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Exploring age and gender differences in socio-semantic representations of words

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Abstract

Semantic representations of words can vary from person to person and can undergo change over the lifespan. Although a number of studies have explored differences in affective variables (e.g. valence), there has not been any large-scale investigation of the way socio-semantic information is represented, nor whether there is variation (or stability) in these representations across a diverse participant sample. We report on a study where 2,700 Czech words were rated by 1,450 Czech speakers along the dimensions of gender (feminine/masculine), location (rural/urban), political alignment (conservative/liberal), valence (negative/positive) and age (old/young). The ratings were analysed based on gender and age demographics. Our results demonstrate that distinct categories of words, e.g. those associated with mental wellbeing (such as úzkost [anxiety]) are self-associated – young participants rate the words as more young, older participants as more old. Our results shed light on the variation that exists in socio-semantic representations within different populations.