

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03260-5 - Landscapes of Emotion: Mapping Three Cultures of Emotion in Indonesia

Karl G. Heider

Excerpt

[More information](#)

PART I

Theory, method, and results

1. Theoretical introduction

1.1. The orienting question

How does culture influence emotion? Obviously, different languages have different words for emotions. But beyond that, how much of emotion behavior is culturally variable? How much overlap is there between, say, Americans' "anger" and Indonesians' *marah*? To answer this raises a whole range of questions about how different people talk, think, feel, and show emotions. For example, can we say that the size of the emotion vocabulary varies from culture to culture? Do emotion words cluster differently in different cultures? Are there culturally unique emotions? Are there emotions emphasized by some cultures and neglected by others? How much do causes of emotions vary, and how different are the outcomes of emotions? Are different facial expressions used for the same emotion in different cultures, and why?

Are those cultural differences merely exotic curiosities or can they be systematically related to other aspects of culture? The task of the anthropologist examining emotion is to look for differences: to identify and to account for culturally variable emotion behavior that takes place against the pan-cultural background.

This volume examines three sets of emotion terms, first mapping out each set to depict the landscapes of emotion. Then it explores the meanings of these maps to describe the cultures of emotion. Each is from Indonesia: One is Minangkabau, one is Minangkabau Indonesian, and the third is Javanese Indonesian.

This project on the ethnography of emotion in Indonesia, designed as a comprehensive approach to the entire realm of emotion, grew directly out of research I began twenty-five years ago with the Grand Valley Dani of Irian Jaya (West New Guinea). That work began with stone adzes and arrow types and eventually led to emotion and sexuality. But emotion and sexuality were at first just peripheral afterthoughts, and they emerged as research problems quite late in the game.

4 1. *Theoretical introduction*

Now I am attacking emotion head-on in a broad, comprehensive study. For many reasons I have shifted the locus of the research to the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, Indonesia (not the least of these reasons is that Irian Jaya has been closed to ethnographic research).

For the study of emotion, the Minangkabau seemed a good starting point. They are considered more coarse, or emotionally open, than Javanese. Most Minangkabau are comfortably bilingual in their regional language, Minangkabau, and the national language, Indonesian. This, as will soon become apparent, affords an important opportunity to examine emotion in two different languages that are used by the same people.

Here I treat Minangkabau as a single culture. It would have been possible to make comparisons within Minangkabau, for there are well-recognized linguistic and cultural differences among the different areas of the Minangkabau region in West Sumatra (see, for example, Anwar 1980a, b). But this would have been unnecessarily fine-grained for a first study. On the other hand, it would be possible to study "Indonesians" by lumping together people from the different ethnic groups in the country, as Brandt and Boucher (1986) did. But that strategy would limit the study to a consensus Indonesian, and lose the advantage of comparing regional languages and regional versions of the national language. From the beginning there was good reason to suspect that comparisons at the regional ethnic group level would be revealing.

I carried out fieldwork in Indonesia for two years (between 1983 and 1986), separated by one year at home to work over the preliminary data and make midcourse corrections in the research design. The fieldwork is described in Section 1.6.

The project involved a variety of tasks, but the first problem logically, and the one I want to discuss here, concerns the emotion lexicon. We begin with the lexicon because words for emotions are simple and overt data, readily accessible and easily codable. Actual emotion scenes or outbursts are relatively rare in daily life, and they are usually kept relatively private. A people's thinking about emotion may be relatively obscure, complex, and even contradictory. Ultimately, the goals of this research project involve the analysis and understanding of emotion scenarios and emotion thinking, however complex and veiled. But we begin with words: What words are used to talk about emotion, how are they related, and what are the features of the cognitive realm of emotion? Words are not cognition, of course, but words and other overt behavior reflect cognition. The first problem is to transfer something of

5 1.1. *The orienting question*

what is in people's minds onto paper. How many dimensions does thought have? None? Or an infinite number? In order to comprehend Minangkabau understanding of emotions, we could take the Minangkabau path and grow up in West Sumatra. But for most of us it is too late for that. Here we shall use the alternative tactic of gathering data from many Minangkabau and devising a representation of Minangkabau emotion thought as a two-dimensional lexical map that shows clusters of closely related words as well as relationships between the clusters. This book is mainly about three such maps. The basic mapping questions formulate themselves thus: What is the shape of the cognitive map of emotion words? How do the cognitive maps of the two languages, Minangkabau and Indonesian, differ for these bilingual Minangkabau? How do the cognitive maps of Indonesian differ for Minangkabau speakers and for Javanese speakers? Finally, how do these three maps from Indonesia compare to maps in English for the emotion realm?

