



THE ASSOCIATIVE FIELD OF A WORD AS A REFLECTION OF NATIONAL AND CULTURAL SPECIFICITY

Aysultan Maratovna Bektursinova

PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Russian Language and
Literature Karakalpak State University named after Berdakh

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17223120>

Abstract. The article examines the associative field of a word as an important tool for identifying the national and cultural specificity of linguistic consciousness. Associative responses of native speakers make it possible to reconstruct cognitive structures that reflect cultural values, stereotypes, and particularities of world perception. The study presents the results of an associative experiment that demonstrates differences in the perception of key concepts.

Keywords: associative field, linguoculture, cognitive linguistics, linguistic consciousness, associative experiment, cultural specificity.

Introduction. The associative field of a word is one of the most significant objects of study in cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics. It represents a set of linguistic and cognitive connections actualized in the consciousness of native speakers when perceiving a given stimulus. Such fields reflect not only individual associations but also collective ones, connected with national and cultural experience.

The study of associative fields makes it possible to identify both universal and ethnospecific features of linguistic consciousness, as well as to understand which values and images are key for a particular culture. As Yu.N. Karaulov points out, it is associative dictionaries that make it possible to reconstruct the national picture of the world (Karaulov, 2002).

Research Methods. The study employed the method of a free associative experiment: informants (50 philology students) were asked to provide the first word associations in response to a set of stimuli ("family," "friendship," "honor," "conscience"). The data obtained were analyzed both quantitatively (counting the frequency of responses) and qualitatively (identifying cultural and value dominants). A comparative method was also used, which made it possible to determine commonalities and differences in the reactions of Russian-speaking and bilingual participants.

Results. The experiment demonstrated that the associative field of words is closely connected with national and cultural priorities. For example, the stimulus "family" elicited associations such as "home," "parents," "love" among Russian-speaking students, while bilingual participants most often responded with "tradition," "respect," "elders." Thus, associative fields capture the cultural value core, where language reflects specific ideas about morality, interpersonal relations, and the social order.

Discussion. The associative field of a word can be regarded as a kind of "mirror" of culture, reflecting not only lexical meanings but also historically established representations of the world, moral guidelines, and spiritual values. It reveals key concepts entrenched in the collective memory of a people and shaping the nature of their national worldview. Associative

responses that arise in the minds of speakers demonstrate which meanings are most significant in a particular cultural context.

In the Russian language, the concept of “conscience” has a rich associative field, ranging from emotional and evaluative reactions (“shame,” “honor,” “duty”) to religious and moral ones (“sin,” “God,” “repentance”). At the same time, conscience is perceived not only as an individual moral category but also as a social value regulating relationships between people. This indicates that the associative field captures the complex interplay of moral and cultural norms embedded in the language.

In the Turkic cultural tradition, a concept close to the Russian “conscience” is the word “ar” (in Karakalpak, Kazakh, and other Turkic languages). Its associative field includes such responses as “honor,” “dignity,” “purity,” and “shame.” Unlike the Russian “conscience,” where the emphasis is placed on inner moral self-control, the focus in “ar” shifts toward the social perception of an individual: a person who has lost “ar” is deprived of respect in the eyes of the community. Thus, while in Russian culture “conscience” is primarily associated with internal ethical responsibility, in the Turkic tradition “ar” carries a strong social component that links the individual to the collective.

Such differences confirm E.F. Tarasov’s view that language preserves not only lexical meanings but also cultural scenarios reflecting the historical and spiritual experience of a people (Tarasov, 1996). A comparative analysis of associative fields shows that in different cultures the same moral categories acquire different semantic content: for Russian culture, the focus is on inner responsibility, while for Turkic culture it is on maintaining social harmony and public respect.

Moreover, these divergences demonstrate how associative fields embody the value priorities of a community. While Russian linguistic consciousness emphasizes the individual’s inner dialogue with conscience, Turkic linguistic traditions highlight the individual’s accountability before the collective. This distinction underlines different cultural models of morality: one oriented toward introspection and personal ethics, the other toward communal harmony and reputation. In this sense, associative fields become not only linguistic phenomena but also cognitive markers of cultural identity, showing how deeply ethical categories are embedded in the worldview of a nation.

National and cultural specificity is manifested in the fact that the same stimuli can be interpreted differently across cultures. For example, the word “friendship” in Russian linguoculture is associated with trust and mutual assistance, whereas in some Western cultures the emphasis is placed on the aspect of “personal interests.” This demonstrates the cultural variability of cognitive structures.

The associative experiment makes it possible to go beyond the dictionary meaning of a word and to capture not only individual responses but also the dynamics of cultural changes in society. Unlike traditional dictionary definitions, which record relatively stable meanings, the associative field reflects the living linguistic consciousness, mirroring current trends, fashions, and social priorities. New generations form their own associative fields, in which traditional values may coexist with modern realities. For instance, the stimulus “honor” among students often elicits reactions such as “army” or “service,” which are connected with the actualization of civic duties, whereas in traditional culture the prevailing responses were “glory,” “valor,” and “knighthood.”

Similar shifts can be observed in other concepts. For example, the word “family” for older generations was primarily associated with notions such as “children,” “kin,” and “tradition,” whereas younger informants more frequently mentioned “love,” “support,” and “trust.” This indicates a transformation of value orientations and the adaptation of cultural representations to modern conditions.

Thus, the associative field serves not only as a tool for describing language but also as a method for studying the mentality and value orientations of an ethnos. It makes it possible to trace how the cultural picture of the world changes depending on historical time, social circumstances, and intercultural contacts, as well as to reveal stable archetypes preserved in national consciousness despite external changes.

Conclusion. The associative field of a word reflects national and cultural specificity, capturing the stable values and mental dominants of a linguistic community. The results of the associative experiment show that words related to moral and social categories demonstrate rich cultural variability while maintaining their significance for contemporary linguistic consciousness. The study confirms the necessity of a comprehensive analysis of associative fields as one of the key methods in cognitive and cultural linguistics.

References:

- Karaulov, Yu.N. Russian Associative Dictionary. Moscow: AST, 2002.
- Kubryakova, E.S. Language and Knowledge: On the Way to Gaining Knowledge about Language. Moscow: Languages of Slavic Culture, 2004.
- Sternin, I.A. The Study of Meaning as a Phenomenon of Linguistic Consciousness. Almaty: Polilingva, 2018.
- Tarasov, E.F. (2000a). Linguistic consciousness: research perspectives (Preface). In Linguistic Consciousness: Content and Functioning: XIII International Symposium on Psycholinguistics and Communication Theory. Abstracts. Moscow: Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences, pp. 3–4.
- Ufimtseva, N.V. Linguistic Consciousness: Dynamics and Variability. Moscow: Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2011.