Linguistics and emotion

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evaluated. Variables like the temporal distance of the event, the salience of life transitions, and the vividness of the memory influence how information about one’s past is used.

Finally, people may bypass feature-based evaluation processes by drawing on their current affect as an indicator of their overall well-being (see AFFECT-AS-INFORMATION MODEL). This results in reports of higher satisfaction with one’s life as a whole (as well as any other object) under happy rather than sad *moods, unless people are aware that their current feelings are due to an irrelevant influence (like rainy weather or finding a dime).

Given these dynamics, it is not surprising that the relationship between objective conditions and reported life satisfaction is usually weak in cross-sectional surveys.

Correlates of life satisfaction

As one would expect from a judgement perspective, cross-national comparisons show that average life satisfaction is low in societies in which daily needs of food and shelter are not met or in which the material standard of living has undergone a pronounced recent downward change; under both conditions, material concerns are likely to be on people’s minds, resulting in the observed relationship. In contrast, gradual improvements in the material standard of living over time are less likely to capture attention and are not accompanied by increased life satisfaction in affluent societies. For example, the material standard of living in the United States and Japan improved profoundly since the 1950s, whereas life satisfaction remained flat (Easterlin 1974). Moreover, gradual improvements give rise to upward shifts in expectations and aspirations, which undermine favourable intrapersonal comparisons; similarly, the simultaneous improvement in the conditions of others implies that one’s relative position does not change, which undermines favourable interpersonal comparisons.

Within a society, the rich, well-educated, healthy, and married individuals report somewhat higher satisfaction than their less fortunate counterparts (for an overview see Argyle, 1999). However, the observed long-term impact of favourable as well as unfavourable circumstances and events is far more limited than lay intuition would suggest.

DANIEL KAHNEMAN AND NORBERT SCHWARZ


linguistics and emotion Although rarely posited as such in the main theories of emotion, language plays a crucial role in the conceptualization and expression of emotion (cf. Barrett 2006b, Fiedler 2008). Language is de facto an integral part of the affective sciences’ endeavour. For instance, much psychological research relies on free *self-report and the use of verbal labels for emotion. Some models explicitly state the importance of language in assessing emotional awareness (Lane and Schwartz 1987) or representing emotion (Norman 2004). Influential dimensional approaches (see DIMENSIONAL MODELS) derive their dimensions from the connotative structure of lexical items (Osgood et al. 1957). In addition, affective neuroscience investigates how emotional language primes cognitive processes (Kissler et al. 2006), and substantial evidence is available of the influence of language on the facial perception of emotion (Barrett et al. 2007a).

Given that linguistics as a discipline concerns itself with the study of language, its relevance for the affective sciences is apparent. In the following, some of its contributions will be discussed. First, we review some linguistic approaches to emotion, and then we discuss the extent to which linguistic findings have bearings for emotion theorizing itself.

The study of emotion in linguistics

Since affect pervades language (see LANGUAGE AND EMOTION), the linguistics of emotion comprises all levels of linguistic analysis (phonetic, morphological, syntactic, semantic, etc.) and a variety of methodological approaches (cognitive, anthropological, diachronic, comparative, etc.). This vast body of linguistic literature on emotion can be seen as instantiating two main research orientations: one concerned with conceptual/semantic representation and another with performance. Sweeping as it is, this differentiation accounts for both the research on emotion concepts (e.g. Johnson-Laird and Oatley 1989, Wierzbicka 1999) and the study of emotion talk as a socioculturally, age-, gender-, and personality-specific practice (e.g. Bamberg 1997, Weigand 2004). A comprehensive account of all these contributions exceeds the scope of this entry, but a few examples from different disciplines can briefly illustrate the field.

