

1. Language and Emotion Concepts

This chapter describes some aspects of emotion language that have not yet received a great deal of attention but are clearly important in the study of emotion concepts. Most important of these is the role of figurative language in the conceptualization of emotion. Do metaphor and other figurative language matter at all in how we think about the emotions? Do metaphors simply reflect a preexisting, literal reality, or do they actually create or constitute our emotional reality? Is it of any consequence that speakers of English use expressions like *boiling with anger*, *being swept off one's feet*, *building a relationship*, and *being madly in love*?

I will suggest that it is of serious consequence. If we are not clear about why people engage in this way of talking, we cannot really understand why lay people categorize the emotions as passions, while some experts categorize them as states and others as actions; if we do not pay a great deal of attention to figurative language, it is impossible to see precisely how the lay view of emotion differs from the lay view of human relationships or that of rational thought or morality; if we do not examine this kind of language, we will never understand why we have the theories of emotion in psychology, philosophy, and anthropology that we do; and if we do not analyze this kind of language in cultures other than our own, we will never find out whether the way we think about our emotions is shared (and, if it is, to what extent) by speakers of other languages. I will contend that metaphor, and figurative language in general, does matter in all of these issues, and crucially so.

But in order to see in precisely what ways metaphor matters in all this, we have to clarify first what we mean by the language of emotion; second, what the competing theories of emotion language and

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emotion concepts are; and third, what the more specific issues are that emerge in connection with emotion language. The survey to follow is divided into three sections: (1) words and emotion, (2) meaning and emotion, and (3) some issues that inevitably arise in the study of everyday conceptions of emotion.

As is obvious from the goals above, I will not deal with certain important aspects of emotion language and emotional implications of language in general. I will have nothing to say about the syntactic, phonetic, and pragmatic properties of this language, although a great deal of high-quality work is being done in all these fields (see, e.g., Iván Fónagy's extremely interesting work, such as Fónagy, 1981, on the relationship between emotion and human sound systems).

Words and Emotion

When they deal with emotion language, many scholars assume that this language simply consists of a dozen or so words, such as *anger*, *fear*, *love*, *joy*, and so forth. I will challenge this view in this section and claim that this is just a small fraction of our emotion language. I will briefly discuss the most general functions and organization of emotion-related vocabulary, and then focus attention on a large but neglected group of emotion terms.

Expression and Description

A first distinction that we have to make is between expressive and descriptive emotion words (or terms or expressions). Some emotion words can *express* emotions. Examples include *shit!* when angry, *wow!* when enthusiastic or impressed, *yuk!* when disgusted, and many more. It is an open question whether all emotions can be expressed in this way, and which are the ones that cannot and why. Other emotion words can *describe* the emotions they signify or that "they are about." Words like *anger* and *angry*, *joy* and *happy*, *sadness* and *depressed* are assumed to be used in such a way. We should note that under certain circumstances descriptive emotion terms can also "express" particular emotions. An example is "I love you!" where the descriptive emotion word *love* is used both to describe and express the emotion of love.

The categories of descriptive and expressive emotion terms are analogous to Searle's (1990) categories of assertive and expressive

speech acts, in that descriptive terms have an assertive function and expressive terms often constitute expressive speech acts.

In this work, I will be concerned only with that part of the emotion lexicon that is used “to describe” emotional experience. As we will see below, this is a much larger category of emotion terms than the one that “expresses” emotions.

Basic Emotion Terms

Within the category of descriptive emotion words, the terms can be seen as “more or less basic.” Speakers of a given language appear to feel that some of the emotion words are more basic than others. More basic ones include in English *anger*, *sadness*, *fear*, *joy*, and *love*. Less basic ones include *annoyance*, *wrath*, *rage*, and *indignation* for anger and *terror*, *fright*, and *horror* for fear.

