Concept "humour" in the linguistic consciousness of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to define and to describe the semantic components of the stimulus word humour *in the linguistic consciousness of young Russian-speaking people from Eastern Ukraine. The main method of the research was a psycholinguistic experiment. The sample comprised 400 young people (aged 20-31), males and females being equally represented. The experiment proved that the concept* humour *in the linguistic consciousness of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine is represented by four core semantic clusters: "laughter," "joke," "merry-making/joy" and "show." Analysis of female and male associative fields shows that the semantic core of the word* humour *does not depend on the respondents' gender identification. The results of frequency and cluster analysis have implied a number of the following conclusions. Firstly, humour and laughter form an inseparable unity of stimulus and reaction in the linguistic consciousness of respondents, although the psychological paradigm considers humour and laughter as two independent phenomena. Secondly, the cognitive component of humour was only reflected in the peripheral cluster "mind" of respondents' associations. Thirdly, young Russian-speaking people from Ukraine do not have an ideal image of humour represented by a certain comedy show or relevant to any specific comedians. The generalised visualisation of humour is represented by reactions of the extreme periphery. Finally, comparative analysis of the verbalised concept* humour *in the linguistic consciousness*

of Russian-speaking population of Ukraine and people who live in Russia did not reveal any national-specific features in the perception of stimulus humour.

1. Introduction

Researchers This article continues a series of studies devoted to *ludic competence* (Gordiienko-Mytrofanova & Sypko 2015; Gordiienko-Mytrofanova & Sauta 2016b; Gordiienko-Mytrofanova & Kobzieva 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019; Gordiienko-Mytrofanova et al. 2018a, 2018b). We define ludic competence as a system of inner resources to which a person turns in order to balance their personality against external conditions of the social environment on the basis of positive emotions, e.g. interest and joy, which are frequently expressed affectively and accompanied by tension and excitement. Ludic competence is formed alongside with the development of *playfulness*, which is a stable personality trait in the modern world of gamification (Gordiienko-Mytrofanova & Kobzieva 2017a, 2017b).

As a stable personality trait, playfulness has been the subject of scientific research since 1975 (Csikszentmihalyi 1975; Groos 1976; Chapman 1978; Bowman 1987; Barnett 1990; Bundy 1996; Schaefer & Greenberg 1997; Guitard et al. 2005; Shen 2010; Yarnal & Qian 2011; Proyer 2012; 2013; 2017; Yue et al. 2016). We define *playfulness* as the individual creative adaptation to the reality of their own "Self" (individual identity) and to the reality of the World (social identity). As a result, every difficult situation can be faced as a challenge rather than a threat. This definition of playfulness is close to the one provided by Guitard et al. (2005: 19).

In Ukraine, we are among the few researchers studying playfulness (Gordiienko-Mytrofanova 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; Gordiienko-Mytrofanova & Sypko 2015; Gordiienko-Mytrofanova & Sauta 2016c) with the help of psycholinguistic methods and psycholinguistic experiments in particular, the main stage of which is free association test. Previously, we carried out the most extensive longitudinal free association test with the stimulus word *playfulness* (4,795 respondents). In order to explore common tendencies and characteristic features of the general population (which is the whole population of Ukraine aged 18-75 who are fluent in Russian) and meet the objectives of this research, several samples were formed. Respondents were selected quantitatively and qualitatively.[1] Nineteen psycholinguistic meanings of playfulness were described as a result of the psycholinguistic experiment with a sample of 1,600 respondents (Gordiienko-Mytrofanova et al. 2019). Based on previous theoretical and empirical research of playfulness as a personality trait (Barnett 2007; Guitard et al. 2005; Proyer 2012; 2013; Yarnal & Qian 2011; Shen et al. 2014), as well as analyses of components/scales of playfulness (Glynn & Webster 1992; Tsuji et al. 1996; Schaefer & Greenberg 1997; Barnett 2007; Yarnal & Qian 2011; Proyer 2012; Shen et al. 2014; Proyer 2017), high-frequency reactions of the biggest sample of 4,795 respondents and established psycholinguistic meanings, we managed to single out the following components of playfulness: s*ensitivity, imagination, sense of humour, ease, flirting, impishness, fugue* (Gordiienko-Mytrofanova & Sauta 2016a;

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[1] The way we formed our sample groups quantitatively and qualitatively was theoretically and experimentally explained in our previous study (Gordiienko-Mytrofanova et al. 2018b). The sufficient size of experimental sample varies from 400 to 1,500 people depending on the qualitative and quantitative features of general population and research conditions. One of the main strategies of sample formation is to single out strata followed by randomisation. In other words, we divide the general population into strata, i.e. groups that share certain parameters (gender, age, status, education, etc.) and apply randomisation.

Gordiienko-Mytrofanova & Kobzieva 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019; Gordiienko-Mytrofanova et al. 2018a, 2018b, 2019). The components of playfulness as an integral personality trait are also the components of ludic competence. We define them as "motivational predispositions" (Raven 2001). They help people achieve personal goals and stay in harmony with themselves and the outer world (Gordiienko-Mytrofanova & Kobzieva 2017a).

