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## ABSTRACT

The article deals with the research of the structure of associative fields of the stimulus 'competitiveness' for heterogeneous groups of informants – future specialists, specialists in economics and economy and specialists of other professions using a system of research procedures. At the first stage, a free association experiment was carried out, based on the results of which associative fields are constructed and the core, near periphery and far periphery are identified. To clarify the stability/dynamics of the respondents' idea of the stimulus word, the degree of stereotyped reactions is determined.

**Keywords:** free associative experiment, associative gestalt zones, competitiveness, professional linguistic consciousness.

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# Psycholinguistic Analysis of the Structure of the Stimulus 'Competitiveness'

Nataliia Syzonenko, Ph.D. in Philology, Associate Professor<sup>α</sup> & Yanina Tahiltseva, Ph.D. in Philology, Associate Professor<sup>σ</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*The article deals with the research of the structure of associative fields of the stimulus 'competitiveness' for heterogeneous groups of informants – future specialists, specialists in economics and economy and specialists of other professions using a system of research procedures. At the first stage, a free association experiment was carried out, based on the results of which associative fields are constructed and the core, near periphery and far periphery are identified. To clarify the stability/dynamics of the respondents' idea of the stimulus word, the degree of stereotyped reactions is determined. At the third stage of the research, the general and terminological meanings of the lexeme 'competitiveness' are found out and the level of closeness of lexical and associative meanings is determined. The fourth stage is the analysis of the associative gestalt of associative fields in the three samples, identifying common and distinctive features.*

*According to the results of the research, it was found out that the core responses of specialists in economics and economy are associates in the form of economic categories; for the samples of specialists in economics and economy and specialists of other professions the associates 'quality' and 'professionalism' are common; in the sample of future specialists the associates 'competition', 'power', 'business' are actualised. Respondents in the three samples reproduce a wider range of components of the general-linguistic meaning. Specialists in other professions verbalise the basic components of the term 'competitiveness' and certain components of the term 'personnel competitiveness', while specialists in economics and economy verbalise both the hyperonym and the hyponyms*

*'competitiveness of goods' and 'personnel competitiveness'. These findings are confirmed by the associative gestalt of the associative fields in the three samples: differences in the way of associating and the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the 10 associative gestalt zones.*

**Keywords:** free associative experiment, associative gestalt zones, competitiveness, professional linguistic consciousness.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

At present, we are witnessing a unique situation of the large-scale, intensive impact of globalisation processes on various sectors of national and world economy, which demands quick adaptation to changes and adequate respond to the demands of the times, development of skills of professional mobility and reorientation from both specific institutions, economic entities, business structures and participants in various professional teams. Socio-political shifts, scientific and technological progress and integration of related fields of scientific knowledge entail changes in the linguistic picture of the world: the emergence of innovations, semantic reinterpretation of terms and the use of terminological units in everyday discourse. As a consequence, there are dynamic changes in the system of modern vocabulary, in particular, the individual vocabulary of the speaker.

In order to carry out successful communicative activities, a native speaker seeks to identify and verbally fix the dominant components of a lexical unit that is new to him or her. The notion of

*competitiveness* is no exception, which in the minds of speakers of the national language is no longer correlated with a purely economic branch of scientific knowledge, but has expanded the sphere of its functioning – education, pedagogy, psychology, management, marketing, public administration and management, etc. It should be noted that some scholars, given the multiple representations of the notion and its application to illustrate the interests of different social and institutional groups, consider *competitiveness* as a discourse (Stuart D. Green, Chris Harty, Abbas Ali Elmualim, Graeme D. Larsen & Chung Chin Kao, 2008).

The lexeme *competitiveness* as a term is part of the active vocabulary of professionals; it is also used by ordinary speakers, who, despite their lack of knowledge of the terminological meaning of a language unit, use it in everyday non-professional discourse, thereby certifying a certain level of orientation in the modern world and interpretation of phenomena of reality.

A person's involvement in a particular professional activity implies not only acquiring professional experience, but also forming a certain way of perceiving and organising professional consciousness – integrating professional knowledge, skills, meanings, motives, interests and goals (Drobot, 2016, 2019; Shevchenko, 2005). Professional linguistic consciousness, unlike ordinary consciousness, is formed and manifested by professionally marked linguistic means (Antonova, 2010), in particular the conceptual and categorical framework of a specific sphere of knowledge, which are one of the ways of verbal representation of special knowledge (Bakirova, 2021: 849). This thesis is proved by some empirical studies (Vasylenko, Demenko, 2017; Yefimova, 2012; Nedashkivska, 2019), the results of which show that future professionals – lawyers, computer science and robotics specialists, representatives of musical professions, civil servants – are already at the initial stage of professional genesis, respond to stimulus language units of a professional nature (terms and professional concepts) with professionally oriented associates and sometimes verbalise the broader semantic context of the terminological meaning of a professional notion.

