

Emotions in Crosslinguistic Perspective



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Emotions in Crosslinguistic Perspective

Edited by
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Introduction

Anna Wierzbicka and Jean Harkins

The study of human emotions needs input from the study of languages, now more than ever before. Advances in the science of brain physiology are identifying in ever greater detail the specific wave patterns and locations of brain activity that correspond to different affective or emotional states. Studies of this kind require high technology, and most of them are conducted in predominantly English speaking research environments. It is expected that their findings will apply to human brains generally, not just those of a particular language or cultural group (cf. e.g. Davidson and Ekman, eds. 1994; Ekman and Rosenberg, eds. 1997). Further research may confirm or challenge this expectation, but the research itself and the interpretation of its results hinge at certain crucial points upon questions of language. These questions have to be approached seriously, for the validity of scientific studies of emotional response may depend upon whether the issue of language is addressed in an informed way or by default.

Along with increased technical understanding of the workings of human brains, there have also been major advances in the study of emotions from the perspectives of cognitive and crosscultural psychology, psychological anthropology, and sociology. Some of this work has recognised the role of language as central to the study of emotions, particularly when examining instances where the cultural life of one group seems to focus attention on emotional states for which other groups don't even have names. Detailed descriptions of the meanings and manifestations of emotional states in different linguistic and cultural groups have added much to the understanding of emotions in cultural context.

The purpose of the crosslinguistic studies presented in this volume is to demonstrate how the tools of linguistic analysis can be applied to produce more accurate descriptions of the meanings of emotion words and, more generally, ways of speaking about emotions in different languages. Such analyses of linguistic meaning not only complement findings from other approaches to the study of emotions, but help to resolve methodological problems that arise when these other approaches have to deal with data

from different languages. Before proceeding to the language-specific studies, we draw readers' attention to the relevance of language in the study of human emotions, and give some background to the approaches to analysing language data that are used in these studies.

1. Emotions and languages

Emotions are among the least tangible aspects of human experience, yet they exert powerful influences upon our thoughts and actions, and even upon our physical appearance and physiological processes occurring within our bodies. Examining the outward manifestations of facial expression and measurable physiological responses is one approach to studying these inner states and events. But an emotional feeling is so internal to the experience of the person who has it, that it has rightly been questioned whether it is even reasonable to think that there is necessarily, or demonstrably, very much in common between one person's experience of, for example, anger in a particular situation, and a different person's experience of anger in the same or some other situation.

Moreover, people's emotional responses obviously differ, so that a context in which one person feels anger may evoke a different kind of emotional response in another person. Even if there is a general social or cultural expectation that a person would or should feel anger in this situation, not everyone reacts in the same way. Neither do most people respond the same way all the time; something that makes me angry today may prompt a different reaction tomorrow. Hence, emotions cannot be defined purely in terms of situation, context or eliciting conditions.

The extent to which emotional states can be detected through measurable or observable reactions is, as mentioned above, a focus of much current scientific research. But we know that observable displays of emotion vary according to many factors. One may turn red with anger, glower and shout in one situation and appear white-faced, expressionless and icily polite in another. Both social and cultural pressures may encourage people to adjust their outward appearance to please others even while inwardly seething. One may not even be aware of feeling angry about something that happened, until talking or thinking about it afterwards.

Whatever the conditions that produce an emotion like anger, whether or not it is visibly expressed, and whatever physiological responses accom-

pany it, it is only through language (if at all) that we can know that what is experienced *is* anger: that is, if the experiencer says so, or says other things by which we know that the person feels anger. Even if an identical physiological pattern is observed on two occasions, only language enables us to connect these two events with the emotion of anger. Most, though of course not all, of what we know about people's inner feelings comes to us via language, and it is only language that enables people to use the same word, *anger* or *angry*, to designate two different instances of an emotional experience. While theories of word meaning and use differ, the point here is that it is language that provides a conceptual connection between two disparate emotion experiences, by giving them the same label.

The same label, however, may not apply across languages. Bilingual dictionaries usually equate English *anger* with French *colère*, for example, and deal in varying ways (if at all) with the fact that they cannot correctly be substituted for each other in every situation. The further observation that the adjective *angry* is often, though not invariably, better translated as *furieux* (which therefore in turn cannot be regarded as an exact equivalent of *furious*) is only part of the story (cf. Wierzbicka 1988). So, even if we think we can understand what *anger* means for two people who use this English word to label their experience, how are we to understand the supposed equivalent or equivalents in another language and culture?

Even in the case of these two fairly closely related European languages, it is widely perceived that the differences in usage of emotion words are connected in some way with cultural attitudes and cultural identity. The different "feel" of the words *angry*, *furious*, *furieux* has much to do with the kinds of things English and French speakers do, how they look, sound and behave, when they feel these emotions. Studies of societies in other parts of the world have explored how certain patterns of emotional response seem to be centrally involved in the social behaviour of a cultural group. For example, Briggs (1970) examined an Eskimo group where very little attention was devoted to feelings comparable to those described in English as *angry*, while more socially cohesive emotions received greater cultural emphasis. The passionate feeling of *liget* described by Rosaldo (1980) in the Philippines had some similarities to *anger*, but was seen by Ilongot speakers in a more positive light, as a constructive force motivating much worthwhile human activity.

Links between cultural identity and emotions identified by particular words, often held to be untranslatable, have long been recognised. They

have often been seen as an important key to understanding cultural patterns and motivations, as for example in Benedict's (1946) discussion of the Japanese emotion *haji* in comparison with English *shame* and *guilt*. A Japanese psychiatrist has devoted a whole book to analysing "a particularly Japanese emotion" (Doi 1981: 169), *amae*, which he views as central to personality structure and social relations in his own culture. This is a good example of a practically untranslatable emotion concept, discussed by various writers in terms of affection, love and dependency, but clearly not equivalent to any of these English words.

More recent crosscultural studies have explicitly challenged prevailing "Western" views of emotion and its place in relation to personal and social life. As Russell (1991) has pointed out, "emotion" is itself a cultural category, and there are many groups of people in the world who neither recognise such a category nor have a word for it (cf. also Wierzbicka 1995, 1999). Lutz (1985, 1988) has deliberately avoided importing categories from outside, aiming instead to describe emotional meanings as they emerge through social and interpersonal processes in Ifaluk society. The thorough and insightful account that results from this approach includes extensive discussion of many Ifaluk words that involve emotional meanings, and of how these words differ in meaning from various English words for emotions.

