Emotions Across Languages and Cultures: Diversity and Universals

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: feelings, languages, and cultures

1 Emotions or feelings?

According to the biologist Charles Birch (1995: ix), ''Feelings are what matter most in life''[1]. While it is debatable whether they really matter ''most'', they certainly matter a great deal; and it is good to see that after a long period of scholarly neglect, feelings are now at the forefront of interdisciplinary investigations, spanning the humanities, social sciences, and biological sciences.

Some would say: not ''feelings'', but ''emotions'' – and the question ''which of the two (feelings or emotions)?'' plunges us straight into the heart of the central controversy concerning the relationship between human biology on the one hand and language and culture on the other.

Many psychologists appear to be more comfortable with the term ''emotion'' than ''feeling'' because ''emotions'' seem to be somehow ''objective''. It is often assumed that only the ''objective'' is real and amenable to rigorous study, and that ''emotions'' have a biological foundation and can therefore be studied ''objectively'', whereas feelings cannot be studied at all. (Birch (1995: v) calls this attitude ''the flight from subjectivity''; see also Gaylin 1979).

Seventy years ago the founder of behaviourism John Watson proposed the following definition (quoted in Plutchik 1994: 3): ''An emotion is an hereditary 'pattern-reaction' involving profound changes of the bodily mechanisms as a whole, but particularly of the visceral and glandular systems''. While such purely behaviouristic conceptions of ''emotions'' have now been repudiated, ''emotions'' are still often seen as something that, for example, can be measured. Plutchik (1994: 139) himself writes: ''Because emotions are complex states of the organism involving feelings, behaviour, impulses, physiological changes and efforts at control, the measurement of emotions is also a complex process''.

Many anthropologists, too, prefer to talk about ''emotions'' rather than ''feelings'' – in their case not because of the former's ''objective'' biological foundation but because of their interpersonal, social basis. (See e.g. Lutz 1988; White 1993.)

But the word *emotion* is not as unproblematic as it seems; and by taking the notion of ''emotion'' as our starting point we may be committing ourselves, at the outset, to a perspective which is shaped by our own native language, or by the language currently predominant in some academic disciplines rather than taking a maximally ''neutral'' and culture-independent point of view. (Some will say, no doubt: ''nothing is neutral, nothing is culture-independent''. To avoid getting bogged down in this particular controversy at the outset, I repeat: *maximally* neutral, *maximally* culture-independent.)

The English word *emotion* combines in its meaning a reference to ''feeling'', a reference to ''thinking'', and a reference to a person's body. For example, one can talk about a ''feeling of hunger'', or a ''feeling of heartburn'', but not about an ''emotion of hunger'' or an ''emotion of heartburn'', because the feelings in question are not thought-related. One can also talk about a ''feeling of loneliness'' or a ''feeling of alienation'', but not an ''emotion of loneliness'' or an ''emotion of alienation'', because while these feelings are clearly related to thoughts (such as ''I am all alone'', ''I don't belong'' etc.), they do not suggest any associated bodily events or processes (such as rising blood pressure, a rush of blood to the head, tears, and so on).

In the anthropological literature on ''emotions'', ''feelings'' and ''body'' are often confused, and the word *feelings* is sometimes treated as interchangeable with the expression *bodily feelings*. In fact, some writers try to vindicate the importance of feelings for ''human emotions'' by arguing for the importance of the body. For example, Michelle Rosaldo (1984: 143) in her ground-breaking work on ''emotions'' has written, inter alia: ''Emotions are thoughts somehow 'felt' in flushes, pulses, 'movements' of our livers, minds, hearts, stomachs, skin. They are *embodied* thoughts, thoughts seeped with the apprehension that 'I am involved'''. Quoting this passage with approval, Leavitt (1996: 524) comments: ''This apprehension, then, is clearly not simply a cognition, judgment, or model, but is as bodily, as felt, as the stab of a pin or the stroke of a feather''. I agree with Rosaldo and Leavitt that some thoughts are linked with feelings and with bodily events, and that in all cultures people are aware of such links and interested in them (to a varying degree). But I do not agree that ''feelings'' equals ''bodily feelings''. For example, if one says that one feels ''abandoned'', or ''lost'', one is referring to a feeling without referring to anything that happens in the body. Precisely for this reason, one would normally not call such feelings ''emotions'', because the English word *emotion* requires a combination of all three elements (thoughts, feelings, and bodily events/processes).

In the hypothetical set of universal human concepts, evolved by the author and colleagues over many years' cross-linguistic investigations (see below, section 8), "feel" is indeed one of the elements, but "emotion" is not. If words such as *emotion* (or, for that matter, *sensation*) are taken for granted as analytical tools, and if their English-based character is not kept in mind, they can reify (for English speakers and English writers) inherently fluid phenomena which could be conceptualized and categorized in many different ways. Phrases such as "the psychology of emotion", or "psychobiological theory of emotion", or "operational definition of emotion" (such as galvanic skin response, GSR) create the impression that "emotion" is an objectively existing category, delimited from other categories by nature itself, and that the concept of "emotion" carves nature at its joints. But even languages culturally (as well as genetically) closely related to English provide evidence of different ways of conceptualizing and categorizing human experience.