Basicness can mean two things (at least, loosely speaking). One is that these words (the concepts corresponding to them) occupy a middle level in a vertical hierarchy of concepts (in the sense of Rosch, 1975, 1978). In this sense, say, *anger* is more basic than, for example, *annoyance* or *emotion*. *Anger*, because it is a “basic-level” emotion category, lies between the superordinate-level category *emotion* and the subordinate-level category of *annoyance*. This is depicted in Figure 1.1.

The other sense of “basicness” is that a particular emotion category can be judged to be more “prototypical” (i.e., a better example) of emotion than another at the same horizontal level (again, “prototypical” in the sense of Rosch, 1975, 1978). This horizontal level coincides with the basic level of the vertical organization of concepts. For example, *anger* is more basic in this sense than, say, *hope* or *pride*, which, in the previous sense, are on the same level (see Figure 1.2).

These organizations of emotion terms have been extensively studied in the past decade for English (e.g., Fehr and Russell, 1984; Shaver,

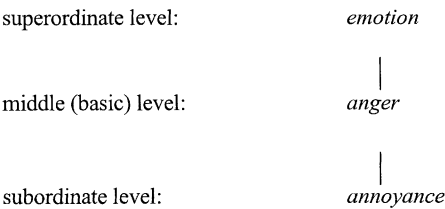


Figure 1.1. Levels of emotion terms in a vertical hierarchy

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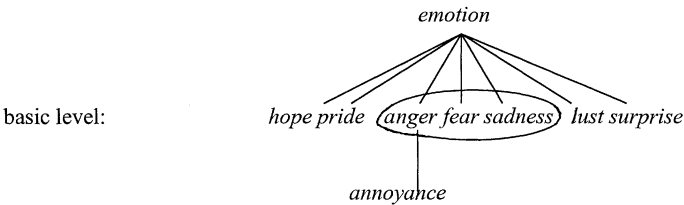


Figure 1.2. Prototypical vs. nonprototypical emotion terms on the horizontal level of conceptual organization. (The circle indicates that, e.g., *anger*, *fear*, and *sadness* are better examples of emotion terms than *hope*, *pride*, *surprise*, and *lust*.)

Schwartz, Kirson, and O'Connor, 1987). Cross-cultural research along these lines is just beginning. Using a methodology borrowed from Fehr and Russell (1984), Frijda, Markan, Sato, and Wiers (1995) arrive at five general and possibly universal categories of emotion in 11 languages. These basic emotion categories include happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and love. Smith and Tkel-Sbal (1995) investigate the possibility that emotion terms are prototypically organized in the Micronesian language of Palau, and Smith and Smith (1995) attempt to do the same for Turkish.

Metaphor and Metonymy

There is another kind of emotion-related term, the group of figurative terms and expressions. Since figurative terms also describe (and do not primarily express) emotions, this is a subgroup within descriptive terms. This subgroup may be larger than the other two groups combined. Here, unlike the previous group, the words and expressions do not literally “name” particular kinds of emotions, and the issue is not how basic or prototypical the word or expression is. The figurative words and expressions that belong in this group denote various *aspects* of emotion concepts, such as intensity, cause, control, and so forth. They can be metaphorical and metonymical. The metaphorical expressions are manifestations of conceptual metaphors in the sense of Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Conceptual metaphors bring two distant domains (or concepts) into correspondence with each other. One of the domains is typically more physical or concrete than the other (which is thus more abstract). The correspondence is established for the purpose of understanding the more abstract in terms of the more concrete. For example, *boiling with anger* is a linguistic example of the very productive conceptual metaphor ANGER IS A HOT FLUID (cf. Lakoff and

Kövecses, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Kövecses, 1986, 1990, 1995a), *burning with love* is an example of LOVE IS FIRE (cf. Kövecses, 1988), and *to be on cloud nine* is an example of HAPPINESS IS UP (cf. Kövecses, 1991b). All three examples indicate the intensity aspect of the emotions concerned.