This is quite a cerebral, quantitative, lexical approach to what is, after all, a most rich and human subject. But there is a method in this method. It is easy to fall into the habit of equating words with behavior, and of thinking about a word as being the same as an emotion. Words are parts of behavior, and my strategy here is to attack first via words. As we develop the three cognitive maps of emotion terms, we shall be led to think of an emotion not in relation to a single word – say, “anger” – but in relation to a set of closely related words we shall call the “Anger” cluster. An effect of this intense scrutiny of emotion words will be to liberate us from the rigid equation of *one word = one emotion*. (Brandt and Boucher 1986, in their work with Indonesian lexical clusters, have also stressed the importance of cluster, rather than single-word consideration of emotions. See also, Ortony, Clore, and Foss 1988:15). The later stages of this project involved analyses of Indonesian emotion, its management, and its culture-boundedness, all of which rest on the understanding of the lexical maps. During the fieldwork itself, I pushed ahead with all the tasks more or less simultaneously. Because the other tasks involved people using emotion words, however, the actual analysis of these other tasks depended on the lexical maps described here.

There have been a number of excellent ethnographies of emotion, including those by Jean Briggs on the Inuit (1970); Robert Levy on the Tahitians (1973); Michelle Z. Rosaldo on the Ilongot (1980); and Catherine Lutz on Ifaluk (1988). Each of these and many more present vibrant human pictures of the emotional life of a people. I myself have attempted that with my writing on the Dani of Irian Jaya (1979; ms.). But

6 1. *Theoretical introduction*

as much as I admire what that sort of ethnography can accomplish, I have not tried to do it here. This book does not attempt a full picture of the life and passions of the Minangkabau. It is a dictionary, a grammar – or, better yet, a mapping of the cognitive landscape of emotion. It is a first step toward a systematic ethnography of emotion. If it is successful, it will stand by itself and will also provide a basis on which Indonesian ethnography can build.

Emotion is a difficult subject for rigorous investigation since it is not amenable to convenient precise definition. Partly because of this it has only recently come into prominence as a subject of anthropological investigation. Because emotion is so fuzzy, it forces reconsideration of some basic problems in anthropology. More than most cross-cultural work, the study of emotion stirs up problems of translation. Emotions are central to much human behavior but are extremely difficult to pin down. Emotions are inner states with external manifestations. Both inner states and external manifestations are shaped, managed, and defined by cultural norms. Often these norms prescribe ways to conceal reality from fellow actors in a culture, not to mention from the outsider trying to understand emotion behavior. And emotions, unlike earlier topics on the anthropological agenda such as kinship terms or color words, are not constructed on an obvious, concrete biological or physical base such as age and gender, or hue and brightness.

In Part I of this book the first five chapters are concerned with the method and underlying theory of lexical mapping. They are followed by a discussion in Chapter 6 of the cultural features, cluster by cluster, of the three lexical maps of emotion terms: in Minangkabau, in Indonesian as spoken by Minangkabau, and in Indonesian as spoken by Central Javanese. Chapter 7 summarizes and draws conclusions. Part II provides the data and detailed analysis of the 44 clusters.

1.2. **Conceptualizing emotions**

This is not the place for an extended essay on the theory of emotion, but it is necessary to describe briefly two formulations of emotion that are used in this study.

The flow of emotion

Although at times it is convenient to speak as if “an emotion” were a unitary thing, with a name such as “anger,” there are often advantages