This "motivational predisposition" forms the basis of ludic positions of effective social interaction: "sensitivity" (sensitive) – "aesthete;" "imagination" – "sculptor;" "ease" (easy) – "balance-master;" "flirting" (flirtatious) – "diplomat;" "impishness" (impish) – "frolicsome fellow;" "humour" (funny) – "real humourist;" "fugue" (fugue) – "holy fool." Ludic positions reflect the way ludic competence manifests itself in different standard and non-standard situations, which brings about behavioural aspect. Therefore, mastering ludic positions means mastering certain behavioural patterns. The names of ludic positions are justified both theoretically and empirically (Gordiienko-Mytrofanova & Kobzieva 2017b; 2018; Gordiienko-Mytrofanova et al. 2018a) and were tested during ludic competence coaching sessions, which are part of the curriculum of psychology students in H.S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University.

Being mentioned above, humour is one of the components of ludic competence. Humour is a part of several scales designed to measure playfulness: *Playfulness Scale for Adults* (Schaefer & Greenberg 1997)*; Older Adult Playfulness Scale* (Yarnal & Qian 2011). It is also worth mentioning questionnaires where *joy* is used as one of the scales of playfulness rather than *humour*: *Adult Playfulness Scale (APS)* (Glynn & Webster 1992); *Adult Playfulness Trait Scale (APTS)* (Shen et al. 2014).

We approached humour as a component of ludic competence from a psycholinguistic angle since psycholinguistic methods prove to be extremely effective in studying phenomena that are popular lexemes in the linguistic consciousness of respondents (Gordiienko-Mytrofanova & Sauta 2016c), and *humour* is definitely one of them. With this purpose, we carried out the free association test with a stimulus word *humour*. In particular, in our ludic competence coaching sessions we use the results of the psycholinguistic experiment that help us consider gender-specific differences in the perception of humour, emotional attitude to humour, popular meanings of humour that are typical of the linguistic consciousness of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine,[2] etc.

In our ludic competence coaching sessions we considered humour as 1) ability to understand and use healthy humour (Martin 2007), i.e. affiliative and self-enhancing humour bringing emotional satisfaction, strengthening social bonds and influence, providing self-actualisation and a way to cope with difficulties (self-enhancing black humour); 2) ability to react adequately to unhealthy humour (aggressive and self-defeating) within acceptable social norms. These components correlate with a ludic position that we called "real humourist" and were described in detail in our previous publications (Gordiienko-Mytrofanova & Kobzieva 2017a, 2017b; Gordiienko-Mytrofanova & Pashchenko 2017).

The present article describes the results of a joint research effort (2015-2018) into the stimulus *humour* conducted by I. Gordiienko-Mytrofanova, I. Kobzieva, M. Udovenko and S. Sauta. The aim of the present article is to use the method of applied psycholinguistic research to define semantic components of the verbalised concept *humour* in the linguistic consciousness of young Russian-speaking people living in Ukraine. The results of the research will be eventually used to describe the behavioural pattern of the ludic position "real humourist" taking into account meanings that reflect the linguistic consciousness of Russian native speakers. The

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[2] Part of the sample that took part in the psycholinguistic experiment also participated in ludic competence coaching sessions.

following objectives were outlined: to determine general features of the verbal behaviour of young respondents in the framework of studying the stimulus word *humour*; to suggest major strategies and ways of dividing associations triggered by the stimulus *humour* into semantic groups.

We consider it worthwhile to explain the meaning of some of the key terms used in this study, in particular − linguistic consciousness and verbal behaviour.

Linguistic consciousness is coined as "the aggregate of psychological mechanisms of speech generation and understanding, as well as retaining the language in consciousness, i.e., mental mechanisms that underlie a person's speech activity" (Popova & Sternin 2007: 32). It should be noted that this approach describes linguistic consciousness from the perspective of psycholinguistics, science with the human linguistic consciousness in the context of its psychological reality as an exclusive object of study (Sternin & Rudakova 2011).

The associative field obtained in the course of association experiment is "not only a fragment of the verbal memory of a human being, but also a fragment of the image of the world shared by a particular ethnos, reflected in the consciousness of an average representative of some particular culture, their motives and judgments, and, consequently, cultural stereotypes" (Ufimtseva 2009: 98). The scope and nature of reactions in associative fields tell us a lot about the word usage, revealing the content of the word which is psychologically common among the native speakers of the language.

Verbal behaviour refers to behaviour that includes verbal reactions, such as speaking, reacting to words, remembering verbal material, etc. In the framework of our research, verbal behaviour is applied in a rather limited way, i.e. as written reactions to the stimulus words.[3]

2. Methods

The main method of the given research is a psycholinguistic experiment, whose major part is the free association test with the stimulus word *humour*. As additional methods, we used surveys (to refine the results of the free association test) and questionnaires (to specify the characteristics of the sample). As a mathematical-statistical method for the analysis of the results, we used frequency and cluster analysis allowing us to identify tendencies in the distribution of associations expressed by the experimental group.

The free association test with the stimulus word *humour* was conducted in a written form. Respondents were instructed to state their gender, age, education/specialisation, marital status, and write down the first five words that came to their minds somehow associated with the word *humour*. The total number of respondents was 400 young people (age 21-30), males and females equally represented. By education, 6.75 per cent were undergraduates, 27.25 per cent had a university degree, 11.5 per cent completed secondary school education, and 54.5 per cent did not state their education. By marital status, 21.5 per cent were married, 1.75 per cent had a partner, 76.75 per cent were single.