Linguistic expressions that belong in this large group can also be metonymical. Conceptual metonymies, unlike conceptual metaphors, involve a single domain, or concept. The purpose of metonymy is to provide mental access to a domain through a part of the same domain (or vice versa) or to a part of a domain through another part in the same domain (for more explanation of the nature of metonymy, see Kövecses and Radden, 1998). Thus, metonymy, unlike metaphor, is a “stand-for” relation (i.e., a part stands for the whole or a part stands for another part) within a single domain. Emotion concepts as wholes are viewed as having many parts, or elements. For instance, one part or element of the domain of anger is to be upset, and one part or element of the domain of fear is an assumed drop in body temperature. Thus, linguistic examples for these two emotion concepts include *to be upset* for anger and *to have cold feet* for fear. The first is an instance of the conceptual metonymy PHYSICAL AGITATION STANDS FOR ANGER, while the second is an example of the conceptual metonymy DROP IN BODY TEMPERATURE STANDS FOR FEAR (see Kövecses, 1990).

A special case of emotion metonymies involves a situation in which an emotion concept B is part of another emotion concept A (see, e.g., Kövecses, 1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b). In cases like this, B can metonymically stand for A. This can explain why, for instance, the word *girlfriend* can be used of one’s partner in a love relationship. Since love (A), at least ideally, involves or assumes friendship (B) between the two lovers, the word *friend* (an instance of B) can be used to talk about an aspect of love (A).

We can represent the three types of emotion language in Figure 1.3. Of the three groups identified (expressive terms, terms literally denoting particular kinds of emotions, and figurative expressions denoting particular aspects of emotions), the group of figurative expressions is the largest by far, and yet it has received the least attention in the study of emotion language. Figurative expressions are deemed completely uninteresting and irrelevant by most researchers, who tend to see them as epiphenomena, fancier ways of saying some things that could be said in literal, simple ways. Further, the expressions in group one are usually considered literal. Given this, we can understand better why the expressions in group three received scant attention. If one

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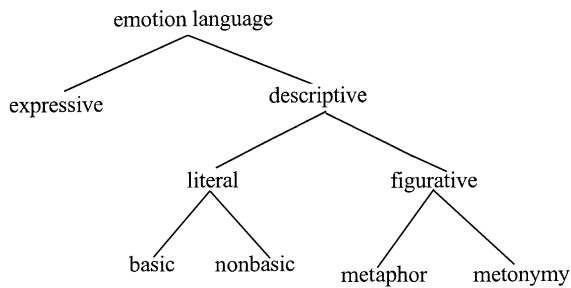


Figure 1.3. Summary of types of emotion language

holds the view that only literal expressions can be the bearers of truth and that figurative expressions have nothing to do with how our (emotional) reality is constituted, there is no need to study “mere” figurative language. However, there is also an increasing number of scholars who do not accept this view of the function of language in how human beings create their emotional realities (see, e.g., Baxter, 1992; Duck, 1994; Gibbs, 1994; Holland and Kipnis, 1995; Kövecses, 1990).

Meaning and Emotion

The isolation and description of emotion language is just the beginning in the process of uncovering the significance of this language in human conceptualization. The more difficult problem is to deal with the question of meaning. The issue of what constitutes the meaning of emotion words is a hotly debated topic in several disciplines – from psychology through anthropology to philosophy. There are several distinct views that scholars have offered in an attempt to characterize emotional meaning.

The “Label” View

The label view of emotional meaning maintains that the meaning of emotion terms is simply an association between a label, like the words *anger* and *fear*, plus some real emotional phenomena, like physiological processes and behavior. This view is the simplest lay view of emotional meaning. It is based on the folk theory of meaning in general according to which meaning is merely an association between sounds (forms) and things. This understanding of meaning in general also

forms the basis of a scientific theory of emotion. Schachter and Singer (1962) proposed that emotion involves three things: a label, plus something (emotionally) real, plus a situation. This view is an improvement on the simplest lay view. However, they both exclude the possibility that emotion terms can have much conceptual content and organization. But, as several studies indicate (see, e.g., Wierzbicka, 1995; Shaver et al., 1987; and Kövecses, 1990, among others), emotion terms have a great deal of conceptual content and structure.

