A Calm Happiness: Affective Norms for Lebanese Arabic and English Words. A Cross-cultural and Cross-linguistic Investigation

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Affective Norms (AN) for Words are databases that map out words (or phrases) along the dimensions of different axes of emotion measurement, such as valence (negativity—positivity) and arousal (calm—arousing). Originally introduced by Osgood et al. (1957), they are widely used for various types of psycholinguistic research and have been adapted to and refined in different languages, but often conflate language and culture.

This study developed AN for 422 Lebanese Arabic Words (ANLAW) on the dimensions of valence, arousal, and subjective familiarity with N=299 participants (age: 18-70). The ANLAW corpus was constructed to best reflect the words most frequent - and hence most representative - of the Lebanese affective landscape. Cluster analysis and visualization methods characterized and confirmed the difference of the Lebanese affective landscape from most other collected ones, especially in that high-valence words are consistently low on arousal: simply put, positive concepts are calm, whereas in other collected norms, the affective landscape was more U-shaped, then negative and positive concepts being similarly more arousing than more neutral ones.

The second part of this study highlights a methodological caveat of AN in bilingualism studies. So far, no published study has compared the affective landscape of a language between its native- and second-language speakers, but native-speaker based ANs are readily used for psycholinguistic studies.

The results demonstrate that affective ratings in English differ between native speakers and a Lebanese sample, particularly in arousal levels for positive words. However, the Lebanese English affective landscape does not wholly resemble the Lebanese Arabic landscape, suggesting both cross-linguistic and cross-cultural effects in the affective landscape of a population.

Hopefully, this study will be useful both for Lebanese research on language and emotions, and for highlighting the importance of studying ANs in second-language populations.

Keywords: affective norms, Arabic, bilingualism, emotion, second language.
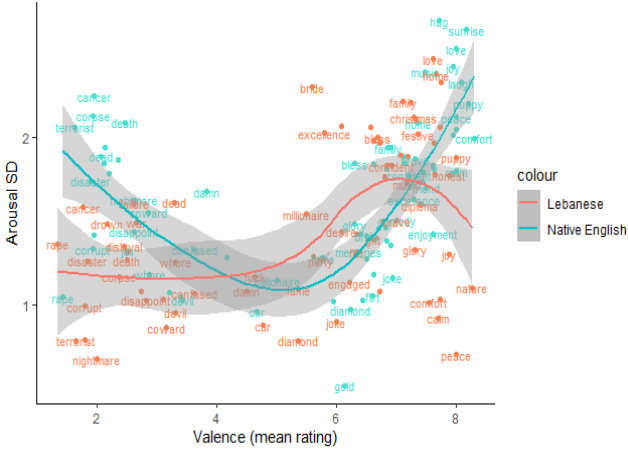
<u>References:</u>

Osgood, C. E., Suci, G. J., & Tannenbaum, P. H. (1957). *The measurement of meaning* (No. 47).
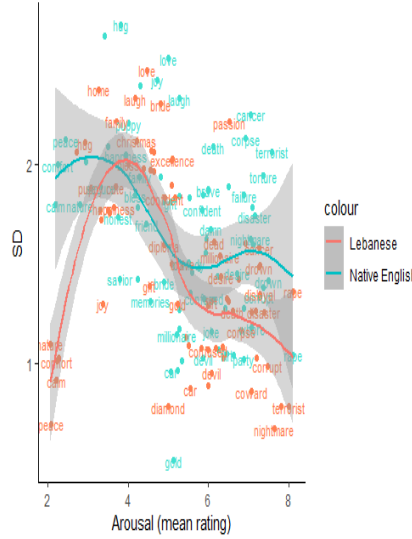
University of Illinois press.

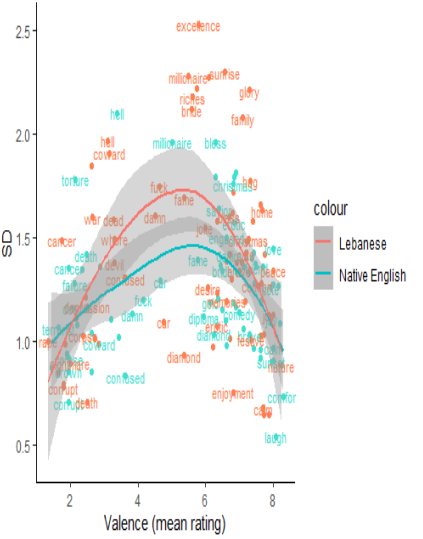Variance of Arousal ratings as a function of Valence

