

## Emotional Universals

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### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Emotions or feelings?

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

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

But there are no neat lines separating disciplines and schools of thought which prefer "feelings" to "emotions" or vice versa. Generally speaking, the buzz word in the field is "emotions" rather than "feelings". There are many reasons for that, but they all seem to have something to do with what Birch (1995) calls "the flight from subjectivity".

Many psychologists appear to be more comfortable with the term "emotion" than "feeling" because "emotions" appear to be somehow "objective", and it is assumed that only the "objective" is real and amenable to rigorous study. Indeed, it is often assumed that "emotions" have a biological foundation and can therefore be studied "objectively", whereas feelings cannot.

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<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, Needham (1981:99) states: "I take it to be true that what we think of as our "real" lives is characteristically an account of our feelings."

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

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

But the word *emotion* is not as unproblematic as it seems; and by taking the notion of emotion as our starting point we may be committing ourselves, at the outset, to an ethnocentric perspective which is shaped by our own native language, or by the language predominant in the field, rather than taking a maximally "free" and culture-independent point of view.

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

The English word *emotion*, however, with its characteristic combination of three components (related to feeling, thinking, and the body) does not have exact equivalents in other languages. In fact it embodies a concept which is itself an artifact of the English language.

In the hypothetical set of universal human concepts, evolved by the author and colleagues over many years' cross-linguistic investigation (see below, section 2.1.) 'feel' is indeed one of the elements, but 'emotion' is not. If words such as *emotion* (or, for that matter, *sensation*) are taken

for granted as analytical tools, and if their English-based character is not kept in mind, they can reify (for English speakers and English writers) inherently fluid phenomena which could be conceptualized and categorized in many different ways. Phrases such as "the psychology of emotion", or "psychobiological theory of emotion", or "operational definition of emotion (such as galvanic skin response, GSR)" create the impression that 'emotion' is an objectively existing category, delimited from other categories by nature itself, and that the concept of 'emotion' carves nature at its joints. But even languages culturally (as well as genetically) closely related to English provide evidence of different ways of conceptualizing and categorizing human experience<sup>2</sup>.

For example, in ordinary German there is no word for 'emotion' at all. The word usually used as the translation equivalent of the English *emotion*, *Gefühl* (from *fühlen* 'to feel') makes no distinction between mental and physical feelings (although contemporary scientific German uses increasingly the word *Emotion*, no doubt borrowed from scientific English, while in older academic German the compound *Gemütsbewegung*, literally "movement of the mind", was often used in a similar sense). At the same time, the plural form *-Gefühle-* is restricted to cognitively based feelings, although -unlike the English *emotion-* it doesn't imply any "bodily disturbances" or processes of any kind.

The same is true of Russian, where the noun *chuvstvo* (from *chuvstvovat'* "to feel") corresponds to both *feeling* and *emotion*, and where the plural form *chuvstva* suggests cognitively based feelings. (For further discussion, see Wierzbicka 1994b).

I am suggesting, then, that while the concept of 'feeling' is universal and can be safely used in the investigation of human experience and human nature, (see below, section 2.1.), the concept of 'emotion' is culture-bound, and cannot be similarly relied on.

In a culture where it is common to regard "composure" as a person's "normal state", phenomena such as joy, despair, shame, or fear may indeed be viewed as a "departure" from the normal, "baseline state". The English adjective *emotional* (with its implications of something unusual if not slightly reprehensible), reflects this perspective very

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<sup>2</sup> To give just one non-European example, Gerber (1985) notes that Samoans have no word corresponding to the English term "emotion", and rely, instead, on the notion of 'feeling' (*lagona*). (See also Ochs 1986:258).

clearly, but in a way, so does the noun *emotion* itself, because (unlike *Gefühle* or *chuvstva*) it links the idea of cognitively based 'feelings' with that of 'bodily events'.