7 1.2. Conceptualizing emotions

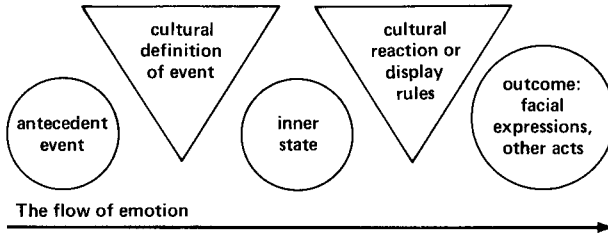


Figure 1. The flow of emotion

in treating emotion as a slice of the continuum of human behavior, a sort of scenario with antecedents and outcomes, where the culture-specific and the pan-cultural play different but complementary roles. Paul Ekman, in his resolution of the debate between the pan-culturalists, who thought that all emotions everywhere were the same, and the culture-specific proponents, who thought that everything was always different, introduced the concept of *display rules* (Ekman and Friesen 1969:75) to refer to the cultural patterning of the flow of emotion. We can develop this a step further and recognize two cultural interventions in the emotion process. The *flow of emotion* scenario runs from left to right across Figure 1. *Antecedent events* can be described neutrally: for example, “the death of a child.” The event is given emotional coloring by, first, the *cultural definition* through culture-specific rules that produce simple or complex emotional *inner states*. A second culture-specific intervention, the reaction rules, or display rules, of that culture for that emotion determine whether the emotion of the inner state is altered in its public performance through intensification, diminution, neutralization, or masking by the behavior (usually the facial expression) of another emotion. Ekman, speaking specifically about facial expressions and emotions, used the term “display rules,” emphasizing the communicative property of the face. An Indonesian display rule, for example, is reported by the musicologist Mantle Hood: “Among the many refinements of Javanese society is the ideal of concealing the emotions – it is sometimes said that there is a Javanese smile for every emotion” (1963:455). In other words, in Java every emotion is to be masked with a smile. However, one suspects that the real meaning of the saying is that the Javanese have a different smile for each emotion. But, of course, this present study focuses on the Minangkabau, who are not nearly so refined as the Javanese, and who conceal emotions much less (a contrast that runs through the two cultures – in their dance performances, Ja-

8 1. *Theoretical introduction*

vanese use wooden masks, Minangkabau dance without masks, and so forth). Ekman has described many different American smiles and how they are used for masking (1985:150; Ekman, Friesen, and O'Sullivan 1988), and a systematic study of Indonesian smiles would surely show as rich a repertoire.

Here we are talking about outcomes of emotion in a broader behavioral sense than just facial expressions. We want to include many other sorts of behavior, and so we can use the term "reaction rules" for those culture-specific norms for behavioral outcomes or reactions to an inner emotion state.

On the whole, this flow of emotion follows a cross-culturally recognizable path with relatively little culturally unique behavior. Probably in most cultures the death of a child is defined as sad, and that sadness is expressed directly with the pan-cultural "sad" face and weeping. However, it may be altered according to some culturally specific reaction rule. Let us return to the flow diagram in Figure 1, where the two cultural interventions are pictured as refracting prismatic wedges. Most emotion scenarios flow in a culturally neutral, and pan-cultural, path across the bottom of the diagram. But a few cultures have strong culture-specific rules that do refract the flow. We can say in such cases that antecedent events are defined culturally: The death of a child may be an occasion for anger (if it is believed to be the result of witchcraft) or happiness (if the child is taken directly to heaven). The second type of cultural intervention is more common: Reaction rules direct the outcome of a scenario. For example, anger is masked by a smile, or happiness is neutralized.

The logical variations in scenarios, or flows, are diagrammed in Figure 2:

Emotion words, then, can be taken as labels for particular scenarios. And as we shall see, the antecedents and outcomes for most Indonesian emotion words give us the very scenarios for emotions we anticipated on the basis of the English-language dictionary translations of words. For example, Indonesian *sedih* is translated by dictionaries as "sad." Its antecedents do in fact concern losing or parting from another, usually a relative or a lover, and its main outcome is in fact weeping. We are thus on firm ground in concluding that *sedih* and Sad share a pan-cultural scenario – the flow of emotion in both instances is unrefracted by special rules of the cultures.

On the other hand, we shall see many instances where the outcomes for a particular emotion are rather unexpected, indicating that a display

9 1.2. Conceptualizing emotions

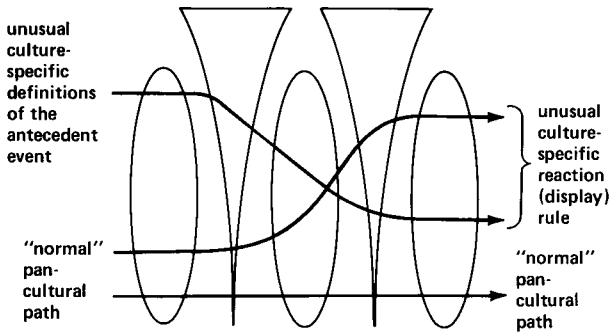


Figure 2. Cultural refractions of the flow of emotion

rule is in effect. For example, the outcomes for Happiness in Indonesian are, expectably, smiling and such, but the outcomes for Happiness in Minangkabau are masking and withdrawal, suggesting a display rule of neutering happiness in Minangkabau.

