

# THE LEXICAL-SEMANTIC STRUCTURE OF THE CONCEPT OF “YOUTH”

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## Annotation

This article examines the lexical-semantic field of the concept of “youth” from a linguistic perspective. The study focuses on the structure of vocabulary units related to youth, analyzing their organization into core, near-core, and peripheral zones. Special attention is given to semantic relations such as synonymy, antonymy, and hierarchical connections, as well as to word-formation processes and metaphorical extensions. The analysis demonstrates that the concept of “youth” is represented in language as a complex and multi-layered system reflecting biological, psychological, and social aspects of human development.

**Key Words:** youth, lexical-semantic field, concept, adolescence, semantic structure, synonymy, antonymy, derivation, age, vocabulary system

## Introduction

The age concept refers to the way age is understood, categorized, and expressed in language, thought, and culture. At its most basic level, age is the measurement of how long a person has lived, usually counted in years. However, as a concept, it goes far beyond simple numbers and includes a wide range of meanings and associations connected to different stages of human life. In linguistic terms, the age concept is represented through a system of words and meanings that form a lexical-semantic field. This field includes terms that denote life stages such as childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age. It also involves nouns referring to people at different ages, such as infant, teenager, adult, and elder, as well as adjectives like young, middle-aged, and elderly. In addition, verbs and expressions such as grow up, age, and mature contribute to expressing the idea of age in language. Together, these elements create a structured system that reflects how people talk about and understand age.

## Main Part

The age concept can be analyzed in terms of its internal structure, which includes a central core and a peripheral zone. The core consists of the most basic and universally recognized terms, such as child, youth, adult, and old person. These units directly denote stages of life and are understood across different contexts with minimal ambiguity. The peripheral zone, on the other hand, includes more specific, context-dependent, or metaphorical expressions such as toddler, adolescent, senior citizen, or expressions like “at the prime of life.” These elements enrich the concept by adding nuance and detail. Another important feature of the age concept is the presence of semantic relationships between its elements. Synonymy allows for variation in expression, as seen in pairs like elderly and aged, or youth and



adolescence. These words share similar meanings but may differ in stylistic tone or usage context. Antonymy plays a crucial role as well, creating oppositions such as young versus old, which help structure the conceptual understanding of age through contrast. There are also hierarchical relationships, where broader terms like person or human include more specific categories such as child or adult. Word formation processes further expand the lexical-semantic field of age. Through derivation and compounding, new words are created that carry age-related meanings. For example, suffixes can form adjectives like youthful or ageless, while nouns such as adulthood or childhood emerge from base forms. These morphological patterns demonstrate how language systematically develops and organizes concepts related to age.

In addition, the age concept often extends into metaphorical and figurative usage. Age-related vocabulary is frequently applied to non-human entities, such as in expressions like “a young nation,” “an old tradition,” or “the birth of an idea.” In such cases, age serves as a metaphor for development, maturity, or historical duration. This shows that the concept is not limited to human life but is also used to interpret and describe abstract phenomena. The pragmatic aspect of the age concept is also significant [10]. The choice of words related to age can reflect politeness, social norms, and attitudes. For instance, speakers may prefer terms like senior or elderly instead of old to avoid negative connotations. This demonstrates that language use is influenced by cultural sensitivity and communicative context. Moreover, the age concept is dynamic and subject to change over time. As societies evolve, so do the meanings and usage of age-related terms. For example, the boundaries of what is considered “youth” or “old age” may shift due to changes in life expectancy, education, and social expectations. New terms may emerge, and existing ones may acquire new connotations. The lexical-semantic field of “youth” represents a structured system of words united by the common meaning of a particular stage in human life between childhood and adulthood. From a linguistic perspective, this concept is not expressed by a single word, but by a network of interrelated lexical units that reflect biological, psychological, and social characteristics of young age. At the center of this field lies the core lexeme *youth*, which functions as the dominant unit. It directly denotes the period of life associated with physical growth, development, and the transition to maturity. Closely related to this central unit are near-synonymous terms such as *adolescence*, *teenage years*, and *young age*. These units share the main semantic component “early stage of life,” but differ slightly in usage, stylistic coloring, or specificity. For example, *adolescence* emphasizes the developmental and transitional aspect, while *teenage years* refers to a clearly defined chronological period[5].

The near-core zone includes lexical units that denote individuals belonging to this age group, such as *teenager*, *adolescent*, *youngster*, *juvenile*, and *minor*. These words are semantically linked to the core concept through the shared feature of “young age,” but they shift the focus from the abstract stage to concrete persons. Some of these lexemes also carry additional semantic (shades), for instance, *juvenile* may have a formal or sometimes negative connotation, while *youngster* is more informal and neutral. The peripheral zone of the lexical-semantic field consists of words that describe attributes, processes, and social roles associated with youth. These include lexical units such as *energy*, *vitality*, *enthusiasm*, *curiosity*, and *idealism*, which reflect positive psychological characteristics, as well as *impulsiveness*, *immaturity*, and *inexperience*, which convey less positive or neutral traits. Although these words do not directly denote youth, they are semantically connected through associative meaning. Another important

component of the analysis is the system of semantic relations within the field. Synonymy is observed among words like *youth*, *adolescence*, and *juvenility*, which share similar denotative meanings. Antonymy plays a crucial role in structuring the concept through opposition, as seen in pairs such as *young* versus *old*, and *youth* versus *old age*. These oppositions help define the boundaries of the concept more clearly. Hierarchical (hyponymic) relations are also present. For example, *youth* can be considered a broader category that includes more specific terms like *teenager* or *adolescent*. In turn, these can be seen as hyponyms within the larger semantic domain of human age classification. Word-formation processes further expand the lexical-semantic field[3]. The root *youth* generates related forms such as *youthful* (adjective) and *youthfulness* (noun), which retain the core semantic feature but shift grammatical function and nuance. Similarly, *adolescent* gives rise to *adolescence*, illustrating derivational relationships within the field. The concept of youth also extends into metaphorical usage. Words related to youth are often applied to abstract or non-human entities, as in expressions like “the youth of a nation” or “the dawn of life.” In such cases, youth symbolizes beginning, renewal, and potential, demonstrating the conceptual flexibility of the field.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the lexical-semantic field of “youth” is a complex, multi-layered system consisting of a central core, a near-core group, and a broad periphery. It is structured through various semantic relations, including synonymy, antonymy, and hierarchy, and enriched by derivational and metaphorical extensions. This analysis shows how language organizes and reflects the concept of youth as an important stage of human life.

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