Since a specialist's professional genesis is a dynamic phenomenon (future specialist → specialist → experienced specialist), and a specialist can simultaneously/alternatively be the bearer of several professional consciousnesses, comparative studies within an associative experiment, in particular with heterogeneous groups of respondents: future specialists (students), bearers of professional consciousnesses of a specific field of science, bearers of professional consciousnesses of different fields of scientific knowledge, seem to be relevant.

A comparative analysis of the general-linguistic, terminological and associative meanings of terms allows us to identify the actual meaning of the term for a particular person and to find out the difference between real semantics and the semantics recorded in lexicographic works. In this perspective, in the studies by T. Nedashkivska (Nedashkivska, 2019), L. Kushmar (Kushmar, 2012, 2019), I. Markovina (Markovina, 2015) the lexical and associative meaning of economic terms (bank, premium, sanction, bond, bankruptcy, account, aviso, quality, tender, devaluation, client, profit) are compared and the structure of their associative fields is analyzed.

The content of the associative field in psycholinguistics can be interpreted in different ways: using the method of cognitive interpretation, semantic spheres, vectors and clusters of association, and associative gestalt. In this study, we use such a tool of associative field structuring as an associative gestalt – a whole image of a phenomenon or object being represented by a language unit (Lakoff, 1987; Sternin and Bykova, 1998), which is a fragment of a conceptual part of the world (Didur, 2015: 122). An associative gestalt is manifested “when associates semantically tend towards certain characteristics, naturally grouped around a few (usually frequent in the associative article) responses denoting (naming) a particular set of speech image- concepts” (Markovina, Danilova, 2000: 119). We understand an associate as a

component of the associative field—the respondent’s verbal or non-verbal response to a stimulus word during an experiment.

In spite of solid current research works on the associative meaning and structure of associative fields of quite a number of economic terms, the lexeme *competitiveness*, which is actively used by bearers of both professional and everyday consciousness, remains unexplored in this aspect. This is the aim of the research, which is to use an associative experiment to find out the structure of the associative fields of the stimulus of competitiveness in three samples – future specialists, specialists in economics and economy and representatives of other professions, and to identify the common and specific features in their linguistic consciousness.

To ensure the reliability and objectivity of the results of the scientific analysis, a set of research tasks was used: 1) to carry out an associative experiment; 2) to construct associative fields in three samples, to characterise their structure; 3) to determine the level of closeness of general linguistic, terminological and associative meanings in each sample; 4) to compare the structure of associative fields in three samples.

## II. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES OF THE RESEARCH

For the psycholinguistic experiment, we chose the stimulus word *competitiveness*, which is a professional term for specialists in the economic sector, but relevant for representatives of other professions, as well as future non-economic specialists.

During the study, both general scientific and linguistic and psycholinguistic methods were used: *analysis, synthesis and observation* – to provide the study with empirical material, clarification of lexical and terminological meanings of the lexical unit *competitiveness*, *free association experiment* (discrete response) with heterogeneous groups of informants (age, gender, affiliation/non-affiliation to professional group/professional groups) as a “tool for measuring the components of the semantic space of the

recipients” (Zasiekina, Zasiokin, 2008: 55); *the associative gestalt technique* (Terekhova, 2000; Markovina, 2000), which made it possible to structure the associative material and identify the thinking components (associative gestalt zones) that form a complete image of competitiveness in different groups of informants; *matching* – for visibility of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of representative material, the structure of associative fields in three samples.

### 2.1 Sample

In order to identify quantitative and qualitative changes in the linguistic consciousness of respondents with different statuses – higher education seekers (future specialists), specialists in economics and economy, experts in other fields of scientific knowledge – a free association experiment was conducted on the basis of Poltava State Agrarian Academy, and also respondents from Poltava, who are specialists in education, engineering, technology, maintenance, etc., were involved.

In choosing the stimulus word – *competitiveness*—we considered the following parameters:

- the word must be polysemantic, its meaning is recorded in explanatory and special dictionaries;
- the word must be understood both by a person who does not yet identify himself/herself with a professional (corporate) group and by a person belonging to different professional groups (specialists who do not deal with economics or economy). For persons belonging to a homogeneous professional group (specialists in economics and economy), the stimulus word should be key in the professional lexicon and have the status of a term.