Inner state versus interaction

Anthropologists, historians, and others have long been aware that a crucial dimension on which cultures vary is the relative emphasis placed on the person as an interactive part of the social network versus the person as an autonomous individual. This was formulated in terms of absolute dichotomy when Ruth Benedict wrote of “guilt cultures” versus “shame cultures” (1946). Recently it has been presented in more nuanced terms (see, for example, Heelas and Lock 1981). It has been recognized as relevant to recent cross-cultural work on emotion (Lutz 1982) and also attacked as simplistic (Shaver et al. 1987). Although we recognize the basic utility of the concept, and indeed shall present much supporting data, still we must avoid absolute dichotomies and emphasize the nuances. Indonesian cultures on the whole place more emphasis on social interaction, Western cultures on the whole place more emphasis on inner states of autonomous individuals. A diagnostic trait is marriage form: In Indonesia marriages are commonly arranged by family groups; in Europe and America, by the two principal individuals. Yet even this is not an absolute rule, for there are marriages in Indonesia not usually arranged by families (lower-class marriages, or second marriages) and in some circumstances Western families do play crucial roles in deciding who will marry whom.

10 1. *Theoretical introduction*

Certainly, Indonesians have inner state emotions – this study would be impossible otherwise. Indonesians know guilt, although we shall not find a good cluster of “Guilt” words. And Indonesian emotions do involve inner states, although they are more usually about social interactions, especially in traditional Minangkabau when compared with the national language, Indonesian.

But thinking in terms of this inner state – interaction continuum helps to explain much: Why Indonesian behavior is on the whole more interactionally oriented than is Western behavior; and why there is more interaction in Minangkabau emotion behavior when they talk about it in Minangkabau than when they talk about it in Indonesian.

1.3. A theory of culture

A basic definition of culture holds that it is (1) learned, (2) shared, (3) ideas about behavior. But these days we have trouble with the attribute of sharedness, for it is clear that there is considerable variation in thought and behavior among people whom we want to consider belonging to the same culture, or, in Swartz’s phrase, there is “incomplete cultural sharing” (1988:22). There are several possible solutions to this dilemma, short of discarding the concept of culture itself:

1. Rely on a single person’s understanding of the world at a single moment. This is the strategy of the life-history approach in anthropology, and of the self-introspective approach in linguistics (see Lakoff’s study of anger [1987], where he used introspection plus *Roget’s Thesaurus*). But this approach is not as elegant as it seems, for there is evidence that people are not even consistent with themselves over a period of time (see Heider’s ax stone and sweet potato naming tasks with the Dani [1969]).
2. Achieve cultural group consensus. This solution is represented by the familiar formula “the X people believe that . . .” or “they have only one word for. . .” The actual methodology that produces such statements is rarely specified, and the statements depend on the (untestable) authority of the ethnographer. However, Eleanor Rosch has shown, in her early color term work, just how such unexamined factors as the ethnographer’s own preconceptions and expectations can bias the outcome (1972).
3. Quantitative breakdown of the variation. The statement that “the X people are polygynous” gives us some information but leaves us guessing about ideology versus behavior. An alternative is a table that gives:

11 1.3. *A theory of culture*

- % of unmarried adult males
- % of males with one wife
- % of males with two wives,
- etc.

This tells us more about behavior, less about ideology.

Each of the above treatments has its uses and its strengths and weaknesses, depending on the sorts of problems and the particular realms being investigated. Here, however, a fourth approach is used:

4. The *composite map* solution produces a two-dimensional map of emotion terms that looks rather like a star chart. Each map is based on pieces of data from fifty Indonesian informants. Obviously such a map does not represent what is in a single person's head, nor is it a cultural consensus. Rather, it is a *composite map*. Each map aggregates the notions of fifty Indonesians, and so represents not so much that which is shared but the middle ground on which they all meet, and by means of which they communicate with each other. For communication does take place, after all. We are sometimes surprised at how much, say, people who have communicated with each other for much of their lives may yet disagree about the meanings of their world. They have, indisputably, somehow, been communicating even if the agreements are mostly tacit. Nida speaks to the same point: "No communication, whether intralingual, interlingual, or intersemiotic, can occur without some loss of information. Even among experts discussing a subject within their own fields of specialization, it is unlikely that comprehension rises above the 80% level" (1978:63).

The composite map, then, attempts to represent not some clear, firmly-shared idea present in the minds of all the people but rather the actual, operational common ground on which people in fact interact.

When understood as such, these maps will allow us to compare emotion terms in different languages, to compare the different forms of the same language as used by people of different linguistic backgrounds, and to analyze the emotion words used by people in their naturally occurring behavior, in their fictions (novels and films), and in their responses to such experimental stimuli as photographs of facial expressions and short sequences of emotion behavior taken from scripted commercial films.

To anticipate: We find this same problem of partial sharing writ large when we compare the two versions of "the Indonesian language." Emotion terms in the version of Indonesian used by Minangkabau are not identical to the same emotion terms in the version of Indonesian spoken