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

It is interesting to ask, in this context, what exactly some scholars mean by "emotion" when they claim that emotions are not cognitively based. For example, Izard (1984:24) explicitly states that "emotion has no cognitive component. I maintain that the emotion process is bounded by the feeling that derives *directly* from the activity of the neurochemical substrates" Yet as examples of "emotions" Izard mentions "shame", "anger", "sadness" and so on — and not, for example, "pain", "hunger", "thirst", "itch", or "heartburn". In practice, then, Izard, too, distinguishes cognitively based ( i.e., thought-related) feelings (such as "shame" or "sadness") from purely bodily feelings and calls only the former "emotions". While denying that "emotions" are cognitively based he doesn't go so far as to include among them "hunger" or "thirst". On what basis, then, does he distinguish his "emotions" from hunger, thirst, or pain? The very meanings of words such as *shame*, *anger*, or *sadness* on the one hand, and *hunger* or *thirst* on the other draw a distinction between feelings based on thoughts and purely bodily feelings; and the word *emotion*, too, is only used in ordinary language with respect to thought-related feelings, never with respect to bodily feelings such as

hunger. Thus, in drawing a line between feelings such as "shame" or "sadness" on the one hand and "hunger" or "thirst" on the other, even "naturalist" scholars such as Izard accept in practice the distinction drawn in everyday conceptions -but at the same time they reject this distinction at a theoretical level!

## **1.2. Lexical universals and universal human concepts**

To analyse "emotions" (or any other semantic domain) in a clear and precise manner we need an appropriate semantic metalanguage. Up to a point, informal English can serve well enough, as can also technical, academic English. At some point, however, the fundamental concepts on which our analysis is based have to be defined clearly and precisely; and to define anything (without direct or indirect circularity) we need some indefinables. If our indefinables, or primitives, are not intuitively intelligible and self-explanatory, then our definitions will explain nothing. (Cf. Arnauld 1964[1662]; Couturat 1903/1961; Descartes 1931[1701]; Pascal 1954[1667].)

If we want to define emotion concepts in a way which would be truly explanatory we must define them in terms of words which are intuitively understandable (non-technical) and which themselves are not names of specific emotions or emotional states. This can be done using a small set of simple and universal concepts such as 'feel', 'want', 'say', 'think', 'know', 'good', 'bad', and so on, which have been independently justified as plausible candidates for the status of conceptual primitives (cf. Bogusławski 1966, 1970; Goddard 1989; Wierzbicka 1972, 1980, 1992b, 1996; cf. also the evidence in Goddard and Wierzbicka (eds.) 1994). The use of such primitives frees our analysis from obvious or hidden circularity and provides a framework in terms of which all concepts encoded in language (emotion concepts and any other concepts) can be clearly and rigorously portrayed.

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 (up to a point) its own classification upon human experience, language-specific English words such as *emotion*, *sensation*, or *mood* are cultural artifacts of the English language, not culture-free analytical tools (see Wierzbicka, 1993). 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" (to use Leibniz' phrase, cf. Couturat, 1903/1961, p.430); 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.

Given the non-universality of the concept 'emotion', the expression "emotional universals" should also be used with caution and always, so to speak, in inverted commas. (Cf. Wierzbicka, 1996). In line with what was said before even if we are interested, primarily, in emotions rather than in feelings in general, it will be safer to formulate our research agendas in terms of "universals of (the conceptualization of) feeling" rather than in terms of "emotional universals". If for rhetorical or other reasons we prefer, nonetheless, to use the latter expression (as I am doing in the title of this chapter), we should not let this expression fool us, or lull us, into forgetting what in our framework is, what is not truly universal and therefore truly reliable. For if we wish to build our analytical house on rock we must, ultimately, build it on the foundation of universal human concepts.

The work of the last thirty years undertaken by myself and colleagues, and spanning over a wide range of languages, has identified nearly sixty candidates for the status of universal semantic primitives, as outlined in the table below (for justification and discussion, see Goddard & Wierzbicka (eds.) 1994, and Wierzbicka 1996):

Substantives: I, YOU, SOMEONE (PERSON), SOMETHING (THING), PEOPLE, BODY  
Determiners: THIS, THE SAME, OTHER  
Quantifiers: ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MANY(MUCH)  
Attributes: GOOD, BAD, BIG, SMALL  
Mental predicates: THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR  
Speech: SAY, WORD, TRUE  
Actions, events and movement: DO, HAPPEN, MOVE  
Existence and possession: THERE IS, HAVE  
Life and death: LIVE(ALIVE), 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); FAR, NEAR; SIDE, INSIDE

Intensifier, Augmentor: VERY, MORE  
Taxonomy, partonomy: KIND OF, PART OF  
Similarity: LIKE

As the format of this outline suggests, the proposed set of primitives is not an unstructured set, but rather, a network of categories, which can be compared (somewhat metaphorically) with the parts of speech of traditional grammar. Taken together, these primitives can be used as a kind of mini-language, suitable for the description and comparison of meanings. In what follows, I will try to rely (as far as possible) on this mini-language in trying to formulate testable hypotheses about "emotional universals".

