

# ETYMOLOGICAL MEMORY OF A WORD IN DESIGNATING SOCIOCULTURAL STEREOTYPE

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**Abstract.** The article presents the semantic history of the word *flapper* that denotes social stereotype of American culture. Being a multifaceted phenomenon of semantic cognition, a sociocultural stereotype presents a condensed and coded information that develops on the background of a cultural context. The semantic analysis from diachronic perspective sets up a correspondence of Latin origin of the word *flapper* with Indo-European stem that produced a number of words in Germanic languages. The cognate words of related languages reveal conformity of negative connotations determined by attitude to human weakness in different forms of its manifestations. This presumes historically determined negative connotation of the word *flapper*. The initial designation was motivated by kinetic characteristic of the object – a vertical movement. The meaning “a young and daring American girl of the 1920s” of the word *flapper* was semantically motivated. As it was stated, at the moment of designation, youth and immaturity of a girl were conceived of a fledgling image, that traditionally symbolizes inexperience of a youngster. This zoomorphic metaphor acts as the source of categorization of a cultural and social phenomenon “Flapper”.

**Keywords:** *sociocultural stereotype, initial designation, zoomorphic metaphor, pragmatic presupposition, connotation.*

**Анотація.** У статті представлено семантичний аналіз слова *flapper*, яке позначає соціокультурний стереотип, що появився в 20-х роках 20-го століття в Америці. Стереотип є концентрованою і абстрагованою формою семантичної пам'яті народу, в якій збережено етнічно і культурно маркований образ. В ході етимологічного аналізу було доведено, що основі слова *flapper*, яка має індоєвропейське походження, відповідає певна кількість слів споріднених мов, негативна конотативна забарвленість яких дає можливість визнати історичну детермінованість конотації слова *flapper*. Позначення первинного образу було мотивовано кінетичною характеристикою образу, тоді як значення «молода смілива дівчина в Америці 20-х років 20-го століття» слова *flapper* було семантично обумовлене. Сприйняття молодості та незрілості відбувалось на метафоричній основі образу пташеня, що асоціювався з несталістю моральних принципів молодих дівчат. Зооморфна метафора діє як джерело категоризації соціально-культурної інформації, що сприймалась критично. Первинний образ, який обумовив появу нового значення, визначив прагматичний потенціал слова, що позначає соціально-культурного явище.

**Ключові слова:** *соціокультурний стереотип, первинна номінація, зооморфна метафора, прагматична пресупозиція, конотація.*

## 1. Introduction

Social stereotype, as a specific kind of a cultural concept, results from categorization and abstraction of a meaningful information about an individual or a social group. A stereotype is considered a verbalized unit of mental activity aimed to identify, and store cumulative information about a typified image of a social

group. Our study of a social stereotype from cognitive linguistic perspective involves the analysis of its name, which preserves culture perceptual pattern and pragmatic potential of the word at the time of designating a new social phenomenon.

Pragmatic component of a word meaning, which determines word designation, henceforward directs perception of the object the word refers to. This “etymological memory of the word”, as Y. Apresyan calls it (Apresyan, 1995:169), encodes the primordial image of the object that once conditioned a word appearance. Traced in the course of etymological analysis a primordial image reveals linguistic community expressive assessment of noteworthy properties of the object.

## 2. Methods

With the view of finding out pragmatic potential of the word designation, etymological analysis is conducted. Our interest lies in pragmatic meaning of the word *flapper* which is the name of a socio-cultural stereotype and the symbol of America’s “Roaring Twenties”.

The undertaken study is based on the semantic history analysis of the word *flapper*. On asserting means and facilities of a primordial image designation, we discover pragmatic presupposition affecting attitude to the phenomenon “flapper” in American culture.

R. C. Stalnaker regards pragmatic presupposition as predetermined by a linguistic disposition to behave in one’s use of language as if one had certain beliefs, or were making certain assumptions (Stalnaker, 1974). Certain beliefs are essential to a concept and a change in one or more of these amounts to conceptual change (Jackson, 1998:38). The pragmatic presupposition in case of a socio-cultural stereotype “Flapper” assumes the existence, shared by major members of language community in the 1920s, institutional assessment, which reflected aversion and criticism of a new phenomenon “self-sufficient young women”.