A straightforward case is (evaluative) morphology, where diminutive suffixes (like English -y in doggy) have been shown to communicate affection, while pejorative suffixes (like Spanish -acha in casucha, from casa ‘house’) convey contempt. Within syntax, the alteration of the canonical word order of a language motivates topicalization effects that can be related to affect (e.g. and he went out versus and out he went). Similarly, different grammatical configurations reflect greater or lesser degrees of agency, responsibility, or control in the construal of the emotion-eliciting event, and they can manipulate an audience’s affective response (e.g. a passive
construction like Baghdad was bombed last night, conceals the agency that would have been present in the active voice). In phonetics, sound symbolism has been found to interplay with affect. For example, back vowels, like the (a) sound in agh, are often found in words expressing disgust or dislike in English (e.g. blunder, dull, muck) (Jespersen 1922). Within discourse, research has been conducted on specific emotion communication patterns, like children’s narrative accounts of emotional situations (Bamberg 2001), or cultural varieties of mother–child emotion talk. Discourse analysis also studies the power of framing to invite inferences leading to specific cognitive-emotional responses. Within semantics, connotation is crucial in the study of linguistic affective expression (e.g. Pavlenko 2005) and affective response (as when we use euphemisms to manipulate aversion-acceptance in our interlocutors).

Another important area in semantics for the study of affect is figurative language (see metaphors). Beyond specific linguistic expressions, the study of ‘conceptual metaphors’ and metonymies (Lakoff 1989, Panther and Radden 1999) has gained popularity. These are basic cognitive phenomena underlying novel and conventionalized linguistic expressions, as well as gesture, ritual, art, and abstract reasoning at large. Many emotion concepts have been analysed cross-culturally using this approach (cf. Kövecses 2000). The concept of ‘emotion’ is metaphorically construal: an emotion is frequently represented as a person, an object, a force, or a location. These seem to be fairly universal conceptualizations, while different cultures specify in different manners what sorts of tokens instantiate those types, and what sorts of metaphors/metonymies are more salient. The use of metaphor seems to be universal, as is our resorting to physiological experience (either literal or metaphorically elaborated) to refer to emotional episodes (Wierzbicka 1999), which many scholars see as an instance of the conceptual metonymy the effects for the cause.

The most relevant area of semantics for emotion research is probably the study of emotion terms. The emotion vocabularies of the natural languages vary significantly in the way they categorize the emotional continuum. Quantitatively, the reported body of emotion terms of a language varies considerably both intra- and cross-culturally. For instance, the number of reported emotion terms in English fluctuates between 325 and 2000, depending on the criteria used to define ‘emotion term’. Somewhere in between is Taiwanese Chinese, reported to have 750 emotion lexemes, while some languages have extremely scarce emotion lexicons, like the two Ghanaian languages Fante and Dagbani, with 14 and 9 emotion terms, respectively (e.g. Dzokoto and Okazaki 2004). Qualitatively, a distinct line of research in lexical semantics has focused on culture-specific emotion terms that cannot be easily translated into other languages (see Cultural Specificity). This is the case of Russian sochvetstvie and sostradanie, Portuguese suavade, or German Angst and Schadenfreude (e.g. Wierzbicka 1999). Like the universalists from psychology, linguists in the quest for universal emotion terms have failed to arrive at a consensus list of basic emotions with respect to both their number and their phenomenological characteristics. Recent overviews of universals in semantics maintain that no lexical item in natural languages is universal in an absolute sense (von Fintel and Matthewson 2008), the very term ‘emotion’ being a cultural artefact of the English language.

Despite abundant lexical variation, not everything is culture-specific in the semantics of emotion. In response to the problem that English is used as tertium comparationis in most contrastive studies, an inventory of semantic universals has been proposed as metalanguage in the cross-linguistic description of emotion terms (e.g. Wierzbicka 1999). Additionally, nine putative linguistic emotional universals have been proposed, which include the mere existence of emotion terms, the possibility of evaluating emotions as good or bad, and the existence of emotive interjections and verbs similar to feel, smile or cry (Wierzbicka 1999, pp. 275–86). In spite of the cultural specificity of any emotion term, ‘anger-like’, ‘fear-like’, and ‘shame-like’ words are also stated to be universal (Wierzbicka 1999, pp. 286–94). This means that at least three superordinate semantic categories, as instantiated by the English terms anger, fear, and shame, are thought to be common to all languages, even if the specific configuration of each domain varies from language to language, or if other superordinate categories emerge to account for the emotional space.

Finally, recent dimensional studies on the semantics of emotion terms (Fontaine et al. 2007) have shown a considerable degree of overlap with dimensional studies of emotional experience, suggesting the existence of certain pan-cultural dimensions, such as pleasantness, potency, or arousal (also found in event-related potential studies; Chapman et al. 1978), capable of accounting for variation in the emotional domain.

