ЛІНГВОАКСІОЛОГІЯ. ПСИХОЛІНГВІСТИКА

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MEASURING THE EVALUATIVE COMPONENT OF A SOCIOCULTURAL STEREOTYPE IN MEDIA DISCOURSE

The application of quantitative methodology is essential to ensure the accuracy of inferences and the validation of hypotheses in sociolinguistic research. The proposed work presents an algorithm for conducting a semantic differential procedure that employs quantitative and statistical techniques to study a verbalised sociocultural stereotype, using the example of the American flapper of the 1920s. In the context of this work, a sociocultural stereotype is defined as a simplified and conventional image of a social group, represented in media discourse by a minimal set of qualities that elicit an evaluative attitude. To express value judgments about the stereotype, evaluative nouns and adjectives are identified through content analysis of newspaper articles. The evaluative lexical units are grouped and ranked on an ordinary scale. To validate and interpret the collected data, factor analysis is employed. Interpretation of factors enables inferences of regularities in stereotyping of a social group in media discourse.

Keywords: *sociocultural stereotype, nomen of the stereotype, media discourse, evaluative noun and adjective, semantic differential.*

Любимова С. А. Вимірювання оцінного компонента соціокультурного стереотипу в медійному дискурсі. *Застосування кількісних методів дослідження є необхідною умовою для забезпечення точності висновків і перевірки гіпотез у соціолінгвістичних дослідженнях. Крім того, такі методи допомагають виявити латентні характеристики вивчаємих об'єктів та процеси, які не були досліджені. У пропонованій роботі представлено алгоритм проведення процедури семантичного аналізу, що передбачає використання кількісних і статистичних методів для дослідження вербалізованого соціокультурного стереотипу на прикладі стереотипу жінки в американському медійному дискурсі 20-х років минулого століття. Соціокультурний гендерний стереотип у роботі визначається як спрощений та умовно узагальнений образ соціальної групи, представлений у медійному дискурсі мінімальним набором якостей, що викликають емоційно-оцінне ставлення. Метод семантичного деференціалу допомагає проаналізувати суб'єктивне ставлення людей до соціальної групи, що обумовлює її стереотипізацію. Розроблений Чарльзом Осгудом метод семантичного деференціалу є засобом вимірювання з високим ступенем узагальнення результатів, який можна*

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адаптувати для виконання різних дослідницьких завдань. Для отримання матеріалу дослідження зазвичай використовують контрольований асоціативний експеримент. У пропанованій роботі матеріал для аналізу отримано шляхом контент-аналізу газетних статей. Такий підготовчий етап має як переваги, оскільки аналізований матеріал не залежить від ставлення дослідника до об'єкта дослідження, що впливає на підготовку питань для експерименту, так і недоліки, пов'язані з неможливістю провести всі психометричні вимірювання. Оцінні іменники та прикметники, що виражають суб'єктивні судження про стереотип, групуються та ранжуються за шкалою порядку. Для перевірки та інтерпретації зібраних даних застосовують факторний аналіз. Інтерпретація факторів дає змогу зробити висновки щодо динаміки стереотипізації соціальної групи в медійному дискурсі минулого століття.

Ключові слова: *соціокультурний стереотип, номен стереотипу, медійний дискурс, оцінні іменники та прикметники, семантичний диференціал.*

Introduction

Recognition of language as the "foundation of the possibility of knowledge" (Williams, 1978, 61) stimulated the development of interdisciplinary approaches in linguistic studies. Integrating the achievements and methods of the sciences, different branches of linguistics analyse language phenomena in relation to mental processes, societal dynamics and cultural frameworks. Cognitive sociolinguistics aims to merge the social and cognitive elements of usage-based linguistics, "as social implies empirical, and empirical implies social" (Kristiansen & Dirven, 2008, 3). The usage-based approach to social phenomena takes into account their linguistic expression within real-world contexts and specific historical periods. This framework employs rigorous methods to test hypotheses and validate the accuracy of inferences. Quantitative empirical methodology yields reliable and replicable research results; this is why linguistics has witnessed a remarkable quantitative turn since the 1990s and early 2000s (Kortmann, 2021). By handling quantitative data, linguists solve various problems, such as establishing stylistic features of idiostyle (Melka & Místecký, 2019), the distribution of sounds in dialects (Elmer, 2024), and the encoding of information in different languages (Koplenig et al., 2017). Quantitative tools are widely used in corpus linguistics, for example, to detect keywords in texts across different languages (Kapranov, 2022) and to assess the word sequence complexity of a text (Feng & Yu, 2024). The proposed study of verbalised sociocultural stereotypes is conducted on media texts. The purpose

of this paper is to present an algorithm for conducting a semantic differential test that employs quantitative methods to study stereotyping of social categories, using the example of a sociocultural stereotype of the American flapper as represented in 1920s newspaper discourse.