## 3. The study

The first step of etymological insight into a historic background of the word *flapper* is the reconstruction of an initial morpheme. As the derivative of the verb *flap* (A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary, 1966:597), the noun *flapper* was registered in 1570 by Peter Levins in “Manipulus Vocabulorum. A dictionary of English and Latin words, arranged in the alphabetical order of the last syllabus”. In this vocabulary, the word *flapper* was registered in the meaning of “a fan” (Latin *flabellum*) (Manipulus Vocabulorum, 2001:150). “Manipulus Vocabulorum” presents also the word *flappe* as the noun in the same meaning (Manipulus Vocabulorum, 2001:127) and as the verb with the corresponding Latin verb *flabellare* (in the meaning “to blow”) (Manipulus Vocabulorum, 2001:128).

The evident semantic and phonetic conformity of the English and Latin words from “Manipulus Vocabulorum” suggests their connection to Latin *flābrum* (in the meaning of “waft, blowing”) and *flāre* (in the meaning of “to blow, puff”) (A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary 1966:596). The reference to C. Quiles’s “A grammar of Modern Endo-European” in the search of primary source of these words has resulted in the finding of Indo-European stem *bhlag* (in the meaning of “to beat, producing sound”) (Quiles, 2009:24), from which the words *bhlaghmn*

(waft, blowing) and *bhlādhrom* (a fan) were derived. Later these words transformed into Latin *flabellum* (a fan) (Quiles, 2009:381).

The meaning of “a vertical movement accompanied by a noise of a flat and flexible object” is still preserved in the verb *flap*. The stem of the word is of an onomatopoeic origin (Chamber’s Dictionary of Etymology, 1999:153; A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary, 1966:597; The Oxford English Dictionary, 1961: 8; Indogermanisches Etymologisches Woerterbuch, 1959:56).

The indication of a vertical movement is found in the Middle English verb *flappen*, meaning “to move in vertical direction” (A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary, 1966: 597). The verb was used in the meaning of “to strike” (1330) and “to lash” (1350) (Chamber’s Dictionary of Etymology, 1999: 388), later transformed into the New English verb *flap* (to move up and down, flutter, strike) (A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary 1966: 597). The indication of a flat object movement is noted in the noun *flappe*, meaning “a blow” (1330) (Macrae-Gibson, 1973: 247). Corresponding to *flappe* is Latin word *flagellum* (1440) with a cognate word *flabello*, meaning “a swatter” (Promptorium Parvulorum, 1987: 164). The noun *flap* was used in the meaning “an arm” (1565) (The Towneley Plays, 1993: 248) and “a piece of cloth” (1594) (Green, 1970: 82). In 1726 the word *flapper* was used by J. Swift in “Gulliver’s Travels” as a term for a servant whose duty was slapping his master to take him out from drowsiness (Swift, 1991: 169).

The similarity of sound complex and semantic conformity of the word *flapper* manifests in related languages.

Table 1

#### Germanic Languages Analogy

Word	Part of Speech	Meaning	Language
Flap	Noun	slap, smack	Danish Dutch Norwegian
flappe	Verb	clap, slap	Danish
flappen	Verb	clap, slap	Dutch German
fladder	Noun	flutter, mobility	Swedish
fladdra	Verb	flutter	
Flap	Noun	swatter	German
Flapp		slap	

A flat form of the object is evident in Norwegian word *flaberg* (plateau) (Norwegian-Russian Dictionary, 1963:218) and Swedish word *flathet* (flatness) (Swedish-Russian Dictionary, 1973:144). German dictionaries explain the nouns *Flap* (valve, lapel, swatter) and *Flapp* (slap) as originated from North German dialectal *flabbe* (weak, feeble) (Wörterbuch Der Deutschen Alltagssprache 1971: 240). In the dictionary of Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm (1862) the word *Flabbe* is presented as North German dialectal word *Flappe* (Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jakob

Grimm, 1999: 724). In Modern German dictionaries the noun *Flapper* (felt hat) is marked as English adoption in the meaning of “a lively girl” and “a duckling” (Das großen Wörterbuch, 1999: 1253).

Linguistic affinity, as W. Humboldt stated, manifests differently: it can be reflected in a phonetic conformity, as well as in a logic cognation of ideas, that has arisen from a retroactive effect of words on mind (Gumboldt, 1984: 110). In case of the word *flapper* it can be noted, that except for a common origin, the cognate words of related languages are characterized by conformity of connotations. Thus in Dutch there is *flapuit* (chatterer) (Dutch-Russian Dictionary, 1954: 246), in Norwegian – *flapdrol* (ditherer, spineless creature) and *flapmadam* (a dolled-up woman) (Norwegian-Russian Dictionary 1963: 218). In German the word *flapsig* is used in the meaning of “ill-mannered” (Das großen Wörterbuch, 1999: 125), the word *Flappe* means “a drooped lower lip, a crooked mouth” and “dweeb” (Duden Deutsches Universal Wörterbuch, 2001:774). The German word *Flaps* means “a fool, oaf” (Das großen Wörterbuch, 1999: 1250). Connotative meaning of mockery, hostility and condemnation marks the words that are compiled in the chart 2.