The concept of emotion is also being reexamined in the light of poststructuralist critiques of essentialist approaches to personality and to culture. If selves are understood as shifting and plural, it may become difficult to identify anything like an emotion or an experiencer of it. Kondo (1990) presents a view of Japanese identities as fluid and unbounded, constantly created and recreated through a variety of discourses within the society. At the same time, her account shows that the discourses through which these selves are crafted rely upon many linguistic elements, and that for example the interdependency associated with the emotion *amae* mentioned above plays an important part in the fluidity of boundaries among the selves she describes.

Thus, even approaches that call into question central assumptions about emotion and self are still having to deal with language data: with the ways that people talk about what they are feeling, and with the words that they use in whatever language they speak. The studies presented here are intended to illustrate that examining these words and the contexts in which they are spoken can lead to a better understanding of the meanings associated with them.

2. Linguistic evidence in studying emotions

The discussion so far has touched upon several matters in which caution is necessary in approaching linguistic data concerning emotions. All of the papers in this volume challenge the kind of ethnocentric view that assumes that an English word such as *anger* (or a French or Ilongot word like *colère* or *liget*) denotes the same experience or concept as its supposed equivalents in other languages or in other cultural contexts. Neither do these studies assume that any society is so homogeneous as to have a single, unitary understanding or ideology of, for example, *anger*, *colère* or *liget* that is shared by all its members or implied by every use of a corresponding word.

What we do assume is that a careful examination of linguistic data can provide clues to what people mean when they use such words or expressions. Without some such empirical evidence, any assertions about similarities or differences in emotional meanings, either within or across cultures, would be hard to maintain. By looking closely at how words are used, we can observe both similarities and differences in the use of an English word like *anger* and its equivalents or near-equivalents in other languages. This emotion is of particular interest here because “anger” is often assumed to be basic to human psychology, along with a small group of other emotions including “fear”, “surprise”, “sadness”, “joy”, “disgust” (see Izard 1977; Ekman 1992, 1993; Moore et al. 1999).

Anger is indeed intuitively simpler than related emotion concepts like *outrage* or *indignation* (in English), which are often explained in terms of it. For example, *outrage* is considered to be a “stronger version” of anger, and *indignation* to be anger arising from some specific offence or injustice. Thus it may appear that “anger” is basic to a number of other emotions, and in lexicography as well as psychology there is a well established tradition of defining complex emotions in terms of ones that appear to be simpler. While this may be a reasonable or at least practical approach within the English language, the crosslinguistic evidence raises some questions about whether “anger” really is a basic human experience.

The Yankunytjatjara language of Central Australia, for example, has three main translation equivalents for the English *anger* or *angry* (as in *This person is angry*). These three Yankunytjatjara words are examined in detail by Goddard (1991, 1998), who shows that none of them is sufficiently general to serve as a basic equivalent for *angry*, as each is appropriate in some contexts but not others. The three words focus on different as-

pects of angry feelings and behaviour: *pikaringanyi* is associated with active hostility, *mirpanarinyi* with a sense of grievance, and *kuyaringanyi* with resentfulness. None of the three is basic or general enough that the others can be defined in terms of it. In the light of evidence like this, it would surely be ethnocentric to assert that Yankunytjatjara speakers are really experiencing a basic emotion “anger” but that they call it different things on different occasions, suggesting that they do not or cannot generalise by giving it a single label the way English speakers do.

Another language, Malay, has a single word, *marah*, that is usually translated as *angry*. But on closer examination of its use in Malay, Goddard (1996, 1998) finds evidence that the concept of *marah* is not identical with the English concept of *anger*. For example, the word *marah* cannot be used to describe a protester’s feelings about the destruction of rainforests; it is a more personally oriented feeling of having been treated badly. In this way it is somewhat closer to the English *offended*, and both the attitudes and behaviour associated with Malay *marah* are consistent with this. But in most contexts there is no better translation for *angry* in Malay than *marah*. Here again, it would be ethnocentric to suggest that Malay speakers have no word for the supposedly basic emotion of “anger”, but only for a more complex feeling of personal offence.

Obviously these words from other languages share some elements of meaning with the English *anger*. Many of them involve “feeling something bad because someone did something”, many involve “wanting to do something”, and often, “wanting to do something (bad) to the person who did this”. Semantic elements like these may indeed be common to words for anger-like feelings in many, perhaps even most languages, and in this sense there may after all be a basic human experience of something like “anger” (cf. Wierzbicka 1998a, 1999). But in the light of crosslinguistic evidence, it would be wrong to say that an emotion concept precisely equivalent to the English *anger*, or indeed to the Malay *marah*, or any other language-specific emotion term, is common to all humans. Whatever does emerge as a possible “emotional universal” in this area will need to be identified in universal terms, not in terms of the English emotion lexicon.

The papers in this volume focus on words and other linguistic expressions related to emotions from a diverse selection of languages, and examine in depth the linguistic evidence concerning their meanings. Attention is devoted not only to words for emotions, but also to a range of other

lexical and grammatical devices from interjections to reflexives that are deployed in various languages to express emotional meanings. In analysing the language data, we show that it is possible to identify what elements of meaning are specific to the language under examination, and what elements are shared with similar words and expressions from other languages.

While this book is written in English, we explicitly recognise the limitations imposed by the language of inquiry. We distinguish in a principled way between words belonging to particular languages, and elements of meaning that may be applicable across languages and cultures. Throughout the volume we indicate typographically whether we are speaking of a language-specific word or concept, such as English *anger* or Malay *marah* (in italics), an English gloss such as ‘anger’ (in single quotation marks), or elements of meaning involved in such a concept, such as “feeling something bad”. If a more general reference is made without typographic marking, for example to an angry expression or an anger-like feeling, it is recognised that these are English words and cannot be assumed to apply across languages and cultures.

3. Emotion concepts as cultural artefacts

The semantic differences among words for anger-like feelings in the languages mentioned above are fairly subtle, and the similarities in meaning may seem to outweigh the differences. It could be argued that the emotion denoted by these various words is essentially the same, and that any differences in meaning are due to the social context, that is, to when and how these feelings emerge and are expressed in social interaction. From this perspective, the fact that people can be said to feel *anger* but not *marah* about environmental damage, or that one has to choose between describing someone as actively *pikaringanyi* or broodingly *kuyaringanyi* seem to be cultural and individual matters.

