

## THE OWN AND THE FOREIGN IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

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### *Abstract*

*According to Gal Ariely in the situation of globalization two opposite tendencies can be observed with respect to the feeling of national identity: increase and reduction of the sense of identity.<sup>1</sup> We will try to trace the dynamics of the concept with the help of a psycholinguistic test conducted in different phases of Bulgaria's transition to democracy since 1989. The concepts illustrating the findings are 'foreigner' and 'motherland' with a focus on the connotative meaning of the concepts on a subconscious level. During the first trial 'foreigner' evoked intensive positive reactions, whereas nowadays the attractiveness and the striving for contact with the foreigner decrease. The 'foreigner' is no longer representative of the West, but just a human, and could be emigrant or homeless. The personal experience in a situation of free mobility changes the viewpoint and the distance between the own and the foreign.*

*During the first trial, the declarative affiliation to 'motherland' imposed by the totalitarian ideology was not reflected in the test results, most probably due to a reaction of resistance to its official propaganda. On the contrary – 'motherland' was associated with skeptical and even negative reactions. Our data also show moderate consolidation of these reactions on subconscious level during the last three decades, even as there have been constantly growing social criticism and radical attitude in our societies.<sup>2</sup>*

*It is important to note that in both phases of the test the main focus of the reactions has been contrary to the dominant social mood: in 1989, the young people expressed negative attitude to the officially advanced patriotism; nowadays, amid strong social critique of the state, the emotional reactions to it have become more positive. Indeed, it appears that when the concept of homeland is threatened, especially amidst of a widely felt deficit of values, the erosion of feelings does not penetrate at a deeper level.*

**Key words:** *identity, political attitude, semantic change, concept drift*

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<sup>1</sup> Gal Ariely, "Globalization and Decline of National Identity? An Exploration Across Sixty Three countries," *Nation and Nationalism*, 18 (3) (ACEN/Blackwell Publishing, 2012), pp. 461-482.

<sup>2</sup> Vihren Bouzov, "'Europe 2020': Some Problems of Development in Romania and Bulgaria," *Maximizing Comparative Advantages of Cross-border Regions* (Gabrovo: Express Ltd., 2013), p. 20.

### **1. Introduction**

The sense of the concepts of *own* and *foreign* has changed in recent decades. Although the core meanings of the words have largely persisted, new semantic components and tendencies in their connotation have emerged. We will try to trace the concept drift with the help of a psycholinguistic test revealing the connotative meaning of the concepts. After Fokkens at al., we define the semantic of concept drift as a change in the intension of a concept, while its core remaining stable.<sup>3</sup> Although the processes of semantic change in general and of concept drift in particular were originally discussed in semantics and psycholinguistics, they have also become relevant to the work of a number of other academic fields, including philosophy, history, and political science. We shall present a longitudinal study on the dynamics of some social and political concepts with the aim to trace particular aspects of the transformation of social and political attitudes in Bulgaria in the new political context of the decades after the transition to democracy in 1989. We illustrate the concept drift using an analysis of associative tests results of the stimulus words *motherland* and *foreigner*. We take the concepts of *own* and *foreign* to represent “conflict” zones at the present time of mobility and refugee flow, and we endeavor to identify a tension between the longing to the *foreign* and the belonging to the *own*, which could be detected in young people’s answers in different proportions during the trials of the study.

In what follows, in Section 2 and Section 3, we make an overview of works on semantic change and concept drift respectively. In Section 4, we discuss some related work in the field of the semantic shifts of political concepts. In Section 5, we introduce the methodology, the procedure and the analysis of the present study. In Section 6, we offer a discussion of the study, and we conclude in Section 7.

### **2. Semantic change**

Both the meaning and the outer form of the words change over time and at various rates. It is generally considered that meaning is the most variable and shifting part of the linguistic sign. Word meanings are highly dependent on context, whether that of the ongoing discourse or of social and ideological changes.