Before the pilot experiment, respondents were asked to fill in a questionnaire with the following data: gender, age (completed years), education and qualifications (for specialists)/training year (for higher education seekers), subjects that were taught/ are being taught (for academic staff whose professional activity involves economic knowledge), position/s held (for specialists in

economics and economy and representatives of other scientific fields), the total length of work (for specialists in economics and economy and other specialists), mother tongue (the language of everyday and family communication). Any association that came to mind within two to five seconds had to be given for the stimulus word in writing. It is the first association that is the strongest compared to the second or next association (Nelson, Mcevoy, Dennis, 2000).

The free association experiment involved 327 participants, who were divided into three groups:

- first sample – 1st-year agronomy and veterinary medicine students of Poltava State Agrarian Academy, future specialists (hereinafter – FS), age– 17 – 18 years old, 160 respondents;
- second sample – predominantly teachers of economic disciplines of the faculties of economics and management, accounting and finance at Poltava State Agrarian Academy, as well as economists of enterprises (hereinafter – specialists in economics and economy (SEE)); age – 25 – 67 years old; professional experience – 3–50 years; education – higher; 94 respondents;
- third sample – specialists in other professions (hereinafter – SOP); age–23 to 40 years old; professional experience – from 3 to 30 years; education – specialised secondary, higher; 116 respondents.

All respondents are native speakers of Ukrainian, which is important to establish the national specificity of the association of the stimulus word. The conducted free association experiment is valid because each of the samples meets the requirements for the lower limit of the number of respondents (Palkin, 2010: 69). Both quantitative measures of the frequency of responses and the percentage of responses were taken into account. Response refusals available in all samples (in the first sample – 6, in the second – 1, in the third – 4) were not considered for quantitative estimation. Respondents provided word-form responses, word-combination responses and sentence responses (definitions).

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the results of the free association experiment we created associative fields of the first, second and third samples. We consider the most frequent response to be the core of the associative structure; if the gap between the first and second, second and third frequency responses does not exceed 2%, we assign them to the core; single responses are assigned to the far periphery; others – to the near periphery.

Let us analyse the structures of associative fields on the stimulus of *competitiveness* for the first (future specialists), second (specialists in economics and economy) and third samples (specialists of other professions) (Table 1). The associates are tabulated according to descending frequency and percentages since the samples have different volumes of associative fields on stimulus.

Table 1: Core, near and far peripheries of the first, second and third samples

Samples	First sample (FS), 154 responses	Second sample (SEE), 93 responses	Third sample (SOP), 112 responses
<b>Core</b>	<p>competition + 8 (5,2 %), power + 5 (3,2 %), business + 4 (2,6 %) = 17 (11 %)</p>	<p>quality + 5 (4,7 %), enterprise + 4 (3,7 %), market + 4 (3,7 %), profit + 4 (3,7 %), rentabelnist (profitability) + 4 (3,7 %), professionalism + 3 (2,8 %), effectiveness + 3 (2,8 %), rivalry + 3 (2,8 %), winning ability + 3 (2,8 %) = 33 (35,5 %)</p>	<p>ability + 6 (5,3 %), professionalism + 4 (3,6 %), quality + 4 (3,6 %), = 14 (12,5 %)</p>
<b>Near periphery</b>	<p>victory + 3 (1,9 %), ekonomika (economy or economics) + 3 (1,9 %), struggle + 3 (1,9 %), rivalry + 3 (1,9 %), money + 2 (1,3%), development + 2 (1,3 %), leader + 2 (1,3 %), professionalism + 2 (1,3 %), ability to compete + 2 (1,3 %), competitiveness + 2 (1,3 %), worker + 2 (1,3 %), skill + 2 (1,3 %), quality + 2 (1,3 %), ability to stand up for yourself + 2 (1,3 %) = 32 (20,8 %)</p>	<p>prybutkovist (profitability) + 2 (1,9 %), price + 2 (1,9 %), confidence + 2 (1,9 %), victory + 2 (1,9%) = 8 (8,6 %).</p>	<p>market + 2 (1,8 %), to be the best + 2 (1,8 %), struggle + 2 (1,8 %), rivalry + 2 (1,8 %), activity + 2 (1,8 %), a professional + 2 (1,8 %), success + 2 (1,8 %), demand + 2 (1,8 %), high level + 2 (1,8 %), = 18 (16,2 %)</p>
<b>Far periphery</b>	<p>single responses: competition with someone else, creating and selling products at an enterprise, being able to show your professional qualities; products, people, modernisation, high level of achievement, I can defend it among colleagues; anger, fear, etc. = 105 (68,2 %).</p>	<p>single responses: opportunity to sell profitably; to represent oneself, something (product); strengths; specialist; market; business; productivity; growth; leadership; plan; SWOT analysis, etc. = 52 (55,9 %).</p>	<p>single responses: comparison, power, create, produce and sell goods and services, office, entrepreneur, enemy, demand, achievement, salary, aware, etc. = 80 (71,3 %)</p>