For example, in ordinary German there is no word for "emotion" at all. The word usually used as the translation equivalent of the English *emotion*, *Gefühl* (from *fühlen* "to feel") makes no distinction between mental and physical feelings, although contemporary scientific German uses increasingly the word *Emotion*, borrowed from scientific English, while in older academic German the compound *Gemütsbewegung*, roughly "movement of the mind", was often used in a similar sense. (It is interesting to note, for example, that in the bilingual German–English editions of Ludwig Wittgenstein's writings, the word *emotion* used in the English translation stands for Wittgenstein's word *Gemütsbewegung*, not *Emotion*; see e.g. Wittgenstein 1967: 86.) At the same time, the plural form – *Gefühle* – is restricted to thought-related feelings, although – unlike the English *emotion* – it doesn't imply any "bodily disturbances" or processes of any kind. The same is true of Russian, where there is no word corresponding to *emotion*, and where the noun *čuvstvo* (from *čuvstvovat'* "to feel") corresponds to *feeling* whereas the plural form *čuvstva* suggests cognitively based feelings. To take a non-European example, Gerber (1985) notes that Samoan has no word corresponding to the English term *emotion* and relies, instead, on the notion of *lagona* "feeling" (see also Ochs 1986: 258). The French word *sentiment* (unlike the Russian *čuvstvo* and the German *Gefühl*) includes only two of these elements (a feeling and a thought). This is why one can speak in Russian of both a *čuvstvo styda* "a feeling of shame" and a *čuvstvo goloda* "a feeling of hunger", and in German of both a *Schamgefühl* and a *Hungergefühl*, whereas in French one can speak of a *sentiment de honte* (a "mental feeling" of shame) but not a *sentiment de faim* (a "mental feeling of hunger"); and also, why one can speak (in French) of *le sentiment de sa valeur* (a feeling of one's own worth) but not (in English) of the "emotion of one's own worth": one does not expect a feeling of one's own worth to be associated with any bodily events or processes. (As for the relations between the French word *émotion*, the Italian *emozione*, and the Spanish *emoción*, see Wierzbicka 1995c.)

Thus, while the concept of "feeling" is universal and can be safely used in the investigation of human experience and human nature[2] (see below, section 8; see also chapter 7), the concept of "emotion" is culture-bound and cannot be similarly relied on.

Of course scholars who debate the nature of "emotions" are interested in something other than just "feelings". In fact, the notion that "emotions" must not be reduced to "feelings" is one of the few ideas that advocates of different approaches to "emotion" (biological, cognitive, and socio-cultural) tend to strongly agree on (cf. e.g. Schachter and Singer 1962; Solomon 1984: 248; Lutz 1986: 295). Since, however, it is the concept of "feel" (rather than the concept of "emotion") which is universal and untinted by our own culture, it is preferable to take it as the starting point for any exploration of the area under consideration. This need not preclude us from investigating other phenomena at the same time. We can ask, for example: When people feel something, what happens in their bodies? What do they do? What do they think? What do they say? Do they think they know what they feel? Can they identify their feelings for themselves and others? Does their interpretation of what they feel depend on what they think they *should* feel, or on what they think people around them think they should feel? How are people's reported or presumed feelings related to what is thought of, in a given society, as "good" or "bad"? How are they related to social interaction? And so on.

Nothing illustrates the confusion surrounding the term *emotion* better than the combination of claims that emotions are not cognitively based with the practice of including in the category of "emotions" only those feelings which in fact *are* related to thoughts (and excluding those which are not). For example, Izard (1984: 24) explicitly states that "emotion has no cognitive component. I maintain that the emotion process is bounded by the feeling that derives *directly* from the activity of the neurochemical substrates". Yet as examples of "emotions" Izard mentions "shame", "anger", "sadness", and so on – not, for example, "pain", "hunger", "thirst", "itch", or "heartburn". In practice, then, Izard, too, distinguishes cognitively based (i.e. thought-related) feelings (such as "shame" or "sadness") from purely bodily feelings (such as "hunger" or "itch") and calls only the former "emotions". While denying that "emotions" are cognitively based he doesn't go so far as to include among them "hunger" or "thirst". On what basis, then, does he distinguish his "emotions" from hunger, thirst, or pain? The very meanings of words such as *shame*, *anger*, or *sadness* on the one hand, and *hunger* or *thirst* on the other draw a distinction between feelings based on thoughts and purely bodily feelings; and the word *emotion*, too, is in practice only used with respect to thought-related feelings, never with respect to bodily feelings such as hunger or thirst. Thus, in drawing a line between feelings such as "shame" or "sadness" on the one hand and "hunger" or "thirst" on the other, even "anti-cognitivist" scholars like Izard accept in practice the distinction drawn in everyday conceptions. Yet, at the same time, they reject this distinction at a theoretical level!

A hundred years after the publication of William James' famous paper "What is an emotion?" some scholars still argue about the "right" answer to James' question, instead of rephrasing the question itself. For example, Marks (1995: 3) writes: "What, then, is (an) emotion? The most obvious answer is 'A feeling'", and then he goes on to discuss "the apparent inadequacy of the feeling view of emotion", citing, among others, the philosopher Robert Solomon's celebrated statement that "an emotion *is* a judgement" (1976: 185). At the end, Marks rejects both the "feeling view of emotions" and what he calls "the New View of Emotions [as Judgement]" in favour of what he calls "an even Newer View . . . that emotions are not just things in the head but essentially involve culture" (p. 5).