However, several different lines of recent research in the cognitive sciences have independently arrived at a remarkably similar view of what constitutes an emotion, suggesting that socially accepted ways of thinking about the kinds of events that provoke *anger*, *marah* or *kuyaringanyi* and the kinds of behaviour that result from these feelings are integral parts of the emotion itself. Analyses of emotions by cognitive psychologists such

as Frijda (1986), Ortony et al. (1988), Johnson-Laird and Oatley (1989), social constructionists like Harré (1986), and linguistic semanticists like Goddard (1995 a, b, 1996, 1998); Harkins (1990, 1996); Wierzbicka (1986, 1992 a, b, 1999); Ye (In press) and Zalizniak (1992) all indicate that to produce an adequate description of an emotion one must include both situational or social and cognitive elements in addition to the obvious affective elements. If this is correct, then we must indeed regard *anger*, *marah*, *pi-karinganyi* and so on as different concepts, though clearly closely related ones; and we cannot treat English emotion words such as *anger* as neutral, self-explanatory, and culture-independent terms by means of which human emotional experience in all cultures can be validly and meaningfully described.

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

There is an important truth in what Taylor is saying here, but it is a partial truth, as discussed more fully in Wierzbicka (1999). It is true that there are “communities of meaning”, sharing a 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 semantic analyses see Wierzbicka 1992 a; Zalizniak 1992), 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 (see Wierzbicka 1992a). Crucially, this (simplified) definition can be translated word for word into Russian, and tested against the intuitions of 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. And these concepts are the stepping stones by which we can escape the "hermeneutical circle".

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 lexicalised 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, that is, simple concepts which are maximally self-explanatory and at the same time maximally culture-independent.

4. Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) as a tool for crosscultural analysis

The basic idea underlying this book is that language is a key issue in "emotion research" and that progress in the understanding of "emotions" requires that this issue be squarely addressed. "Human emotions" vary a great deal across languages and cultures, but they also share a great deal. Neither the diversity nor the universal aspects of "emotions", however, can be studied without an appropriate metalanguage. All attempts to study "human emotions" in terms of ordinary English (or any other natural language) are bound to lead to distortions, because every natural language contains its own "naïve picture of the world" (cf. Apresjan 1992[1974], 2000), including its own "ethnopsychology". By relying, uncritically, on

ordinary English words we unwittingly fall prey to the “naïve picture” that is reflected in them.

Nor can we transcend this “naïve picture” by adopting the conventional technical language of traditional psychology, because this conventional language has developed on the basis of ordinary language and is coloured by the naïve picture embedded in it. The reliance of many psychologists on English folk-distinctions such as that between *emotion* and *mood* is a good case in point (cf. Mandler 1975).

Despite insights from, inter alia, psychologists like Mandler, the faith in technical English as a suitable metalanguage for describing human emotions across languages and cultures is still deeply entrenched in emotion research in general, and the psychological literature on emotion in particular. For example, Van Geert (1995: 260) writes (with reference to one of the present authors): “Anna Wierzbicka argues (correctly, I think) that a theory of emotion universals cannot be stated in terms such as ‘sadness is a universal emotion’ because the word ‘sadness’ has a culture- and language-specific meaning, and can therefore not be used to refer to universal meanings”. But the solution that Van Geert proposes is a retreat into a technical language (that is, in practice, technical English):

It is very possible that the number of [emotion-related] physiological patterns is limited and universal, but that there is no universality in the corresponding subjective experience. That is, the universals are of an entirely technical nature, they require particular technical instruments and theories and do not correspond with intuitive experiential categories accessible to the layperson. [...] The emotions are experiential universals, that is, all people are in principle able to entertain a set of similar subjective experiences called the universal emotions. But the only way to refer to such shared emotions is by means of a technical language. (pp.261–262)

The claim that ordinary people’s subjective experience can only be validly discussed in a technical language (which means, in effect, technical English), is, in our view, a form of ethnocentrism, as well as misguided scientism. Van Geert suggests that only an expert, armed with technical language, can know what an ordinary person (non-expert) “really” experiences: “what a person experiences is not a separable set of such emotion components, but an inseparable subjective unity. It requires technical expertise and a technical language in order to successfully entangle [sic] and identify the components”. (Cf. also Kupperbusch et al. 1999).

But the goal of devising a technical language for describing other people’s emotions is very different from that of getting insight into other

people's subjective experience and their own way of thinking about it. Here, technical English will help us even less than ordinary English. In ordinary English, we can single out some words (and grammatical constructions) which can be rendered in the language of the speakers whose experience we are trying to understand – words like “good” and “bad”, “feel”, “want” and “think”, “people”, “body”, “part”, “inside” and so on. Technical English, on the other hand, is totally unrelated to the experience of people in other cultures – or, for that matter, that of most people in English-speaking cultures. “Technical universals” of emotion (whatever they are) cannot throw light on ordinary human experience and conceptualisation of experience. To understand this ordinary experience, and the way “ordinary” people think about it, we must pay attention to the way “ordinary” people talk; and to try to understand their talk we must rely on concepts “they” (the “laypeople”) and “we” (the “experts”) share. In this task, simple and universal words such as “good” and “bad”, “feel”, “want” and “think”, “people”, “body”, “part” and “inside” will be our most reliable tools. (For further discussion, cf. Enfield and Wierzbicka, *In press*.)

The approach to “emotions” adopted in most chapters of this book (and in earlier publications by the editors and colleagues) seeks to break the dependence on any one natural language as the source of “common sense insights” by anchoring the analysis in universal human concepts and their “universal grammar”, according to the Natural Semantic Metalanguage methods developed by Wierzbicka and colleagues. Both the universal concepts and their universal rules of combination (i.e. their “grammar”) have been arrived at by empirical crosslinguistic investigations carried out by several linguists over many years, working with typologically diverse and genetically unrelated languages, including Chinese (Chappell 1986, 1991, 1994), Japanese (Hasada 1997, 1998; Onishi 1994, 1997; Travis 1997), Malay (Goddard 1995 a, 1996), Lao (Enfield *In press*), Mbula (Bugenhagen 1994), Ewe (Ameka 1990 a, 1990 b, 1994), French (Peeters 1994, 1997), several Australian Aboriginal languages (Goddard 1991 b; Harkins 1995, 1996 a; Harkins and Wilkins 1994; Wilkins 1986), among others.

