Is ‘respect’ a Feeling or a Behaviour?

-a study of the connection between word meaning and age for native and non-native speakers of English

Anna Kaczorowski

C-Essay, Net Course
Tutor: Monika Mondor
ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate if there is a connection between language and social identity in the perception of word meaning among second language learners in the same way as for native speakers, and if the sociolinguistic variable age is significant. This was done with an investigation of two generations of Swedish learners' perception of the meaning of the words 'respect', 'integrity' and 'communication'. The investigation showed that age is important to a certain extent regarding interpreting words and their meaning, but that it is not as important if the speaker has English as their mother tongue or as their second language.

Key Words: Word Meaning, Semantics, Sociolinguistics
# Contents

1. Introduction 1  
   1.1. Background 1  
   1.2. Aim 1  
   1.3. Method and Material 1  
2. Semantics and semantic shifts 3  
   2.1 Chapter outline 3  
   2.2 Semantics 3  
   2.3 Semantic change 4  
   2.4 Family Resemblance 5  
   2.5 Cultural Differences 6  
   2.6 Dictionary Definitions 7  
3. Results 9  
   3.1 Chapter outline 9  
   3.2 Speaker definitions 9  
      3.2.1 Non-native speaker teachers 9  
      3.2.2 Non-native speaker students 10  
      3.2.3 Native speaker teachers 10  
      3.2.4 Native speaker students 11  
   3.3 Speaker synonyms 12  
      3.3.1 Non-native speaker teachers 12  
      3.3.2 Non-native speaker students 12  
      3.3.3 Native speaker teachers 12  
      3.3.4 Native speaker students 13  
   3.4 Speaker opposites 13  
      3.4.1 Non-native speaker teachers 13  
      3.4.2 Non-native speaker students 13  
      3.4.3 Native speaker teachers 14  
      3.4.4 Native speaker students 14  
4. Discussion 16  
5. Conclusion 18  
6. References 19
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The world is constantly changing and languages with it. The meaning of words is not permanent and words may even have different meanings for different people (Finegan 2008:421).

The relationship between language and society – sociolinguistics – concerns language as a social and cultural phenomenon (Trudgill 2000:21).

Some factors influencing shifts in meaning are "based on community, purpose, and situation" (Clarke 1988 in Presmeg 2006).

When we discuss word meaning, we generally have the native speaker in mind. However, we may ask if there is a difference how different variables affect native speakers vs. second language learners. How important is a sociolinguistic variable such as age in how we define the meaning of different words? To what extent are we influenced by our parents, friends or idols?

1.2 Aim

The overall aim of this essay is to investigate that there is a connection between language and social identity in the perception of word meaning among second language learners in the same way as for native speakers. In other words, to what extent is meaning change for second language learners also dependent on sociolinguistic variables such as age and other factors of group identity. In order to do so, I will investigate two generations of Swedish learners' perception of the meaning of the words 'respect', 'integrity' and 'communication'. If any differences are found, I will try to explain the differences by tracing the different meanings to the use of the same words among native speakers of different age groups.

1.3 Method and Material

In order to perform my investigation, a questionnaire was composed and distributed among two groups of second language learners of English: teachers and students, and native English speaker teachers and students (see Appendix 1). In the questionnaire, the participants are asked to give synonyms and opposites to the words, and also define them.
The teachers participating are teaching English at different Upper Secondary Schools on the West Coast of Sweden and the students were attending the same Upper Secondary Schools. Among the four groups of participants, one group of teachers have English as their mother tongue, and one group of teachers have Swedish as their L1. This is similar to the two groups of students, where one group of students have English as their L1 and one group of students have Swedish as their mother tongue. The teachers, as well as the students were informed that the participation is voluntary and all information is anonymous.
2. Semantics and semantic shifts

2.1 Chapter outline
In this chapter, I will give an overview of the study of semantics and, in particular, explanations behind semantic shifts. I will also present the definitions of the words investigated according to the Oxford Dictionary of Current English (Thompson 1993), and synonyms and opposites of the words according to the dictionary Thesaurus.com.