But there is absolutely no reason why we should have to make such choices, linking "emotion" either with bodily processes, or with feelings, or with thoughts, or with culture. The very meaning of the English word *emotion* includes both a reference to feelings and a reference to thoughts (as well as a reference to the body), and culture often shapes both ways of thinking and ways of feeling. All these things can be and need to be studied: ways of thinking, ways of feeling, ways of living, the links between ways of living and ways of thinking, the links between thoughts and feelings, the links between what people feel and what happens inside their bodies, and so on. But to study all these, we need a clear and reliable conceptual framework, and the English word *emotion* cannot serve as the cornerstone of such a framework. It is good to see, therefore, that even within psychology the practice of taking the word *emotion* for granted is now increasingly being questioned. George Mandler, who first tried to draw attention to the problem more than twenty years ago (see Mandler 1975), has recently expressed surprise at the fact that "something as vague and intellectually slippery as emotion" could have been used for so long, by so many scholars, as a seemingly unproblematic notion (Mandler 1997: vii). Speaking specifically of what is often referred to as the "facial expression of emotions", Mandler (1997: xii) asks rhetorically: "Are *expression* and *emotion* even the right concepts, or has our everyday language frozen in place ideas that were only half-baked and prescientific?"

In a similar vein, Russell (1997: 19) writes: "'Emotion' is an ordinary, everyday word understood by all, rather than a precise concept honed through scientific analysis. Perhaps 'emotion' is a concept that could be dispensed with in scientific discourse (except as a folk concept requiring rather than providing explanation)". Referring, in particular, to the "facial expression of emotion", Russell (ibid.) concludes: "we have probably reached the point where further usefulness of thinking of facial expressions in terms of emotion requires a clarification of the concept of emotion itself". (Cf. also Ginsburg 1997.) As many writers on "emotion" have begun to agree, the point can be generalized: progress of research into "human emotions" requires clarification of the concept of "emotion" itself. For example, Lisa Feldman-Barrett (1998: v) in her recent article entitled "The future of emotion research" notes that "there is still little consensus on what emotion is or is not", and states: "The future of affective science will be determined by our ability to establish the fundamental nature of what we are studying".

But calls for clarification and explanation of the concept of "emotion" raise some crucial methodological questions. To explain the concept of "emotion" (or any other concept) we have to render it in terms of some other concepts, and our proposed explanations will only be clear if those other concepts are themselves clear; if they are not, they, in turn, will also need to be explained, and this can involve us in infinite regress. It is essential, therefore, that our explanation of "emotion" be couched in terms which are not equally problematic and obscure. If we do not anchor our explanations in something that is self-explanatory, or at least more self-explanatory than the concept we are trying to explain, they can only be pseudo-explanations (as "explanations" in scholarly literature often are). To quote Leibniz:

> If nothing could be understood in itself nothing at all could ever be understood. Because what can only be understood via something else can be understood only to the extent to which that other thing can be understood, and so on; accordingly, we can say that we have understood something only when we have broken it down into parts which can be understood in themselves. (Couturat 1903: 430; my translation)

This basic point, which in modern times has often been lost sight of, was made repeatedly in the writings on language by the great French thinkers of the seventeenth century such as Descartes, Pascal, and Arnauld. For example, Descartes wrote:

> I declare that there are certain things which we render more obscure by trying to define them, because, since they are very simple and clear, we cannot know and perceive them better than by themselves. Nay, we must place in the number of those chief errors that can be commit-

> ted in the sciences, the mistakes committed by those who would try to define what ought only to be conceived, and who cannot distinguish the clear from the obscure, nor discriminate between what, in order to be known, requires and deserves to be defined, from what can be best known by itself. (1931[1701]: 324)

In my 1996 book *Semantics: Primes and Universals* I illustrated this point with a recent discussion of the concept IF by two prominent researchers into child language who start by saying that "it is difficult to provide a precise definition of the word *if*", and at the end conclude that "The fundamental meaning of *if*, in both logic and ordinary language, is one of implication" (French and Nelson 1985: 38). These statements reflect two common assumptions: first, that it is possible to define all words – including *if*; and second, that if a word seems difficult to define, one can always reach for a scientific-sounding word of Latin origin (such as *implication)* to "define" it with. These assumptions are not merely false; jointly, they constitute a major stumbling block for the semantic analysis of any domain. One cannot define all words, because the very idea of "defining" implies that there is not only something to be defined but also something to define it with.

What applies to *if* and *implication*, applies also to *feel* and *emotion*: one can define *implication* via *if*, and *emotion* via *feel*, but not the other way around, as was attempted, for example, in the following explanation: "'feeling' is our subjective awareness of our own emotional state" (Gaylin 1979: 2). If someone doesn't know what *feel* means then they wouldn't know what an *emotional state* means either.