Most words in any language are specific to this particular language or to a group of languages, and are not universal. For example, neither English nor Spanish nor Malay has a word with a meaning corresponding exactly to the meaning of the German word *Angst* (cf. Wierzbicka 1999). At the same time, there is evidence that all languages have words with meanings corre-

sponding exactly to the meanings of the English words *good* and *bad*, or *know* and *want*. This suggests that the concepts of “good” and “bad”, “know” and “want” are universal, and can therefore be used as elements of a culture-independent semantic metalanguage.

Furthermore, the use of conceptual primitives allows us to explore human emotions (or any other conceptual domain) from a universal, language-independent perspective. Since every language imposes its own classification upon human emotional experience, English words such as *anger* or *sadness* are cultural artefacts of the English language, not culture-free analytical tools. On the other hand, conceptual primitives such as ‘good’ and ‘bad’, or ‘want’, ‘know’, ‘say’ and ‘think’ are not cultural artefacts of the English language but belong to the universal “alphabet of human thoughts”; and they do appear to have their semantic equivalents in all languages of the world. Basing our analysis on lexical universals we can free ourselves from the bias of our own language and reach a universal, culture-independent perspective on human cognition in general and on human emotions in particular.

The latest empirical evidence (cf. Goddard and Wierzbicka (eds.) 1994, In press; Wierzbicka 1996; Goddard 1998) suggests that the full set of hypothetical conceptual primitives, lexicalised in all languages of the world, looks something like this:

Substantives	I, YOU, SOMEONE (PERSON), SOMETHING (THING), PEOPLE, BODY
Determiners	THIS, THE SAME, OTHER
Quantifiers	ONE, TWO, SOME, MANY/MUCH, ALL
Attributes	GOOD, BAD, BIG, SMALL
Mental predicates	THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR
Speech	SAY, WORD, TRUE
Actions, events, movements	DO, HAPPEN, MOVE
Existence and possession	THERE IS, HAVE
Life and death	LIVE, DIE
Logical concepts	NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF
Time	WHEN (TIME), NOW, AFTER, BEFORE, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME
Space	WHERE (PLACE), HERE, UNDER, ABOVE, TOUCH (CONTACT), BELOW, FAR, NEAR; SIDE, INSIDE
Intensifier, Augmentor	VERY, MORE
Taxonomy, partonomy	KIND OF, PART OF
Similarity	LIKE

To reflect the special status of such words as exponents of universal human concepts, we can render them in capital letters, as GOOD and BAD, or BUENO and MALO (Spanish), or BAIK and BURUK (Malay), thus indicating that they are being used as elements of a special semantic metalanguage. At the same time we can identify them with the meanings of ordinary English, Spanish and Malay words (*good* and *bad*, *bueno* and *malo*, *baik* and *buruk*), and require that semantic formulae including these words be testable via natural language.

Since the words of ordinary language are often polysemous, we need to identify the meanings in question by means of specified “canonical” sentences such as, for example, *this person did something bad* (English), *esta persona ha hecho algo malo* (Spanish), and *orang ini buat sesuatu yang buruk* (Malay), or *something good happened to me* (English), *algo bueno me ha sucedido* (Spanish), *sesuatu yang baik terjadi kepada aku* (Malay). Proceeding in this way, we can overcome both the incomprehensibility and unverifiability of a technical language relying on “experience-distant” concepts, and the ethnocentrism of descriptions using a full natural language such as ordinary English, in all its culture-specific richness.

Thus, a configuration of conceptual primes such as “I feel (something) good now” appears to be universally possible and can therefore be plausibly proposed as the meaning of a smile, in preference to culture-specific English words like *enjoyment* or *happy*. Similarly, configurations such as “I want to do something”, “I know I can’t do anything”, or “I know: something bad happened” also appear to be universally present and can be assigned as plausible semantic components to emotion words such as, for example, the English *sad* and the Russian *grust’*, helping to map the similarities and differences between them.

5. 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 ... (which the author then describes). To give just one typical example from Tolstoy’s novel *Anna Karenina*, when 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. (Tolstoy 1970[1918]: 254)

This is quoted from the translation by Louise and Aylmer Maude; for more detailed discussion of this literary practice, see Wierzbicka (1973).

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 is seen in the blues song, "Sometimes 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.

Although "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 three basic modes: (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, (3) one can tell people what seems to be happening inside one's body. 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. If I tell them that "my heart is breaking" or that "my heart is heavy", I am following the third.

For example, we can say that to "feel pleased" means, roughly, "to feel something good, like a person does who thinks: something good happened, I wanted this to happen"; that to "feel delighted" means, roughly, "to feel something very good, like a person does who thinks: I know now that something very good happened, I didn't know before that this would happen"; that to "feel hope" means, roughly, "to feel something good, like a person does who thinks: I don't know what will happen, some good things can happen, I want these things to happen"; and that "to feel fear" means, roughly, "to feel something bad, like a person does who thinks: I don't know what will happen, some bad things can happen, I don't want these things to happen". Using a standardised mode of semantic description we can represent these meanings as follows:

Pleased (X was pleased)

- (a) X felt something because X thought something
- (b) sometimes a person thinks:
- (c) "something good happened
- (d) I wanted this to happen"
- (e) when this person thinks this, this person feels something good
- (f) X felt something like this
- (g) because X thought something like this

Delighted (X was delighted)

- (a) X felt something because X thought something
- (b) sometimes a person thinks:
- (c) "I know now: something very good happened
- (d) I didn't know that this would happen"
- (e) when this person thinks this, this person feels something very good
- (f) X felt something like this
- (g) because X thought something like this

Hope (X felt hope)

- (a) X felt something because X thought something
- (b) sometimes a person thinks:
- (c) "I don't know what will happen
- (d) some good things can happen
- (e) I want these things to happen"
- (f) when this person thinks this, this person feels something good
- (g) X felt something like this
- (h) because X thought something like this

Fear (X felt fear)

- (a) X felt something because X thought something
- (b) sometimes a person thinks:
- (c) "I don't know what will happen
- (d) some bad things can happen
- (e) I don't want these things to happen"
- (f) when this person thinks this, this person feels something bad
- (g) X felt something like this
- (h) because X felt something like this

In these semantic formulae, the symbol “X” stands quite simply for “this person”. This symbol is used for convenience, because in reading the formulae quickly, confusion might arise between the “this person” of the utterance scenario (this person (X) was pleased) and the “this person” of the prototype scenario (sometimes a person thinks...). The two are in fact quite distinct on careful reading, as the prototype scenario is a self-contained subset of the utterance meaning. The composition of semantic representations of emotion words and expressions is more fully explained in Wierzbicka (1999).