### **1.3. Are there any "universal human emotions"?**

Nothing is more persistent in the study of human emotions than the belief that they can all be reduced to a small number of universal and innate emotions found in all ("normal") human beings, and also, that these supposedly innate and universal emotions can be identified by means of English emotion terms such as *fear*, *anger*, or *sadness*. To quote a recent statement by a proponent of this idea, Plutchik (1994:54): *This (...) approach makes the assumption that a small number of emotions are considered primary or fundamental or basic, and that all other emotions are secondary, derived mixtures, or blends of the primary ones. From this perspective, one needs to identify the basic emotions and then explain which mixed emotions or blends are derived from them. Over the centuries, many philosophers and psychologists have proposed lists of basic emotions.*

Plutchik points out that in recent times the old theory of "basic emotions" has, if anything, gained in popularity; and that although many different lists of "basic emotions" have been proposed, there is nonetheless some consensus concerning at least some emotions: *In the last three decades numerous investigators have embraced the concept of "basic emotions". (...) These theorists all agree that a small number of emotions qualify as primary emotions. The smallest number is three and the largest number is eleven, while most proposals list five to nine emotions. Also of interest is the fact that certain emotions such as fear and anger appear on every list. Sadness (or its synonym grief, distress, or loneliness) appears on all but two lists.* (p.57)

In justifying the claim that emotions such as fear, anger, or sadness are innate and universal, many scholars appeal to the (alleged) fact that these particular emotions "are found in all cultures". As Plutchik (Ibid.) reports:

Kemper (1987) believes that there are at least four physiologically based primary emotions: fear, anger, sadness, and satisfaction. He argues that the rationale for considering them as primary is that they can be observed (or inferred) in most animals, *that they are universally found in all cultures*, that they appear early in the course of human development, that they are outcomes of power and status interactions, and that they are associated with distinct autonomic patterns of physiological changes. These are important points in that they represent an explicit justification for considering certain emotions as primary.

Similarly, Ortony and Turner (1990) point out that the usual reasons that theorists give for assuming the existence of primary emotions is that: (1) *some emotions appear to exist in all cultures*; (2) some can be identified in higher animals; (3) some have characteristic facial expressions; and (4) some seem to increase the chances of survival. (Emphasis added).

Some of the claims which have been made in recent literature about the alleged "basic emotions" are bizarre. Thus for example Plutchik suggests that "joy (or near equivalents such as love, pleasure, elation, happiness, or satisfaction) appears on every list." If emotions as different as joy, love, pleasure, elation, happiness, or satisfaction can be regarded as "near equivalents", then the whole idea of trying to identify some universal emotions and to draw specific lists of such emotions, seems rather pointless. (The same applies to Plutchik's list of "sadness", "grief", "distress", and "loneliness", described by him as "synonyms".) If, on the other hand, the intended claim is that people distinguish, universally, between "positive emotions" and "negative emotions", then this should be stated explicitly, and terms such as "love", "joy" and "pleasure", or "sadness" and "loneliness" should not be called "near-equivalents" or "synonyms".

Other suggestions made by the proponents of "basic emotions" may seem more plausible, for example, the idea that "fear", "anger", and "sadness" may correspond to some shared aspects of human emotional experience, and human genetic endowment. But a growing body of literature has established that despite its apparent plausibility this idea,



too, is hardly tenable. (See, e.g. Rosaldo 1980, Lutz 1988; Wierzbicka 1992a and b, 1994a, 1998; White 1992).