3. Procedure

3.1. Building associative fields by five reactions and by the first reaction
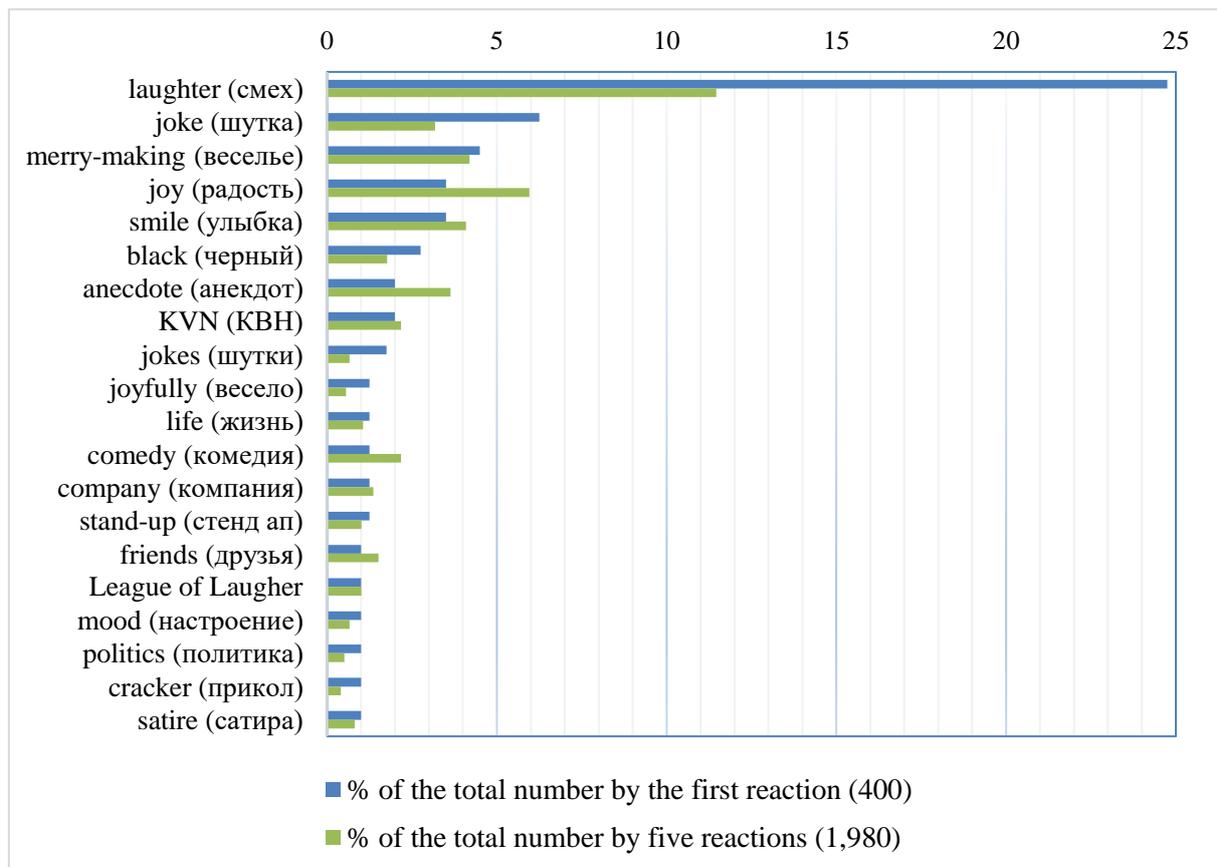
Frequency analysis of the free association test with the stimulus word *humour* enabled us to build associative fields by five reactions and by the first reaction. A total of 1,980 reactions were

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[3] In this context, the term "verbal behaviour" is synonymous to the term "associative behaviour."

expressed by the respondents (the results of the free association test by five reactions). Out of these, 477 reactions were unique,[4] including 46 word combinations or complete sentences; 163 reactions with a frequency greater than one; 314 isolated cases;[5] 0 declined to answer the question.

As far as the first reaction is concerned, the free association test with the stimulus word *humour* yielded 400 associations, of which 130 reactions were unique, including 8 word combinations; 48 reactions with a frequency greater than one, 82 isolated cases, 0 declined to answer the question.

The comparative analysis of the associative fields (by the first and by five additional reactions) prompted the conclusion that the composition and nature of reactions had not changed significantly. What has changed, however, is the sequence of high-frequency reactions (cf. Figure 1), as well as the quantity of peripheral reactions and isolated cases. The latter can be easily explained by the greater number of respondents.

Note. League of Laughter (Лига Смеха) is a Ukrainian TV show; KVN (КВН) is a TV show where stand-up comics and humoristic teams perform and compete.

Figure 1. Comparative analysis of the associative fields by the first and by five additional reactions to the stimulus word "humour"

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[4] Unique reactions are reactions expressed with different lexemes (Karaulov 2002a).
[5] Isolated cases are reactions with a frequency that equals 1 (Karaulov 2002a).

3.2. Partial semic interpretation of the results of the frequency analysis of the free association test with the stimulus word *humour* by the first reaction

Partial semic interpretation of associative reactions involves combining cognate associations and nominations of the same semantic component expressed by different parts of speech, and also singular and plural forms of the same word.