6. Emotion and culture

The literature on “emotions” often contrasts “biology” with “culture”, as if the two were mutually exclusive. It is worth remembering, therefore, that it was actually a psychologist (William James), not an anthropologist or a linguist, who said that the categorisation of feelings depends on “the introspective vocabulary of the seeker”, which in turn depends on his or her language and culture (James 1890: 485). James held that feelings represented the subjective experience of biological (physiological) events, but he recognised that feelings can be categorised in a variety of ways, and that they *are* differently categorised in different cultures. This is not to say that there are no common threads. But the diversity is very considerable indeed.

The meaning of English “emotion words” has actually changed a great deal in the course of history. Had Shakespeare been interested in proposing a basic “emotional keyboard” (cf. Shweder 1985: 200) it would have been different from that proposed by twentieth-century psychologists – even if it contained some of the same words, for example *angry*. The view of *anger* as something that can be manipulated – “controlled”, “vented”, “released”, left “unresolved”, “directed” at this or that target, “stirred up”, “repressed”, “expressed”, “suppressed” and so on (for examples see, e.g., Pendergrast 1998: 23, 24, 219, 242, 243, 364) – is entirely modern and goes far beyond the semantic range of the Shakespearian *anger* (cf. Logan 1998; cf. also Stearns and Stearns 1986).

What this example of historical change shows is that an apparently “basic and fundamental human concept” like *anger* is in fact linked with a certain cultural model, and so cannot be taken for granted as a “culture-free” analytical tool or as a universal standard for describing “human emotions”.

Examples of this kind provide an answer for those who, like Paul Harris (1995), ask “whether we can draw any conclusions – other than lexical conclusions – about the emotional universe of a culture by examining its emotion lexicon.” The answer is that, by examining the meaning and the use of words like *anger* and *angry* in contemporary English, we can indeed learn a great deal about the “emotional universe” of the speakers of contemporary English. “Emotion words” such as *anger* reflect, and pass on, certain cultural models; and these models, in turn, reflect and pass on values, preoccupations and frames of reference of the society (or speech community) within which they have evolved. They reflect its “habits of the heart” (Bellah et al. 1985) and the concomitant “habits of the mind”. The English *anger* and *angry* (with their current range of meanings and use) both reflect and reinforce what Bellah et al. (1985) call the “therapeutic culture” in modern Anglo society; and the shift from the Shakespearian *wrath* to modern *anger* both reflects, and constitutes an aspect of, the democratisation of society and the passing of the feudal order (cf. de Tocqueville 1953 [1835–40]; Stearns and Stearns 1986; Logan 1998).

Naturally, it is not only the lexicon that provides clues to the “emotional universe of a culture”. Grammar does too, as do phraseology, discourse structure, gestures, intonation, interjections, swearwords, forms of address, culture-specific facial expressions and bodily postures, and so on. For example, it is clearly significant that “active” verbs like *rejoice* have all but disappeared from modern English usage, giving way to “passive” adjectives like *happy* or *pleased*; and that those “emotion verbs” which remain tend to have pejorative or humorous connotations (cf. e.g. *fume*, *fret*, *sulk*, *pine*, *enthuse*, *rage*, and so on; for detailed discussion see Wierzbicka 1988, 1995; cf. also Hübler 1998, Dirven 1997, Osmond 1997 on various emotion-related grammatical patterns). Similarly, the Russian “emotional universe” is reflected in Russian expressive derivation, including notably the numerous “diminutive” suffixes with different emotional shadings encoded in each of them (for detailed discussion see Wierzbicka 1992b; see also Friedrich 1997). It is also reflected in the culture-specific phraseology centred on the human body and expressive bodily (and facial) behaviour (cf. Iordanskaya and Paperno 1996; Wierzbicka 1999).

The semantic explorations in this volume go far beyond the lexical semantics of emotion words and their equivalence or otherwise in different languages. As several of these authors point out, the “emotional world” or “emotional universe” of the speakers of Chinese, Russian, Mbula or Malay

is much richer than just their set of lexical labels for particular feelings. “Emotion talk” or talk about people’s feelings – one’s own or other people’s feelings or both – may receive greater or lesser emphasis in each cultural and social setting, but in every language examined thus far, people don’t just name feelings: they have recourse to a whole realm of discourse about human feelings and their manifestations. (Cf. also Palmer 1996; Palmer, Bennett and Stacey 1999, among others.)

The domains of emotion discourse and phraseology in each language and culture are represented in these studies in a wealth of different ways. Semantic analysis of particular emotion concepts has to pay close attention to evidence from their distinctive collocations and associated phraseology. To give just one example from this volume, an understanding of the nature of the Malay *hati* or seat of emotion relies substantially on the discourse concerning it: the *hati* can “speak” to the person, though it apparently doesn’t “move” (unlike the seat of emotion in many other languages); it can be *sakit* ‘sick’, *puas* ‘content’, *kecil* ‘small’ and many more – and each of these feeling-states has its own semantic content that cannot be derived by simply adding together the meanings of the individual words. Such phraseology can involve both metaphorical and non-metaphorical cultural models (cf. Emanatian 1999; Gibbs 1999; Yu 1998), which in turn pose challenges for how to represent these meanings in semantic explication.

Even the non-verbal facial and bodily signals of emotional feeling are in turn given linguistic representations – and these too have their distinctive interpretations in each language and culture, so that the Mbula *mata- sijsiŋ* (lit. ‘eye red’) hasn’t anything to do with crying, but rather with eagerness; and the Japanese *hiya-hiya* ‘shivery feeling’ isn’t so much a “frisson” as a helpless apprehensiveness. It is this wealth of associated discourse that makes the domain of feelings such a rich field for linguistic, anthropological, psychological and social science investigation. Some evidence is seen in these studies for possible universals of emotion phraseology, for example, description of emotional feelings via bodily events, sensations, images (Wierzbicka 1999), and culture-specific syntactic and pragmatic patterns (Goddard Forthcoming a; Enfield In press).

All these aspects of both verbal and non-verbal communication deserve careful attention and analysis both within their specific linguistic and cultural contexts, and across cultures. None of them, however, can be studied with precision and without an ethnocentric bias if attention is not given to the vital matter of a suitable metalanguage. Whether one wishes to focus

on the study of the emotion lexicon, collocations, grammatical devices, common metaphors, interjections, gestures, facial expressions, or whatever, one cannot escape the issues of methodology; and the question of an appropriate metalanguage is a key methodological issue.