Speaking about the "uncritical presumption that in their emotional lives human beings anywhere are by and large essentially alike", Needham (1981:99) remarked that "it calls for very little acquaintance with history or ethnography to provoke the serious doubt that this view can be correct", and he commented:

For a comparativist, the prime field of evidence is presented by vocabularies of emotion in different linguistic traditions; and the first lesson is that simply in the numbers of emotions discriminated they diverge very greatly.

But numerous influential recent writers on emotions have simply ignored such warning.

As William James noted, we know from introspection that, on the one hand, we are capable of a great variety of feelings, and on the other, that these different feelings are not clearly separated from one another and could not be counted. Furthermore, as James also noted, upon this largely nebulous world of feelings every language imposes its own interpretive grid: ... *if one should seek to name each particular one of [the emotions] of which the human heart is the seat, it is plain that the limit to their number would lie in the introspective vocabulary of the seeker, each race of men having found names for some shade of feeling which other races have left undiscriminated. If we should seek to break the emotions, thus enumerated, into groups, according to their affinities, it is again plain that all sorts of groupings would be possible, according as we chose this character or that as a basis, and that all groupings would be equally real and true* (1890:485).

Thus, the way people interpret their own emotions depends, to some extent at least, on the lexical grid provided by their native language. Two different creatures (e.g. a large nocturnal moth attracted by lights and a clothes moth) may be classified as "the same kind of creature" (in English) and as "two different kinds of creature" in Polish (*ćma* and *mól* respectively), and conversely, two different animals (e.g. a mouse and a rat) may be classified as "two different kinds of animal (in English) and as "the same kind of animal" in another language (e.g., *nezumi* in Japanese). The same applies to emotions: whether or not two feelings are interpreted as two different instances of, essentially, "the same emotion" or as instances of "two different emotions" depends largely on the language through the prism of which these emotions are interpreted.

It is ethnocentric to think that if the Tahitians don't have a word corresponding to the English word *sad* (Levy 1973), they must nonetheless have an innate conceptual category of "sadness"; or to assume that in their emotional experience "sadness" - for which they have no name - is nonetheless more salient and more relevant than, for example, the feelings of *t•iaha* or *pe'ape'a*, for which they do have a name (although English does not).

Obviously, there is no reason to think that Tahitians are incapable of feeling "sad"; but neither is there any reason to believe that the speakers of English are incapable of feeling "*t•iaha*" or "*pe'ape'a*". Above all, there is no reason to think that "sadness" is more important or more "universal" than "*t•iaha*" or "*pe'ape'a*".

The conceptual categories of "sadness" or "anger" are highly relevant to the speakers of English, and also to the speakers of other languages which have words corresponding in meaning to the English words *sad* and *angry* or *sadness* and *anger*. In many other cultures, however, the conceptual grid provided by language is different. As in the case of "emotion" itself, to find examples of such differences, we don't have to refer to "exotic" languages accessible only to a narrow range of specialists: we can find them easily in German, Italian, or Russian. (Cf. Wierzbicka, 1992b, 1994a and b, 1998, In press).

## 1.2 A new approach to the search for emotional universals

It is often assumed that if one emphasises the differences in the emotional lexicon of different languages, and in particular, if one refuses to accept the universality of concepts such as 'anger', 'fear', or 'sadness', one is ipso facto embracing cultural relativism and rejecting the possibility of there being any "emotional universals". This isn't necessarily true, however, and certainly not in my own case. But false universals are a major obstacle in our search for true universals; and in searching for the latter we must, first of all, debunk the former. Since false universals arise, first of all, from the absolutization of distinctions drawn by one's native language, close attention to such ethnocentric traps is of prime importance. As Sapir (1949:165) put it, "The philosopher needs to understand language if only to protect himself against his own language habits".

Three levels of phenomena need to be distinguished here: (1) the psychological phenomena themselves; (2) the conceptualization of these phenomena; (3) the words and expressions linked in a given language for

the concepts in question. Ideally, these three levels of analysis should be signalled by typographic distinctions. For example, we could write about the phenomenon of ANGER, the concept of 'anger', and the English word *anger*; and also, about "anger" in some undifferentiated sense, discussed in the literature. In practice it is not always feasible to rely on such typographic distinctions in a fully consistent manner. The crucial point to remember, however, is that while the phenomenon of ANGER (singled out for our attention by the English word *anger*) is of course real, it is no more real than the phenomenon of RABBIA or SONG, singled out for other people's attention by the Italian word *rabbia* and the Ifaluk word *song*, and that the concept of 'anger' associated with the English word *anger* is no more revealing of human nature in general than the concept of 'rabbia', or the concept of 'song'.