The object of the study

Sociocultural stereotypes that embody simplified and conventional images of social groups or individuals are defined by minimal sets of features with respect to the referents of the categories (Geeraerts et al., 2008, 26). A lexeme that represents a sociocultural stereotype in media discourse is defined as its nomen (from Latin "name") (Lyubymova, 2022, p. 120); for example, flapper is a word that represents a sociocultural stereotype of American young and daring women. It is a kind of anthroponym that codifies an extensive network of attributes, implications, and beliefs about a social group or an individual.

Stereotypes emerge from social categorisation (Pickering, 2015), a cognitive process that distinguishes and evaluates salient features of social groups. Evaluation of a social group is the ascertainment of compliance or noncompliance with culturally prioritised value criteria, conditioned by national ideals, cultural values and ethical, aesthetic, and behavioural standards (Lyubymova, 2020; Lyubymova & Shutova, 2024). Most standards are based on universal values, but some are culturally specific. Determining the habits and actions of individuals and groups, behavioural standards correlate with society's ethical standards during a given period. Aesthetic standards are norms of acceptability of a person's appearance in a definite culture.

Sociocultural stereotypes are susceptible to changes in social opinions, which are very often shaped by media through discursive practices. The media may form, reinforce, or change sociocultural stereotypes by emphasising the authority of the speakers, focusing on arguments and evidence to make their opinions more acceptable, and appealing to relevant attitudes and emotions of recipients (Dijk, 2008, 230). A notable example of how the media can reinforce a sociocultural stereotype is the American flapper, as represented in newspaper discourse. American media of the 1920s stimulated the interest of society in the flappers – "the first thoroughly modern Americans" (Zeitz, 2006, 291). The flappers were a social group, identified by a middle-class background, predominantly white ethnicity, young age, daring behaviour, and fashion styles that challenged traditional societal

norms. Polarisation of opinions about the flappers in the newspaper discourse of the 1920s was caused by confrontation between the ideologies of the new generation, which supported the daring behaviour of flappers, and the conservatism of their opponents. The favourable opinion was expressed by the architects of the consumer society, who steered Americans toward conspicuous consumption. The criticism is voiced by a large part of society – politicians, journalists, religious and social organisations, moralists of various kinds.

To explore the characteristics of flappers that elicit evaluative attitudes toward them, the semantic differential method is applied. It is also suitable for tracing latent processes in stereotyping of a social group.

The research method

Developed by American psychologist C. E. Osgood, the semantic differential (SD) method is a well-known research technique in the social sciences. Widely applied in social sciences, it is rarely used in linguistics. The method rests on the comparability of concepts allocated to a single semantic space defined by a common set of general factors, with evaluative, potency, and stability being the most prominent among them (Osgood et al., 1957). Factors reflect an individual's subjective reaction to a certain stimulus, typically conveyed verbally. The SD method captures the affective and cognitive components of respondents' attributions to the study's objects on bipolar scales that rate their dimensions in semantic space (Hahn & Heit, 2001). The scales should be aligned, reliable, and relevant to semantically stable concepts (Osgood et al., 1957, 77–78). The ratings of words on these dimensions would essentially form their coordinates in semantic space (Nicmanis, 2024).

SD method is "a highly generalizable technique of measurement" that must be adapted to the requirements of each research problem to which it is applied (Osgood et al., 1957, 76). In my research, this method, which is usually accompanied by a controlled associative experiment, is applied to data obtained through content analysis of newspaper articles. Data mining presents both an advantage, as the analysed material does not depend on the researcher's attitude, which inevitably interferes with the preparation of experimental questions, and a disadvantage, because it is not possible to make all psychometric measurements. The stimulus in my research is the nomen *flapper* that encodes essential characteristics of a sociocultural stereotype.

The Main Material

The first step in the research is media monitoring, which involves observing and recording linguistic data for further processing. This method of collecting information from media sources takes into account the context of their creation (Syzonov, 2015). The criterion for selecting material for the analysis is conditioned by the thematic focus of media texts on portrayal of the social group, marked by the nomen *flapper*. The sample comprises 109 articles, published from 1919 to 1929 by the authoritative American periodical "New York Times" (nytimes.com).