7. Cultural semantics in cognitive linguistics

Each of the language-specific studies included in this volume demonstrates the vital contributions that can be made by means of detailed analysis of emotional meanings based on empirical linguistic evidence. This places the work firmly within the broader cognitive linguistics enterprise, although we recognise that the pluralism of approaches valued by cognitive linguists like, for example, Niemeyer (1997), Athanasiadou and Tabakowska (1998) and Langacker (1999) is criticised by some who would prefer to narrow the field. For example, Athanasiadou and Tabakowska (1998: xxi), in the same series as this volume, remark that their book “represents a wide spectrum of cognitive trends, thereby testifying to pluralism within the cognitive linguistic paradigm: the metaphorical-metonymical Lakoffian approach (Kövecses), the semantic-primitives approach (Wierzbicka), and the semasiological-structure approach (Geeraerts/Gronde-laers).” On the other hand, other scholars have strong ideological objections to an analysis of linguistic and cultural meanings based on a theory of conceptual primes.

Goddard (Forthcoming b), contrasts the view quoted above with that of Geeraerts (1997, cf. 1999), who, he says, “characterises present-day cognitive linguistics as having two methodological extremes. In the ‘good corner’ there are the data-driven, empirically-minded linguists doing psycholinguistics, neurophysiological modelling and corpus analysis. In the ‘bad corner’ there is the ‘idealistic tendency’ represented by Wierzbicka and her colleagues, with their appeals to intuition and platonistic views about conceptual primes.”

Another apparent conflict of emphasis here concerns the issues of visual (diagrammatic) versus verbal (paraphrastic) representations of meaning, and the emphasis on either the experiential or the conceptual aspects of communication and cognition. Our own view is, like Goddard’s (Forthcoming b), that the two approaches should be seen as complementary rather than inimical:

Just as it is easy to fall into “either-or” thinking in relation to verbal and diagrammatic representation, so too with the contrast between symbolic (conceptual) meaning and its experiential (pre-conceptual) underpinnings. However, one may very well grant that embodied, pre-conceptual experiential schemas (kinaesthetic image-schemas) underlie, constrain and support the emergence of conceptual meaning, without accepting that conceptual meaning is reducible to experiential schemas. ... [B]oth conceptualist and experientialist perspectives are needed if we are to get anything approaching a full picture of language as a human phenomenon (just as we need both universalism and relativism ...)

Conceptual analysis of meaning carried out in universal semantic primes is, in our view, essential to the understanding of human communication, cognition, and emotion; and we see it as a necessary part of cognitive linguistics, alongside other models and approaches. The usefulness of this approach in the area of culture-laden aspects of language, such as the language of values and emotions, seems to us particularly clear in the studies presented here.¹

With our strongly semantic orientation and our concern for precise yet culture-free specifications of linguistic and cultural meanings, we aim both to complement the work of other cognitive scientists by contributing analyses based on rich linguistic data; and to challenge them to strive also for maximally clear and culturally unbiased analyses and explanations within their own research frameworks. This volume joins the valuable body of crosslinguistic and crosscultural studies assembled in recent years by Nie-meier and Dirven (1997), Athanasiadou and Tabakowska (1998), Palmer and Occhi (1999), Gibbs and Steen (1999), but seeks to extend and refine the ways we deal with both the universal and the culture-specific dimensions of human emotional communication and meaning.

8. Cognitive and semantic analysis in practice

Above all, our hope is that these papers will encourage others to experiment with the methods demonstrated in them, as useful research tools for the investigation of emotions and related aspects of culture. This is an eminently practical way of exploring cultures. Of the increasing number of linguists now actively using aspects of the NSM approach in their work, it would probably be fair to say that few have adopted it through an *a priori* theoretical attraction to semantic universals. People use this method first and foremost because it works, particularly for those who wish to explain cul-

tural meanings without imposing external interpretive frameworks. These papers demonstrate its applications in linguistic fieldwork, corpus-based studies, literary analysis, and analysis of contemporary cultural material.

The tools of linguistic analysis, and in particular, the use of a language-independent analytical method provided by the Natural Semantic Metalanguage, can point the way out of the hermeneutical circle inherent in culture-dependent frameworks. In so doing we can, as so clearly shown in these studies, resolve much of the confusion surrounding the dual character of emotions in human experience. On the one hand, we can pinpoint, explain and validate in terms of linguistic evidence the culture-specific and culture-dependent nature of the set of categories of emotional experience identified by each cultural group through its language. And on the other, we can observe certain tendencies that do indeed seem to be universal, including the existence in all languages of words for cognitively-based feelings, and substantial overlaps between certain elements in the semantic composition of some of these, overlaps that can be specified in language-independent terms, thus explaining the extremely common crosslinguistic phenomenon of partial but never perfect intertranslatability of at least some emotion words.

The studies presented here demonstrate the usefulness of the proposed approach to studying a variety of different emotions and feelings expressed in a wide range of languages from diverse cultural groups around the world. Each of these papers examines a set of words or expressions used to talk about particular feelings in one language, giving an in-depth analysis of their semantic content, and thus showing what elements of meaning they may have in common with words for similar feelings in other languages, and what elements of meaning may be specific to the language under examination. The papers are not grouped thematically or by language groupings because the various themes explored in each of them link and resonate with several of the others, cutting across genetic, areal and thematic boundaries.

While the authors share a commitment to seeking language-independent, non-ethnocentric ways of analysing culturally situated linguistic meanings, grounded in accurate linguistic description and tested against natural language data, readers will notice also a diversity of perspectives and practices in applying this semantic approach. As a research tool, the NSM metalanguage is undergoing vigorous development, and each application of it yields theoretical insights into patterns of linguistic meaning as well as

into the structures of the languages under investigation. These papers demonstrate a greater convergence than previously found between different researchers' NSM formulations, but important variations in explicatory style and practice remain. Alternations in phrasing between, for example, "thinks something *like*: ..." vs "thinks something *like this*: ...", or "I didn't think before now: *this will* happen" vs "I didn't think before *that this would* happen", or "sometimes a person thinks" vs "sometimes people think" are more than trivial stylistic variations, in that they represent different positions with regard to the semantic valency (or combinatorial properties) of the primes "like" and "think", or the association of prototypical cognitive scenarios with individuals or groups. Such theoretical issues, which are only resolved through ongoing empirical work of the kind seen here, are not generally pursued in this volume, but are explored in Goddard and Wierzbicka (In press).