If such distinctions are not carefully maintained, confusion sets in, often giving rise to fruitless controversies obscuring the real issues. To illustrate. Lutz (1986) rightly attacked "the tendency to treat [English] emotion concepts as conceptual primitives and universals" and charged that "in the cross-cultural context, Western ideas about the nature of emotion have set the terms for descriptions of the emotional lives of cultural 'others'" (p.47). But the impact of Lutz's well justified attack on the wide-spread ethnocentrism in the study of emotions may have suffered from her concomitant claim that emotions do not "happen 'inside' the person" (p.11), but somehow "outside", in the "society", and that they have to be treated as social, cultural, and moral rather than psychological, phenomena.

In fact there is no conflict between the view that "indigenous conceptualizations of emotions" (p.43) are shaped by culture and are often concerned with interpersonal relations and the view that emotions happen "inside a person". Furthermore, even if one wants to claim that not only emotion concepts but also emotions themselves can be culturally shaped, there is still no need to deny that those culturally shaped emotions happen "inside a person". Both words and concepts embodied in them are cultural artefacts, which evolve in a given society, and which are shared by people living in that society; but feelings are indeed "internal", subjective, and likely to be associated with "private" bodily events and processes. There is no conflict between accepting this and maintaining at the same time that people think, talk and interpret their feelings in terms of conceptualizations provided by their language and culture.

What applies to specific "emotion terms" such as *anger* or *sadness* applies also to the term *emotion* itself; for while the phenomenon of EMOTION is real enough, it is no more real than the phenomena of GEFÜHLE or CHUVSTVA, singled out for attention by the German word *Gefühle* (plural) or the Russian word *chuvstva* (also plural), and linked with the concepts 'Gefühle' and 'chuvstva', overlapping with but different from the concept of 'emotion'.

William James' point about "all sorts of groupings [being] possible" (...), all of them "equally real and true", applies to "emotions" in general as much as it does to specific feelings such as "anger" or "sadness". This is why in order to free our search for "emotional universals" from a culture-specific perspective it is good to rely in our discussion, as far as possible, on universal human concepts. This is what I will try to do in the survey which follows.

An analogy from the research into "colour universals" may be useful here. Many languages don't have a word for "colour", and in many societies people talk habitually about visual experience without separating the "colour" of various things from other aspects of their appearance. Even in English there are words like *gold* or *silver*, (referring not only to colour but also to a shining appearance), and in many other languages words of this kind appear to be the rule rather than an exception. A classic example is Hanunuo (cf. Conklin 1955), where, for example, the closest equivalent of *green*, *latuy*, is more properly glossed as "looking like plants when they have a lot of juice inside" (i.e. fresh, succulent-looking, probably -but not necessarily- green).

The search for "colour universals" initiated by Berlin and Kay's 1969 classic has ultimately proved misguided (see, e.g. van Brakel 1992) precisely because it approached human ways of thinking and talking about "seeing" in terms of a preconceived and non-universal notion of "colour"; and also in terms of preconceived and non-universal concepts such as 'black', 'white', 'red' and 'green'.

While Berlin and Kay's error proved fruitful (for although their theory finally collapsed, a great deal was learnt in the process) this error should not be endlessly repeated in the case of emotions. The concept of 'emotion' is no more universal than the concept of 'colour', and conceptual categories such as 'anger', 'sadness', or 'surprise' are no more universal than the conceptual categories 'white', 'red', 'green', or 'blue'. For example, the English concept of 'anger' is linked with a cognitive scenario which includes the following components:

- (a) this person did something bad
- (b) I don't want this person to do things like this
- (c) I want to do something to this person because of this

By contrast, the cognitive scenario linked with the Ifaluk concept 'song' includes components (a) and (b) above, but not (c); and this is why 'song' may manifest itself in sulking, refusal to eat, or even attempted suicide, whether 'anger' normally manifests itself in an action aimed at the offender, not at oneself. (See Lutz 1988; Wierzbicka 1992a).

