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HISTORICAL AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH LEXEMES NAMING THE AGE PERIODS “EARLY  
YOUTH” AND “YOUTH”

Research article

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**Abstract**

Stylistically neutral units of the English language comprising the lexical field “age” and representing its fragment corresponding to the concepts naming the periods of early youth and youth are being analyzed in the article. The aim of the study is to establish the etymology, to monitor the diachronic development and to define the semantics of the lexemes that are names of the specified age periods and the names of people bearing the age characteristics of these periods. The specific character of the English national representation of the age periods in question is being discussed. Also, the semantic analysis of the means of verbalization of the concepts “early youth” and “youth” in diachronic and synchronic aspect is carried out.

**Keywords:** language picture of the world, concept, age, puberty, adolescence, youth.

ИСТОРИКО-СЕМАНТИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ АНГЛИЙСКИХ ЛЕКСЕМ, НАЗЫВАЮЩИХ ВОЗРАСТНЫЕ  
ПЕРИОДЫ «РАННЯЯ МОЛОДОСТЬ» И «МОЛОДОСТЬ»

Научная статья

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**Аннотация**

В статье анализируются стилистически нейтральные единицы английского языка, составляющие лексическое поле «возраст» и репрезентирующие его фрагмент, представляющий концепты «ранняя молодость» и «молодость». Цель исследования – описание этимологии, наблюдение за историческим развитием значений и установление семантического объема в синхронии лексем-названий указанных возрастных периодов, а также лексем-наименований людей, соответствующих возрастным признакам по данным периодам. Делаются выводы относительно способов вербализации указанных концептов, их национально-специфического характера в английской картине мира, а также сопоставляются объемы их значений в синхроническом и диахроническом аспектах.

**Ключевые слова:** языковая картина мира, концепт, возраст, юность, молодость.

**Introduction**

Language is a means of reflecting and a tool of exploring reality, therefore language units make up what is termed in anthropo- and cognitive linguistics “the language picture of the world”. Certain fragments of it are directly connected with the life span of a human being, such as the concepts of age, life, time, space. The concept of age was frequently the object of research in different languages: in Russian – A.T. Ashkharava [2], Yu.Yu. Litvinenko [3], E.S. Yakovleva [5]. The concepts “young” and “new” were analyzed in semantic constructions with their synonyms [1]. The representation of the concept of time was studied comparatively in American English and Russian [4].

The present study considers stylistically neutral units of the English language, that are the dominant neutral lexemes of the lexical field “age” and represent the fragment of it corresponding to the periods of youth and early youth.

The study is based on the theoretical premise that a word-centric approach may be employed in the study of a language, and a word can be considered not only as a nominative unit, but also as an element of the lexico-semantic system of the language.

The relevance of the research is defined by the fact that the phenomenon of youth and its periodization is closely connected with such universal concepts and mental constructs as “age”, “time” and “life”, which are of importance in economic, political and social aspects of today’s national and international policies.

**Methods and principles**

When gathering language material from lexicographic sources, the method of continuous sampling was used. Other methods such as that of word-formation analysis, the method of dictionary definitions, as well as the etymological method were applied in the analysis of the data collected. In the work we also relied on the descriptive-analytical method, which involves observation of the language units with subsequent generalization of the results, as well as the method of paradigmatic and component (seme) analysis of these lexical units.

**Main results**

Age appears as a notion, or a concept representing the process of human development, which implies certain stages with their intrinsic characteristics reflected in the vocabulary in accordance with the division of the age continuum. The study showed that in the English language picture of the world, the oldest semantic-pragmatic opposition “ascending/descending line of life”, “youth/old age” has been preserved through centuries and continues to be relevant.

