reactions triggered by the

advertisement text, and also a high number of refuses to answer, 29%. The rejection of this word is confirmed by a presence of negative reactions (*nonsense, crap, substance, bullshit*); those negative reactions do not occur in adult respondents.

The number of reactions triggered by the advertisement text in the associative field of stimuli words *aromagic, warrant, fungus, immunity, heels, Nikola, crispy bread* is several times higher in adolescent than in adult respondents. We believe that it can be explained by the fact that adolescents learn these words mainly from advertisement texts, and the development of related images is influenced by advertisement (TV advertisement in this case). Stimuli words *whiteness, gel, beverages, enjoyment, powder, springs, freshness, syrup, spasm, agen*t are concepts related to general knowledge. These words do not associate with a concrete text and they get into respondents' conscience by different ways.

During the association experiment we observed a high number of refuses to answer in adolescents and a total lack of such refuses in adult respondents. Adolescent respondents would treat a stimulus word as non-familiar if a related conscept is not yet developed in adolescent's mind. Examples of such words are: a portmanteau word *aromagic*, an anthroponym *Nikola*, the word *warrant* which is not part of respondents' active lexicon and thus is treated as non-familiar, or a word *whiteness* – although it is part of a common lexicon, is not perceived familiar by adolescent respondents. Quantitative data on refuses to answer are represented below as a % of a total number of respondents (Table 2):

Table 2. Percentage of refuses to answer

Stimuli words	Total number of respondents 108	Total number of respondents 107	Stimuli words	Total number of respondents 108	Total number of respondents 107
	Adolescents	Adults		Adolescents	Adults
Aromagic	32.5%	—	Nikola	22.00%	—
Whiteness	56.50%	—	Powder	8.5%	—
Warrant	39.00%	—	Springs	6.50%	—
Gel	7.50%	—	Freshness	3.50%	—
Fungus	4.50%	—	Syrup	—	—
Immunity	7.50%	—	Spasm	18.5%	—
Heels	8.5%	—	Agent	16.5%	—
Beverages	2%	—	Crispy bread	2.00%	—
Enjoyment	17.50%	—			

After processing the data collected in a course of the associative experiment we identified four types of reactions triggered by advertisement texts: *canonic*, i.e. presented in the same format as in advertisement texts; *categorizing*, i.e. represented by a noun or another key word, linked to a notion communicated by the entire text; *indirect*, i.e. represented by a word which in the mind of a respondent is linked not to a single product but rather to a group of products, and *relative*, i.e. related to the area of activity of advertisement media (for instance, such words-reactions as *advertising, television* etc.) (Shchennikova, 2016). Quantitative data on types of reactions are represented below as a % of a total number of respondents (Table 3):

Table 3. Types of reaction

Stimuli words	Canonic		Categorizing		Indirect		Relative	
	Adolescents	Adults.	Adolescents	Adults.	Adolescents	Adults.	Adolescents	Adults.
Aromagic	-	1	43	3.5	8.5	3.5	-	2
Whiteness	14	5.5	23.5	7.5	27	32.5	-	-
Warrant	3	1	1	-	17	5.5	1	1
Gel	-	-	61.5	46.5	15	20.5	-	-
Fungus	22.5	6.5	42	31	-	-	-	-

Immunity	-	-	14	1	5.5	3	-	-
Heels	8.5	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Beverages	-	-	-	1	25	2	-	-
Enjoyment	-	-	1	-	7.5	6.5	-	-
Nikola	-	1	46.5	26	7.5	2	-	-
Powder	-	-	54	52.5	11	3.5	-	1
Springs	13	10	-	2	-	-	-	-
Freshness	-	-	21.5	9	5.5	2	-	-
Syrup	-	-	27	13	1	1	-	-
Spasm	46.5	43	2	1	5.5	2	2	-
Agent	9.5	8.5	4.5	5.5	2	-	-	-
Crispy bread	-	-	23	1	3	12	-	-

Canonic reactions, i.e., reactions presented in same format as in advertisement texts, appear mainly when a stimulus word acts as a pre-position element of the syntagm which is part of the advertisement text. These reactions are observed if the stimulus word is part of the slogan and, at the same time, an element of the following structures: Noun+noun (N+N), Noun+noun in genitive (N+N2), N+N: the reaction *"make-up*" to a stimulus word "*heels*" is given by 8.5% of adolescent respondents ("*everything's all right, heels-make-up, this day is ours*"). The stimulus word *heels*is part of a structure which is perceived as idiomatic and triggers the second component of this structure: *make-up*, since it comes at the beginning of a canonic text. The phrase "*everything's all-right*" is several times appearing, or aggressively popping up, in a canonic text – this reaction is not observed in adult respondents.

The stimulus word "*spasm"* yielded a reaction "*pain*" in 46.5% of the total number of adolescent respondents. This word is mainly used in advertising and, although it is located in a post-position (*Pain and spasms? Buscopan is coming to a rescue*!), it is closely related to pain in adolescents' mind. In adult respondents the "*pain*" reaction was 43%.