The “Core Meaning” View

It is customary in semantics to distinguish between core (denotative, conceptual, cognitive, etc.) and peripheral (connotative, residual, etc.) meaning (see, e.g., Lyons, 1977). What characterizes core meaning is a small number of properties or components that are taken to define a category in an adequate manner. This means, in this view of meaning, that core meaning should be capable of minimally distinguishing between the meaning of any two words; that is, by virtue of the smallest possible number of components. Since, in this view, the major function of definitions is systematic differentiation of meaning, the more important kind of meaning, the kind of meaning that really matters, is typically thought to be core meaning, while peripheral meaning is viewed as less important in giving the meaning of words and expressions. (For a more detailed discussion, see Kövecses, 1990, 1993a). Peripheral meaning or connotation is usually seen as being made up of various social, situational, or affective properties – any properties that are not taken to contribute to the cognitive content of words in a significant way. Connotations are assumed to vary from person to person and from culture to culture. However, according to some researchers, like Osgood (1964), certain connotations are universal: namely, the general meaning dimensions of evaluation (good vs. bad), activity (fast vs. slow), and potency (strong vs. weak).

The core meaning view of emotion categories typically assumes the idea that emotional meaning is composed of *universal* semantic primitives. A leading proponent of this view is Wierzbicka (see, e.g., Wierzbicka, 1972, 1995). For example, she defines the English emotion and *anger* in the following way: “X feels as one does when one thinks that someone has done something bad and when one wants to cause this person to do something he doesn’t want to do” (1972, p. 62). This definition makes use of some universal semantic primitives, such as

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THINK, DESIRE, WANT, BAD, GOOD, CAUSE, DO, and so forth. One of the major points of Wierzbicka's approach is that it is a mistake to think of emotion words in particular languages, such as English, as being universal (e.g., Wierzbicka, 1986, 1992a, 1995). Thus, for example, the English word *emotion* is anything but universal; it does not seem to exist even in languages otherwise closely related to English (Wierzbicka, 1995). What is universal instead, Wierzbicka maintains, are the semantic primitives that make up the conceptual content of particular emotion words in particular languages. (Because Wierzbicka's work also fits another group, her views will be discussed further in a later section.)

In one respect, however Wierzbicka's approach is not very representative of the core meaning view. In defining an emotion, one uses universals to make a clause that describes a scene or scenario: "X feels as one does when. . . ." In a typical core meaning theory, the mere presence or absence of the primitives is defining and there is no syntax that governs their construction as concepts. But in Wierzbicka, syntax matters because the semantic universals are combined in contingent clauses to construct scenes and scenarios ("X feels as one does when one thinks that. . .").

To take another example of the core meaning view, Davitz (1969) characterizes the meaning of the English emotion word *anger* as being composed of HYPERACTIVATION, MOVING AGAINST, TENSION, and INADEQUACY. These (and other) components, or clusters, of meaning are derived from linguistic data produced by speakers of English. The clusters are taken to be capable of successfully distinguishing each emotion word in English. Furthermore, it is suggested that the same clusters can be applied to the study of emotion concepts in other cultures (such as Ugandan).