Traditionally, semantic changes are classified in terms of opposing tendencies, such as broadening and narrowing, and development of positive or negative meanings. An example of broadening (generalization or widening) is the noun *dog*, which was used to refer to some specific breeds but nowadays means any dog. On the opposite side, the noun *girl* narrowed (specialized) its meaning: in Middle English, any young person could be called a *girl*; the restriction to female young persons occurred in the Modern period. The same process occurred with the meaning of the Bulgarian word *лято*, which meant *year* in Old Bulgarian and subsequently narrowed its meaning to one season only – *summer*.

An illustration of melioration (development of positive meanings) is the word *rude*, whose original meaning of ‘unmannered’ is rather negative, but nowadays could be used in a more positive sense as ‘physically attractive’. Words with negative meaning, such as *killer*,

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<sup>3</sup> Antske Fokkens, Serge ter Braake, Isa Maks, and Davide Ceolin, “On the Semantics of Concept Drift: Towards Formal Definitions of Semantic Change,” In S. Darányi, L. Hollink, A. Meroño Peñuela, & E. Kontopoulos (Eds.), *Proceedings of Drift-a-LOD* (Bologna, 2016).

are used in English, as well as in Bulgarian, jargon to designate powerful entities or to express or evoke strong (including positive) feelings. As an example of pejoration, or development of more negative meaning, could serve the noun *communist*. Another way in which semantic changes have been traditionally classified is related to whether they are driven by language-internal or by language-external factors. Language external factors are broadly cultural and social.

According to Willem B. Hollmann's review of publications from the previous century, semantic change was generally neglected in research for a considerable period of time.<sup>4</sup> It was not until Elizabeth Traugott endeavored to establish regularities in the semantic processes that it came into focus. Traugott and Dasher maintained that there is a path from pragmatically polysemous meanings to new semantically polysemous meanings.<sup>5</sup> Recently, scholars have put forward different models for attesting regularities in semantic change, including Geeraerts' *Diachronic Prototype Semantics* and Traugott and Dasher's *Invited Inference Theory of Semantic Change*, where semantic change regularities were identified by means of technological tools. New quantitative laws were also proposed, such as that of the correlation between semantic change and frequency, modelled along the linear regression suggested by Hamilton et al.<sup>6</sup>

### **3. Conceptual replacement and concept drift**

In some of the cases of semantic change the core of the meaning changes, while in other cases the change is only in the field of its connotation. The latter represents the concept drift – a change in the intension (associations) of a concept, while its core remains stable.<sup>7</sup> If the core of the concept changes as well, a new concept emerges, and we have a conceptual replacement. An example of the latter semantic change is the English word *cute* (based on Frermann and Lapata).<sup>8</sup> In the early 18th century, the word appeared with the meaning of 'clever'. In the late nineteenth century the meaning had shifted to 'cunning'. It then shifted to its modern day meaning of 'sweet' and 'attractive' (according to the Oxford English Dictionary).<sup>9</sup>

In this paper, we are particularly interested in the concept drift – the changes in the field of connotation of the meanings of the word while the core remaining intact. As an ex-

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<sup>4</sup> Willem B. Hollmann, "Semantic Change," In Jonathan Culpeper, Francis Katamba, Paul Kerswill, and Tony McEnery (eds.), *English Language: Description, Variation, and Context* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009: 536), pp. 301-313.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Closs Traugott and Richard B. Dasher, *Regularity in Semantic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> William L. Hamilton, Jure Leskovec, Dan Jurafsky, "Diachronic Word Embeddings Reveal Statistical Laws of Semantic Change," *Proceedings of the 54th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics*, (Berlin, Germany, August 7-12, 2016), p. 1495.

<sup>7</sup> Antske Fokkens, Serge ter Braake, Isa Maks, and Davide Ceolin, "On the Semantics of Concept Drift: Towards Formal Definitions of Semantic Change," In S. Darányi, L. Hollink, A. Meroño Peñuela, & E. Kontopoulos (Eds.), *Proceedings of Drift-a-LOD* (Bologna, 2016). Shenghui Wang, Stefan Schlobach, Michel Klein, "Concept Drift and How to Identify It." *Journal of Web Semantics: Science, Services and Agents on the World Wide Web*, 9 (3), (2011), pp. 247–265.