The collected data are subjected to content analysis, which converts verbal information into an objective, non-verbal format by revealing patterns within qualitative data (Pocheptsov, 1999, 378). To obtain a limited sample suitable for quantitative analysis, evaluative adjectives and nouns that express opinions of distinctive features of the flappers are extracted from the selected newspaper articles. Manifested through adjectives and nouns evaluation does not require deep interpretation of the underlying contextual or intended meanings (Nicmanis, 2024). As a result, 201 evaluative units are revealed.

Evaluative adjectives or nouns carry implications of positive or negative attitudes on the part of the speaker (Stojanovic, 2017). The stereotype operates principally through adjectives, which establish certain characteristics of a social group (Hulme, 1986, p. 49). For example, in the abstract … *flappers were there in plenty, the spoiled daughters… As flappers, of course, they should have been insolent and disrespectful*, according to the article titled "Flappers Kept the Change" (The New York Times, 1922); the adjectives spoiled, insolent, and disrespectful convey a negative attitude toward the social category of flappers.

Nouns that represent a sociocultural stereotype in media discourse do not only assign a property, but also express a value judgment (Masià, 2019, 295). For example, the newspaper nouns *waywardness*, *pep*, *strength, and vitality,* and noun combinations extracted from the newspaper word combinations *defiance of social laws*, *pioneers of equal rights* explicitly convey societal opinion of the flappers as being active antagonists to a social order. Evaluative units are grouped according to certain classes of attributes: intellectual abilities, appearance, morality, activity, and general characterisation of a social category.

The next stage of the research involves algebraic and statistical calculations that begin with scaling, which is a possible psychometric processing of qualitative data (Überla, 2013). Scaling is the process of ordering the obtained variables through a ranking procedure. The scales are the results of decomposing the sociocultural stereotype's evaluative component into opposing yet interrelated opinions expressed in the newspaper articles. The data are arranged on five bipolar scales with poles, corresponding to antonyms "smart – stupid", "beautiful – ugly", "moral – immoral", "energetic – passive", "bad – good". Derived from simple calculations, raw numbers indicate the prevalence of a certain opinion (Reef et al., 2008). Ranking is performed relative to the quantitative manifestation of the properties associated with the sociocultural stereotype. Ordinal scales represent factors that describe the semantic space of opinions about the flapper stereotype, reflecting its perception in American culture of the 1920s. The distribution of factors on an ordinal scale reveals properties of the stimulus that cannot be detected by qualitative analysis alone.

Table 1

Value of factors

Factor / Factor rank		Factor Value			
		Overall		Approval	Disapproval
Intellectual abilities	F1	15	7%	11	4
Activity	F2	25	12%	11	14
Appearance	F3	46	23%	26	20
Morality	F4	53	27%	3	50
General characterization	F5	62	31%	29	33
Total 201 evaluative units					

A linear combination of a limited number of significant factors characterises a sociocultural stereotype of the flappers. As sociocultural stereotypes are split into two halves – their "good" and "bad" sides (Hulme, 1986), each factor that describes a quality of the stereotype under study is characterised by the presence of two types of reactions – approval (+) and disapproval (–), which have numerical values. The quantitative representations of factors reflect the generalised attitude of American society toward

a sociocultural stereotype of flappers. Simple arithmetic processing of data shows the flappers were considered intelligent, strong, rather beautiful, but immoral; therefore, they were bad and deserved criticism from society. The ordinal number of the factor, i.e., its rank, indicates the proportion of attributes that drive societal attention and evaluation within the cognitive structure of the stereotype.

The subsequent phase of the research involves factor analysis to validate and interpret scaling. Factor analysis is a diagnostic tool for assessing whether factors accurately reflect the intended measurements (Matsunaga, 2010, 98). The important characteristic of the received values is the variation, which determines the deviation of the obtained results from the true ones. The variation range indicates whether the evaluation of certain attributes of the stereotype is distributed correctly on the ordinal scale. To determine the range of variation, the quartile deviation is calculated. The first step is to calculate the median, which is the middle value of the ordinal scale. It is the midpoint of the dispersion of ranking values. The median is defined by the formula MeR = (n + 1)/2 (Überla, 2013, 86–87), where N denotes the number of ranks. In my research, MeR = (5 + 1)/2 = 3. It means the midpoint of dispersion is the third rank of values on the obtained ordinal scale.