Section 2.2 discusses different levels of meaning in words. Important aspects are word choice, context and speaker feelings regarding the word or words spoken.

Section 2.3 considers how the meaning of words can change because of the fact that people use words in new and different contexts and this new usage becomes the average.

Section 2.4 concentrates on similarities and differences of words in terms of family resemblance, and the understanding of these differing meanings as well as the choices speakers make regarding what words to use in different contexts.

Section 2.5 discusses the importance of cultural differences and the great importance of these when it comes to interpreting words and their meaning.

Finally, in section 2.6, I present the dictionary definitions, the definitions of synonyms, and the definitions of opposites, of the words investigated.

2.2 Semantics
Meaning can be studied at different levels such as morphology or word level. It is noteworthy that a word can be ambiguous in that it can have different meanings and thus be interpreted differently (Finegan 2008:174). He also states that “meaning is a very complicated matter and there is no single theory about how (sic) languages mean” (Finegan 2008:174).

Finegan discusses referential meaning as a way of defining meaning, which means that the word stated really is what is said. If a person is talked about, then the word is that person, or, if a feeling is being discussed, the word is the feeling (Finegan 2008:174).

There is also a social meaning within the linguistic meaning which gives information about the person uttering the word, or sentence. It can reveal the social status, the ethnical belonging and what kind of dialect the person uses. A final factor
is the context of where, and perhaps when, the statement is being uttered (Finegan 2008:176).

According to Finegan, *affective meaning* shows differences in word choice, how the word or utterance is stressed and the intonation used. These factors could give a whole new meaning to a sentence saying exactly the same thing. Finegan uses the following sentences as examples:

1. “Tina, who always boasts about her two doctorates, lectured me all night on Warhol’s art”.

2. “Tina, who’s got two doctorates, gave me a fascinating overview of Warhol’s art last night” (Finegan 2008:176).

As is seen in the examples, the interpretation of the two sentences differs substantially due to the word choice. Then, imagine the first sentence being said in an arrogant and scornful way, as opposite sentence number two, uttered with a glimpse of admiration and interest. The difference is obvious.

The three categories of meaning are all dependant on what word is being spoken. They are also dependent of the context of where it is told and who the speaker is, as much as how the word is uttered. These factors together contribute to the interpretation of the word.

Finegan states that “meaning is not a simple notion but a complex combination of three aspects:

- Linguistic meaning, including referential meaning (the real world object or concept picked out or described by an expression) and sense meaning.
- Social meaning: the information about the social nature of the language user or of the context of utterance
- Affective meaning: what the language user feels about the content or about the ongoing context” (Finegan 2008:177).

2.3 Semantic change

Suzanne Kemmer, Associate Professor of Linguistics at Rice University, states on the Rice University Website that, when it comes to words and the shifting of their meaning, semantic change is about people using words in new and different contexts and this new usage becomes the norm. The initial meaning of the word is usually completely dissimilar compared to the meaning of the word after the semantic change.
Kemmer gives an example in the word ‘awful’ meaning ‘very bad’. From the beginning the word meant “awe-inspiring, filling (someone) with deep awe” (Rice University Website). Further on, awful was used in contexts where unfavourable and adverse characteristics were shown.

There are different types of semantic shifts. Simplified, semantic shift may be defined as “shrinking or extending the scope of their referents” (Finegan 2008:50). In a semantic shift words do not tend to work as a substitute, taking away the earlier meaning. On the contrary, it contributes to the meaning by making it grow. Still, the metaphorical origins of words can fade as time passes (Finegan 2008:50).