Partial semic interpretation allows us to obtain more objective data on high-frequency associations and the quantity of different sememes that were revealed during the experiment. For example, *laughter (смех)* 104 [laughter (смех) 99, funny (смешно) 3, hilarious (смешной) 2]; *joke (шутка)* 32 [joke (шутка) 25, jokes (шутки) 7]; *merry-making (веселье)* 23 [merry-making (веселье) 18, joyfully (весело) 5]; *smile (улыбка)* 16 [smile (улыбка) 14, smiles (улыбки) 2]; *black (черный)* 12 [black (черный) 11, gallows humour (чернуха) 1]; *anecdote (анекдот)* 9 [anecdote (анекдот) 8, anecdotes (анекдоты) 1]; *friends (друзья)* 7 [friends (друзья) 4, friend (друг) 2, girl-friend (подруга) 1]; *mood (настроение)* 5 [mood (настроение) 4, good mood (хорошее настроение) 1]; *mind (ум)* 5 [wittiness (остроумие) 2, mind (ум) 2, reason (разум) 1]; *guffaw (ржач)* 3 [guffaw (ржач) 2, big guffaw (ржачка) 1]; *warmth (теплота)* 3 [warmth (теплота) 1, warmly (тепло) 1, warm (теплый) 1]; *innate (врожденный)* 3 [innate (masculine form) (врожденный) 2, innate (neuter form) (врожденное) 1].

Analysis of the data from partial semic interpretation resulted in a changed sequence of some high-frequency associations in comparison with the reactions. However, the composition and nature of the associations remained the same.

3.3. Determining general features of the verbal behaviour of the young respondents

Partial semic interpretation allowed us to outline general and specific features of the verbal behaviour of the young respondents (cf. Figure 2).
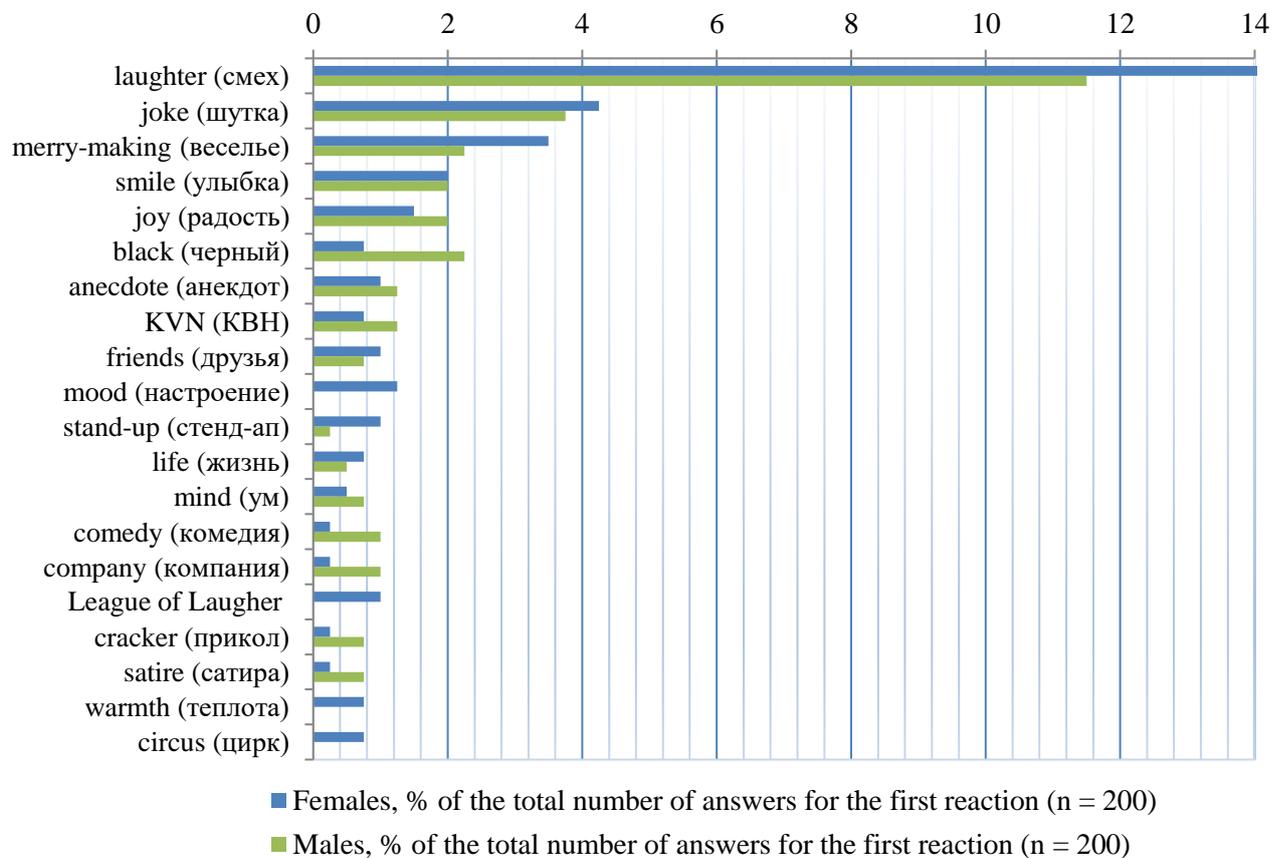

Figure 2. Comparative analysis of associations of female and male samples to the stimulus "humour"

Note. League of Laughter (Лига Смеха) is a Ukrainian TV show; KVN (КВН) is a TV show where stand-up comics and humoristic teams perform and compete.