The core responses demonstrate the disagreement in the perception of the stimulus word by representatives of different groups of respondents. Future specialists associate the notion of competitiveness primarily with

competition and power, which is obvious for competition, in particular in the field of business. Specialists in economics and economy associate competitiveness with some economic categories, notably quality, enterprise, market, profit,

profitability and effectiveness, as well as with such key components of the concept as rivalry, ability to win, and professionalism. The core associates 'quality' and 'professionalism' are common for both specialists in economics and economy and specialists in other professions but are used with different frequencies. In addition, the latter group of respondents reproduces the key component of the meaning of competitiveness – ability.

As we can see, the largest percentage is accounted for by single responses; the core of the SEE and SOP samples are represented by infrequent responses reflecting the connotative properties of the object necessary for its recognition, which is obviously related to the stereotype of the respondents' speech consciousness. This indicator for the three samples is calculated using the formula proposed and tested by N. Yufimtseva (2011: 128):  $R = N/S$ ,  $0 \leq R \leq 1$ , where N is the number of different responses to the stimulus, S is the total number of responses to the stimulus; the lower the value of R, the higher the level of stereotyped reactions to the stimulus. The indicator of stereotyped responses for the first sample (FS) is 0.79 ( $R = 122/154$ ,  $R < 1$ ), for the second sample (SEE) it is 0.7 ( $R = 65/93$ ,  $R < 1$ ), for the third sample (SOP) – 0.82 ( $R = 92/112$ ,  $R < 1$ ). Although the stereotype indicator does not differ significantly in the three samples, it is the lowest for the group of respondents who are specialists in economics and economy, which may indicate certain stability, typicality of associations and, consequently, stabilisation of ideas about the notion of *competitiveness*. The fact that respondents reacted to the stimulus word with a significant number of diverse (individual) responses, in particular in the FS sample – 105, SOP – 80, may indicate “dynamism of speech consciousness” (Horoshko 2003: 114), i.e. the incomplete assimilation by native speakers of the fundamental components of the semantics of the notion, the potential for change.

It is known that the associative and semantic fields rarely coincide. As a rule, the linguistic picture of the world is reflected in the lexical meaning of this or that linguistic unit, and the conceptual picture of the world, represented in

the form of associative fields, is richer and wider than the linguistic one.

The criterion for identifying coincidences and differences in the structure of linguistic and conceptual pictures of the world is the lexical meaning recorded in lexicographical works, and the associative meaning revealed in the associative experiment. We will compare the level of closeness of lexical and associative meanings of the notion of *competitiveness* in two directions according to the following algorithm: 1) to find out the lexical meaning of the word-stimulus in explanatory and special (terminological) dictionaries, scientific articles and monographs; 2) to identify the key components of the semantics of a stimulus word that form the core of meaning by analysing lexicographical and terminological dictionaries and scientific publications; 3) to calculate the general-linguistic lexicographic and special meaning of the stimulus word using the formula  $A/B = C$ , where A is the total number of core responses, B is the number of core responses of the dictionary meaning; 4) to formulate a conclusion about the coincidence/divergence of lexical and associative meanings along the two lines of the research procedure according to the formula: if  $C = 1$ , then the stimulus lexeme belongs to the first level of closeness; if  $C < 2$ , then the stimulus lexeme belongs to the second level of closeness; if  $C > 2$ ,  $B = 0$ , then the stimulus lexeme belongs to the third level of closeness (Kushmar, 2019).