For Lebanese speakers of English, words at the tails of the valence spectrum are more consistently rated on Arousal levels than for NE speakers
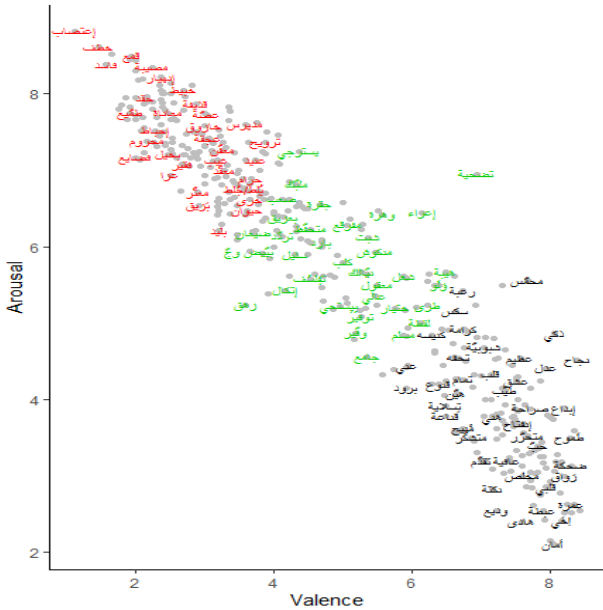

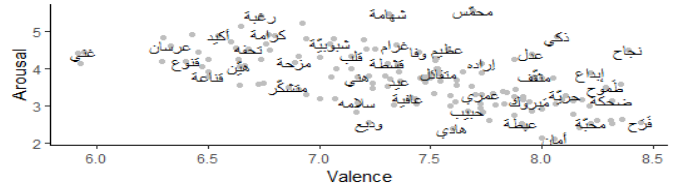Variance of mean Arousal ratings
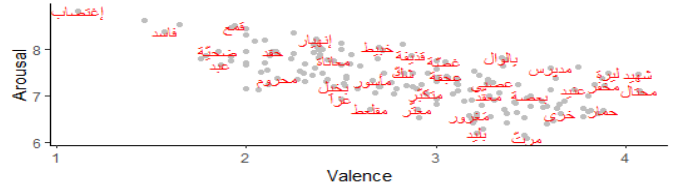

Variance of mean Valence ratings

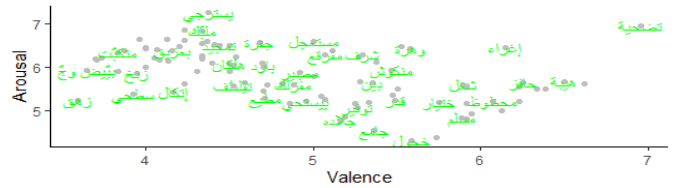Distribution of Words across Valence and Arousal levels

Cluster 1: High Valence, Low Arousal words

Cluster 2: Low Valence, High Arousal words

Cluster 3: Neutral Valence, Neutral Arousal words

About the Lebanese Linguistic Landscape:

Lebanon is a historically trilingual country wherein people use at least 2 languages in their daily lives in most respects: education, expression, social media, etc. Education in schools is either bilingual or trilingual, most higher education universities teach in either French or English, and work contexts rely on English or French especially in written communication. Arabic is furthermore diglossic and rife with prescriptivist scrutiny, where Lebanese Arabic is spoken but is still in its early written stages (with not even a consensus on its script yet), as opposed to the rarely spoken Modern Standard Arabic used for formal contexts, such as in legal texts or newspaper articles.

Typically, these languages are all acquired either simultaneously or before the age of 7 (qualifying for sequential bilingual classification).

There is heavy codeswitching between Arabic, English, and French in the society.
In many aspects, especially in education and media, English or French (the L2/L3) is the more prevalent language that is used rather than Lebanese Arabic (Although this is seeing recent changes since October 2019, with a rise in the use of Lebanese Arabic).

Briefly put, the Lebanese linguistic landscape is one where languages rely heavily upon each other and none is truly dominant over the other.

This invites questions as to how these languages exist and interact with the culture, how their use and perception might differ from each other, and more importantly, how their use differs from their use in their countries where the language is the mother tongue.