Quartile deviation is used to estimate how much the studied value of the expressed opinion of the stereotype fluctuates, on average, in the given population. Quartile deviation is calculated according to the formula E = (Q3 – Q1)/2, where the first quartile is Q1 = R1+ Rn /2 and the third quartile is Q3 = Rn/2 + Rn/2. In my research, Q1 = 15 + 40/2 /2 =17,5 and Q3 = 201/2 + 115/2 /2 = 79 with E = (79 – 17,5) /2 = 30,75.

To confirm the correctness of the calculations of numerical data, it is required to find the quartile skewness coefficient, which is a characteristic of variation in the ranked range that indicates the unevenness of distribution on the ordinal scale. The formula is given by As(Q) = 1/2E(Q1 + Q3 – 2MeR) (Ray et al., 2020). In my research, As (Q) = 1/61,5 (17,5 + 79 – 92) = 0,073, which means the dispersion affects the left side of the ordinal scale, with factors F1 and F2 located on it (Table 1). As the dispersion is insignificant, the distribution on this scale can be considered symmetrical. If the quartile skewness coefficient is greater than zero (As(Q) > 0), the skewness is positive; hence, it does not impede the determination of the rank correlation coefficient (Ray et al., 2020).

A possible statistical method for nonparametric data representing qualitative attributes on an ordinal scale is Spearman's rank correlation (Überla, 2013, pp. 78–79). It shows the interrelationships between two ranked variables that, in my research, express negative and positive opinions of the flappers' qualities. The calculation of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is performed with the established formula $r = 1 - 6\Sigma d^2 / n (n^2-1)$, in which d^2 – square of the difference between the ranks of the variables under study and n – the number of matched pairs (Ray et al., 2020, p. 372). The coefficient obtained indicates the ratio of negative to positive perceptions of the flappers in society. Interpretation of the quantitative expression of the factors makes it possible to conclude stereotyping of the social category of flappers.

For calculating Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, the variables representing negative (–) and positive (+) opinions are ranked in ascending order. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

The calculation of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient

Matched pairs	1	2	3	4	5
Variable (+) value	4	14	20	33	50
Variable (–) value	3	11	11	26	29
Variable (+) rank	1	2	3	4	5
Variable (–) rank	1	2	2,5	3	4
Rank difference	0	0	0,5	1	1

The table is used for calculating Spearman's rank correlation coefficient: $r = 1 - 6\Sigma (0{,}5 + 1 + 1)^2 / 5 (5^2 - 1) = 0, 99$. The resulting value is close to 1, which signifies a very strong correlation between the factors: an increase in one variable is associated with an increase in the other, thus balancing the opposite sides of the emotional component of a sociocultural stereotype of the flappers.

The computations show the factor of general characterisation conveys opposed opinions about the flappers. Positive opinions (73%) prevail only in the evaluation of the flappers' intelligence abilities. The factor of appearance shows positive and negative opinions in almost equal numbers (56% and 43%), indicating that the flappers' style was ambiguously perceived by society. The most significant divergence of opinions (94% negative opinions) is revealed in the evaluation of the moral qualities of the flappers. The

intellectual abilities of the young women do not evoke much reaction from society because this factor is not as essential in the American male-centric society of the 1920s as their appearances or morality.

Most actively, American society reacts to the manifestation of freedom in behaviour and style of clothes, concerning the self-determination of the flappers as a sign of decline in the morals of American society. Through the awareness of the fact that women's freedom is evil, the media creates the attitude that society must restrict it. The findings suggest that the evaluation focuses more on the ethical issues associated with flappers than on their unconventional and audacious fashion style, which was widely criticised in the media discourse of the 1920s.

Conclusions

The semantic differential technique has validated the stereotype status of a sociocultural phenomenon of the flappers in the American media discourse of the 1920s. It has also revealed the media's tendency to sustain public interest in this stereotype by presenting opposing opinions that balance the views of those who were supportive of the flappers and those who opposed the lifestyle of modern women.

The semantic differential method proves to be an underestimated technique in sociolinguistic studies. It is able to disclose latent factors that condition stereotyping, as it reveals the evaluative attitude of society toward a social group. It can also validate working hypotheses in the linguistic study of sociocultural stereotypes. The algorithm presented in the paper for conducting semantic differential tests can be of use for a wide range of quantitative linguistic research on verbalised cognitive units, such as media stereotypes.

Although this method has been known for a long time, the availability of new technologies can open up new perspectives for its use. By using natural language processing with the help of AI technologies, the research can be fully automated. AI can assist in exploring real-time trends in how the semantic differential changes in real time.

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