Just as 'anger' doesn't match 'song', the English concept of 'blue' doesn't match the Russian concept 'goluboj' (sky blue), the Polish concept 'niebieski' or the Japanese concept 'aoi'. (For discussion, see Wierzbicka 1996).

This doesn't mean that there are no "universals of seeing", or that there are no "universals of feeling", but it does mean that in our search for these universals we should carefully listen to how people in different cultures talk about what they see, and how they feel (cf. White 1992); and that we should avoid analytical categories based on culture-specific aspects of our own languages.

## **2. A proposed set of "emotional universals"**

In this section (2.1. - 2.10.) I am going to survey ten or so "emotional universals" which emerge from the relevant portions of many linguistic and ethnographic studies of diverse languages and cultures. One or two of these universals are proposed here as firm findings, but most have the status of working hypotheses, with varying degrees of empirical support available thus far.

As particularly rigorous from a methodological point of view I regard the studies of the concept FEEL included in the volume *Semantic and Lexical Universals* (Goddard & Wierzbicka, eds., 1994), which was devoted in its entirety to an empirical search for conceptual universals, and which addressed directly the various methodological dilemmas involved in such a search. But a wealth of relevant data and observations can of course be found in reputable and methodologically informed modern "grammars" of various languages, as well as in other descriptive linguistic studies, particularly those focussed on emotions. A great deal of information is also available in recent anthropological literature, and in particular, in the writings of scholars such as Rosaldo (1980), Lutz (1988), Howell (1981), White (1993), and many others.

On the basis of the evidence gleaned from both linguistic and ethnographic studies I would like to propose the following set of working hypotheses:

1. All languages have a word for FEEL
2. In all languages, some feelings can be described as "good" and some as "bad" (while some may be viewed as neither "good" nor "bad").
3. All languages have "emotive" interjections (i.e. interjections expressing cognitively-based feelings).
4. All languages have some "emotion terms" (i.e. terms for cognitively-based feelings).
5. All languages have words overlapping (though not identical) in meaning with the English words *angry*, *afraid*, and *ashamed*.
6. All languages have words comparable (though not necessarily identical) in meaning to *cry* and *smile*.
7. In all languages, people can describe cognitively-based feelings via observable bodily symptoms.
8. In all languages, cognitively-based feelings can be described via figurative "bodily images".
9. In all languages, there are alternative grammatical constructions for describing (and interpreting) cognitively-based feelings.

In what follows, I will discuss these nine putative universals one by one.

### **2.1. A word for FEEL**

As mentioned earlier, all languages have a word for FEEL, undifferentiated between "bodily feelings" (sensations) and "cognitively-based" feelings ("emotions"). This word doesn't have to be a verb — it can be an adjective, or a noun; but cross-linguistic surveys conducted to date suggest that all languages do have some word corresponding in meaning to the English *feel* — not in all its senses, but in the basic "psychological" sense which can be illustrated with the following sentences:

- I feel like this now.
- I don't feel anything.
- I can't describe what I felt.
- How are you feeling?
- I felt as if I was going to die.

The claim that all languages do have a word for FEEL (in this sense) has often been denied, but a closer examination of the evidence suggests that such denials were premature or misguided. In particular, the claims that a given language doesn't have a word for FEEL are often followed by a statement that in this language to say the equivalent of "I feel good" or "I feel bad" one has to say "my liver is good" and "my liver is bad", or "my insides are good" and "my insides are bad" (see e.g. Lutz 1988; Howell 1981; Levy 1973). What statements of this kind show is that the languages in question do have a word for FEEL (in the relevant sense) but that this word is not a verb (as in English), but a noun, and that it is a noun which, in a different sense, means 'liver' or 'insides'.

Cross-linguistic investigations show that the pattern of polysemy which links 'feel' with 'liver', 'insides', or 'stomach' is very common (cf. Goddard 1994), and since facts of this kind cannot possibly be interpreted in terms of "vagueness", they are perfectly consistent with the claim that FEEL is a lexical and semantic universal.

