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REPRESENTATION OF THE LAW CONCEPT IN THE LANGUAGE CONSCIOUSNESS OF MODERN STUDENTS

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Abstract

Legal consciousness is the subject of research in many sciences: philosophy, jurisprudence, psychology, psycholinguistics, etc. The basis of this study was the hypothesis that in the process of studying and gaining knowledge of law the students understand the lexical unit of *law* as representations or images that expressed by associative bonds with the words from their lexicon formed during the learning process. The purpose of the study was to model the semantic field of the lexical unit of *law* in the language consciousness of modern students and to assess the state of their legal consciousness. To interpret the data of the association experiment, the following procedures were carried out: all word-reactions of the subjects were distributed into thematic groups – associative (semantic) fields (AF); calculated, built from the most common word reactions (frequency) to single, statistically processed (the percentage of each reaction was revealed with respect to the entire number of responses and individual groups of subjects); the content of images and representations in the consciousness of students, reflecting associative (semantic) bonds in each group of subjects was analyzed; the associations (word-reactions) of students of non-legal fields of training and law department were compared. These methods made it possible to conduct a meaningful analysis of images of consciousness revealing the understanding of the lexical unit of *law* and characterizing the internal psychological component of legal consciousness.

Keywords: Legal consciousness, concept, law, associations, experiment, students

1. Introduction

Legal consciousness is a complex, multifaceted and multidimensional phenomenon, the subject of study of many sciences: philosophy, jurisprudence, psychology, psycholinguistics, etc. In each science, legal consciousness is considered and studied within the framework of a specific science, and to date, a lot of information has accumulated. The legal consciousness and its structure largely depend on the meaning and content the author puts into this word. The term *legal consciousness* itself combines two different entities – law and consciousness. Consciousness is the highest level of human mental activity, a reflection of reality in the form of sensitive and mental images (Philosophical Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1983). Consciousness is a reflection of the surrounding reality in its own spiritual world and serves as a regulator of human activity. *Law* is an ambiguous word. In explanatory dictionaries the word *law* has three meanings used in science and practical activities of the state, and four meanings in informal conversation of people (Lopatin & Lopatina, 2001). In jurisprudence, the term *law* is understood and applied in its two meanings: subjective – a measure of possible human behavior, and objective – a system of generally binding social norms protected by the power of state coercion (Rumyantsev & Dodonov, 1996).

We believe that in the process of studying and gaining knowledge of legal science, in the minds of students, the understanding of the lexical unit of *law* is reflected in the form of representations or images, which are expressed by associative (semantic) bonds with the words from their lexicon. The lexicon of a person is formed in the process of his entire life; a person accumulates all words learned as a result of life experience, including in the process of studying at a university. Meaningful images, ideas about law, displayed in the consciousness of a person, indicate the formation of legal consciousness and make it possible to assess its state.

Table 1. Associations to stimulus-word *law* related to meaning in explanatory and legal dictionaries

Associations to stimulus-word *law*	Non-legal departments (number of word-reactions)	Law department (number of word-reactions)	Associations to stimulus-word *law*	Non-legal departments (number of word-reactions)	Law department (number of word-reactions)
life	7	7	honor	2	-
freedom	6	7	for smth	1	-
choice	6	4	protection	-	1
duty	2	8	education	1	-
person	7	3	love	1	-
opportunity	2	4	meeting	1	-
society	5	1	thoughts	1	-
live	5	-	have	-	1
personality	2	2	everybody	1	-
citizen	1	2	use	-	1
criminal	-	3	everyone has right	1	-
property	2	-	system	-	1
protection	1	1	words	-	1
norms	-	2	environmental	-	1

Table 2. Associations related to educational activities

Associations to stimulus-word *law*	Non-legal departments (number of word-reactions)	Law department (number of word-reactions)	Associations to stimulus-word *law*	Non-legal departments (number of word-reactions)	Law department (number of word-reactions)
laws	19	24	code	-	1
foundations	7	-	science	1	-
Constitution	2	2	behavior	1	-
classes	2	1	theory of state and law	-	1
study	-	2	disposition	-	1
Law Department	-	2	court	-	1
jurisprudence	-	2	moral	-	1
lawyers	-	2	consciousness	-	1
subject	1	-	instruction	1	-
lecture	1	-	judges	1	-
violation	-	1			