In modern English, as well as in the history of its development, the following several stages of human life are obvious and easily distinguished: *infancy (babyhood)* – the earliest years of life right after the birth, in other words, the early childhood; *childhood* – the period of being a child, i.e. a young person of either sex between infancy and youth; *puberty (teens)*, *adolescence* – early youth; *youth* – more generally: a period between childhood and maturity, in particular, as regards a more precise staging: a period between the ages of adolescence and maturity; *maturity* – adulthood, middle age; and *old age (elderliness)* – the final stage of the normal life span [11]. Further interpretation of the meanings of lexemes denoting these periods reveals the definite vagueness of the boundaries separating one age period from another. It becomes evident that the age periods are defined and described either in relation to each other, or in relation to the beginning, the end, or the whole span of life; and it is extremely rare that the boundary of the age period has an exact numerical expression.

The main words in the lexico-semantic groups of names of people of the two age periods can be distinguished:

- for puberty, adolescence, or teens (early youth) – *an adolescent, a teenager*;
- for youth – *a youth, a young man, a young lady (girl)*, plus *a youth* – for both sexes, collectively.

So, the age period immediately following that of childhood is called *puberty*. However, in the English language picture of the world, the concepts “puberty”, “adolescence”, and “youth” denoting early youth and youth are somewhat complicated and discreet. So, the word “puberty” denotes:

- “a state or an age period characterized by the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics, when a person becomes capable of reproduction”; the beginning and the actual boundaries of this period are fixed in medicine, pedagogics and social science: 13-16 years for boys and 11-14 years for girls.

In a more general sense, puberty marks the early period of the growing up process (“covers the earlier period of adolescence”) [11]. Along with “puberty” the word “adolescence” is widely used, and the meanings attributed to this one are the following:

- “the state or process of growing up in general; a period that covers the time from childhood to maturity: for boys 14-25 years old, for girls - 12-21” [10];
- “the period of life beginning from the stage of puberty and up to maturity, that is, up to becoming of age” – the word “youth” [11] is considered a synonym.

Upon consideration of these interpretations, two conclusions can be drawn: firstly, adulthood, or maturity in the English picture of the world comes after becoming of age, and secondly, between childhood and maturity, a person goes through two periods: the earlier one – puberty, and later comes adolescence, or youth.

It should be emphasized that the notions of adolescence and youth clash. In one and the same article in the Webster Dictionary [11] the word “youth” is first defined as “the period of life between childhood and adulthood”, and only further on, in the definition of “a young person” is defined as “a young male person between the years of puberty and maturity”. Some discrepancy is present: the wording of the periodization of age in general is different from that in the process of naming of people of different age groups. On the one hand, it is possible to divide the first stage of a person’s life into childhood, youth (the same as adolescence) and maturity (based on the interpretation of the word “youth” denoting a stage of life), and on the other hand, this periodization can be represented as childhood – puberty – youth (the same as adolescence) – maturity (based on the interpretation of the word youth – “young man”). Moreover, amplifying the confusion, the words “adolescence”, “puberty”, “pubescence” all together are regarded as synonyms for the word “youth” in the meaning of “period of life”. It becomes clear that in English these words are often interchangeable, but the word “youth” is the name and a concept of a more general character and sometimes refers to the entire period of life from childhood to adulthood, and sometimes only to the period from puberty to maturity. The word “adolescence”, which in the most general sense refers to the same period as “youth”, has an additional connotation of even greater, in comparison with youth, immaturity, suggesting inexperience, awkwardness, mental and emotional disbalance and instability. Thus, for an English-speaking person, the staging of the discussed period of life will most likely look like: *childhood – puberty – adolescence – youth – maturity*, where the word “youth” can replace and name each of the periods between childhood and maturity.

The word “puberty” is of Latin origin. The Middle English “puberte” – “ability to reproduce” came from Latin through the French “puberté” – “adulthood, maturity”. In the Latin Language “pūbertās” is “manhood, age of maturity, puberty”, and the very word “pūbertās” is a derivation of the word “pūbēs” – “manhood; maturity, ripeness; facial hair; hair growth in the genital area; adults, men, people”.