*The general-linguistic meaning of the notion 'competitiveness' in the Big Explanatory Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language (BED) is as follows: "ability to compete" (Busel, 2005: 448) (hereinafter emphasis ours – S. N. M., T. Ya. M.), in the Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language in 20 volumes – property with the meaning competitive – "endowed with properties, qualities which make it possible to successfully compete with someone or something" (Dictionary, 2010). The Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language in 11 volumes does not contain the notion of competitiveness; instead, the lexemes 'male competitor', 'female competitor', 'competitive' and 'competition' are interpreted; the dictionary entry on the notion of competitiveness is not*

presented in the Universal Encyclopaedia Dictionary either. Based on the above, the key components of the general-linguistic meaning of competitiveness are ability, properties, qualities,

competition and compete. The closeness calculations of the general-linguistic and associative meanings are shown in Table 2.

*Table 2:* Closeness of general-linguistic and associative meanings of the notion ‘competitiveness’

	FS	SEE	SOP
C= A/B	$8+5+4/8=2,1$	$5+4+4+4+4+3+3+3+3/5+3+3= 3$	$6+4+4/6+4= 1,4$

Consequently, the associative and general-linguistic meaning in the sample of future specialists and specialists in economics and economy refers to the third level of closeness (C=2,1, C=3, C>2). The statistical information on the sample of specialists of other professions refers to the second level of closeness (C=1,4, C<2). Hence, respondents demonstrate a broader scope of the associative meaning of competitiveness as compared to its general-linguistic meaning, which is probably due to the fact that respondents verbalise the key components of the terminological meaning of the notion.

The Economic Dictionary defines *the terminological meaning of competitiveness* as “*the ability to conduct activities in an open market environment and to remain profitable for a long time. Four main factors determine the level of competitiveness: technology, availability of capital, competitiveness of products, competitiveness of human resources, state of foreign economic activity*” (Zavadskyi, Osovska, Yushkevych, 2006: 139), in the Explanatory English-Ukrainian Dictionary of Economic Terms – as “*capable of existing in a competitive environment*” (Yakovenko, 2015: 19), in the Financial and Economic Dictionary – as “*the ability of subjects to conduct their activities in market conditions and at the same time to make a profit sufficient for scientific and technological improvement of production, encouraging workers and the production of high-quality products*” (Financial and Economic Dictionary, 2018: 69).

It is important to take into account that the notion of competitiveness in the national economic theory was primarily applied to goods

and later – to enterprises: “during the period of dominance of the administrative-command management system, there was no open competition between enterprises and there was no need to talk about their ability to compete (Upravlinnia konkurentospromozhnistiu pidpriemstva, 2010: 34). Currently, economic science assigns a leading role in shaping enterprise competitiveness to product competitiveness (Zos-Kior, 2020: 26), but stresses the interdependence of these categories. Therefore, the definitions of competitiveness of goods and enterprise competitiveness should be involved in the analysis. The first notion is defined as “the totality of its *characteristics* that ensure the *maximum level* of satisfaction of a certain *consumer need* compared to *competing goods* in a certain period of time in a particular market segment” (Kurbak, Krykavskiy, Kosar, 2013: 17); “the aggregate *ability of goods* to withstand competition compared to other goods in a particular regional or commodity *market*, to be in *demand* and sold and make a *profit*. The aggregate ability of goods is determined by the *properties of the product* to satisfy *consumer needs* (quality, technical parameters, taste, conformity to fashion, traditions, etc.)” (Yakovenko, 2015: 166). Scientists’ views on the semantic structure of the term ‘enterprise competitiveness’ are summarised in a study by T. Shtal, M. Belikova (Shtal, Belikova, 2019): the *ability to withstand competition* compared to similar objects; the *ability to withstand competitors*, the *ability to operate in a relevant external environment*, the *ability to realize competitive advantages*; the *possibility to produce, market more attractive products to consumers*, the *possibility to operate effectively*

under conditions of *risk* and *uncertainty*; the *difference* in the development process from a *competitor's* producer in terms of satisfaction with its *products* and the *efficiency of production activities*; a *state* of better use of *key competencies* compared to *competitors*, the *ability* to maintain this state for some time; the *characteristic* reflects *differences* in the development process, the *characteristic* specifies the potential ability to *function effectively*.