Researchers should not be deterred from using this method to describe cultural meanings of interest to them, by feeling that they must master a rigidly formalised system of representation. Although the emerging formal properties of the metalanguage are indeed worthy of close examination (see Goddard and Wierzbicka In press), it can readily be employed as a practical tool for investigating meaning. Statements of meaning can be proposed, tested against more data, and tested for intelligibility and translatability as shown in several of these studies. It takes many successive revisions and much analytical work to arrive at optimally clear and accurate explications, but many researchers are now finding this process immensely rewarding in terms of the cultural insight gained through it, in addition to the usefulness of the outcomes for language teaching and intercultural communication.

In the first paper, Mengistu Amberber demonstrates that the meanings of both lexical and grammaticised expressions of emotion in **Amharic** can be fully described in terms of semantic universals, allowing far greater accuracy than approaches based on partial translation equivalents. The polysemy of the verb (*tə*)*səmma* 'feel; hear' is resolved on formal, language-internal criteria; and it is found that the Amharic data support the main proposals that have been put forward about universal trends in the linguistic expression of cognitively-based feelings. The anger-like verb *tək'ot't'a* reveals an interesting link between emotion and speech act, containing a semantic element of wanting to rebuke the person who aroused the angry feeling.

The **Mbula** language of Papua New Guinea is one of many in its region that make extensive use of body image expressions, as the most productive and semantically rich means of talking about emotional experiences. Robert Bugenhagen's detailed explications of expressions based on *mata*- 'eye', *lele*- 'insides', *kete*- 'chest, liver', *ni*- 'being', *kuli*- 'skin', *kopo*- 'stomach' show how a language that reflects a view of the human person markedly different from "Western" concepts (cf. also McVeigh 1996), draws nonetheless on the same kinds of semantic components (THINKING something, FEELING something GOOD/BAD, WANTING to do something) that other languages do in emotion expressions. These explications occasionally introduce elements from outside the basic NSM set of primes. Although such elements could themselves be reduced to combinations of primes, it sometimes works better to retain them as "semantic molecules" to enhance the readability of long definitions, and explicate these molecules separately elsewhere.

Turning to a European language, a corpus-based analysis by Uwe Durst of *Ärger*, *Wut* and *Zorn* in **German** illustrates how even a very closely related language does not have an exact match for the supposedly basic English *anger*, but that the differences in distribution of these words can be explained in terms of subtle differences in their semantic structure. He also demonstrates some of the ways in which historical changes in cultural models, as suggested above, may be reflected in semantic changes and shifts in usage of a group such as the anger-like emotions.

Several genetically unrelated languages of Asia provide rich sources of data and analysis. Ways of talking about facial expressions in **Lao**, studied by Nick Enfield, reveal not only a culture-specific set of associations between emotions and facial gestures, but also a distinctive ethnolinguistic perspective on what are the significant features or components of facial expression. At the same time, the Lao evidence provides support for proposals concerning the universality of "cry" and "smile" as facial expressions of feeling (cf. Wierzbicka 1999). While this paper does not propose explications in the same style as most of the others, it nonetheless demonstrates the same kind of empirical and non-linguocentric approach to the identification and discussion of meanings.

Cliff Goddard gives a thorough overview of the **Malay** cultural keyword *hati*, referring to what is seen as the seat of human feelings and a highly productive source of linguistic expressions of emotion. Semantic analysis of this word provides a key to Malay ethnopsychology, both in its under-

standing of human nature, and in the role of interpersonal feelings in Malay social and emotional life. Goddard points to some developments in NSM metalanguage syntax, such as the avoidance of semantically complex “and” and “feel something towards someone” in favour of combinations of syntactically simpler elements. Like some of the other contributors, he employs a simplified version of the prototype framework explained above. He also provides a table of the NSM primes in Malay, though he does not actually give full explications in that language. These latter themes are taken up in Jean Harkins’ exploration of processes and issues involved in developing language-internal explications with speakers of **Arrernte**.

A striking phenomenon in **Japanese** is explored by Rie Hasada, who shows how the semantic complexity of the psychomimetic words reflects unique cultural perspectives. These words are among the most difficult for learners of Japanese to grasp, despite their frequent use and importance to effective communication, and an analysis of them in terms of universal semantic elements can help to overcome this problem. The strongly embodied nature of these concepts raises issues of how to represent auditory elements and physical prototypes in explications (I could hear something like: “*dokiQ*”; this person thinks: “if I am in a cold place I will feel something like this” [*hiya-hiya*]). (Cf. also Occhi’s 1999: 157, 167 observation about their power to invoke intuitive recall of an image.)

The theme of anger-like emotions is revisited in Paweł Kornacki’s study of a family of five **Chinese** words: *nu*, *sheng/qi*, *nao(huo)*, *fen*, and *taoyan*. Elements of these emotional states are compared with Western proposals concerning symptoms and stimuli related to anger-like feelings (cf. also Yu 1998), and some overlapping components of meaning are found, although they also differ in ways that are specified in Kornacki’s definitions. As with anger-like emotions in many other languages, impulses to action (I want to do something ...) are often involved, but in each case the role and phrasing of elements of this kind differs in important particulars.

The rich emotional vocabulary of **Russian** is addressed by Irina Levontina and Anna Zalizniak, who cover more than a dozen emotion concepts that have not received in-depth treatment in the already extensive literature on Russian emotions. By focussing on aspects of the system of culturally significant stereotypes of experience reflected in the language (which could also be understood in terms of cultural models or image-schemas), they are able to explain some of the most frequently observed characteristics of Russian emotional life – and literary reflections there-

of – without making unwarranted generalisations about “national character”.

A single highly salient **Polish** emotion, *przykro*, is analysed in depth by Anna Wierzbicka, who places it in context of the set of interpretive categories provided by the Polish language. She shows how the different set of categories provided by English would link similar feelings with several different emotion concepts including *hurt*, *offended*, *sorry* and *feeling bad*, and how *przykro* is linked also to Polish cultural values and expectations of interpersonal “good feelings”, the perceived lack of which produces this painful emotion.