Table 3. Associations characterizing the emotional attitude that are connected with the outside world

Associations to stimulus-word *law*	Non-legal departments (number of word-reactions)	Law department (number of word-reactions)	Associations to stimulus-word *law*	Non-legal departments (number of word-reactions)	Law department (number of word-reactions)
Associations characterizing the emotional attitude (3.1 %)					
Blessing	-	1	Gross!	1	-
Important	-	1	Rich peasant	1	-
Necessary	-	1	Darkness	-	1
Associations connected with the outside world (1.5 %)					
Money	-	1	Suit	-	1
Steering wheel	1	-			
Associations-antonyms (0.5 %)					
Left	-	1			
Associations connected with abstract notions (0.5 %)					
Reality	-	1			

2. Problem Statement

For more complete and comprehensive justification of the theory of legal consciousness, we consider it necessary to take a comprehensive approach to its study not only on the basis of theoretical, but also empirical material. The Russian philosopher, lawyer, psychologist Ilyin (1996), argued that it is not possible for a person not to have a legal consciousness: everyone who realizes that there are other people in the world has it. In his essay on the essence of legal consciousness, Ilyin (1996) refers to the types of its conditions: normal (healthy, stable) and guilty ("common" criminal, "habitual criminal", "accidental" offender). The state of legal consciousness is influenced by its psychological component: understanding of *law*, attitude towards it, preferences, etc. To assess the state of legal consciousness of an individual, a group of people shall have the necessary "tools". Legal science does not have its own methods. One of such "toolkits" may be psycholinguistic research methods. The integration of legal

science with scientific approaches to psycholinguistics may complement the theory of legal consciousness.

3. Research Questions

Legal consciousness is a subjective understanding and perception of the legal phenomena by people (Matuzov & Malko, 2014), i.e. the ability to clarify the content, meaning, value" of legal phenomena and "the ability to perceive, distinguish and acquire them (Lopatin & Lopatina, 2001). Other scientists describe it as a *reflection* and *idea* of law... (Pigolkin et al., 2017), i.e. "display, reproduction" of law and the reproduction in the mind, in imagination; its knowledge, understanding (Lopatin & Lopatina, 2001). According to Chuikov (2007), *attitude* to legal reality... and *manifestation* in the form of actions and acts... (Chuikov, 2007), the same as the "view" of legal reality, its "understanding and something embodied" in actions and acts (Lopatin & Lopatina, 2001). Therefore, using these lexemes the authors look at it as at the understanding of the essence of *law* and *legal reality* and its reflection in the consciousness of an individual.

The theory of law considers two elements in the structure of legal consciousness: ideology and psychology (Matuzov & Malko, 2014; Pigolkin et al., 2017). The element of ideology is represented by a system of legal ideas, views, theories, attitudes, doctrines. The psychological element is understood as feelings, emotions, experiences, moods of an individual associated with the perception of law and all phenomena derived from it, an empirical section of legal consciousness, which involves the knowledge of an object through an experiment. Some law theorists distinguish a third element – behavioral, in which intellectual, ideological and psychological elements are "cemented", and "all three factors expressed in motives, goals, internal attitudes and specific will in regulated legal relations largely determine the legality of the behavior of the subjects of law" (Kvaratskhelia, 2013, p. 23).

One understanding of the meaning and content of *law* is not enough to form legitimate behavior, an internal attitude must also be formed: an understanding of the value and significance of *law* as a regulator of public relations.

The reflection of legal phenomena and categories in the consciousness of an individual in the form of images and representations is less noticeable, but more stable, conservative part of legal consciousness (Kvaratskhelia, 2013), its verbalization with the help of words becomes accessible for understanding by others. The specifics of consciousness and human activity are determined by its language, closely related to thinking and participating in all mental functions: cognitive, emotional, speech. Language is not just words (Lakoff, 2000). A language initiates a complex mechanism of knowledge and reflection of the world in the consciousness of an individual (Aitchison, 2003; Kramsch, 2000). The human lexicon contains representations of words that may have more than one meaning, but each of the meanings of a word is uniquely related to the concept (Zalevskaya, 1990). The study of associations is one of the possible and accessible ways to penetrate the human psyche (Alder & Hull, 1967). The method of free association experiment is widely used to measure the psychological meaning of a word in psycholinguistics.