For example, Howell (1981:139) notes that while popular conceptions in the West contrast the head and the heart as the organs of thought and feelings, the Chewong people of Malaysia "make no such explicit distinction. (...) The liver, *rus*, on the other hand, is the seat of both what we call "thoughts" and "feelings", and they do not make any conceptual distinction between the two. In fact, they have no word for "think" or "feel". Whenever they do express verbally emotional and mental states and changes, this is done through the medium of liver. Thus, they may say, "my liver is good" (I'm feeling fine)".

But if the Chewong really made no distinction between thoughts and feelings, then why should the sentence "my liver is good" mean 'I'm feeling fine' rather than 'I think well'? The very gloss offered by Howell suggests that one of the meanings of *rus* (liver) is simply 'feel', not some mixture of feeling and thinking.

As for thinking, it is noticeable that in the Chewong myths edited by Howell (1982 and 1984) references to thinking do occur from time to time, as in the following sentences:

*The woman thought she was pregnant.* (1982:255)

*Bòngso was born and the pandanus woman thought that he was a real baby* (1982:255)

*They were asleep, but he thought they were dead.* (1982:253)

It is possible that the Chewong word translated here by Howell as "think" is a loan from Malay, for in a more recent work Howell (In press) writes: *They [the Chewong] do not distinguish between thinking and feeling. In fact, as far as I could make out, they do not have indigenous verbs for these processes.*

But even if the verb for 'think' is in fact a loan from Malay, this would not, in my view, disqualify it from being a valid exponent of the primitive THINK, for, first, a loan from Malay may have been in use for hundreds of years, and second, it may well have replaced an earlier indigenous word. Nor is it necessary for a valid exponent of either FEEL or THINK to be a verb: a noun like *rus* (1. liver, 2. feel) may well do as an exponent of FEEL if, as Howell herself tells us, "my *rus* is good" means, unambiguously, 'I feel good'. (Cf. Goddard 1996).

Linguistic evidence suggests that it is not true that some languages fail to distinguish between THINKING and FEELING, and that in fact both these categories are a necessary ingredient of the universal "folk model" of a person (cf. D'Andrade 1987; Bruner 1990) -alongside THINK, KNOW, and WANT.

Where cultures do differ is in the extent, as well as character, of their "feel-talk". But this is a different matter altogether: the basic conceptual, and linguistic resources for talking about matters relating to feelings are always there. On the other hand, whether the main focus of such talk is psychological, moral, or social, depends on the culture. For example the great importance of "feel-talk" in American culture (cf. Bellah et al. 1985) is clearly in sharp contrast to the avoidance of "feel talk" in many other cultures, such as, for example, Japanese culture (see e.g. Lebra 1976) or Chewong culture (Howell 1981).

## 2.2. "Feel good" and "feel bad"

It appears that in all languages feelings can sometimes be described as "good" or "bad". For example, in English, one can say "I feel good" and "I feel bad", or "I feel awful" and "I feel wonderful"; and, as mentioned earlier, in Chewong one can say "my liver is good" meaning 'I feel well' or "my liver is bad" meaning 'I feel bad'.

A few further illustrations. In the Australian language Yankunytjatjara people say (Goddard 1994:239):

<i>Ngayulu</i>	<i>tjuni</i>	<i>palya/kura</i>
I	belly	good/bad



'I feel good/bad'

Similarly, in another Australian language, Kayardild (Evans 1994:212) one uses the word *bardaka* 'stomach' to refer to good and bad feelings:

<i>mirraa</i>	<i>bardaka</i>
good	stomach/feeling
<i>birdiya</i>	<i>bardaka</i>
bad	stomach/feeling

In other languages, one simply combines a word for FEEL with a word for GOOD or BAD (as in English). Hale (1994:269) provides examples from Misumalpan languages of Nicaragua, such as the following:

<i>yamni</i>	<i>ka-daka-yang</i>
good	feel
'I feel good'	

And Hill (1994:317) provides a similar example from the Austronesian language Longgu:

<i>Un</i>	<i>vadangi</i>	<i>meta/ta'a</i>
I	feel	good/bad
'I feel good/bad'		

In Japanese, one can use the expressions *ii kimochi* or *warui kimochi* (good or bad feeling), also with reference to unspecified (physical or mental) feelings. One example (from a Japanese novel, quoted in Hasada, 1997; see also Onishi 1994): *Watashi wa konya wa, ii kimochi deshita. Bunji-san to Eiji-san to anata to, rippa na kodomo ga sannin narande suwatte iru tokoro o mitara, NAMIDA GA DERU hodo, ureshikatta*. 'I feel very good tonight. When I saw you and Bunji and Eiji sitting next to one another, I was so happy I almost wept' (for further illustrations and discussion, see Goddard and Wierzbicka, eds., 1994).