2.4 Family Resemblance

Similarities between words can also be described in terms of e.g. family resemblance. In *Philosophical Investigations* (paragraph 67), Wittgenstein explains that family resemblance concerns similarities between words. He gives an example with the word “game” (in paragraph 66). There are a number of words that we call games and in some aspect they can be connected even though there are a lot of different kinds of games. A card game can, for example, be connected to a ball game in the aspect of playing and wanting to win, but other then that there are no other obvious likenesses.

The conclusion Wittgenstein comes to explains that “the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail” (Wittgenstein 1958:32). Thus, the word game can be connected to a lot of other categories of words, depending on what kind of game is referred.

Further on, Wittgenstein asks “Must I *know* whether I understand a word? Don’t I also sometimes imagine myself to understand a word (as I may imagine myself understand a kind of calculation) and then realize that I did not understand it?” (Wittgenstein 1958:53). You think you know the meaning of a lot of words, but when you are supposed to explain what a certain word means, you realize that you do not know. You might have an idea of what kind of word it is, and you might also be able to connect it to a certain context, but you cannot fully explain the word. On the other hand, if you come across a word in a certain context, then you might understand it and you might be able to explain it, but put the same word in a different context and you might not be able to understand the meaning.
Wittgenstein continues by stating that we often chose a word because it is suiting, which means we chose words in the same way as we chose between similar, but slightly different, pictures, since we often use pictures instead of words, or to illustrate the words (Wittgenstein 1958:54).

Wittgenstein (paragraph 508) also discusses habits. He uses an example with measuring temperatures on the Fahrenheit scale. If you do not know that scale and if you are not used to it, the figures of such a measurement would be unintelligible. If you are used to interpreting a word a certain way, another interpretation of it is unknown (Wittgenstein 1958:139-140).

Further on, in Wittgenstein’s Tractacus, it is stated (following Eriksson 1998) that language is assumed to be a description of things in the way that language reflects reality, on the contrary to what is pointed out in Wittgenstein’s other work Philosophical Investigations. In the latter account, he claims that clauses have multiple functions and that a description is nothing settled, but numerous different things (Eriksson 1998:73, my translation).

Janik (1995) describes Wittgenstein’s view on language as something you learn through experience, other people’s experience in the first place. Before you are capable of speaking and having command of a language, you are already within the language when parents and others are using words in different ways, for example when the child is learning how to walk. Then the child gets encouragements, congratulations and commands which lead to learning through others’ experiences; the behavior constitutes language before actually mastering the language (Janik 1995:20, my translation).

### 2.5 Cultural Differences

According to Moon (2007) cultural differences are of great importance when it comes to interpreting words and their meaning.

Moon also discusses people and how we classify people. One of the first things a Swedish person would ask a person they have not met before is most likely “What do you do for a living?”, and depending on the answer, he or she will put you in a certain category. The word of what you are doing, your employment, is here interpreted and decides which category you are to be put in (Moon 2007:20).
Moon (2007) finishes his book “In the Secret Garden Sweden” with the following: “You do not see the world as it is, you see the world as you are” (my translation). It is true that all see the world differently because of who we are; our earlier experiences and the culture we live in.

**2.6 Dictionary Definitions**

Dictionary definitions are static, in that they give the meaning of a word at a given point in time. The dictionary definitions of the words investigated are presented in the following section. The dictionary definitions will be useful when comparing the results from my investigation.

In the presentation of a dictionary definition of the words ‘respect’, ‘integrity’ and ‘communication’, I will use the *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Thompson 1993:774).

In the dictionary definition for respect, we find out that *respect* has five different meanings when used as a noun and two different meanings as a verb, one with three subordinate levels. The noun meanings are: (1) deferential esteem felt or shown towards a person or quality; (2) heed or regard; (3) aspect, detail, etc. (e.g. correct in all respects); (4) reference, relation (e.g. with respect to), and (5) polite messages or attentions (e.g. give her my respects). As a verb, the word can mean (1) regard with deference or esteem; (2a) avoid interfering with or harming; (2b) treat with consideration, and (2c) refrain from offending (e.g. a person or a feeling). This then shows that respect is associated with feelings, and that it is something expressed and shown.