A number of other notions have emerged on the basis of 'competitiveness of goods', they say about the competitiveness of such objects as manufacturing, information systems, technology, firm, enterprise securities, state, country, as well as subjects – personnel manager, professional, specialist, individual and so on. Obviously, the term 'competitiveness' expands the scope of its functioning depending on what it is thought in the "object – activity – subject" paradigm: enterprise (organisation) personnel is seen by modern economic science as an important prerequisite for its development. Therefore we are also considering the notion of personnel

competitiveness (competitiveness of workers/specialists is used as a synonym), which currently is not yet fixed in economic terminology dictionaries, but is actively being used for analysis in scientific surveys. Here are a few definitions: "personnel competitiveness is the ability to realise the *competitive advantages* available to it in such a way so that to promote the *enterprise* to a better competitive position compared to other subjects of *competition* in a given *market*" (Slavhorodska, 2005: 94); "competitiveness of a worker is the compliance of the *quality of labour force* with *market* needs, the possibility to win in the labour market *competition*, i.e. to satisfy *employers' requirements* in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities, personal traits more completely than other candidates" (Grishnova, 2005: 99); "personnel competitiveness is the *ability of labour force* to realise a set of personal, professional and business *qualities* and to satisfy *employers' requirements*" (Hrosheleva, 2006: 75).

The dominant components of the terminological meaning of competitiveness are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Dominant components of the terminological meaning of competitiveness, competitiveness of goods, competitiveness of enterprise, personnel competitiveness

Competitiveness	Competitiveness of goods	Competitiveness of enterprise	Personnel competitiveness
possibility/ability, market, profit, competition	capacity/ability, characteristic, competition, goods/properties of goods, market, demand, maximum level, profit, consumer needs/consumptive needs	ability/possibility, competition, competitors, relevant external environment, competitive advantages, goods, risk, uncertainty, difference, effectiveness of production activity, condition, core competencies, characteristic, efficient operation	ability, competitive advantages, enterprise, competition, quality of labour force, employers' requirements

Since competitiveness is a multidimensional notion, we take into account the totality of the above-mentioned components of the terminological meaning of the notion.

The results of the divergence between the terminological and associative meanings according to the three samples are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

	FS	SEE	SOP
C = A/B	$8+5+4/8+4=1,4$	$5+4+4+4+4+3+3+3+3/5+4+4+4+4+3+3+3+3= 1$	$6+4+4/6+4+4=1$

Based on the data shown in Table 4, in the sample of future specialists the associative meaning belongs to the second level of closeness to the terminological meaning ( $C=1.4$ ,  $C>2$ ), that is, the respondents actualise the dominant components of the terminological meaning of the stimulus lexeme – ‘competition’, as well as the lexemes ‘competitiveness of goods’, ‘competitiveness of enterprise’ in the associate ‘business’ (an enterprise (firm) that sells goods or delivers services to consumers; an activity aimed at making a profit).

In the samples of specialists in economics and economy and other professions, we observe the first level of closeness of the associative and terminological meaning of the word ( $C=1$ ). Consequently, the dominant components of the terminological meaning are actualised in the linguistic consciousness of the respondents of these samples, as they probably actively use the stimulus word and its equivalents in practice, are well aware of its definition and reproduce the cognitive images associated with the professional activity. However, with identical statistical results—the coincidence of associative and terminological meanings in the samples of specialists in economics and economy and specialists in other professions – we observe the verbalisation of properties of the denotation ‘competitiveness’ that are different in their importance for the linguistic consciousness of the respondents. Specialists in other professions actualise, in addition to the general-linguistic and terminological components of ‘ability’, the components of ‘quality’ and ‘professionalism’ which certify the associative link with the notion of personnel competitiveness. Instead, specialists in economics and economy reflect a wide range of basic components for understanding the essence of the notions of competitiveness, competitiveness of goods, personnel competitiveness: quality,

enterprise, market, profit, profitability, effectiveness, professionalism, rivalry, ability to win.

To find out the structure of the associative fields of the three samples that form the complete image of the stimulus word, let us identify the associative gestalt zones for each of the samples and calculate the volume of associates in each of them.

Taking into account the specificity of semantic features of the stimulus word ‘competitiveness’, we have singled out the following zones of associative gestalt: 1) object/subject; 2) properties; 3) functions, actions; 4) qualitative parameters of activity; 5) quantitative parameters of activity; 6) results of activity; 7) methods and forms of activity; 8) assessment; 9) personal responses; 10) emotions. Table 5 shows the structure of associative gestalts for the three samples, Table 6 – the frequencies and ranks for the three samples, and Figure 1 presents the frequencies for the three samples.