2 Breaking the "hermeneutical circle"

There are of course many scholars who claim that nothing is truly self-explanatory and who appear to accept and even to rejoice in the idea that there is no way out of "the hermeneutic circle". Charles Taylor (1979[1971]: 34) applied this idea specifically to emotions when he wrote:

> The vocabulary defining meaning – words like "terrifying", "attractive" – is linked with that describing feeling – "fear", "desire" – and that describing goals – "safety", "possession".
>
> Moreover, our understanding of these terms moves inescapably in a hermeneutical circle. An emotion term like "shame", for instance, essentially refers us to a certain kind of situation, the "shameful", or "humiliating" . . . But this situation in its turn can only be identified in relation to the feelings which it provokes . . . We have to be within the circle.
>
> An emotion term like "shame" can only be explained by reference to other concepts which in turn cannot be understood without

> reference to shame. To understand these concepts we have to be in on a certain experience, we have to understand a certain language, not just of words, but also a certain language of mutual action and communication, by which we blame, exhort, admire, esteem each other. In the end we are in on this because we grow up in the ambit of certain common meanings. But we can often experience what it is like to be on the outside when we encounter the feeling, action and experiential meaning language of another civilization. Here there is no translation, no way of explaining in other, more accessible concepts. We can only catch on by getting somehow into their way of life, if only in imagination.

There is an important truth in what Taylor is saying here, but it is a partial truth, and it is distorted by being presented as the whole truth. It is true that there are "communities of meaning" sharing the familiarity with certain common meanings, such as, for example, the meaning of the Russian words *toska* (roughly, "melancholy-cum-yearning") or *žalet'* (roughly, "to lovingly pity someone"; for detailed discussion, see Wierzbicka 1992a), or the Ifaluk concept *fago* (roughly, "sadness / compassion / love", cf. Lutz 1995). It is also true that verbal explanations of such concepts cannot replace experiential familiarity with them and with their functioning within the local "stream of life" (to use Wittgenstein's phrase; cf. Malcolm 1966: 93). But it is not true that no verbal explanations illuminating to outsiders are possible at all.

The crucial point is that while most concepts (including *toska*, *žalet'*, *fago*, *shame*, *emotion*, *implication*) are complex (decomposable) and culture-specific, others are simple (non-decomposable) and universal (e.g. FEEL, WANT, KNOW, THINK, SAY, DO, HAPPEN, IF); and that the former can be explained in terms of the latter. For example, while there is no word in English matching the Russian word *toska*, one can still explain to a native speaker of English what *toska* means, relying on concepts shared by these two languages (as well as all other languages of the world): it is how one feels when one wants some things to happen and knows that they cannot happen (for detailed discussion, see Wierzbicka 1992a).[3] Crucially, this (simplified) definition can be translated word for word into Russian, and tested with "ordinary" native speakers.

Shared, universal concepts such as FEEL, WANT, KNOW, THINK, SAY, DO, HAPPEN, and IF (in Russian ČUVSTVOVAT', XOTET', ZNAT', DUMAT', SKAZAT', SDELAT', SLUČIT'SJA, ESLI) constitute the bedrock of intercultural understanding. These concepts are the stepping stones by which we can escape the "hermeneutical circle".

Needless to say, not everything worth knowing can be explained in words. But as Wittgenstein (1988[1922]: 27) put it, "what can be said at all can be said clearly". And even if someone wished to insist that concepts such as FEEL, WANT, SAY, THINK, DO, or IF are not entirely clear to them either, they would have to admit that they are clearer and more intelligible than *emotion*, *sensation*, *volition*, *locution*, *cognition*, *agency*, or *implication*. And it is indisputably more intelligible to say, for example, that "I want to do something and can't do it" than to say that I experience "a lack of goal conductiveness" (cf. chapter 4).

This doesn't mean that complex and technical words should always be *replaced* by simple and easily comprehensible ones. For example, Izard (1977, 1991) may have good reasons for describing "emotions" as "consisting of neuro-physiological, behavioural, and subjective components" (cf. Russell and Fernández-Dols 1997a: 19) rather than in terms of "feeling something, doing something, and having something happen inside one's body". But complex and technical concepts such as "neuro-physiological", "behavioural", and "subjective" have to be introduced and explained, at some stage, via intuitively intelligible concepts such as "body", "happen", "do", and "feel", rather than the other way around.

Generally speaking, scientific discourse – and in particular scientific discourse about "human emotions", "human subjectivity", "human emotional experience", or "human communication" – has to build on ordinary discourse, and on words intelligible to those ordinary mortals whose "subjectivity" it seeks to investigate and explain.

Emotion shouldn't be taken for granted in scientific discourse, not so much because it is "an ordinary, everyday word understood by all" (and not "a precise concept honed through scientific analysis") but rather because it is a fairly complex and culture-specific word which does require explanation. It is not "understood by all" because, as mentioned earlier, it doesn't have exact equivalents in other languages (not even in other European languages such as German, Russian, or French); and it is not "understood by all" because children have to learn it on the basis of a prior understanding of words such as *feel*, *think*, *know*, *want*, and *body*.

One can imagine a child asking an adult: "What does the word *emotion* mean?" or "What does the word *sensation* mean?" but not "What does the word *feel* mean?" or "What does the word *want* mean?" And the answer to the questions about the meanings of *emotion* and *sensation* would have to be based on the concept "feel". For example, one might say to the child: "*Sensation* means that you feel something in some part of your body, e.g. you feel cold or itchy, and *emotion* means that you feel sad, or happy, or angry – something to do with what you think".