According to the dictionary, the definition for *integrity* has two meanings as a noun; (1) moral excellence; honesty, and (2) wholeness; soundness (Thompson 1993:460). The definitions show that integrity is a desirable character to possess.

In the dictionary definition of communication, we find out that *communication* is a noun with four different meanings, one with three subordinate levels. The meanings are: (1a) communicating or being communicated; (1b) information etc. communicated; (1c) letter, message, etc; (2) connection or means of access; (3) social dealings; (4) science and practice of transmitting information (Thomson 1993:167). These definitions suggest that communication is related to both what one can use to...
communicate, what is to be communicated as well as the relation between the 
communicators; the social dealings.

The synonym dictionary *Thesaurus.com* listed 34 synonyms to the word ‘respect’ 
defined as a verb, with the definition of admire and obey, and 25 when ‘respect’ is 
defined as a noun, meaning admiration given by others. I chose to pick out four of 
those and present them here: ‘consideration’, ‘appreciate’, ‘honor’ and ‘look up to’.

According to the synonym dictionary, 16 synonyms are listed for the word 
‘integrity’ defined as honor and uprightness, and I chose to pick out four of those, as 

*Thesaurus.com* listed 38 synonym entries for the word ‘communication’, 
meaning giving, exchanging information and ideas, and I chose to pick out four of 
those, as I did with the other two words: ‘talk’, ‘talking’, ‘conversation’ and 
‘correspondence’.

*Thesaurus.com* also define antonyms, i.e. opposites. To the word ‘respect’, there are 
seven defined with the same definitions to the word as stated above. Similarly, I chose 

To the word ‘integrity’ there are four antonyms defined, with the definition of 
the word as above, which are: ‘corruption’, ‘disgrace’, ‘dishonesty’ and ‘dishonor’.

Regarding the word ‘communication’ there are five entries as antonyms. Four of 
those are: ‘concealment’, ‘cover’, ‘quiet’ and ‘withholding’.
3. Results

3.1 Chapter outline
The outline of the present chapter is as follows: In section 3.1, the definitions made by the non-native and native speakers are presented. In section 3.2, I present synonyms defined by the non-native and native speakers. Finally, in section 3.3, opposites listed by non-native and native speakers are presented.

3.2 Speaker definitions

3.2.1 Non-native speaker teachers
The L2 (second language learners’) teachers agree regarding the definition of the words by giving them the definition of a feeling. “Respect is something you feel towards a person”, “You can show respect by the way you treat people”. The L2 teachers defined ‘respect’ as a feeling one has towards people and depending on how one treats people, respect is shown. This shows that the teachers agree with Oxford University Dictionary of Current English, since ‘respect’ is defined as “deferential esteem felt or shown towards a person or quality” (Thompson 1993:774) and thus could be said to be something one feels.

According to the dictionary ‘integrity’ is described as “1 moral excellence; honesty. 2 wholeness; soundness” (Thompson 1993:460). The L2 teachers’ definition of ‘integrity’ as a feeling of self-esteem and the fact that one is certain of oneself, despite the way one is received and treated by others, thus could be connected to the meaning of the word in the dictionary. “Integrity is something you have when you feel that you know who you are regardless of the way people treat you”. However, the dictionary points more to the fact of how to behave towards others compared to ones own feelings.

The teachers described the definition of ‘communication’ as a feeling of comprehension one gets when communicating orally. “Communication is a feeling of understanding when talking and listening”. This definition agrees with one of the four descriptions of the word ‘communication’ in the dictionary: “social dealings” (Thomson 1993:167), since the feeling of comprehension could be seen as a social dealing. The L2 teachers’ definitions revolve mainly around how one wants to be
treated and how to treat others. The way one acts and how one is interpreted is most likely important.

