The Impact of Culture on Word Association Norms

By

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Abstract

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The present study investigates the role culture plays in word association with specific reference to Arabic native speakers. This study also examines the role of gender, age, and parents' education of the person in word association and aims at specifying whether these variables are significant in determining the use of word association types, which are: functional, logical, enactive, and iconic, or not.

The sample of this study consists of (130) Jordanian Arab students divided into two groups. The first group includes (50) primary school students (children), and the second group includes (80) undergraduate university students in the English Department at Yarmouk University (adults) of both genders. The sample was drawn from different social, educational, and economic backgrounds.

The subjects were given a controlled test consisting of sixty written words which are familiar vocabulary items in Arabic. The target question of the test was: what does this word remind you of? The subjects were asked to write their first response to each stimulus word in a given time.

After gathering the data, a descriptive analytical statistics and a statistical analysis were used for analysing the data.
The results of the study indicate the following observations:

1. The logical type of word association is the most frequent type used among children and adults. This may be due to the spread of modern technological means, such as the internet and computer among other things, in Jordan among people of different ages, which enlightens their knowledge and their way of thinking, as well as the wide awareness of children and adults.

2. Gender distinction plays no significant role in word association. This perhaps due to the equal educational opportunities for both males and females in the Jordanian society.

Furthermore, the study reveals no statistically significant differences in the four types of word association due to the parents' education variable, which may be due to the lack of interaction between parents and their children. On the other hand, the study reveals statistically significant differences in the functional and iconic types of word association due to age variable. This may be due to the level of education, experience and exposure to language.

The findings displayed a significant cultural function in word association made by Arabic native speakers; this function determined the type of association employed by the various types of subjects.

**Key words:** Culture, Word Association Norms, Linguistics.