"Precise concepts honed through scientific analysis" are of course necessary, too; but to have any explanatory power they have to build on simple and intuitively clear concepts such as FEEL and WANT, which a child picks up in social interaction *before* any verbal explanations can be offered and understood.

Scientific discourse about "humans" can have an explanatory value only if it can address questions which arise on the basis of people's fundamental conceptual models, models which cannot be reduced to anything else. Semantic investigations into English and a great many other languages suggest that "ordinary people" conceive of a human individual as someone who can think, feel, want, and know something; and who can also say things and do things. The universal availability of words expressing precisely these concepts (e.g., not "believe" but "think"; not "intention" or "volition" but "want"; not "emotion", "sensation", or "experience", but "feel") allows us to say that these particular concepts (THINK, KNOW, FEEL, WANT, SAY, and DO) represent different and irreducible aspects of a universal "folk model of a person" (cf. Bruner 1990; D'Andrade 1987).

Complex and language-specific notions such as, for example, *belief*, *intention*, *emotion*, *sensation*, or *mood* have to be defined on the basis of those fundamental, universal, and presumably innate "indefinables". Even concepts as central to the traditional scientific pursuits carried out through the medium of the English language as "mind" have to be acknowledged for what they are – cultural artifacts of one particular language and tradition, no more scientifically valid than the German *Geist*, the Russian *duša*, or the Samoan *loto* (cf. Wierzbicka 1992a and 1993a; Mandler 1975). All such concepts can of course be retained in scientific discourse if they are found to be useful – but they can only be truly useful if they are previously anchored in something more fundamental and more self-explanatory (also to children, and to speakers of other languages).

3 "Experience-near" and "experience-distant" concepts

The distinction between "experience-near" and "experience-distant" concepts was introduced into human sciences by Clifford Geertz (1984[1976]: 227–8) (who credited it to the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut). To quote:

> An experience-near concept is, roughly, one which an individual – a patient, a subject, in our case an informant – might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he and his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly applied by others. An experience-distant concept is one which various types of specialist – an analyst, an experimenter, an ethnographer, even a priest or an ideologist – employ to forward their scientific, philosophical, or practical aims. "Love" is an experience-near concept; "object cathesis" is an experience-distant one.

As Geertz (ibid.) points out, the distinction is not absolute but a matter of degree; for example, "'fear' is experience-nearer than 'phobia', and 'phobia' experience-nearer than 'ego-dissontic'".

On the face of it, it would seem obvious that "experience-near" concepts like "love" or "fear" throw more light on human "emotional" experience than "experience-distant" ones like "object cathexis" or "ego-dissontic". But the catch is that experience-near concepts like "love" and "fear" are language-specific and so cannot give us a handle on human experience in general. To quote Geertz (1984[1976]: 124) again:

> Confinement to experience-near concepts leaves an ethnographer awash in immediacies as well as entangled in vernacular. Confinement to experience-distant ones leaves him stranded in abstractions and smothered in jargon. The real question . . . is what roles the two kinds of concepts play in anthropological analysis. To be more exact: How, in each case, should they be deployed so as to produce an interpretation of the way a people live which is neither imprisoned within their mental horizons, an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a witch, nor systematically deaf to the distinctive tonalities of witchcraft as written by a geometer?

Fortunately, it is not the case that *all* experience-near concepts are language-specific and that their use has to "entangle us in the vernacular". For example, concepts like FEEL, WANT, and THINK are experience-near (unlike *affect*, *volition*, or *cognition*), and yet using them in our explanations or definitions we do not get "entangled in the vernacular", because "lexical exponents" of these concepts can be readily found in every language.

Thus, we are not forced to choose in our discussions of "human emotions" between, on the one hand, experience-near but language-specific concepts such as the Russian *toska*, the Ifaluk *fago*, the German *Schadenfreude*, or the English *embarrassment* (see chapter 2, section 6) and on the other, language-independent but experience-distant expressions such as "object cathexis" or "ego-dissontic". By explaining concepts like *toska*, *fago*, *Schadenfreude*, or *embarrassment* in terms of universal concepts such as FEEL, THINK, WANT, and HAPPEN (as illustrated earlier) we can have our cake and eat it too, for concepts of this kind are both experience-near and readily translatable into any other language (as are also their combinations like the one illustrated in the definition of *toska*).

What applies to particular "emotion concepts" such as *toska*, *Schadenfreude*, or *embarrassment*, applies also to the concept of *emotion* in general. While *emotion* is not as experience-distant as its more technical (and somewhat dated) substitute *affect*, it is not as experience-near as *feel*. At the same time, it is not the experience-near concept *feel* which would entangle us in the idiosyncrasies of the English vernacular, but the (relatively) experience-distant concept *emotion*. As Russell (1997: 19) has put it, *emotion* is a ''folk concept requiring rather than providing explanations''; and to be truly explanatory, our explanation of this concept has to be phrased in terms of concepts which themselves do not require any further explanation (because there is nothing simpler or clearer to explain them with).

In this book I will, nonetheless, use the word *emotion* (generally either in italics or in inverted commas), because the book is written in English and *emotion* is an important and convenient English word; I will not, however, *rely* on this word and treat it as an unproblematic analytical tool; and I will be using it as an abbreviation for, roughly speaking, ''feelings based on thoughts''. On the other hand, I *will* use as unproblematic analytical tools words like *feel, want*, and *happen* (in their basic and indefinable meanings), which stand for concepts that are both experience-near and – as linguistic evidence suggests – universal.