Table 2

### Cognate Words of Germanic Languages

lexeme	Part of speech	Denotation	language
flapuit	Noun	chatterer	Dutch
flapdrol		ditherer	Norwegian
flapmadam		a dolled-up woman	
Flappe		crooked mouth, dweeb	
Flaps		fool, oaf	
flapsig	Adjective	ill-mannered	

Expression of disdain and mockery is observed in the verb *flap* derivatives as *flap-ear'd knave* (1593) (Shakespeare, 1995:149) and *flap-mouth'd mourner* (1593) (Shakespeare, 1992:125).

A negative connotation meaning is observed in Modern English words *flippant* (careless, irresponsible) и *flabby* (lacking strength and vitality) (Indogermanisches Etymologisches Woerterbuch 1959: 154). The weakness in different forms of its manifestations is noted in the majority of stated above examples. Presumably negative character of the word *flapper* connotation was historically determined.

Though the term “connotation” has provoked a kind of terminological confusion and a great deal of debate in linguistic society, it best meets requirement to express implied meaning (C.K. Ogden, I.A. Richards) or emotive meaning (C.E. Osgood, G.C. Suci, P.H. Tannenbaum) associated with the concept and opposed to cognitive meaning. Connotation reflects emotive and evaluative attitude toward the object of denotation due to which the utterance acquires expressiveness (Teliya, 1986:5). M. Urban equates connotation with meaning, in which he distinguishes cognitive, emotive and intuitive meaning, the latter being responsible for creation of concepts. As M. Urban sees it, a new indirect meaning, expressing the qualities of the object, appears by virtue of intuitive

meaning, which evokes a primary experience in the formation of the concept (Urban, 2013:146–147). The intuitive element of a word meaning is connected with imagery and process of imagination. Intuitive meaning is communicable, with the help of it values are apprehended and transferred by a linguistic community (Urban, 2013: 149).

In terms of Urban's concept, the cognitive meaning of the verb *flap* (movement of a flat object) has been preserved in the word *flapper* denoting extremity of a sea mammal or a part of oil industry equipment (19<sup>th</sup> century). As Ch. S. Peirce wrote, new meanings of a word appear in relation to new spheres of experience (Peirce 2000:92). Whether it is cognitive domain, or emotional domain, intuitive meaning of the word *flapper* has given rise of new meanings. "Intuitions can provide evidence about the content of a concept. They can do this even if they are not constitutive of conceptual content, since intuitions may nonetheless be correlated with the conditions that influenced the appearance of the concept" (Laurence, 2003:278). As we show it below the choice of word that indicates the stereotype "Flapper" has been intuitively conditioned by negative pragmatic potential of the word *flapper*.

Registered in 1460 the word *flaptaill* in the meaning of "adulteress" was given in the glossary to "The Tale of Beryn with a Prologue of the Merry Adventure of the Pardoner with a Tapster at Canterbury" published in 1909 (The Tale of Beryn, 1973: 41). Randle Cotgrave in "A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues" (1611) recorded the word *flaptaill* and marked it as derived from the stem *flap* in the meaning of "to move buttocks in a wanton manner" (The Tale of Beryn, 1973:211).

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the word *flapper*, used in English culture, was registered by lexicographers as pejorative term for a very immoral young girl in her early teens. J.R. Ware in his "Passing English of the Victorian era: a dictionary of heterodox English, slang and phrase" gives two opinions of correspondents working for "Notes and Queries" (1892) on the usage of the word *flapper*. One considers the word slang applied to young girls. Another correspondent points out that the word is a young wild duck, which is unable to fly, hence a little duck of any description, human or otherwise (Ware, 1909:133).

Evidently, the indication of a movement accompanied by a noise of a flat and flexible object, e.g. a wing, caused the appearance of the meaning "fledgling", which was recorded in dictionaries of 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1773 Oxford dictionary marked the word *flapper* as dialectal, meaning "fledgling" (Dalzell, 1996:22).

In the almanac of 1895, devoted to hunting traditions in Britain, the word *flapper* is introduced as the name for recently fledged female nestling "not in the full glory of adulthood". While a male nestling is named mallard (Crawford, 1895: 33).

The image of a fledgling, associated with early youth, lack of experience and inability to protect oneself, preconditions semantic changes that give rise to designation of a new phenomenon.