*Table 5:* Structure of the associative gestalt of the stimulus of competitiveness in the first, second and third samples

Gestalt zones	Examples of FS	Examples of SEE	Examples of SOP
Object/subject	business, economy, employee, market, profession, clinic, goods, team, competitor	enterprise, market, specialist, products, business	a professional, market, office, own business, fighter, competitor
Properties	competition, power, struggle, rivalry, competitiveness, ability to compete	ability to win, rivalry, keeping up with the necessities of the times, power, social responsibility, ability to win, competition	ability, struggle, activity, rivalry, opportunity, choice, battle, ability to compete with others
Functions, actions	can compete, be independent of competitors, be able to stand up for his/her business, create and sell products	outperform the competitor, represent his/herself, something (product), always be up-to-date, meet international standards	be better, create, produce and sell goods and services
Qualitative parameters of activity	professionalism, skill, endurance	quality, professionalism, product quality	professionalism, quality, competence
Quantitative parameters of activity	quality, money, level of a person, enterprise, efficiency, profit	profit, rentabelnist (profitability), efficiency, price, prybutkovist (profitability), high quality	high level, money, productivity
Results of activity	victory, leader, development	victory, growth, development, leader, leadership, demand	success, demand, achievement, self-sufficiency, advantage
Methods and forms of activity	–	plan, SWOT-analysis	
Assessment	high level of achievements, indomitable, the best of the best, businesslike, worthy	confidence, best of breed, adequacy, modernity	one of the best, endurance, confidence, adequacy
Personal responses	for position, self-belief, nature, interest, games	“find my place under the Sun”	I can
Emotions	anger, fear	–	–

*Table 6:* Structure of the associative gestalt of the stimulus ‘competitiveness’, frequency of responses and ranks in the first, second and third samples

Gestalt zones	FS: number, frequency of responses, %	Rank, FS	SEE: number, frequency of responses, %	Rank, SEE	SOP: number, frequency of responses, %	Rank, SOP
Object/subject	28/18,2 %	2	13/14 %	3	15/13,4 %	<b>3</b>
Properties	40/26 %	1	23/24,7 %	1	39/34,8 %	<b>1</b>
Functions, actions	12/ 7,8 %	5	5/5,4 %	7	6/5,4 %	<b>7</b>
Qualitative parameters of activity	20/ 13 %	4	9/,7 %	5	14/12,5 %	<b>4</b>
Quantitative parameters of activity	10/6,5 %	7	21/22,6 %	2	10/8,9 %	<b>6</b>
Results of activity	10/6,5 %	7	11/11,8 %	4	16/14,3 %	<b>2</b>
Methods and forms of activity	–	–	2/2,2 %	8	–	–
Assessment	21/13,6 %	3	8/8,6 %	6	11/9,8 %	<b>5</b>
Personal responses	11/7,1 %	6	1/1,1 %	9	1/0,9 %	<b>8</b>
Emotions	2/1,3 %	8	–	–	–	–