3.2.2 Non-native speaker students
The L2 students defined the words as being something personal and connected the definition of the words to attitude and manners. They defined the word ‘respect’ as ones attitude towards people. “When you are being polite to an older man for example, then you show with your personality that you are respecting him”. By showing ones personality one respects other people. Similar to the L2 teachers, the L2 students’ definition of ‘respect’ seems to be connected to the same definition in the dictionary: “deferential esteem felt or shown towards a person or quality” (Thompson 1993:774), but instead of concentrating on what is felt, the focus is on what is shown.

Regarding the word ‘integrity’ the definition in the dictionary refers to one’s personal right to privacy, which in a way could be connected to one out of two descriptions in the dictioniary: “moral excellence” (Thompson 1993:460). “Integrity is a personal right. There are laws that are meant to protect your integrity, which, give you the right to privacy for example”.

‘Communication’ was defined as, for example talking and spreading information, but is dependant on one’s personality. “Communication can be many things. It depends on how you are as a person. Communication is when people are talking to each other to spread information or just to have a nice conversation”, “You have to communicate with people you already know, but also to strangers so that you can get to know new people. Everyone communicates, but we all do it in different ways depending on how we are as persons”. In the dictionary, one description of ’communication’ is ”1a communicating or being communicated. b information etc. communicated. c letter, message, etc. (Thomson 1993:167), which makes the L2 students agree with the dictionary.

3.2.3 Native speaker teachers
The native speaking teachers’ views in the matter regarded feelings of various kinds as definitions to the words. The definition of ‘respect’ regarded the feeling of admiration towards someone. “When you feel admiration towards someone you respect that person”. In other words, when one admires a person, one is showing
respect. This definition, likewise the L2 teachers’ definition, could be said to agree with one of the explanations of the word ‘respect’ in the dictionary, with the stress what is felt: “deferential esteem felt or shown towards a person or quality /.../ treat with consideration” (Thompson 1993:774).

When defining ‘integrity’ the L1 teachers most likely were influenced by the word respect, since the definition regarded the feeling of getting respect mentioned in various manners. “When you feel someone respects you, your integrity is thought about”, “Integrity is the quality of having the feeling of being morally correct, honest and upright”. In the dictionary, one explanation of the word ‘integrity’ is “moral excellence” (Thompson 1993:460), which shows that the L1 teachers agree with the dictionary.

Regarding the word ‘communication’, the dictionary states that the meaning of the word is “1a communicating or being communicated. b information etc. communicated. c letter, message, etc. 2 connection or means of access. 3 social dealings. 4 (in pl.) science and practice of transmitting information” (Thomson 1993:167). The L1 teachers’ definition as a feeling of understanding as well as a feeling of being understood thus agree with point three in the dictionary as they are social dealings. “Communication is when you deliver a message (verbal or non-verbal) and also feel that the receiver understands”, “Communication is interacting by exchanging information with the feeling of understanding”.

### 3.2.4 Native speaker students

The native speaking students’ opinions regarding how to define the words mainly concern behaviour. One shows respect by having a positive and correct attitude and behaving in a certain way, for example by being polite. “If you show respect to someone you are being polite”, “I would define the word respect as the way you treat someone”. Similar to the L2 students, the definition in the dictionary regarding how to show esteem towards a person, agrees with the L1 students’ definition of ‘respect’: “deferential esteem felt or shown towards a person or quality” (Thompson 1993:774).

‘Integrity’ was defined as having the right manners and doing the right thing, for example being honest. “Integrity is when you are honest and do the right thing – undivided completeness”. This definition then agrees with the dictionary, stating “honesty” (Thompson 1993:460) as an explanation to the word ‘integrity’.
The definition of ‘communication’ also refers to behaviour, as in interaction between people. “I would define communication as interaction between two or more people”. According to the dictionary, ‘communication’ can be seen as “social dealings” (Thomson 1993:167) which is comparable with the L1 students’ definition of the word.