The general features of the verbal behaviour of the young respondents are represented in the following lexemes (more than 1 per cent): *laughter (смех) 104 (26 per cent), joke (шутка) 32 (8 per cent), merry-making (веселье) 23 (5.75 per cent), smile (улыбка) 16 (4 per cent), joy (радость) 14 (3.5 per cent), black (черный) 12 (3 per cent), anecdote (анекдот) 9 (2.25 per cent), KVN (КВН) 8 (2 per cent), friends (друзья) 7 (1.75 per cent), stand-up, life (жизнь), comedy (комедия), company (компания), mind (ум) 5 (1.25 per cent).*

3.4. Negative reactions

The associative field of the stimulus *humour* had a number of reactions with negative connotation[6] (4 per cent). These are: *guffaw (ржач) 3, stupid (тупой) 3, stupidity (глупость),*

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[6] The researchers coded the reactions as positive or negative using Russian dictionaries providing information about emotional connotations of words (Dal 2011; Ozhegov & Shvedova 2011; Ushakov 1935-1940; Yefremova 2000); e.g. GALLOWS HUMOUR (ЧЕРНУХА) 2. Showing dark and grim aspects of every-day life (colloquial,

side splitter (op), mockery (стеб) 2, gallows humour (чернуха), dull (тугой), vulgarity (пошлятина), drunken man (пьяный мужик) 1. The low number of negative reactions shows that the general attitude of the respondents to the stimulus *humour* is quite positive. No gender-specific reactions were revealed in this sample.

3.5.   Semantic clusters of the verbalised concept *humour*

400 reactions obtained during the experiment were distributed among the following semantic groups/clusters:[7]

CORE CLUSTERS (more than 10 per cent):

1. **"LAUGHTER" ("СМЕХ"): associations describing different reactions to humour**: *funny (смешно) 104 [laughter (смех) 99, funny (смешно) 3, hilarious (смешной) 2], smile (улыбка) 16 [smile (улыбка) 14, smiles (улыбки) 2], guffaw (ржач) 3 [guffaw (ржач) 2, big guffaw (ржачка) 1], roar (хохот) 3, side splitter (op) 2* – **128** (32 per cent), f. 70 (17.5 per cent), m. 58 (14.5 per cent); m., f. = the frequency of male and female reactions; the first figure means the frequency, and the figure in parentheses shows the proportion of this reaction in the associative field.

2. **"JOKE" ("ШУТКА"): associations referring to various types and forms of humour**: *joke (шутка) 32 [joke (шутка) 25, jokes (шутки) 7], black (черный) 12 [black (черный) 11, gallows humour (чернуха) 1], anecdote (анекдот) 9 [anecdote (анекдот) 8, anecdotes (анекдоты) 1], cracker (прикол), satire (сатира) 4, irony (ирония), story (рассказ), sarcasm (сарказм), mockery (стеб) 2, red (красный), dialogue (диалог), quirk (острота), parody (пародия), dirty cracks (подколы), various (разный), leg-pull (розыгрыш), gentle (тонкий) 1*– **76** (19 per cent), f. 31 (7.75 per cent), m. 45 (11.25 per cent). This cluster contains reactions that are fixed phrases, e.g. *red humour (красный юмор), gentle humour (тонкий юмор), black humour (черный юмор).*

3. **"MERRY-MAKING/JOY"** ("**ВЕСЕЛЬЕ-РАДОСТЬ**"): *merry-making (веселье) 23 [merry-making (веселье) 18, joyfully (весело) 5], joy (радость) 14, mood (настроение) 5 [mood (настроение) 4, good mood (хорошее настроение) 1], warmth (теплота) 3 [warmth (теплота), warmly (тепло), warm (теплый) 1], harmony (гармония), love of life (жизнелюбие), lightness (легкость), knee-slapper (умора), happiness (счастье) 1* – **50** (12.5 per cent), f. 33 (8.25 per cent), m. 17 (4.25 per cent).

4. **"SHOW" ("ШОУ"): associations related to performing arts**: *KVN (КВН) 8, comedy (комедия), stand-up 5, League of Laugher (Лига Смеха) 4, circus (цирк), Comedy Club 3, series (сериал), show (шоу) [show (шоу) 1, TV show (телевизионное шоу) 1] 2, concert (концерт), TV program (передача), sequel (сиквел), sketch (скетч), theatre (театр), Kvartal 95 (95 Квартал)[8], Sahara ne nado (Сахара не надо)[9] 1* – **39** (9.75 per cent), f. 23 (5.75 per

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derogative) (Ozhegov & Shvedova 2011: 707). The agreement between the researchers was reached up to 95 per cent. The reaction "black" is considered to be neutral, as it merely reflects a type of humour.

[7] The reactions were distributed among various clusters on the basis of the algorithm of describing psycholinguistic meanings developed by I.A. Sternin. (Sternin & Rudakova 2011). The authors of this article, I. Gordiienko-Mytrofanova and S. Sauta, collaborated with I.A. Sternin for 3 years and described the psycholinguistic meanings of the stimulus word "playfulness" with a sample of 1,600 respondents under his supervision.