In its one and only direct meaning, the word “puberty” was first recorded in 1382. Synonyms formed with the help of different suffixes – “pubescence”, “pubescency” – belong to a significantly later period, to the mid-17th century. Similarly, the name of a person in this age period – “pubescent” – was not found in dictionaries in the meaning of “a young man who has reached the age of puberty” until the 19th century (1894). The adjective “pubescent” – “having reached the age of puberty” has been known and in use, however, since as early as the middle of the 17th century. Formed with the suffix -ent and denoting a subject of an action or an instrument, the adjective “pubescent” retains its original meaning without any alteration or deviation in modern English.

The word “adolescence” comes from the Latin “adolēscētia”, which was borrowed into English from French. We know the noun “adolēscētia” to have been formed from the verb “adolēscere” – “to grow”. Morphologically, the verb consists of the prefix ad- with the meaning of direction, initiation, complementarity, attachment, addition, and the stem -alēscere, which is a derivative of the verb “alere” – “grow, increase”.

Historically, the only meaning of the word “adolescence”, which is also a direct one, referring to an age period is “the state or process of growing up in general; the period that covers the time from childhood to maturity: for boys 14-25 years old, for

girls – 12-21” was fixed in dictionaries in 1430, a whole century after the appearance of another word, “adolescence” – meaning a set of properties or signs of the period of growing up. The name of a person in this age period – “adolescent” – was recorded even later, in 1482. Just like “pubescent”, this word is formed by adding the suffix -ent, and has the meaning “a person in the period of growing up; a young man between childhood and adulthood”, and remarkably enough, this meaning has not changed since the end of the 15th century.

Currently a more colloquial and common name for the period of life from 13 to 19 years for young people of both sexes is the word “teens”. Accordingly, the names of persons at this age are “teeners”, “teensters”, “teenagers”. The word “teens”, being the core of the synonymic row, has three logically interrelated meanings in the English language nowadays:

- “numerals ending in -teen: from 13 to 19”;
- “years of a person’s life (very rarely, almost never – someone or something else), whose numeral-names end in -teen: from 13 to 19 years”;
- collectively: “young people between the ages of 13 and 19”.

Chronologically, these meanings were fixed in dictionaries in 1885, 1673 and in 1820 respectively. Having come into use so late, these words show the word-formation and the creative potential of English, as well as the flexibility of the semantic field “age” and its ability to incorporate new words, rather than the peculiarity and dynamics of understanding the periodization of the period of youth in the English language picture of the world.

Finally, the word “youth” as the name of the age period in modern English has the following meanings:

- “the period of life during which a person is young, that is, between childhood and maturity”;
- “an early period of existence, growth or development of someone or something”;
- “fresh and energetic state of body and mind, youthful appearance, as well as the state of mind inherent in youth”;

The word “youth” simultaneously denotes a person or people at a young age:

- “a young man, a man in the period between adolescence and maturity”;
- “young people collectively or in general any young animated beings”.

The word on the morphological level consists of a stem and a suffix -th, producing abstract nouns with the meaning of an action or process, as well as a state. The suffix is of Germanic origin and has evolved from -thu in Old English via its variation -the in Middle English and further on to its modern form.

Etymologically, “youth” is a Germanism, that is, it dates back to the Old Saxon language. In the Old English period, it had the forms “geogop”, “geogup”, formed from geong – “young”; in the Middle English period – “viwethe”, “youthe”, “youihthe”. These forms correspond with Old Saxon “juguth”, Old Frisian “jogethe”, Old High German “jugund”, etc., which are supposedly all derived from the Proto-Germanic “jugunþi”, descending from the Indo-European “yuwn-ti” “youth”, in its turn derived from yuwn “young”. In the composition of “yuwn”, the stem yeu- meaning “young” stands out and is found in many ancient languages of the Indo-European family: in Old Indian, Avestan, Latin (“juvensis” – “a young man, youth”) and in Driane Slavic (“junŭ”).