3.3 Speaker synonyms

3.3.1 Non-native speaker teachers

The L2 teachers gave examples like admiration and politeness as synonyms to the word ‘respect’. Those examples do not agree with the dictionary of synonym Thesaurus.com, even though there is a definite connection between ‘admiration’, stated by the L2 teachers and ‘look up to’, defined by the dictionary. To ‘integrity’ the answers were self-esteem, which makes their answers disagree with the dictionary. Finally, they connected the word ‘communication’ with mediation, which does not agree with the dictionary either.

3.3.2 Non-native speaker students

The L2 students gave the following synonyms to ‘respect’: accept, consideration, appreciation and honour. Their views on the word are similar to what the synonym dictionary states in the words ‘consideration’, ‘appreciate’ and ‘honor’. Human rights were sometimes mentioned when synonyms to ‘integrity’ was asked for. None of the definitions from the dictionary agree with this. For ‘communication’ the following words were given: talk, write, gestures, body language, conversation and discussion. These definitions agree with the dictionary, which has both ‘talk’ and ‘conversation’ as synonyms to the word.

3.3.3 Native speaker teachers

The L1 teachers gave the following examples as synonyms to the word ‘respect’: admiration and consideration, which also agrees with the L2 teachers’ view. They also mentioned ‘admiration’ as a synonym. Similarly, the L2 students gave ‘consideration’ as an example to synonyms to the word ‘respect’. According to the dictionary, ‘consideration’ is one out of 34 synonyms of the word ‘respect’, which means that the teachers’ view agree with the dictionary. To the word ‘integrity’
trustworthyness and virtuousness were mentioned, and in the dictionary ‘virtue’ is mentioned as a synonym, which can be connected to virtuousness. Correspondence was answered as being a synonym to ‘communication’, which makes the teachers agree with the dictionary.

3.3.4 Native speaker students
The native speaking students mentioned politeness, honour, truthful and caring as synonyms of ‘respect’. The dictionary states that ‘honor’ is a synonym of the word, among 34 other, and this makes the L1 students’ view comparable with what the dictionary says. When answering the question about giving synoyms to ‘integrity’, examples as honesty and moral were shown, and in the dictionary ‘honor’ is listed as a synonym of the word ‘integrity’. Thus, this makes them agree with one of the dictionary entries. The word ‘communication’ was found to be synonymous to interaction, talking and writing, which is similar to the L2 students’ view. They also mentioned ‘talk’ as a synonym of the word ‘communication’. According to the dictionary, one of 38 synonyms to ‘communication’ is ‘talking’, which makes the L1 students agree with the dictionary.

3.4 Speaker opposites
3.4.1 Non-native speaker teachers
The L2 teachers thought that disrespect and ignorance were opposites of the word ‘respect’, which agrees with the dictionary Thesaurus.com, where one can find ‘disrespect’ as one out of seven antonyms. To ‘integrity’ uncertainty was mentioned. This opposite is not to be found in the dictionary: therefore they do not agree with the dictionary regarding the word ‘integrity’. According to the dictionary, misunderstanding is not an antonym of the word ‘communication’, which makes their view differ from the dictionary entries.

3.4.2 Non-native speaker students
The L2 students answered that rude and impolite were good examples of opposites of ‘respect’. Those words are not given as antonyms in the dictionary. Consequently, the L2 students do not agree with the dictionary entries. Continuing, they found it difficult to only give words as opposites to ‘integrity’. Instead, they described it as
when you cannot keep your own personal life and all information regarding it and
yourself personal. For example: “when someone can find out everything about you.
Like when you visited the doctor, how much money you have, where you were
yesterday”. According to the dictionary ‘corruption’ is an antonym of the word
‘integrity’, which is similar to the L2 students’ description, which makes them agree
to a certain extent with the dictionary. ‘Communication’ was dealt with in the same
way: the informants explained the opposite as not talking or writing, and not being
able to understand other people. Those explanations do not agree with what the
dictionary states, which makes the L2 students’ differ regarding what is an opposite to
the word ‘communication’.