N+N2: reaction "*purity*" to the stimulus word "*warrant*" is present in 3% of respondents (A purity warrant is coming to you!). Analogous to this structure is the reaction of "*quality*", observed in 4% of adolescent respondents. Adult respondents present a "*purity*" reaction in 8.5% of the cases. Reaction "*nails*" to a stimulus word *"fungus*" is present in 22.5% of adolescent respondents (*nail fungus – a reason to worry!).* In adult respondents a similar reaction is present in 6.5% of the cases. Reaction "*whiteness*" to a stimulus word *"teeth*" is present in 11% of adolescent respondents (*Shining whiteness of teeth!).* In adult respondents a similar reaction is present in 5.5% of the cases. The stimulus word "*springs*" yields a 13% reaction "…*of Russia*" in adolescent respondents. (*Springs of Russia. Water untouched by civilization!)* vs. 10% in adult respondents.

Structures N+N and N+N2 are the most stable which is confirmed by the number of canonic reactions presented in a course of an associative experiment. *Categorizing reactions*, i.e., those represented by a noun or another key word linked to a notion communicated by the advertisement text as whole, are present in associative fields of such words as *aromagic, whiteness, gel, fungus, immunity, Nikola, powder, freshness, syrup, agent, crispy bread*.

Authors of the ad for coffee Jacobs Monarch followed one of the main rules of creation of an advertisement text: maximum information within a condensed lexico-grammatical text structure: "*Jacobs Monarch. Aromagic intimacy*". The use of a portmanteau word *aromagic*makes the text dynamic, action driven. The dynamicity is enrolled in the structure of a laconic phrase which only uses the predicative basis, and the visual links this text to the advertised product in respondents' mind. This explains a high number of categorizing reactions in adolescents, 42%, vs. only 3.5% in adults.

The stimulus word *fungus* is perceived as part of a clipped genitive structure which is stable in advertising and is reproduced as a whole: *nail fungus – a reason to worry! (an ad for "Loceril" medication).* Analogous to this structure, appear such reactions as *"feet", "legs", "nail"* which are closely related to the visual represented in the TV ad. These reactions are observed in 42% of adolescents and in 31% of adults. The stimulus word *immunity* is not part of the active lexicon, it is seldom encountered in a day-to-day communication. It is rater a term which enters the active speech through advertising, hence 13% of adolescent respondents provide as a reaction a name "Immunele", as opposed to only 1% of adults providing such reaction.

Categorizing frequency reactions to a stimulus word Nikola reflect a unified idiomatic text structure. "*Kvas is not a Cola. Drink Nikola*!" (*Kvasadvertisng*). A transformation of meaning occurs in the associative field of the anthroponym Nikola: the word is closely associated to the drink (kvas) in a respondents' mind, which yields 46.5% of categorizing reactions in the associative field of the stimulus word (adolescents), vs. 26% of such reactions in adults.

The majority of associations with stimuli words powder, freshness, whiteness, gel, syrup, agent, beverages in adolescents' mind is linked to general knowledge. On the other hand, this word is used in advertisement texts which are linked by a common basis, hence a vast majority of reactions triggered by such texts are categorizing reactions.

Indirect reactions, those represented by a word which in the mind of a respondent is linked not to a single product but rather to a group of products advertised in mass media, are present in almost all stimuli words with the exception of words f*ungus* and *springs*, as well as *heels, syrup and agent* which yield a low as up to 2% of such reactions (Fitzpatrick & Thwaites, 2020). For example, the stimulus word "beverages" is not present in an ad dedicated to specific beverages, such as Coca-Cola, Fanta, Pepsi etc.; nevertheless, in the mind of respondents it is closely tied to brands which frequently appear in TV ads. As a result, we observe indirect reactions designating names of advertised beverages or points of sale of such beverages. Adolescents demonstrate 25% of such reactions vs. just 2% in adults.

Relative reactions, i.e., related to the area of activity of advertisement media (for instance, such words-reactions as *advertising, television* etc.) only appear in isolated cases in both adolescent and adult respondents.

In a course of our association experiment (Shchennikova, 2016), we discovered that words which are part of the nucleus of the linguistic conscience and which are related to a basic knowledge of the Russian culture developed since the childhood: *home, pain,* – are resistant to the influence of advertisement texts in adolescents. Reactions triggered by advertising are scarcely present in the associative field of such words, less than in 3% of the respondents. The associative experiment did not yield any such reactions for this kind of words in adult respondents.

4. Conclusions

From a comparison of the content of associative fields of key words extracted from an advertisement text we can draw a conclusion that the linguistic conscience of adolescents is more open to influence of advertisement texts than that of adult respondents. This can be explained by the fact that TV advertising did not exist during the period of socialization of adult respondents and of formation of their image of the world (70-s and 80-s of the XXth century): a developed personality is less receptive to advertising.

Analyzing quantitative data of refuses to answer, we have drowned a conclusion that, if a concept related to a stimulus world is not yet developed in an adolescent's mind, this leads to a large number of refuses to answer. This conclusion is supported by the lack of such refuses in adult respondents. The most receptive to influence of advertising is the content of associative fields of these words which

appear mostly in advertisement texts: aromagic, warrant, fungus, immunity, heels, Nikola, spasm, crispy bread, or those words which are linked by a common conceptual basis: whiteness, gel, beverages, powder, freshness, syrup, agent. Canonic reactions mainly appear in cases where a stimulus word is a pre-position element of a syntagm in the structure of the original text; categorizing and indirect reactions appear when a stimulus word is linked tin respondent's mind to a concept transmitted by the ad text as a whole, to an entire group of products. The content of associative fields of stimuli words making part of the linguistic conscience, such as house and pain demonstrates that such words are prone to influence of advertising since they are fundamental everyday concepts, adopted by a child before the age of 6.

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