The focus of cognitive sciences considers the definition of a concept of *law* as the comprehension of derivation from a language form of its expression. The concept updates its ontological component

1688

reflected in the concept (Zvereva, 2018). The term *law* may refer to many concepts, even when it is limited to its legal meaning (Rappaport, 2014).

The study is based on the concept of *legal consciousness* as an understanding and idea of law, legal phenomena and categories, legal validity, defining and regulating the legal behavior of an individual. The term the *concept of law* is used within the framework of the philosophical Theory of Mental Representation (Fodor, 2011) as the content of human legal consciousness in terms of subjective understanding and perception of the concept of *law* reflected externally by language signs.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to model the semantic field of the lexical unit *law* in the language consciousness of modern students and to assess the state of their legal consciousness. One of the most accessible methods of association research is a free association experiment widely used in the sciences related to the study of the mental side of human activity.

5. Research Methods

During the association experiment, the informant gives its response to the word-stimulus, while certain bonds arise between the words, which may be called associative. It is these bonds that serve some kind of indicators of the relationship between the units of the human lexicon, which in turn has a certain structure. The primary association of a person signals the most current feature of this word in a particular communication system. Thus, associations allow "looking" into a person's consciousness, seeing the representation of his thoughts and feelings, and most importantly, identifying the cultural specifics of his perception of the world. Therefore, the association experiment helps to study the images and representations that are formed in the psyche of an individual in the process of acquiring the knowledge of *law*. This justified the choice of a free association experiment (FAE) as a method of studying the understanding and reflection of the concept of *law* in the minds of students.

The experiment was attended by 200 full-time undergraduate students of the North-Eastern Federal University (NEFU) at the age of 18–25 years: 100 – Department of Law (DL), 100 – non-legal profile (engineering and technical institute, department of road construction) (NLD). By gender: 54.5 of girls and 45.5 % of boys. 96 % of respondents are bilingual and are carriers of two cultures (mainly Yakut and Russian). It should be noted that not all participants in the experiment were able to express their associative relationship with the word-stimulus *law* (6 % of NLD students). FAE was conducted during the period of completion of the study in the discipline *Basics of Law* in NLD (May 2018).

For our study, it is important not only to identify associative links to the word-stimulus *law* among NLD students, but also to compare them with the associations of DL students. The informants were presented with a questionnaire consisting of 100 words, among which was a "hidden" word-stimulus *law*.

To interpret the data obtained in the experiment, we carried out the following procedures: 1) all word-reactions of the subjects were distributed into thematic groups – associative (semantic) fields (AF); 2) calculated, built from the most common word-reactions (frequency) to single, statistically processed (the percentage of each reaction was revealed with respect to the entire number of responses and

individual groups of subjects); 3) the content of images and representations in the consciousness of students reflecting associative (semantic) bonds in each group of subjects was analyzed; 4) associations (word-reactions) of NLD and DL students NEFU were compared.

Thus, the analysis of word reactions with their distribution by AF ensured the following:

- representation of the perception and reflection of the concept of law in students' consciousness;
- meaningful analysis of images of consciousness that reveal understanding and, therefore, attitude to law;
- comparative analysis of images and ideas about the *law* of two groups of NLD and DL students;
- assessment of the impact of the study of *law* on the formation and state of legal consciousness of students.

6. Findings

194 word-reactions (94 – NLD, 100 – DL) were received on the word-stimulus *law*, which were grouped into 6 main associative (semantic) groups (AF) and subgroups:

1. Associations related to the meaning of the word *law* in explanatory and legal dictionaries (58.5 % – NLD, 50 % – DL) (Table 1):

A) in an objective sense, as a regulator of relations in society, a system of general obligatory norms: *duty* (10), *society* (6), *criminal* (3), *norm* (2), *environmental* (1), *system* (1). The most frequent are the words *duty* and *society*. This is explained by the understanding and awareness of a person of the need to live and exist in a collective. NLD students associate *law* with *society* (5), *duty* (2). DL students – *duty* (8), *criminal* (3), *norm* (2), *society* (1), *environmental* (1), *system* (1).