<sup>8</sup> Lea Frermann and Mirella Lapata, "A Bayesian Model of Diachronic Meaning Change," In *Transactions of the Association for Computational Linguistics*, Vol. 4, (2016: 31), pp. 31–45.

<sup>9</sup> Angus Stevenson, *Oxford dictionary of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

ample of this phenomenon could serve the dynamics of the concept “democracy” traced in a longitudinal study using a word association technique conducted in 1989 and three years later.<sup>10</sup> The most frequent association was identical in both stages – “freedom.” The further associations, however, were quite different: in 1989 the concept was associated with “publicness,” “equality,” and “pluralism,” but three years later, none of these associative connections were present. Instead, the stage was taken by skeptical statements of the type “It does not exist,” “utopia,” as well as by straightforward negativism with answers like “demagogy” and “falsehood.” Such changes in the connotation of meaning are especially important with regard to contestable concepts, like ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’, whose meaning is very much a subject of debate. Contestable concepts are of interest for the purpose of determining how the political climate changes in certain periods of time.<sup>11</sup> Some of the latter concepts were imported in Bulgaria into the process of Westernization and globalization along with new technologies, values, and social models. The imported significations, however, were not merely accepted but arouse specific reactions that were often indicative of particular national attitudes. In the process of concept drift, such stable attitudes were detectable along the changes in the connotations of the new forms, concepts, or catchwords, like ‘democracy’.

#### ***4. Related work in the field of semantic shifts in political concepts***

In historical linguistics, semantic shift describes the evolution of word usage. Each word has multiple senses and connotations which can be added, removed, or altered over time. Hosein Azarbyonad and colleagues use distributional semantics to detect temporal semantic shifts in political and media discourse, as well as in the dimension of social and political variability.<sup>12</sup> For instance, they have examined the semantic shifts in the meaning of words like “democracy” and “moral” over time and within the usage of the Conservative and Labour parties in the UK parliament. The meaning of “moral” within the Labour party usage has shifted in time from that of the “philosophical” concept to that of a “liberal” one; whereas within the Conservative usage the meaning of this word has shifted from that of a “spiritual” concept to that of a “religious” one. For its part, the meaning of “democracy” remains stable over time in the usage of both parties, however, the Conservatives refer to it mostly in the sense of a “unity,” while the Labours associate it with “freedom” and “social justice.”

This example is indicative of a change in the connotation of meaning over time. It is relevant to our study in that we focus not so much on the denotative component of the language sign as on the connotative one, as the latter is indicative of the emotional charge and power, which play a key part in inspiring people, forming their attitudes, and often directing their behavior.

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<sup>10</sup> Mirena Patseva, “The Creation of New Meaning in the Process of Democratization of Eastern Europe,” *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 1994, Vol. 32, N 1, pp. 5-13.

<sup>11</sup> David Collier, F. Daniel Hidalgo, Andra Olivia Maciuceanu, “Essentially Contested Concepts,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11(3), 2006: 213, pp. 211–226.

<sup>12</sup> Hosein Azarbyonad et. Al., “Words are Malleable: Computing Semantic Shifts in Political and Media Discourse,” *CIKM’17*, November 6–10 (Singapore, Singapore, 2017), accessed April 4, 2018, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1711.05603.pdf>

### 5. *The present study*

In our investigation, we focus on the concept shift of some social and political words, including contestable concepts. The goal of the study is to trace some directions of the dynamics of particular political concepts in the time of intensive changes, marked by cultural globalization, translocal culture, and postnational discourse (in the terms of Arjuna Appadurai).<sup>13</sup> Because of their changing connotations, words from the political lexicon are vague, ambiguous, and difficult to define. We use the free association technique to illustrate the transformations of connotative meaning over a relatively short period of historical time.