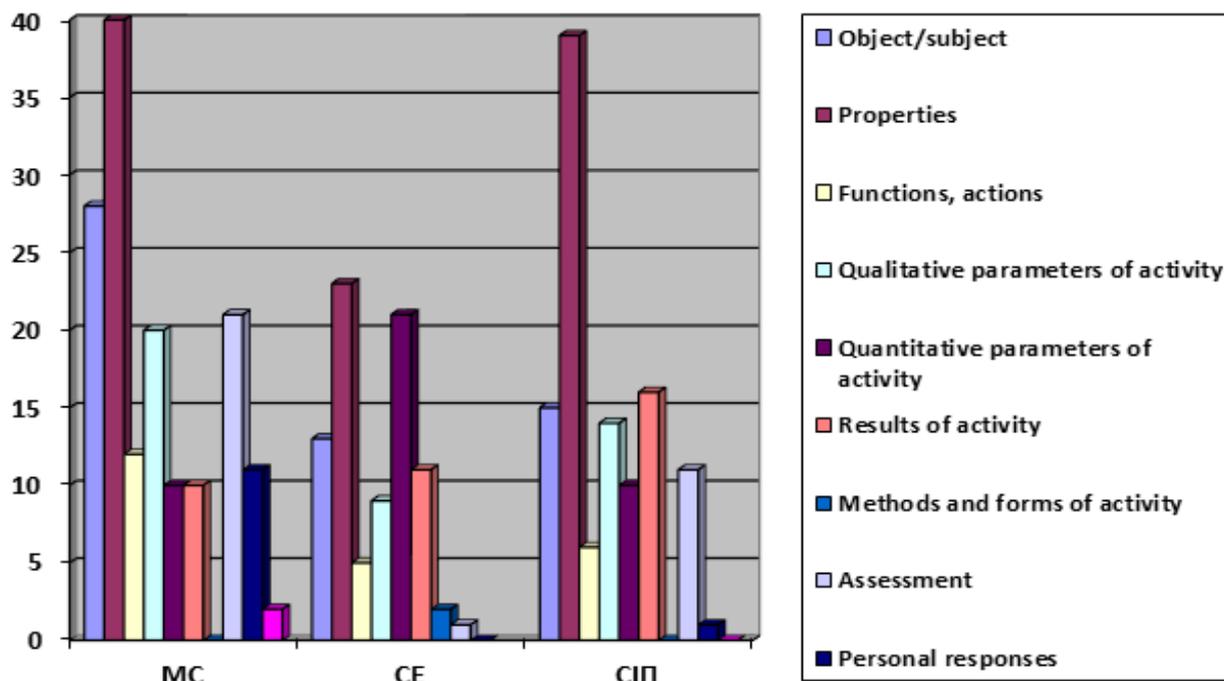


Figure 1: Frequency of the associative gestalt of the stimulus ‘competitiveness’ in the three samples

Characterising the associative gestalts of the first, second and third samples we can state, firstly, that most zones are represented qualitatively and quantitatively, except for the absence of associates in the zone “Methods and forms of activity” in the samples of future specialists and specialists of other professions and “Emotions” in the samples of specialists in economics and economy and specialists of other professions.

Secondly, if we compare gestalt zones according to quantitative indicators, particularly according to the rank assigned, we observe the highest rank – 1 – in all samples of the “Properties” zone; rank 3 in the “Object/subject” zone in the samples of economists and specialists of other professions; rank 4 in the “Qualitative parameters of activity” zone in the samples of future specialists and specialists of other professions.

Thirdly, there is a different volume of zones. For example, in the FS sample the “Quantitative parameters of activity” zone accounts for 6.5%, in the SOP sample – 8.9%, and in the SEE sample – 22.6%, almost 3.5% more than in the former, which results in a different rank in the hierarchy of associative gestalts: ranks 7, 6, and 2 respectively.

Fourthly, the difference between the three samples is not so much in quantitative terms but rather in the qualitative content of the gestalt zones. For example, the zone “Qualitative parameters” in the FS sample is represented by the following associates: *professionalism (2), skill (2), ability to stand up for oneself (1), ability to work hard (1), ability to prove oneself (1), ability to take risks (1), ability to prove oneself in something (1), ability to sell one’s goods better than others (1); ability to stand up for oneself and protect the business (1); ability to prove oneself in a certain business (1), experience (1), knowledge (1), capabilities (1), modernisation (1), uniqueness (1), endurance (1), skilled (1), experience (1)*. The above associates allow us to draw a conclusion about the actualisation (in the linguistic consciousness of different categories of respondents) of those or other aspects of the semantics of the stimulus word: future specialists verbalise the components of the meaning of personnel competitiveness, specialists in economics and economy and other specialities – competitiveness of enterprise, competitiveness of goods, personnel competitiveness.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of a free association experiment with heterogeneous groups of respondents – future specialists (FS), specialists in economics and economy (SEE) and specialists in other professions (SOP) – associative fields on the stimulus of *competitiveness* are constructed. The core responses in the three samples are different: SEE gave associates in the form of economic categories; for the SEE and SOP samples the associates of quality and professionalism are common; in the FS sample the associates of competition, power and businesses are actualised.

Other research procedures were carried out to ensure the relevance of the results. Respondents in the FS and SEE samples show the third and SOP the second level of closeness of the general-linguistic and associative meanings. In the FS sample, we observe the second level of closeness of the terminological and associative meanings of the stimulus lexeme, and in the SOP and SEE sample – the first level, but SOP verbalise the basic components of the term *competitiveness* and certain components of the term *personnel competitiveness*, while SEE verbalise the basic components of the stimulus word (hyperonym) and the basic components of the lexical units of *competitiveness of goods* and *personnel competitiveness* (hyponyms).

The next stage was to study the structure of the associative fields in the three samples. Among the selected 10 zones of the associative gestalt in the FS and SOP sample, the zone “Methods and forms of activity” and in the SEE and SOP sample the zone “Emotions” do not have a verbal representation; the other zones for the three samples are represented by verbal responses. Quantitatively, common to the three samples is the associative gestalt zone “Properties” (rank 1), for the SEE and SOP samples – “Object/subject” (rank 3), for the FS and SOP samples – “Qualitative indicators” (rank 4); the other associative gestalt zones have distinctive features. Quantitatively and qualitatively the volume of associative gestalt zones of associative fields of three samples has many specific features.

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