The word *flapper* is used as a slang word in the meaning of "an inexperienced, unskillful hunter" (1850) and "a very young adulteress" (1893) (A Dictionary of Slang, 1937:401).

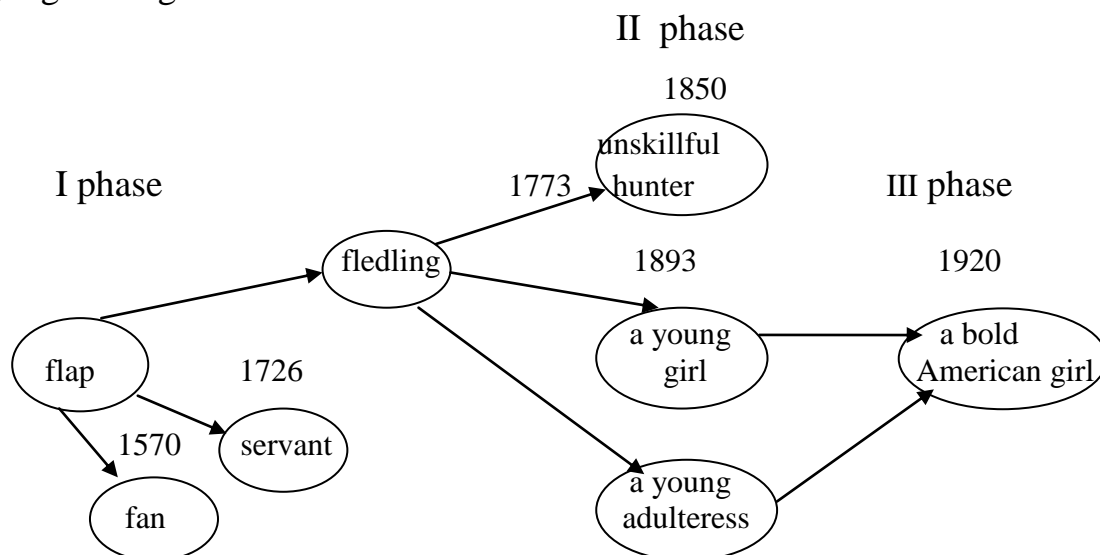
By the year of 1905 the word *flapper* has come into usage on the territory of the Great Britain in the meaning of “a young girl with hair not yet arranged”. In the 1920–30s the word is applied to all young girls with not shortly cropped hair (A Dictionary of Slang, 1937:401). S. Maugham uses the word *flapper* in his “Of Human Bondage” (1915) to denote a girl in her teens (Maugham, 2007:340). Before the World War I the word *flapper* is used as a slang by a Middle England (Partridge, 1938:73).

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a gender marked slang word *flapper* is used for pejorative designation of a young girl. Noticeably expressive, emotional and evaluative character of slang indicates marginal status of young girls that have no respect in the society of mature people. Implicitly the meaning of mockery and disrespect is present in semantics of the word *flapper*.

On the territory of the USA the word *flapper* has acquired somewhat different meaning: in addition to adolescence the word indicates such characteristic of girls as audacity of attire and behavior, that American society of the 1920s perceived as an exposure of viciousness.

#### 4. Discussion

As a consequence of the undertaken analysis we assert that the meaning “fledgling” of the word *flapper* is the fact of initial designation, motivated by kinetic characteristic of the object of designation: fledglings produced clapping sound by their wings. We consider the meaning “a young and daring American girl of the 1920s” semantically motivated, which appeared in comparing images of a fledgling and a girl.