The beginning of the study coincides with the beginning of democratic changes in Bulgaria in 1989 in the context of political enthusiasm after the totalitarian period. Twenty-two stimulus words were used, belonging to (1) the socio-political domain (democracy, power, freedom) and some fundamental categories of human life (family, work, holiday). Three experimental methods were used: associative test, definition technique, and text method. The first one was expected to offer information on affective meaning; through the latter two, we attempted to approximately identify the main body of meaning. We will present here some findings of the first method only, which was used in the next stages of the experiment. We compare the data obtained in 1989 and those obtained in two recent trials – in 2015 and 2017.<sup>14</sup> The data of the latter two stages are grouped together due to the relatively short time distance between them.<sup>15</sup> In the last two stages, we expanded the questioning by taking into account the gender differences in the responses.

#### 5.1. *Methodology – free associative test*

The psychological associations refer to the connections between conceptual entities or mental states that result from the similarity or proximity in space or time. The idea comes from Plato and Aristotle, and was carried on by philosophers like Locke and Hume among others. The same notion is also used in the contemporary psychology, and more particularly in the so-called *neural network models*. Semantic network theory proposes that a word's meaning is represented by a set of nodes and the associative links among them. The semantic information in such a network is accessed through a spreading activation, whereas the mental process in which it occurs are thought to be automatic.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, these characteristics of associations enable us to obtain information from the deeper structures of the mental activity. The free associative test measures the implicit or subconscious content of concepts, based on the assumption that associations are activated without effort, and outside of conscious control.

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<sup>13</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> During the first stage we conducted a comparative study of the national specifics of the meanings of the words in our focus, based on an input from Bulgarian and Russian students (4033 subjects). We consider the cross cultural data obtained in it to be an additional telling dimension of the tendencies we identified.

<sup>15</sup> Other stages were discussed in Mirena Patseva and Mitko Momov, *Tsenmostnoto initsiirane of 90s in Bulgaria* (Sofia: Agata 1998), pp. 114-161 (in Bulgarian).

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Traxler, *Introduction to Psycholinguistics: Understanding Language Science* (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 81.

### **5.2. Procedure: participants and material**

The participants in the tests were students at Sofia University *St. Kliment Ohridski* and *St. Cyril and St. Methodius* University of Veliko Tarnovo (19 to 30 years old). Minimum 100 people took part in the questioning at each stage; in the last two trials they were 50% male and 50% female participants. The procedure of the associative experiment was as follows: each respondent was given a list of all the stimulus words and the task of responding to each stimulus with “the first word that comes to mind”. The response time was not restricted but it did not exceed 20 minutes. Among the 22 stimulus words there were political concepts, such as: *democracy, security, property, freedom, leader, war*, as well as everyday words like *man, woman, work, family, or holiday*. Thus, we obtained 100 answer-associations for each stimulus in each trial. In our analysis we targeted four elements:

1. Semantic analysis
2. Level of stereotypicality
3. Level of abstraction
4. As well as, the distribution of the responses into semantic domains

We present here the first two of these elements in relation to the data of two stimulus words – *motherland* and *foreigner*, which are related to the concepts *own* and *foreign*.

### **5.3. Semantic analysis**

The comparison of the most frequent reactions defines the focuses in the semantic connotation of the words. The whole list of obtained reactions is distributed into semantic groups or fields by experts.<sup>17</sup> The semantic groups are analogous to semantic components (*semes*) – the important features by which speakers of language distinguish different words. These semantic groups do not reveal the entire structure of the word meaning but mainly its connotation. The semantic groups give information about the *actual focuses* in the semantic structure. In tracing the dynamics of these semantic focuses, we keep in mind the observation of Alexander Potebnya that lexical units express not the whole content of the notion, but only those features which are most important for the people.<sup>18</sup> The particular configuration of semantic groups in each stage is informative for the modifications of the connotative meaning. What is important for us here is that the semantic data obtained in the associative test is not declarative but it reflects an automatic level of mental life, which is out of conscious control, and thus gives information about implicit or tacit knowledge. Our semantic analysis will be illustrated by the stimulus words *motherland* and *foreigner*.