4 Describing feelings through prototypes

In literature, feelings are frequently described by means of comparisons: the hero felt as a person might feel in the following situation (description follows). Some examples from Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* (for more detailed discussion see Wierzbicka 1973; the quotes below are from Louise and Aylmer Maude's translation, see Tolstoy 1970[1918]):

> [At the station, Vronsky, who is in love with Anna, catches sight of Anna's husband]
> Vronsky . . . had such a disagreeable sensation as a man tortured by thirst might feel on reaching a spring and finding a dog, sheep, or pig in it, drinking the water and making it muddy. (p. 97)
>
> He [Anna's husband] now felt like a man who on coming home finds his house locked against him. ''But perhaps the key can still be found'', thought Karenin. (p. 132)
>
> [Anna has finally left her husband]
> He felt like a man who has just had a tooth drawn which has been hurting him a long time. (p. 254)

The same mode of description is also often used in everyday discourse, as well as in popular songs and other similar texts. A simple example comes from a blues song: ''I feel like a motherless child''. Much could of course be written about ''what it means to feel like a motherless child'', but the expression ''I feel like . . . '' itself cannot be defined or explained any further: it is as simple and clear as anything can be. There is no point in trying to define or explain the meaning of ''I'', ''feel'', ''like'', or the combination ''I feel like (this)''. The understanding of the whole line depends not only on the assumption that one knows (or can imagine) how ''motherless children'' feel, but also that the meaning of the expression ''I feel like (this)'' is intuitively clear.

But while ''feeling'' cannot be defined, ''ordinary people'' generally assume that the way one feels *can* be described and that one *can* tell other people how one feels. There are many ways of describing to other people how one feels but most of them can be reduced to two basic modes (a third mode will be discussed later): (1) one can tell other people that one ''feels good'' or that one ''feels bad'', and (2) one can tell other people that one feels like a person feels in a certain situation and then identify, in one way or another, that prototypical situation. If I tell someone that I ''feel wonderful'', or that I ''feel awful'', I am following the first mode of describing feelings. If I tell them that I ''feel like a motherless child'', or that I ''feel lost'', or that I ''feel abandoned'', I am following the second mode.

In addition to ''feeling good'', ''feeling bad'', and ''feeling like this'' (with some reference point for ''this'' provided) other ways of describing ''how I feel'' are of course also open to us: one can say, for example, that one ''feels sad'' or ''feels angry''; and also, that one ''feels hungry'', ''feels hot'', ''feels itchy'', ''feels tired'', or ''feels sleepy''. But ready-made labels for describing feelings are usually based on the same two basic modes.

For example, the expression ''to feel hungry'' is a conventional abbreviation (encoded as such in the English language) for saying, roughly speaking, that one feels like a person does if he or she hasn't eaten anything for a long time and wants to eat something because of that. Using a standardized (but still intuitively intelligible) mode of semantic representation, we can portray the meaning of expressions like ''feel hungry'' as follows:

I felt hungry. =
I felt something
    sometimes a person doesn't eat anything for a long time
    afterwards this person feels something bad because of this
    this person wants to eat something
I felt like this

I felt tired. =
I felt something
    sometimes a person does many things for a long time

afterwards this person feels something bad because of this
this person doesn't want to do anything for some time
I felt like this

I felt sleepy. =
I felt something
sometimes a person doesn't sleep for a long time
afterwards this person feels something because of this
this person wants to sleep
I felt like this

Descriptive labels like *sad*, *angry*, *afraid*, or *guilty* differ, of course, from those like *hungry*, *tired*, or *sleepy* in some important respects (to be discussed below), but they, too, rely on the two basic modes of describing feelings, that is, the ''feel good/bad'' mode, and the ''feel like this'' mode. For example, to ''feel guilty'' means, roughly, to ''feel bad, like a person does who thinks: I have done something (bad), something bad happened because of this''. Using, again, the standardized mode of semantic description we could represent this as follows:

I felt guilty. =
I felt something because I thought something
sometimes a person thinks:
''I did something
something bad happened because of this''
because this person thinks this, this person feels something bad
I felt (something) like this because I thought something like this

I felt afraid. =
I felt something because I thought something
sometimes a person thinks:
''something bad can happen to me now
I don't want this to happen
because of this I want to do something
I don't know what I can do''
because this person thinks this, this person feels something bad
I felt (something) like this because I thought something like this

As these formulae illustrate, expressions like *feel guilty* or *feel afraid* can be defined via a ''prototype'', describing, in very general terms, a kind of situation (or a ''scenario''), associated in people's minds with a recognizable kind of feeling.[4]

The main difference between words like *guilty* and *afraid* on the one hand and words like *hungry* or *sleepy* on the other has to do, roughly speaking, with the "cognitive" character of the former and the "non-cognitive" character of the latter. What this means is that the prototypical scenario serving as a reference point for the phrase "feel like this" (e.g. in "I felt like this") is formulated in the case of words like *guilty* or *afraid* in terms of somebody's thoughts ("sometimes a person thinks: . . ."), whereas in the case of words like *hungry*, *sleepy*, or *tired* there is no reference to thoughts. (Cf. Wittgenstein (1967: 88e): "A thought rouses emotions [*Gemütsbewegungen*] in me (fear, sorrow etc.), not bodily pain".) In addition, in the case of *hungry* or *sleepy* (but not *tired*) there are also references to somebody's body (implicit in the meaning of the words *eat* and *sleep*).