*Fig. 1.* Semantic history of the word *flapper*

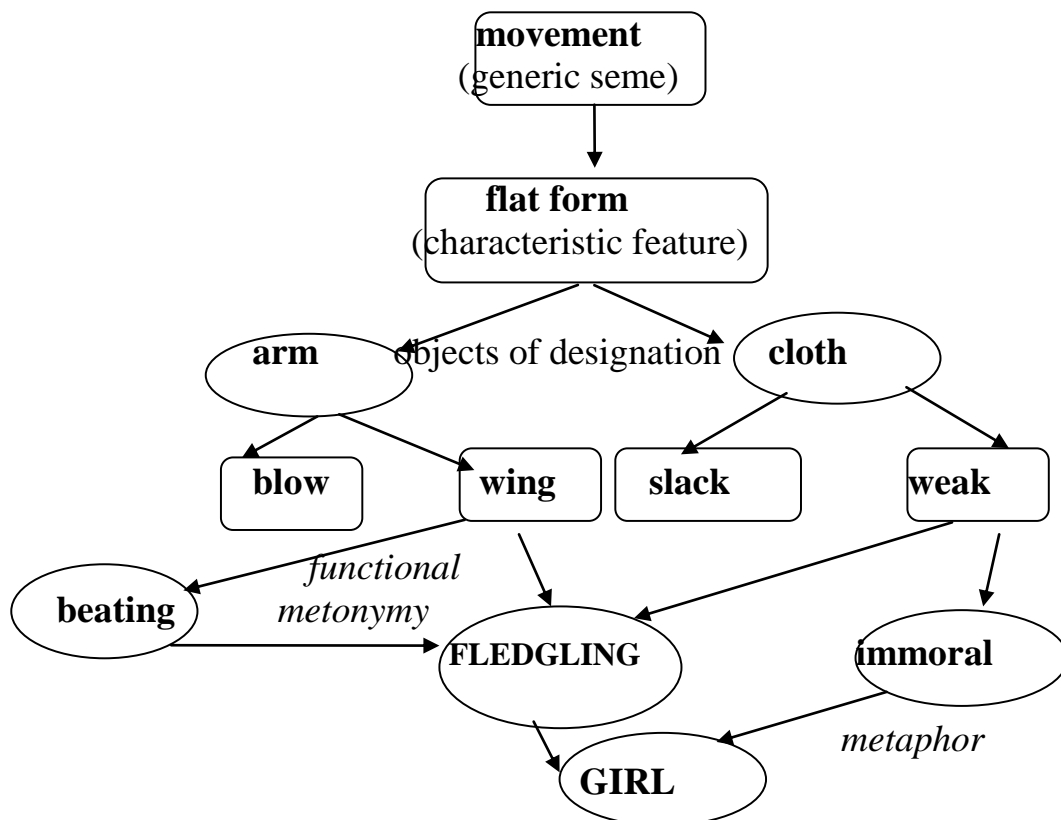
A new meaning of a word, as the result of secondary designation, adapts to indicate another object, the name of which already exists in a language. The aim of this is to convey a characteristic feature of a new object or phenomenon. A feature, that conditions comparison of two complicated cognitive units, A. Potebnya calls a new word determining means (Potebnya, 1958:17). In our case, this characteristic feature is

youth, that defines such qualities as inexperience, buoyancy and freedom. The feature extraction and designation has been conditioned by a traditional culture perceptual pattern.

As C. Ogden and I. Richards write, "...between a thought and a symbol a causal relation holds, between the thought and referent there is also a relation more or less direct, between the symbol and the referent there is no relevant relation other than the indirect one (imputed relation)" (Ogden, 1952:10–11). So, the relation between the word *flapper* and a new for America social phenomenon is imputed, as weakness and immaturity is imputed to the girls.

Semantic motivation manifests itself in imagery (Taylor, 2006:67–69). Images arise from association by similarity, which is typical for metaphor. At the moment of designation, youth and immaturity of a girl were conceived of a fledgling image, that traditionally symbolizes inexperience of a youngster. This zoomorphic metaphor is the source of categorization of a cultural and social phenomenon "flapper". Metaphor, as N. Arutyunova writes, prefers to work in the ideality domain, which is traditionally called connotations (Arutyunova, 1999:316–317). The attitude toward the image is conditioned by a semantic memory, that stores accumulated knowledge about facts, ideas, meaning and concepts, intertwined in experience and dependent on culture (McRae, 2013:206–216).

Reflected in a primordial image cultural notions and traditions have conditioned emotional perception of a social phenomenon "flapper": immaturity and weakness of a fledgling is associated with instability of young girls' morality standards.



*Fig. 2.* Semantic history of the word *flapper*

## 5. Conclusions

Stored in a connotation, pragmatic information of a word directs assessment of cultural phenomenon in society. Derogatory connotative meaning of the word *flapper* expresses pragmatic and cognitive presupposition, which is typical for American society of the 1920s. Pragmatic presupposition manifests in designating the girls as *flappers* thus establishing the fact of disapproval and criticism of this new for America social phenomenon. Cognitive presupposition is based on patterns of previous life experience, stored in our memory in forms of scripts and frames (Kiefer, 1978:337–380). Salient features of girls' behavior, delineated in generalized and schematic manner by frames, are extendedly represented in the discourse.

Thus we can say that the primordial image, which conditioned designation of a social phenomenon “flapper”, is a fledgling. It traditionally symbolizes youth and immaturity in English language. Motivating feature of designation is weakness, associated with instability of girls' moral standards. Derogatory connotations, traced in cognate words of German languages, validate negative pragmatic potential of the word *flapper*, applied to indicate a stereotypic notion about American girls that daringly changed standards of behavior in American society.

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