#### ***Motherland***

Motherland is perhaps the most stereotypical stimulus-word nowadays (Table 1). The most common reaction to it in 1989 was the neutral word *Bulgaria* (with 13% of the responses). In the later stages of the test this changed with the number of the respondents with the same answer more than doubled (31%). This quantitative difference reveals a tendency towards neutralization and stereotyping of the concept. Other repeated reactions to ‘motherland’, like

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<sup>17</sup> The distribution of reactions into semantic groups is based on their similarity and is provided by minimum two experts independently.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Potebnya, *Estetika i poetika* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976), p. 221 (in Russian).

country and *fatherland*, were also neutral (13%). In 1989, 20% of the participants associated their own country with *beautiful land* and *nature* of Bulgaria, whereas in the latest trials they are more than twice less (9%). Young people also associated motherland with *home* and *family*, with the quantification doubling in the latest trials (from 5% in 1989 to 10% in 2015/2017). One possible interpretation of this result could be the narrowing of the national identity concept to the realm of the family.

During the last stages some female participants appeared to express emotions detectable along responses like *love* and *affection*, whereas some men came up more evaluative reactions such as *value*, *sacredness*, *wealth*. In 1989, the young people did not appear inclined to express their patriotic feelings towards motherland – reactions like *patriotism* and *proud* were missing (unlike in the latest trials), and reactions like *dear* were rare. Only few Bulgarian men and only one girl gave *mother* as reaction.<sup>19</sup> Before 1989, the totalitarian ideology had largely imposed a more or less unquestionable affiliation to the motherland. This, however, was not reflected in the test results possibly due to a tacit rejection on the part of the participants of the official propaganda of the communist government. Quite the opposite, in 1989, relatively strong negative feelings were expressed in response to this stimulus word in answers such as *nonsense*, *devaluation*, *barrack*, *chaos*, *mess*, or *darkness*; as well as in terms of existential conflicts such as *accusation and conscience* (totaling 16%). For comparison, two and a half decades later, the related negative reactions were only a few (3%), even if a reaction like *nothing* could be interpreted as indicative of a crisis of the sense of belonging.

Thus, we can conclude that the dynamics of the connotative meaning of the concept *motherland* is towards a narrowing to the realm of the family, along the increasing number of neutral and moderate positive reactions. The critical attitude and tension of 1989 is replaced by calmer feelings accompanied by lower levels of skepticism and negativism in 2015 and 2017.

**Table 1.** *Distribution of reactions to the stimulus word motherland.*

| Semantic groups                       | 1989 | 2015/2017 |
|---------------------------------------|------|-----------|
| Bulgaria                              | 13%  | 31%       |
| country                               | 3%   | 5%        |
| fatherland                            | 10%  | 8%        |
| nature, beautiful land                | 20   | 9%        |
| home, family                          | 5%   | 10%       |
| love, dear                            | 11%  | 15%       |
| mother                                | 2%   | 2%        |
| sacred, holy                          | 2%   | 4%        |
| unique, one, and only one             | 3%   | 2%        |
| patriotism, proud                     | –    | 5%        |
| social feelings: duty, conscience     | 7%   | –         |
| skepticism: barrack, nothing,         | 4%   | 2%        |
| Negation: nonsense, devaluation, mess | 5%   | 1%        |

<sup>19</sup> For comparison, *mother* is the most frequent reaction for Russians associated with the well-known expression *родина – мать* ‘*motherland-mother*’. One other comparative observation is also important: among most frequent Russian answers is also the capital city *Moscow* – the center of the country. Bulgarians never mention their capital Sofia. So, unlike Russian, the Bulgarian identity concept seems less centralized.