Finally, Zhengdao Ye illustrates another area of **Chinese** ethnopsychology with a study of three of the most salient words in Chinese literature and poetry: *bei*, *ai* and *chou*, often glossed interchangeably as ‘sadness’, ‘sorrow’ and ‘grief’. She demonstrates conclusively that they are by no means interchangeable, nor are they equivalent to Western characterisations of “sadness”. Moreover, she provides detailed semantic explications of these three emotion words in both English and Chinese metalanguage formulae – an important demonstration of the principles of intertranslatability of NSM formulae, and of language-internal definition (that each language has the capacity to provide its own definitional metalanguage).

By presenting detailed semantic descriptions of culturally-situated meanings of culturally salient words used in the “emotion talk” in different cultures, we can offer glimpses into other people’s emotional lives – without imposing on those lives a perspective derived from the vocabulary and other resources of our own native language. Since the descriptions presented here are phrased in universal, that is, shared, concepts, they can be both faithful to the perspective of the speaker whose emotions we purport to be talking about, and intelligible to others. (These others include scholars, who often don’t seem to realise that they too are speakers of another language, with their own spectacles, tinted by their own native language.) We *can* combine the insiders’ point of view with intelligibility to outsiders.

Notes

1. The work on the language of emotions carried out within the NSM framework includes Ameka (1990), Bugenhagen (1990), Goddard (1990, 1991, 1995 a, b, 1996,

1997 a, b), Harkins (1990, 1995, 1996), Harkins and Wierzbicka (1997), Hasada (1997, 2000, In press), Kornacki (1995), Mostovaja (1988), Priestley (In press), Travis (1998), Wierzbicka (1973, 1986, 1990 a, b, 1992 a, b, c, 1993, 1994 a, b, 1995 a, b, 1997, 1998 a, b, c, 1999, 2000), Wilkins (1986), and Ye (2000, In press).

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Testing emotional universals in Amharic

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1. Introduction

In this paper I present a semantic description of emotion predicates in Amharic.¹ I assume a distinct cognitive domain which specialises in the emotions, and that the basic architecture of this cognitive domain is innate and universal. I also assume that the best way of searching for universal emotion concepts is through the use of the conceptual primitive FEEL (see Wierzbicka 1990, 1994, 1996, 1997, 1999; Goddard & Wierzbicka 1994; Harkins & Wierzbicka 1997 among others) within the theoretical framework of Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM).

Wierzbicka (1999) proposes the following set of working hypotheses in her study of emotional universals:

- (1)
 - a. All languages have a word for FEEL.
 - b. In all languages, feelings can be described as “good” or “bad”.
 - c. All languages have “emotive” interjections (i.e. interjections expressing cognitively-based feelings).
 - d. All languages have some “emotion terms” (i.e. terms for cognitively-based feelings).
 - e. All languages have words overlapping (though not identical) in meaning with the English words ‘angry’, ‘afraid’, and ‘ashamed’.
 - f. All languages have words comparable (though not necessarily identical) in meaning to ‘cry’ and ‘smile’.
 - g. In all languages, people can describe cognitively-based feelings via observable bodily symptoms.
 - h. In all languages, cognitively-based feelings can be described via bodily sensations.
 - i. In all languages, cognitively-based feelings can be described via figurative “bodily images”.

- j. In all languages, there are alternative grammatical constructions for describing (and interpreting) cognitively-based feelings.

The main purpose of the present study is to test the above set of hypotheses in Amharic. The paper is organised as follows. In § 2, a brief profile of Amharic grammar is presented in order to acquaint the reader with some of the basic grammatical features of the language. In § 3, a wide range of data from Amharic is investigated in terms of the set of hypotheses outlined in (1).

2. An overview of Amharic grammar

Amharic belongs to the Ethiosemitic sub-branch of the Semitic language family. It is one of the major languages of Ethiopia.² It is characterised by a typical Semitic morphology known as *root-and-pattern* morphology. This type of morphology involves roots consisting of a set of consonants, known as *radicals*, which bear the essential lexical meaning, and a set of vowels which occur with the radicals to form the basic stem. For example, the verb *səbbərə* ‘he broke (tr)’ consists of the triradical root \sqrt{sbr} ‘break’ and the pattern $C_1əC_2C_2əC_3ə$, encodes the perfect conjugation with the 3rd person masculine. The same three consonants occur in a whole range of stems. Thus, the infinitive of \sqrt{sbr} ‘break’ is *məsber* ‘to break’ which is formed by attaching the prefix *mə-* to the pattern $-C_1C_2əC_3$.

Open lexical classes include Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives and Adverbs. However, most adjectives are open only by derivation: they are derived from other classes, notably nouns and verbs. The closed classes include Pronouns, Demonstratives, Adpositions, Conjunctions, Numerals and Interjections.

The basic constituent order in the clause is S V (for intransitives) and A O V (for transitives). The verb is obligatorily marked for subject agreement as shown in (2):

- (2) *aster wadə bet hedəčč*
 A. to home go.PF-3F
 ‘Aster went home.’

Amharic is a nominative/accusative language and exhibits a mixture of dependent- and head-marking. A definite object NP (O) is obligatorily marked by the accusative suffix *-n*. The subject NP (S/A) is unmarked. Agreement with the object and indirect object is often optional. Whereas number distinction (singular and plural) is made in all persons (1st, 2nd, and 3rd), gender distinction (masculine and feminine) is restricted to the 2nd and 3rd person singular only.

3. The hypotheses

3.1. A word for FEEL

The Amharic exponent for the conceptual primitive FEEL is found in the verb (*tə-*)*ssəmma*. Consider the following examples:

- (3) a. *minim a- yī- ssəmma- ññī- mm*
 nothing NEG- 3M.IMP- feel- 1O- NEG
 'I feel nothing.'
- b. *min yī- ssəmma- h- al*
 what 3M.IMP- feel- 2M- IMP
 'How do you feel?'

The Amharic word is used to express concepts which are undifferentiated between "emotions" and "sensations", or feelings of "cognition" and feelings of "the body" respectively (cf. Wierzbicka 1997: 18)³. Thus, the following sentences can be felicitous replies to the question "how do you feel"?

- (4) a. *dəssita yī- ssəmma- ññ- al*
 happiness 3M.IMP- feel- I- IMP
 'I feel happy.'
- b. *himəm yī- ssəmma- ññ- al*
 pain 3M.IMP- feel- I- IMP
 'I feel pain.'

The Amharic verb for 'feel' cannot be used to translate the English construction such as "I *feel* the chair" (say as in touching a chair while trying to find your way in darkness):