The very fact that besides words with bodily references like *hungry* and *sleepy* and words with references to thoughts such as *afraid* or *guilty* there are also words like *tired*, which refer neither to the body nor to thoughts but which nonetheless do refer to a kind of feeling, highlights the futility of attempts (cf. e.g. Coulter 1986) to ascribe two different meanings to *feel*, a physical one (as in *hungry*) and a mental one (as in *guilty*): *tired* is neither necessarily "physical" nor necessarily "mental", yet it does imply that one "feels" something (in the basic and undifferentiated sense of the word *feel*, which we find in every language).

The distinction between "thought-based" feelings and other kinds of feelings is of course a valid and an important one. It has to be recognized, however, that this distinction is based not on two allegedly different meanings of the word *feel* (or its equivalents in other languages) but on the kind of prototypical scenario implied by a given "feeling word": some words, e.g. *afraid* and *guilty* in English, imply a thought-related scenario, whereas others, e.g., *hungry* and *tired* in English, imply a scenario not based on thoughts; and *hungry*, though not *tired*, implies, in addition, a scenario related specifically to a person's body.

As I will discuss in detail in chapter 7, the remarkable facts are that, first, all languages have a general, undifferentiated word for FEEL (covering both thought-related and not-thought-related kinds of feelings), and that, second, all languages have some words for some particular kinds of thought-related feelings (e.g. *afraid* and *guilty* in English and *toska* in Russian). The meanings of such words are language-specific and, generally speaking, do not match across languages and cultures. Every language, however, has lexically encoded some scenarios involving both thoughts and feelings and serving as a reference point for the identification of what the speakers of this language see as distinct kinds of feelings. For example, Russian has no word for *guilt*,[5] and of course English has no word for *toska*; but both *guilt* and *toska* identify what the speakers of the language see as a specific kind of feeling, associated with an identifiable cognitive scenario.

Since the cognitive scenarios linked with *guilty* and *toska* can be stated in the same, universal human concepts (such as FEEL, WANT, BAD, DO, and so on), these scenarios can be understood by cultural outsiders, and the kinds of feeling associated with them can be identified, explained, and compared; and both the similarities and differences between scenarios lexicalized in different languages can be pinpointed. But the very possibility of comparisons rests on the availability of a universal *tertium comparationis*, provided by universal concepts like FEEL, WANT, BAD, GOOD, or DO, and universally available configurations of concepts such as, for example, ''I feel like this''.

Importantly, the same *tertium comparationis* can also be used for comparing feelings described in a third mode available in many languages and cultures, linking thought-related feelings and ''felt'' bodily processes. This mode can be illustrated with Charlotte Brontë's (1971[1847]: 14) description of what happened to Jane Eyre when she was locked in a room believed to be haunted and when she saw a beam of light that she thought was a ghost:

> My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings; something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated; endurance broke down; I rushed to the door and shook the lock in desperate effort.

Gaylin (1979: 47), who quotes this description, seems to have no doubt that there is an accurate label to describe it: ''it is horror that she is experiencing'', but even if Jane's thought-related feelings can indeed be loosely described as ''horror'' (for a detailed analysis of ''horror'' and related concepts see chapter 2) the passage implies also that those thought-related feelings were associated with some bodily events, and that these bodily events could be felt, too (as we feel, for example, our movements; cf. Wittgenstein 1967: 85e). Schematically (the first person reflects Jane's point of view):

(a) I felt something because I thought something
(b) when I felt this some things were happening inside my body
(c) I could feel these things happening

Since the bodily feelings in component (c) co-occur with the thought-related ones, the two can be perceived by the experiencer as a global experience and the description of the bodily events may be used as a way of characterizing one's state of mind.

It is possible, and indeed likely, that such a "global" way of describing a person's thought-related feelings is used (to a varying degree) in all cultures. But it is of course not the only way, and not necessarily the dominant one. (For another major mode of describing feelings, based on "bodily images" such as "heart-broken", "blood-boiling", or "a heavy heart", see chapter 7.)

5. "Emotions": disruptive episodes or vital forces that mould our lives?

There is a tradition within Anglo academic psychology which tends to be hostile to "emotions". Fehr and Russell (1984: 473) have illustrated this culture-specific attitude with the following characteristic sentences from an English-language introductory psychology textbook:

> A state of emotion is recognized by its holder as a departure from his or her normal state of composure; at the same time there are physical changes that can be detected objectively.
>
> When sufficiently intense, emotion can seriously impair the processes that control organized behavior.
>
> Sometimes emotion is hard to control.
>
> Emotion accompanies motivated behavior; the effect can be facilitating or interfering.

Sentences of this kind, seemingly objective and scientific, are in fact loaded with unconscious cultural assumptions and saturated with the values of a powerful stream within Anglo-American culture (arguably, the dominant stream), and reading them it is hard not to think of Catherine Lutz's (1988) provocative title "Ethnopsychology compared to what?" The basic assumption is that a person's "normal state" is a state of "composure", and that an emotion constitutes a departure from a "normal state".