B) in a subjective sense, as a measure of possible behavior, the right to something: *life* (14), *freedom* (13), *choice* (10); *person* (10), *opportunity* (6), *to live/be* (5), *individual* (4), *citizen* (3), *property* (2), *protection* (2), *words* (1), *use* (1), *thoughts* (1), *something* (1), *education* (1), *love* (1), *meeting* (1), *honor* (1), *have* (1), *everyone has rights* (1) In this subgroup of associations, the number is wider among NLD students compared to DL students, the frequency is approximately the same.

In both groups, words-reactions prevail in the meaning of subjective law – the right to something, freedom (possibility) of action (53.2 % – NLD, 42 % – DL). It should be noted that these associations may be caused by both the study of *law* and the life experience of students. 194 word-reactions (94 – NLD, 100 – DL) were received to a word-stimulus *law*, which are grouped into 6 main associative (semantic) groups (AF) and subgroups:

2. Educational associations (38.3 % – NLD and 42 % – DL) (Table 02):

A. with educational process: *basics* (in the meaning of the *basics of law* – educational discipline) (7), classes (3) (in the meaning of lessons), *study* (2), DL (Department of Law) (2); *subject* (1), *lecture* (1).

B. with the study of law, legal categories and phenomena: *law* (43), *Constitution* (4), *jurisprudence* (2), *lawyer* (2), *code* (1), *theory of state and law* (1), *disposition* (1), *morality* (1), *consciousness* (1), *science* (1), *court* (1), *judges* (1), *violation* (1), *instruction* (1).

This field consists of such legal concepts and categories as *law* (source of law), *system* (system of

law), *disposition* (part of the rule of law) and *morality* (in the meaning of comparing the two categories of "law and morality"), *consciousness* (in the meaning of studying the legal category of "legal consciousness"), directly related to their study, both at the DL and NLD (Table 02).

The most frequent in both groups is the word *law* (20.2 % – NLD, 24 % – DL).

3. Associations characterizing student emotional attitudes (2.1 % – NLD, 4 % – DL) (Table 3):

A. Evaluation: *blessing* (1), *important* (1), *necessary* (1).

B. Exclamation: *Gross*! (1).

B. Comparative: *rich peasant* (1), *darkness* (1).

DL students turned out to be more emotional. The comparison of law with *rich peasant* as force; *darkness*, perhaps with a difficult task or with something dark, unknown, with difficulties in studying, is demonstrated by the students of the DL. Students of both groups are dominated by a neutral attitude towards *law*.

4. Associations with the world of things: *money* (1), *steering wheel* (1), *suit* (1) – 1.5 % (1 % – NLD, 2 % – DL) (Table 03). The DL students – *money*, perhaps in the meaning that for money you can buy any right, or the possibility of big earnings; *suit*, possibly in the meaning of "white collar", "office worker". The interpretation can be different. NLD students associate law with a *steering wheel* (twist the steering wheel to the right).

5. Associations with abstract concepts: *reality* (1) – (0 % – NLD, 1 % – DL) (Table 3). The *law* really exists, acts. This attitude was expressed by DL students, possibly a firm conviction formed during their studies.

6. Associations-antonyms (0 % – NLD, 1 % – DL) (Table 3). Lexical unit *law* in Russian has an antonym *on the left*. The associative relationship of *law – left* was demonstrated by DL students (1).

7. Conclusion

The results of the study showed the following:

1) knowledge of *law* is reflected in students' consciousness in the form of associative (semantic) bonds with the studied legal categories characterizing the internal psychological component of legal consciousness;

2) students perceive *law* mainly as protected by the state, a legitimate opportunity to do something (freedom of action), to exercise their subjective right granted by law. It should be noted that the students of law department associate *law* not only with freedom of action, but also with duties, which indicates the formation of a better understanding of the essence of *law*;

3) it should be noted that 6 % of non-legal students have gaps in understanding the lexical unit of *law*, which indicates unfair attitude of some students to the educational process. The inclusion of the *basics of law* in educational programs of a non-legal profile contributes to the formation and development of a positive attitude towards *law*, therefore, a normal (adequate) state of legal consciousness.

The study showed the breadth and depth of the concept of *law*, its formation in the linguistic consciousness of a separate social group and made it possible to determine the state of legal consciousness of students of North-Eastern Federal University.

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