[8] Kvartal 95 is Ukrainian production studio that creates comedy shows.

[9] "Sahara ne nado" is a group of comedians from the Ukrainian TV show "League of Laughter."

cent), m. 16 (4 per cent). This cluster is mainly represented by reactions that actualise precedent texts.

PERIPHERAL CLUSTERS (less than 10 per cent, but more than 1per cent):

5. **"COMEDIAN"** (**"КОМИК"**) – **19** (4.75 per cent), f. 5 (1.25 per cent), m. 14 (3.5 per cent). This cluster includes **associations related to professions**: *clown (клоун) 3, performing artist (артист), comedian (комик), humourist (юморист) 1 – 6 (1,5 per cent), f. 2 (0.5 per cent), m. 4 (1 per cent);* **associations that are specific examples of the stimulus**: *Zadornov (Задорнов), Petrosyan (Петросян) 3, Zelensky (Зеленский) 2, Nikulin (Никулин), Pavel Volya (Павел Воля), Ruki-bazuki (Руки-базуки), Trickster (Трикстер), Khazanov (Хазанов) 1– 13 (3.25per cent), f. 3 (0.75per cent), m. 10 (2.5 per cent).*

6. **"COMPANY"** (**"КОМПАНИЯ"**): **associations describing groups of people that spend time together mostly having fun**: *company (компания) 5, friends (друзья) 7 [friends (друзья) 4, friend (друг) 2, girl-friend (подруга) 1], collective (коллектив), youth hostel (общежитие) 1– 14 (3.5 per cent), f. 5 (1.25 per cent), m. 9 (2.25 per cent).*

7. **"MIND"** (**"УМ"**): **cognitive associations:** *mind (ум) 5 [wittiness (остроумие) 2, mind (ум) 2, reason (разум) 1], innate (врожденный) 3 [innate (masculine form) (врожденный) 2, innate (neuter form) (врожденное) 1], intellect (интеллект) 2, inner (внутренний), vocation (призвание) 1– 12 (3 per cent), f. 6 (1.5 per cent), m. 6 (1.5 per cent).*

8. **"OUTER WORLD"** (**"ВНЕШНИЙ МИР"**): **associations describing the outer world** (nature, objects)*: life (жизнь) 5, colours (краски) 2, glitter (блестки), tree (дерево), hemp (конопля), sun (солнце), telephone (телефон), fireworks (фейерверк), balloons (шарики) 1– 14 (3.5 per cent), f. 9 (2.25 per cent), m. 5 (1.25 per cent).*

9. **"THIS IS, FOR EXAMPLE"** (**"ЭТО, НАПРИМЕР"**): **associations containing examples**: *friend (друг) 2, girl-friend (подруга), drunken man (пьяный мужик), one's own (свой), I (я) 1 – 6 (1.5 per cent), f. 3 (0.75 per cent), m. 3 (0.75 per cent).*

CLUSTERS FROM EXTREME PERIPHERY (no more than 1per cent, but more than 0.25 per cent):

10. **"POLITICS"** (**"ПОЛИТИКА"**): **associations referring to public life**: *politics 4 –* **4** (1 per cent), m.

11. **"CHARACTER:"** **behavioural associations:** *exit (выход), confidence (уверенность), character (характер), goal (цель) 1–* **4** (1 per cent), m. 2 (0.5 per cent), f. 2 (0.5 per cent).

12. **"TV"** (**"ТЕЛЕВИДЕНИЕ"**): **associations describing multiple informational channels**: *TV (телевидение) 2, YouTube (ютуб), conversation (разговор) 1–* **4** (1 per cent), m.

13. **"REST"** (**"ОТДЫХ"**): **associations connected with leisure activities**: *entertainment (развлечение), rest (отдых), game (игра) 1–* **3** (0.75 per cent), f. 1 (0.25 per cent), m. 2 (0.5 per cent).

14. **"BODY PARTS"** (**"ЧАСТИ ТЕЛА"**): **associations related to different parts of human body**: *chest (грудь), face (лицо) 1–* **2** (0.5 per cent), f. 1 (0.25 per cent), m. 1 (0.25 per cent).

15. **Theological associations**: *God (Бог), soul (душа) 1–* **2** (0.5 per cent), m.

16. **"VERSATILITY" ("МНОГОГРАННОСТЬ"):** associations reflecting the diversity of types of humour: *versatility (многогранность), diverse (разный) 1– **2** (0.5 per cent), f. 1 (0.25 per cent), m. 1 (0.25 per cent).

ISOLATED CLUSTERS:

17. **"PERSON" ("ЧЕЛОВЕК"): associations actualising the arch-seme "person"**: *person (человек) 1– **1** (0.25 per cent), f.

18. **"YOUTH" ("ЮНОСТЬ"): age-related associations:** *youth (юность)* – **1** (0.25 per cent), f.

19. **"BRITISH" ("БРИТАНЦЫ"): associations related to nationalities:** *the British (британцы)* – **1** (0.25 per cent), m.

20. **"ODESSA" ("ОДЕССА"): associations connected with Ukrainian cities:** *Odessa (Одесса)* – **1** (0.25 per cent), f.