3.4.3 Native speaker teachers
Regarding the opposites, the L1 teachers wrote the following words as opposites of
‘respect’: disrespectful and impolite, which agrees with the L2 teachers’ examples;
they also mention ‘disrespect’ as being an opposite to the word ‘respect’. Although
their answer is similar to the L2 students’ answers as well, as they also used ‘impolite’
as an opposite. The L2 students also mentioned ‘rude’ as an opposite to the word
‘respect’ which shows that they focus more on the behaviour. Those meanings are not
to be found in the dictionary, which makes them disagree with the dictionary.
Opposites of ‘integrity’ were the following: dishonesty and immorality. To the word
‘communication’ discommunication and miscommunication were stated, which are
not mentioned as antonyms to the word, in the dictionary. Consequently, their view do
not agree with the dictionary entries.

3.4.4 Native speaker students
The native speaking students answered that disrespect, impoliteness and ignorance
were opposed to ‘respect’. ‘Disrespect’ and ‘disrespectful’ were also mentioned by
both groups of teachers. Their answers then agree with the dictionary, which states
‘disrespect’ as an antonym among seven to the word ‘respect’. To the word ‘integrity’
they gave the example of lying as an opposite, which can be connected to three of the
antonym entries from the dictionary; ‘corruption’, ‘dishonesty’ and ‘dishonor’. Thus,
the L1 students agree to a certain degree with the dictionary. Silence was a word that
came up when the question about opposites of ‘communication’ were answered.
According to the dictionary, ‘quiet’ is an antonym of the word ‘communication’, which can be associated with silence, and therefore makes the L1 students agree with what the dictionary states.
4. Discussion

My small comparison between students and teachers shows, to a certain extent, a differing way of interpreting and describing words in which the students relate to behaviour and the teachers to feelings. Moon (2007) states the following: “You do not see the world as it is, you see the world as you are” (my translation).

However, the comparisons of the participants’ definitions with the words investigated according to how they are defined in the dictionaries (Thompson 1993, Thesaurus.com) give no sociocultural information and no advice on whether there is a meaning variation across different age groups. Though, because of the fact that dictionary definitions are static, and that they give the meaning of a word at a given point in time, they are useful since they are important to use when comparing the answers and they indicate how the words are to be interpreted.

According to Suzanne Kemmer, Associate Professor of Linguistics at Rice University, semantic change is about people using words in new and different contexts in which this new usage may become the norm. The initial meaning of the word is usually completely dissimilar compared to the meaning of the word after the semantic change. The difference in age between the participants in the present investigation is most likely not great enough for this statement to be valid. A longer period of time must most likely pass, which Finegan (2008) agrees with, saying that the metaphorical origins of words can fade as time passes.

Similarly, the differing answers from the participants are presumably dependant of the association they made, at the very moment of writing, which is something Wittgenstein (1958) talks about. He comes to the conclusion that certain words and their ability of being connected to a lot of other categories of words, are dependant on what kind of category the mentioned word belongs to.

Wittgenstein asks “Must I know whether I understand a word? Don’t I also sometimes imagine myself to understand a word (as I may imagine myself understand a kind of calculation) and then realize that I did not understand it?” (Wittgenstein 1958:53). You think you know the meaning of a lot of words, but when you are supposed to explain what a certain word means, you realize that you do not know. You might have an idea of what kind of word it is, and you might also be able to connect it to a certain context, but you cannot fully explain the word. On the other hand, if you come across a word in a certain context, then you might understand it and
you might be able to explain it, but put the same word in a different context and you
might not be able to understand the meaning. When talking to the participants after
answering the questionnaires, all of them found the questions difficult to answer. The
comments received can be related to Wittgenstein and his statement concerning how
people are generally first being certain and confident regarding words and their
meaning, then realizing, when starting to think, that the first thought with reference to
the word asked for, is only one of many regarding the words and their meaning.