The oldest meanings of the word “youth” were “the time when a person is young, that is, the period from childhood to maturity” and “young people collectively, youth” – as old as back to around 897. Chronologically, the following meanings were recorded for the word:

- 971 – “qualities or condition characteristic of youth and young people”;
- 1100 – “the fact or state of youth – youthfulness”;
- 1250 – “a young man, a young man between childhood (boyhood) and maturity”;
- 1390 – “the designation of any young person in general or a young animated being”;
- 1596 – the indirect, figurative meaning – “novelty, freshness”;
- 1602 – figurative meaning – “an early stage or period of existence of something”.

As results from the analysis, the word “youth” originally denoted an early period of life between childhood and maturity together with “youth” for young people in the collective sense, and only with time acquired the meaning of “a young man”. However, it should be noted that in modern English the word “youth” is not applicable to a young woman or girl. A girl or young woman will therefore be denoted by the phrase “young lady”. Initially (in about 897), such a meaning was present in the semantics of the word, but it became obsolete as early as in the 15th century.

The word “lady” (in Old English “hlǣvdíge” – “mistress of the house”, “the one producing, baking bread”) originally was complex and consisted of two stems: hláf – “bread” and dīg – “knead, knead” [7]. An alternative version claims that the root dǣge was added to the root hláf – “bread” – “virgin, girl” [9], [8], [6]. What is disputed, however, is the origin of the word “hlǣvdíge” from the related word for “master of the house”, “master of bread” – “hláford”. The problem discussed is that the Old English suffix used to form feminine nouns looked like -ícge, and not -íge. The corresponding concept together with the word was recorded in use in 825 – during the age of the predominance of the feudal social system and the feudal system of economy and production. The specific character of the era was reflected in the inner form of the word. In the Middle English period, the word was gradually acquiring the modern form lafdi > lavede > ladi.

Chronologically, the word had several meanings:

- 825 – “mistress in relation to the servants, the woman ruling the household”;
- 900 – was used to address and designate the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary;
- 1000 – “a woman who manages her subjects, accepts taxes and feudal duties”, corresponds to the designation of a man in this status – a lord;
- 1205 – as an extension of the previous meaning – “a woman of a high social status, or to whom this position is attributed in a courteous way, as prescribed by etiquette”, a more polite synonym for the word woman – “woman”;
- 1205 – “wife, spouse”. Initially, the word denoted only the spouse of a person of a high social status; much later, in the 18th and in the first half of the 19th centuries it was used in the society more widely, as a way to address or in relation to any woman. At present, however, this use is considered rude, vulgar [9];

1205 – as a prefix to the names of the wives of high-ranking men, or names of women with titles, or from aristocracy, as well as to the names of goddesses and in case of personification of abstract concepts (Lady Luck);

1374 – to denote a woman who is an object of courtship, the beloved one.

In modern English, the word “lady” preserves all its historical meanings, but is more often used broadly in relation to any woman, and not just to those of noble birth. However, the most prominent component of the meaning appears to be “a woman of refinement and of good manners, worthy of admiration by men”.

### Introduction

The neutral units of the language reflect both the universal content of the concepts “early youth” and “youth”, recognized in many cultures and traditions and some of its national and cultural features. This peculiarity is manifested in the etymology and in the historical development of the semantic structure of the language units in question, as well as in their semantics in modern English. On the basis of neutral vocabulary units representing well-established meanings and meanings assimilated by the collective consciousness, it becomes possible to build cognitive-semantic models of the concepts “early youth” and “youth”. Thus, the staging of the early period of life appears to be as follows in the English language picture of the world: *childhood – puberty – adolescence – youth – maturity*, where the word “youth” can replace and name each of the identified periods between childhood and maturity. Despite somewhat inconsistent and vague boundaries separating one age period from another, the age periods are readily defined in relation to one other, or in relation to the beginning, the end, or the whole span of life. The development of the notions representing the early period of life and words neutrally naming (or rather, terming) people of corresponding age groups started as early as the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and has been dynamically forming throughout the Old English and Middle English periods, well into the modern times. Etymology and the meanings incorporated at different points in the semantic structure of the neutral lexemes reflect the history, culture and the development of the English-speaking community, thus forming its language picture of the world.

### Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

### Рецензия

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### Conflict of Interest

None declared.

### Review

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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