It would be difficult, however, to find evidence for such assumptions in, for example, mainstream Russian, Italian, or German culture. Similar *attitudes* could no doubt be found anywhere, but the cultural premiss taking such attitudes for granted and treating them as background assumptions, is culture-specific, and, as I will illustrate below, it is reflected in the English language. On the other hand, there is ample evidence showing that, for example, from the point of view of traditional Russian culture, states such as "joy", "worry", "sadness", "sorrow", "grief", "delight", and so on constitute most people's normal state, and that an absence of ''emotions'' would be seen as indicating a deadening of a person's *duša* (''heart/soul''). In fact, experiences comparable to ''joy'', ''sadness'', or ''anger'' are often conceptualized in Russian as inner activities in which one engages rather than as states which one passively undergoes, and so they are often designated by verbs rather than adjectives. Some examples: *radovat'sja* ''to rejoice'' (in English archaic), *grustit'* (from *grust'*, roughly ''sadness''), *toskovat'* (from *toska* ''melancholy-cum-longing''), *serdit'sja* (roughly, ''to be angry'', but a verb, like *to rage* in English), *stydit'sja* (roughly ''to be ashamed''), and so on (for detailed discussion see Wierzbicka 1992a and 1995a). The cultural ideal of ''composure'' as a person's ''normal state'' is alien to mainstream Russian culture (cf. Wierzbicka 1989, 1990a, and 1992a and the references cited there; see also chapter 5).

It is also interesting to compare the characteristic ''Anglo'' attitude to ''emotions'' reflected in the sentences quoted from the psychology textbooks with that reflected, for example, in Goethe's reference to ''glorious feelings'':

> Die uns das Leben gaben, herrliche Gefühle
> Erstarren in dem irdischen Gewühle.
>
> The fine emotions whence our lives we mold
> Lie in the earthly tumult dumb and cold.
> (Faust, Pt.1, sc.1, 1.286, quoted in Stevenson 1949: 661)

From Goethe's point of view, *herrliche Gefühle* (''glorious feelings'') are not something that has to be controlled or something that threatens to impair, or interfere with, ''organized behavior''; rather, they are positive forces that ''give us life''.

Of course ''Anglo'' culture in general, and ''Anglo emotionology'' in particular, is heterogeneous and changeable (cf. e.g. P. Stearns 1994; Stearns and Stearns 1986), and in any case, individual scholars are free to side with Goethe rather than with the psychology textbooks quoted above, as the following passage written by (the American philosopher) Robert Solomon (1995: 257) illustrates: ''Emotions are not just disruptions of our otherwise calm and reasonable experience; they are at the very heart of that experience, determining our focus, influencing our interests, defining the dimensions of our world . . . Emotions . . . lie at the very heart of ethics, determining our values, focusing our vision, influencing our every judgement, giving meaning to our lives.'' But in any culture, in any epoch, the prevailing ''emotionology'' finds its reflection in language, and any counter-emotionology must define itself with reference to the prevailing one (cf. e.g. Lutz 1990). For example, while feminist thought in America has challenged the dominant Anglo attitudes to feelings and sought to place more value on them, it has had to define itself with reference to those traditional attitudes; and, moreover, it is easier to challenge overt ideologies than the implicit ones which have found their reflection even in some terms of everyday discourse, and have become imperceptible (as the air we breathe).

For example, there is a certain unconscious "ideology" written into the English word *emotional* – an "ideology" which assumes that showing feelings over which one has no control is a departure from "normal" behaviour. The word has pejorative overtones, and even when it is used in a "tolerant" tone it still implies that there is something there, in the "emotional outburst", which needs to be excused (the loss of "control" over one's feelings and over their display). There are no words analogous to *emotional* in German, French, Italian, or Russian. An individual speaker of English may feel out of sympathy with the perspective reflected in this word and may not use it herself, but she cannot erase it at will from the English lexicon.

The perspective on feelings and their manifestation which is reflected in psychology textbook phrases like "departure from the normal state of composure" is also reflected, in a more subtle way, in the ordinary English word *upset*, which, unlike *sad*, doesn't have equivalents in other European languages. The hidden metaphor of an "upset" position of normal equilibrium (as in an upset vase) is highly suggestive: it implies that the "bad feeling", over which the experiencer has no control, is viewed as a temporary departure from a "normal" state. To quote Gaylin (1979: 175):

> The central image in the feeling of upset is one of disorder and disarray. The synonyms for feeling upset all include a sense of confusion, and an interruption of the normal control and orderliness of life . . . We tend to feel upset when we have a sense that our normal orderly control over our lives is threatened. The feeling of upset suggests a thinness of our defense mechanisms, so that we perceive ourselves as particularly vulnerable to a shake-up, an explosion, or an eruption of emotion. Whatever initiated the feeling of being at sixes and sevens, the risk perceived is not from the original stimulus but from our sense that we are losing control.

Gaylin's comments are perceptive, and yet he misses one important point: that the very idea of "feeling upset" is a cultural creation, and that the central concern with "losing control" reflects preoccupations which are anything but universal. The point is all the more instructive in that the main thrust of Gaylin's book is anti-behaviourist, denouncing the widespread preoccupation with "the orderly charts, statistics, and physiological measurements that have come to represent the academic world of emotion" (p. 425).[6]