The statement Eriksson (1998) makes in Wittgenstein’s Tractatus, that language
is assumed to be a description of things in the way that language reflects reality, also
agrees to a certain extent with the fact that both groups of students described the
words as a sort of behaviour, which most likely is an easier way to relate to oneself
and to reality, than the description of feelings made by both groups of teachers.
According to this, age presumably is a factor which makes the way one sees reality
differ.

In the remaining part of this section, I will discuss additional weaknesses with
the present study. First, when answering a questionnaire, like in the present
investigation, the context is artificial and this most likely affects the students’
answers. Finegan (2008) discusses this as a final factor of social meaning of language
which can reveal the social status, the ethnical belonging and what kind of dialect the
person uses. The final factor is the context of where, and perhaps when, the statement
is being uttered (Finegan 2008:176).

Similarly, when answering a questionnaire in writing, the participants cannot
say how they would pronounce the words, which most likely would differ.
Presumably, they also imagine and think of the words differently, which may be
reflected in their answers. This is also reflected in Finegan (2008) where another
meaning, affective meaning, shows differences in word choice, how the word or
utterance is stressed and the intonation used. These factors could give a whole new
meaning to a sentence saying exactly the same thing.
5. Conclusion

In the comparison between the L2 teachers and the L1 teachers, there are no major differences. The conclusion that can be drawn is that the meaning of the words are similar for these groups since both groups relate the words to feelings of different types. Considering the synonyms and the opposites, the answers are alike, and the conclusion is that it does not matter whether you are an L1 or L2 speaker.

Regarding the comparison between L2 students and L1 students, the resemblance is also substantial. Both groups define the words as behaviour of various kinds. Concerning the synonyms, both groups refer to how to act and how to be treated and the words are positive, which makes the words ‘respect’, ‘integrity’ and ‘communication’ qualify for positive expressions, except for the fact that the L1 students defined ‘silence’ as an opposite of ‘communication’, which does not have to be a negative characteristic, the two groups also defined the opposites in a similar way, as bad behaviour, which concludes that their views of the words most likely are equivalent.

The differences between the teachers and the students are visible to a larger extent. The two groups of teachers agreed upon the words being symbols of feelings on the contrary to the two groups of students, who defined the words as behaviour in different directions. These differences make me come to the conclusion that the students’ definitions might change as they grow older. In other words, the sociolinguistic variable age is important to a certain extent when it comes to defining words and to a small extent regarding social identity.
References


Please underline what concerns you:

Student       Teacher

First language: ____________________________________________________________

1. How would you define the word *respect* to someone who has never heard the word before? When/where/how would you use the word *respect*? Please use the word in one or more sentences to illustrate different uses.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. Please provide some synonyms of the word *respect* in different contexts. What other words mean almost the same thing? Write one or more sentences to illustrate how the word can be used.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. Please write some opposites of the word *respect* in different contexts. Write one or more sentences to illustrate how the word can be used.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
4. How would you define the word *integrity* to someone who has never heard the word before? When/where/how would you use the word *integrity*? Please use the word in one or more sentences to illustrate different uses.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

5. Please provide some synonyms of the word *integrity* in different contexts. What other words mean almost the same thing? Write one or more sentences to illustrate how the word can be used.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

6. Please write some opposites of the word *integrity* in different contexts. Write one or more sentences to illustrate how the word can be used.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

7. How would you define the word *communication* to someone who has never heard the word before? When/where/how would you use the word *communication*? Please use the word in one or more sentences to illustrate different uses.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
8. Please provide some synonyms of the word *communication* in different contexts. What other words mean almost the same thing? Write one or more sentences to illustrate how the word can be used.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

9. Please write some opposites of the word *communication* in different contexts. Write one or more sentences to illustrate how the word can be used.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your participation!