GENERAL EVALUATIVE REACTIONS:

"RECEIVED WITH APPROVAL" ("ВЫЗЫВАЕТ ОДОБРЕНИЕ"): *positive (позитив) 2, kind (добрый), cool (круто), cute (милый), peaceful (мирный), soft (мягкий), dear (родной), warm (теплый), fascinating (увлекательный) 1–* **10** (2.5 per cent), f. 7 (1.75 per cent), m. 3 (0.75 per cent).

"RECEIVED WITH DISAPPOVAL" ("ВЫЗЫВАЕТ НЕОДОБРЕНИЕ"): *stupid (тупой) 3, stupidity (глупость) 2, vulgarity (пошлятина), weak (слабый), dull (тугой) 1–* **8** (2 per cent), f. 3 (0.75 per cent), m. 5 (1.25 per cent).

4. Discussion

Regarding the free association test with the stimulus word *humour* in the Russian language, we are aware of research conducted by Russian scholars Karaulov et al. (2002a, 2002b) in the 1990s that described the results of the free association test with the stimulus word *humour*. It should be noted that their Russian sample, which is similar to ours both in size and age (212 respondents aged 17-25), expressed many negative reactions to the stimulus *humour* (13.2 per cent) (Karaulov et al. 2002a). On the contrary, the overall attitude of the Russian-speaking respondents from Ukraine to the stimulus *humour* was quite positive (reactions with negative connotation accounted for mere 4 per cent).

Below are the results of the associative field of the stimulus word *humour* provided by the Russian Dictionary of Associations. We processed them in the same manner as it was described in Section 3.4:

HUMOUR (ЮМОР): *laughter (смех) 39; black (черный) 23; satire (сатира) 15; wacky (плоский) 13; gentle (тонкий) 9; tongue-in-cheek (острый) 7; anecdote (анекдот) 5; wearing short trousers (Russian phrase for children's humour) (в коротких штанишках), satire (сатира); funny (смешно) 4; English (английский), to laugh (смеяться), good (хороший) 3; merry (веселый), merry-making (веселье), Vokrug Smeha (Вокруг смеха), healthy (здоровый), to have (иметь), grim (мрачный), witty (остроумный), joke (шутка), humourist (юморист) 2; big (большой), joyfully (весело), in short trousers (в штанишках), foolish (глупый), rude (грубый), lips (губы), kind (добрый), soul (душа), caustic (едкий), spiteful (ехидный), cruel (жестокий), life (жизнь), Zadornov (Задорнов), to take up (заняться), Ivanov (Иванов), sorrow (горе),KVN (КВН),*

Koklyushkin (Коклюшкин), company (компания), short (короткий), fly agaric (мухомор), soft (мягкий), unclear (непонятный), Odessa (Одесса), weapon (оружие), I like very much (очень люблю), Petrosyan (Петросян), girl-friend (подруга), vulgar (пошлый), sign (признак), cracker (прикол), lol (пять баллов), rarity (редкость), homeland (родина), Russian (русский), sarcastic (саркастический), wry (с горчинкой), sex (секс), serious (серьезный), More cigarettes (сигареты More), hilarious (смешной), barrack-room jokes (солдатский), saves (спасает), dark (темный), terror (террор), stupid (тупой), clumsy (тяжеловесный), terrible (ужасный), smile (улыбка), Khazanov (Хазанов), ha-ha (ха-ха), good company (хорошая компания), roar (хохот), feeling (чувство), schnauzer (шнауцер), trousers (штаны), lame joke (шутка юмора), off the cuff (экспромтом), this is love (это любовь), humorous (юмора) 1; 212 (number of respondents); 82 (number of unique responses); 2 (number of people with declined to answer the question); 60 (number of isolated cases).

(Karaulov 2002a: 744)

This shows that *laughter* is the most frequent reaction both in Ukrainian and Russian samples, i.e. respondents from both samples tend to associate humour with emotional reaction. Interestingly, Odessa was mentioned among isolated reactions in both samples. This city is considered to be the capital of humour and laughter for the entire post-Soviet territory. In general, the Ukrainian sample had a wider semantic scope and was more likely to express positive emotions towards the stimulus.

Another research that is worth mentioning was conducted by Kvasnyk (2013). She explored the subjective image of humour in the system of individual meanings. The research relied on the characteristics of the subjective image of humour from the association test. Also, the scholar analysed the subjective image of humour with the help of direct association test and provided interpretation of its factor structure (Kvasnyk 2014). The research was carried out in the Russian language in Donetsk National University on the basis of a sample including students studying psychology in their first and second years of study (35 and 47 people respectively).

The above-mentioned research carried out by Kvasnyk revealed that the system of individual meanings of respondents contains a generalised image of humour manifesting itself by means of referring to real people (Kvasnyk 2013: 12). This conclusion is only partially confirmed in our research by reactions actualising precedent texts and personified associations. However, they only account for 8.8 per cent. What is more, Kvasnyk found that *Kvartal 95 Studio* had numerous positive connotations and was almost considered to be a benchmark for humour. In contrast to that, our free association test showed that *Kvartal 95* was an isolated case (0.25 per cent) whereas KVN, stand-up, League of Laughter, and Comedy Club accounted for 2 per cent, 1.25 per cent, 1 per cent, and 0.75 per cent respectively.