\*The numbers represent the percentage ratio of the semantic group quantification of the total number of reactions obtained for one stimulus word. (The total could be less than 100% due to missing answers and because not all reactions are included into the semantic groups).

### **Foreigner**

In 1989, the *foreigner* was an *interesting* (26%) and *attractive* figure (Table 2). He or she evoked *curiosity* and a desire for *contact*, and was seen mostly as a representative of the *West* (*European, American*). But there is a significant decrease in the interest towards him or her two and a half decades later. A central semantic group nowadays is *alien* and *different* (12%). The image of the foreigner became more concrete and the importance of his or her social status decreased: he or she is no longer *investor* or *uncle from America* and could be also *emigrant* or *prisoner*.

The *foreigner* still appears to be more attractive for women who associate him or her with *high standard and money, culture, intellect and education*. The *foreigner* evokes *curiosity* and wish for *acquaintance*. The study results also show men as being more reserved in their attitude towards the *foreigner*: for some of them the foreigner is *interesting*, can be *friend* (4%), but the majority of answers are indifferent: a *man* (4%), can be a *guest* (3%), a *tourist* (4%), or an *emigrant* (5%) looking for job. Men give a few isolated negative reactions as well: *intruder, parasite*. One possible explanation for the warmer women's reactions is the masculine gender characteristic of the stimulus word.

**Table 2.** *Distribution of reactions to the stimulus word foreigner*

| Semantic groups                         | 1989 | 2015/2017 |
|---|------|-----------|
| foreign, alien, different               | 4%   | 12%       |
| man                                     | 2%   | 8%        |
| interest, curiosity                     | 26%  | 7%        |
| attractive                              | 4%   | 1%        |
| contact                                 | 3%   | 2%        |
| European, American, Italian             | 5%   | 8%        |
| Emigrant, Gipsy, prisoner               | –    | 5%        |
| tourist                                 | 3%   | 7%        |
| guest                                   | 1%   | 3%        |
| friend                                  | 5%   | 4%        |
| currency, money                         | 17%  | 4%        |
| investor, uncle from America            | 4%   | 1%        |
| nice dress, sun glasses,                | 2%   | –         |
| culture, education                      | 2%   | 1%        |
| alone, loneliness                       | 2%   | –         |
| Negation:: parasite, intruder, arrogant | 1%   | 7%        |

As a whole, the tendency with regard to the foreigner appears to be towards a diminished interest. The few isolated negative reactions are not a reason to suspect a crisis of toler-



ance. The dynamics of semantic groups, however, indicates a tendency towards a certain restraint in the attitude to the foreigner.

### ***Level of stereotypicality***

Following Alexandra Zalevskaya, we use two methods to measure the level of stereotypical reactions: (1) the average quantity of different (not coinciding) answers and (2) the percentage of the first three most frequent reactions.<sup>20</sup> In 1989, the results showed a low level of stereotypical reactions: the average value of different reactions was relatively high (70.17%), whereas the percentage of the first three most often repeated reaction was relatively small (24.14%). In the recent stages of the study in 2015/2017, the latter was higher (29.5%) and the average quantity of different (not coinciding) answers was smaller (59.1%). That is, with the time, the level of stereotypicality grows up, whereas the diversity of answers decreases. It seems a paradox that during the time of regimentation of the totalitarian regime the level of stereotypical reactions was lower. Our conjecture here is that perhaps at that time the young Bulgarians deliberately distanced themselves from the cliché, strove for originality, and thus gave more diverse answers. The results of our study also suggest that during the years of democratic changes with the increase of social opportunities the diversity of reactions decreases. For us, this means that during the time of destabilization and stratification of the society the associative reactions show the opposite tendency to group together (into the neutral realm), such that the level of stereotypicality increased. This result may reflect a compensatory unconscious reaction of non-acceptance of the dogma of the totalitarian regime in 1989 along a striving for originality. The same mechanism of opposition to the general trend of the contemporary pluralism and diversity results in a kind of “consolidation” within the neutral realm (the most frequent reactions are neutral words like *man* and *Bulgaria*). Another possible interpretation could be related to the fact that nowadays some young people cannot but mature without any help by their parents or by the government, which could have conditioned the replacement of the metaphorical reactions and play on words (characteristic for the data of 1989) with more neutral and sober reaction.