The "Dimensional" View

Emotional meaning is also viewed as being constituted by values on a fixed set of dimensions of meaning. Solomon (1976), for example, postulates 13 dimensions that are sufficient to describe any emotion. These include DIRECTION, SCOPE/FOCUS, OBJECT, CRITERIA, STATUS, EVALUATIONS, RESPONSIBILITY, INTERSUBJECTIVITY, DISTANCE, MYTHOLOGY, DESIRE, POWER, and STRATEGY. The definitions of emotion concepts make use of all or some of these dimensions. The core meaning and dimensional views are not always easy to distinguish. Thus, ac-

cording to Frijda the dimensions that apply to a given emotion provide a “component profile” that uniquely characterizes an emotion (Frijda, 1986, pp. 217–219). Researchers working in the dimensional approach attempt to eliminate a major alleged pitfall of the “core meaning” view in general: the large gap between emotional meaning and emotional experience. For example, de Rivera (1977) states that “there is bound to be a tension between these two poles – the one insisting that the investigator be faithful to experience, the other requiring the sparse elegance of precise relations between a few abstract constructs” (p. 121). Clearly, de Rivera is aware of a gap between emotional meaning as defined in terms of “a few abstract constructs” (i.e., semantic components and dimensions) and the totality of emotional experience, that is, complex experience of people who are in particular emotional states. Another well-known advocate of the dimensional approach is Frijda (1986). Frijda distinguishes among even more dimensions (26 altogether). Obviously, the aim is to reduce the meaning-experience gap.

The “Implicational” View

While the “core meaning” and “dimensional” views are based on the core meaning in general, the implicational view takes connotative meaning as its main point of departure. In the words of a major figure: “To study what something means is to study what it entails, implies, or suggests to those who understand it” (Shweder, 1991, p. 244). For example, according to Shweder, the sentence “One of my grandparents was a surgeon” suggests that my grandfather was a surgeon and the sentence “She is your mother” implies that she is under an obligation to care about your health (pp. 244–245). As these examples suggest, for Shweder, meaning is connotative meaning, not denotative meaning. It is the periphery, rather than the core, that counts in this view of meaning.

Shweder relativizes this approach to emotional meaning. One of his examples is *anger*. Shweder writes: “Anger suggests explosion, destruction, and revenge” (p. 245). As we will see in the discussion of yet another view of emotional meaning, these properties of anger, together with others, will show up in the representation of the meaning of *anger*.

The particular version of the connotative view of meaning that Shweder endorses is the nonuniversalist one. Unlike Osgood (1964),

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Shweder believes, with anthropologists in general, that connotative meaning, and in particular emotional meaning, varies considerably from culture to culture. Making reference to work by several anthropologists, Shweder (1991) writes:

Emotions have meanings, and those meanings play a part in how we feel. What it means to feel angry . . . is not quite the same for the Ilongot, who believe that anger is so dangerous it can destroy society; for the Eskimo, who view anger as something that only children experience; and for working-class Americans, who believe that anger helps us overcome fear and attain independence. (p. 245)

Thus, in Shweder's view the connotative meaning of anger varies cross-culturally. This is a tack that is the opposite of the one taken by Osgood (1964) whose interest lies in what is universal about connotative meaning.

Heider (1991) took a connotative approach in his study of Minangkabau (Sumatra) and Indonesian terms for emotions. Heider discovered clusters of synonyms for emotion terms. We are here regarding synonyms as a kind of verbal connotation. He constructed lists of over 200 emotion terms in each language and obtained synonyms from 50 Minangkabau, 50 Minangkabau Indonesian, and 50 Indonesian subjects for each term in the list. By drawing lines from each term to all its synonyms in each language, he was able to draw extensive maps of the lexical domain of emotion. Heider (1991, p. 27) suggested that each of the clusters of similar words "correspond[s] best to what we mean by 'an emotion.'" Those who think in terms of a small number of basic emotions might be surprised by Heider's discovery of "some forty clusters" with each having ties to "only one or two other clusters" (1991, p. 28). Heider also studied emotion prototypes, as discussed in the following section.

The "Prototype" View

In the section on "Words and Emotion," I mentioned that some emotion words are more prototypical than others. There the question was: What are the best examples of the category of *emotion*? As we saw, the best examples of the category in English include *anger*, *fear*, *love*, and others. We can also ask: What are the best examples, or cases, of *anger*, *fear*, and *love*, respectively? Obviously, there are many different kinds of anger, fear, and love. When we try to specify the structure and