As for research works in other languages, we are aware of a series of experiments devoted to perception of humour and remembering humorous associations that was conducted by S. Stoyanova on the basis of Psychology Laboratories at South-West University "Neofit Rilski" in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, with a sample including 48 respondents (Stoyanova 2016) who also expressed positive reactions to stimulus *humour* (joy, happiness, entertainment, satisfaction, etc.).

The comparative cross-cultural research of different attitudes towards humour conducted by F. Jiang with the help of Implicit Association Test with a sample including 60 Chinese and 33 American students (Jiang et al. 2011) showed different attitudes to humour and seriousness between Chinese undergraduate students and American exchange students. Chinese respondents associated humour more frequently with negative (unpleasant) adjectives and seriousness with

positive (pleasant) adjectives. The opposite pattern was found for the American group (Jiang 2011).

Our sample did not compile many adjectives that can be classified as pleasant or unpleasant – 32 (8 per cent) reactions. Out of these, 18 (4.5 per cent) reactions are unique. If we discard reactions represented by idiomatic phrases, fixed collocations and examples, e.g. *inner (внутренний), innate (врожденный), red (красный), gentle (тонкий), black (черный), one's own (свой)* which do not contain any substantial information for interpretation, there are only 15 reactions-adjectives left (3.75 per cent). Out of these, 12 (3 per cent) reactions are unique. Among positive adjectives are *hilarious (смешной)* 2, *kind (добрый), cute (милый), peaceful (мирный), soft (мягкий), dear (родной), warm (теплый), fascinating (увлекательный) 1 –* 9 (2.25 per cent). Among negative adjectives are *stupid (тупой)* 3, *weak (слабый), dull (тугой) 1 –* 5 (1.25 per cent). There is one neutral reaction – *various (разный)* 1 (0.25 per cent). So, our sample shows the dominance of adjectives with positive and neutral connotations. The overall proportion of adjectives in our sample is only 4 per cent, which is not sufficient for making any conclusions as to whether respondents are likely to use adjectives to express their emotional attitude to *humour.*

5. Conclusions

The cluster analysis showed that the core of the verbalised concept *humour* is represented by four semantic groups: *laughter* (32 per cent), *joke* (19 per cent), *merry-making/joy* (12.5 per cent) and *show* (9.75 per cent). Three of these clusters coincide with the common features of respondents' verbal behaviour reflected in the following associations i.e.: *laughter (26 per cent), joke (8 per cent), merry-making (5.75 per cent), smile (4 per cent), joy (3.5 per cent).* Thus, the verbalised concept *humour* is mainly represented by lexemes that describe people's reactions to humour (laughter, smile) and their positive emotions (joy, merry-making), as well as lexemes that refer to various types and forms of humour.

The analysis of core clusters vividly showed that, firstly, *humour* and *laughter* form an inseparable unity of stimulus and reaction in the linguistic consciousness of respondents, although scholars studying the nature of humour and laughter consider them to be two separate phenomena (Martin 2007; Provine 2000). According to Jean Paul (1981: 145-146), "people first laughed and comedians appeared later."

Secondly, the cognitive component of humour in the linguistic consciousness of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine was represented in the peripheral cluster *MIND*, which accounted for mere 3 per cent. This testifies to the fact that Ukrainian respondents in the same way as Russian respondents do not associate humour with cognitive characteristics. This is remarkable because according to Martin (2007: 6), humour, among other things, involves a number of certain cognitive elements. In particular, the essence of humour seems to be incongruity, unexpectedness, and playfulness. The scholar emphasises that there needs to be some aspect that causes us to appraise the stimulus as nonserious or unimportant, putting us into a *playful frame of mind* at least momentarily.

Thirdly, the analysis of reactions did not reveal any significant difference between male and female samples. It means that the semantic content of the concept *humour* does not depend on gender identification. The fact that clusters on the extreme periphery are exclusively represented either by female or male reactions (cf. Figure 2) is most probably explained by certain individual preferences in usage rather than by gender-specific tendencies.

Frequency analysis showed that young people do not have an ideal image of humour represented by a certain comedy show or embodied by actual comedians, humourists or stand-

up artists. The generalised image of humour is represented by reactions on the extreme periphery and isolated cases: *KVN (КВН) 8, stand-up 5, League of Laughter (Лига Смеха) 4, Comedy Club 3, Kvartal 95 (95 Квартал), Sahara ne nado (Сахара не надо) 1; Zadornov (Задорнов), Petrosyan (Петросян) 3, Zelensky (Зеленский) 2, Nikulin (Никулин), Ruki-bazuki (Руки-базуки), Khazanov (Хазанов), Pavel Volya (Павел Воля) 1.*

Comparative analysis of the concept *humour* in the linguistic consciousness of Russian-speaking people from Ukraine and from Russia did not reveal any national-specific features in the way stimulus *humour* is perceived by Russian-speaking population of Ukraine and people who live in Russia. The only difference was found in the semantic content of *humour* which is slightly wider in the linguistic consciousness of Ukrainian respondents. In addition, Ukrainian respondents are more likely to express positive and neutral reactions to this stimulus in comparison to the Russian sample.

As for the prospect of future research, we believe it is necessary to describe the behavioural pattern of the ludic position *real humourist* taking into account core and peripheral semes of the concept *humour*. We also think it is important to ensure that the participants of our ludic competence coaching sessions understand the fact that humour and laughter are different phenomena. It also appears essential to define a set of cognitive elements that define the essence of humour.

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