**Emotion: the verbal and the conceptual**

A pertinent question at this point is whether linguistic descriptions like the above provide any insights into emotional cognition. Do semantic differences reflect conceptual differences? More generally, are semantic content and concepts the same?

The two most widespread traditions in linguistics nowadays would answer this question differently. Within the generativist school, linguistic representation and conceptual representation are independent and
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need not coincide. In this view, language is disembodied and modular, categories are discrete, subject to minimal and sufficient conditions, syntax is central, and its rules universal and innate.

Cognitive linguistics, on the contrary, advocates an embodied view of language, with scalar (i.e. continuous) categories and no hard-bound distinction between syntax and semantics. Linguistic meaning is seen as a form of conceptual representation largely governed by the same principles as nonlinguistic cognition (prototypicality effects, *gestalt or holistic perception, profile-base construal, basic-level categorization, etc.). Within this tradition, the way we talk about emotions reveals something about the way we mentally represent them. Semantic content is thought to be encyclopaedic (i.e. to encompass everything we know about the domain), and both embodied and socially construed. In this paradigm the distinction between semantic and conceptual representation fades.

If semantic representation is not independent of conceptual representation, the issue of whether linguistic categorization (1) merely reflects, (2) completely determines, or (3) partially influences conceptual representation still needs to be solved.

For (1) to be true, we would have to assume that the use of language is purely referential and language practices cannot change conceptual representation. However, considerable evidence is available nowadays suggesting the contrary (cf. Fiedler 2008). In the case of emotions, recent works acknowledge that emotion language plays a role in creating or transforming emotional experience, as opposed to merely representing it (Barrett 2006b, Barrett et al. 2007a). Besides, there is research in psychotherapy emphasizing the role of linguistic manipulation in construing new conceptual representations for people with disorders like depression (Caro 2001).

A position like (2) exemplifies a strong linguistic relativity stance: the idea that we can only think, and even perceive, according to the linguistic categories provided by our language, because they tap on the basic phenomenon of categorization ("We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language"); Whorf 1956, p. 213). This is frequently assumed to mean that we cannot think of entities for which we lack a 'name' (e.g. the concept behind the Portuguese emotion term *saúde*). However, all human beings are capable of feeling any emotional configuration, and they are also capable of expressing them verbally, either with a readily available lexical term or through other means (paraphrase, creative metaphor, analogy, etc.) (cf. von Fintel and Matthewson 2008).

A more moderate position is exemplified in (3): the potential for conceptual representation of emotion is likely to go beyond what salient categories language provides us with; but linguistic differences bias towards preferred, default ways of categorizing and processing emotional reality in a linguistic community.

Within this view there is space for both culture-specific and pan-cultural traits in emotion semantics. It is also highly compatible with a cognitive view of meaning. If emotion concepts are not organized according to sufficient and necessary conditions, but around a prototype, and they encompass world knowledge about the category, great variability is to be expected cross-culturally in the specific meaning structure of any given term. At the same time, the model predicts that the prototype of semantically close terms across cultures will share some features that are not sufficient to define each emotion (and maybe none of them is individually necessary to do so), but which render the basis for a superordinate category that makes it possible for us to ascribe emotional experiences to the same semantic 'foci'. Those semantic/conceptual foci can be said to be embodied if their features arise out of frequently activated emotion appraisal patterns relevant for humans as a species.

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literature and emotion Since stories were first written some 5000 years ago, emotions have been salient in them. For instance, the first phrase of the *Iliad*—which can be taken as the beginning of Greek literature—is 'Of rage sing, goddess'. The poet invokes the muse to sing of the anger of Achilles against the commander of the Greek army at Troy. Similarly, in the opening of the Bible: Eve and Adam eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and with the dawning of their consciousness they become self-consciously ashamed. Nor are emotions just the subject matter of stories. As readers, we would no more wish to read a short story, novel, play, or poem that did not move us emotionally (see BEING MOVED) than we would wish to read an empirical article that did not offer a validly drawn conclusion.

Worldwide, Hogan (2003) has shown that certain stories are universals, each based on a certain kind of emotion. Most common is the love story: two lovers long to be united, but their union is impeded. Such stories may have happy or unhappy endings. The second most common story worldwide is of anger. One prototype is of two brothers, one of whom is a rightful