### ***6. Discussion***

The tense feelings which characterized the reactions to the stimulus word *motherland* in the first trial of the study were subsequently replaced by more neutral answers. Unlike in 1989, there is almost no negativism among the latest answers. Paradoxically, this comes on the background of a constantly growing social criticism and radical attitude in our societies.<sup>21</sup> The strong criticism towards the government in the mass media and in the public space is almost absent in the associative reactions to the concept *motherland*. Our conjecture here is that both concepts (government and motherland) are kept separate in the minds of the young people. Participants in the later trials keep their notion of *motherland* unaffected by the critical evalu-

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<sup>20</sup> Alexandra Zalevskaya, “Dynamics of Meaning of the ‘Live Word’ in Science and in Common Knowledge,” *Gisap: Philological Sciences*, No. 3 (2014), p. 13, accessed November 15, 2017, <http://Journals.Gisap.Eu/Index.Php/Philological/Article/No3,2014>

<sup>21</sup> Vihren Bouzov, “‘Europe 2020’,” pp. 15-32.

ations of the government and express a certain level of (even if not very enthusiastic) patriotism.

The more intensive positive attitude to the *foreigner* in 1989 could be explained as a reaction to the hostile official politics of the communist regime towards the different West. The emotional grade of the reactions decreases nowadays: the answers are more balanced and the image of the foreigner is more concrete. But the foreigner is no longer representative only of the West – he or she is just a *human*, be it *emigrant* or *homeless*. Another perspective also emerged: the opening of the borders made it possible for many students to experience themselves as foreigners in other countries. They may have longed for their homes but upon coming back many of them experienced difficulties to find their place there. This feeling is expressed in the answer *I am a foreigner in my own country*. In other words, the personal experience abroad changes the view point and the distance between the own and the foreign.

### *Conclusions*

The main goal of this paper was to show the dynamics of the connotative meaning of some political and social concepts. Word meaning is highly dependent on context – not only that of the ongoing discourse, but also that of the social dynamics. Semantic changes could be traced in longitudinal studies using associative test. Our analysis reveals certain semantic groups as corresponding to certain semantic components. The dynamic of their configuration traces particular tendencies in the modification of the connotative meaning, which gives information about the participants' tacit attitudes. We hope that our data could complement those of sociological studies which deal primarily with declarative assessments and deliberately formulated opinions.

The skeptical and critical attitude towards the own national identity expressed in 1989 (in opposition to the official public discourse at that time) is replaced by a moderate and calm patriotic attitude (also in opposition to the prevailing critical public discourse). The tense and even negative feelings are reduced and replaced by neutral reactions amid unrestrained criticism in the social space in the period of the last two trials. Accordingly, it is worth noting that in the two discussed phases of the test the main tendencies revealed in the analysis of the reactions are contrary to the mood of the dominant public discourse: in 1989 amid keenly imposed patriotism of the totalitarian state, young people expressed negation. Now amid strong social critique in the public space, the emotional reactions in the associative test are relieved.

The curiosity and the interest in the foreign and the foreigner is undoubtedly a characteristic feature of the Bulgarian folk psychology. Probably this interest has evolved during the periods of confinement and limitations in the country's history. The attractive image of the other/the foreigner could be seen as a projection of unfulfilled desires and is usually associated with the fact that our own efforts have not always been adequate enough to meet our recurrent needs. Perhaps the massive offensive of the foreign at all levels of life in the last decades deflects the former mystery and charm of the foreigner and causes a withdrawal from the aspiration for contacts with him or her. On the other hand, the onset of individualistic values following the end of the totalitarian regime seems to reduce the openness and the desire for contact with the other.