The hypothesis that feelings can be described, universally, as either good or bad is of course in keeping with the view often expressed by psychologists that emotions are usually "valenced" or that they usually have a positive or negative "hedonic tone". For example, Plutchik (1994:109) points out that "a common practice is to group emotion words

into two broad categories called *positive affect* and *negative affect*"; and he states that an "important characteristic that is part of our experience of emotions is their bipolar nature" (p.65).

Some scholars go so far as to regard this "bipolar" character of emotions as one of their defining qualities. For example, Ortony, Clore, and Collins (1988:13) define emotions as "valenced reactions to events, agents, or objects, with their particular nature being determined by the way in which the eliciting situation is construed."

Linguistic evidence suggests that feelings are not always interpreted as good or bad, and some emotion terms (such as, for example, *surprise* or *amazement* in English) do not imply any evaluation (although the closest counterpart in, for example, Malay, does imply evaluation; see Goddard 1997). On the other hand, it does seem to be true that feelings are often conceptualized as either "good" or bad", and that in all languages people can talk of "good feelings" and "bad feelings" (of "feeling good" and "feeling bad").

### 2.3. Emotive interjections

All languages have special words ("interjections") which are used to express what one might call "cognitively-based feelings", that is feelings linked with specific thoughts, such as, for example, *gee!*, *wow!* or *yuk!* in English. The shared meaning of all such words can be represented as follows:

I feel something now  
because I think something now

What exactly one feels is not described directly but can be gleaned from the content of the thought on which the feeling is based.

For example, Ochs (1988:173) in her study of Samoan language and culture development cites the following Samoan interjections, among others: *ola* "surprise", *uoia* "surprise/sympathy etc.", *visa* "negative surprise", *isa* "annoyance", *a'e* "disapproval", *tae* "anger". Ochs' glosses are of course no more than approximations, but they clearly indicate a combination of feeling ('I feel something') with a thought. On the basis of Ochs' hints, we can hypothesize that these thoughts may have the following content:

*ola* → I didn't think this would happen

*visa* → this is bad  
I didn't think this would happen  
*voia* → something bad happened to this person  
I didn't think this would happen  
*isa* → something bad is happening  
I don't want this to be happening  
I don't want to say: it is very bad  
*a'e* → this person did something bad  
*tae* → this person did something bad  
I don't want this person to do things like this

As noted by Wilkins (1992), interjections are present even in the American Sign Language. Wilkins discusses, in particular, a sign usually glossed as "pity; sympathy; mercy". Presumably, the cognitive component of this sign can be represented along the following lines:

something bad happened to this person  
[I want to do something good for this person because of this ?]

(For a detailed discussion of many interjections from languages as different as Swahili and Ewe (Africa), Arrernte and Mayali (Australia) or Thai, see papers in Ameka (ed.), 1992; for a detailed analysis of many Polish and Russian interjections see Wierzbicka 1991). The existence of such words in all languages shows that although the universal concept FEEL is undifferentiated and makes no distinction between "bodily feelings" ("sensations") and "cognitively-based feelings" ("emotions"), all cultures recognize that some feelings are based on thoughts. It also shows that in all cultures people sometimes want to voice some such feelings by expressing them directly in a first person mode.

#### **2.4. "Emotion" terms**

All languages have some words for describing (rather than merely voicing) feelings based on certain thoughts, such as, for example, *anger* (*angry*), *shame* (*ashamed*), or *surprise* (*surprised*) in English. These words don't have to match in meaning across languages, but they all combine (in addition to various others) the following two components:

someone thinks something  
because of this, this person feels something

Furthermore, words of this kind attempt to describe the nature of the feelings in question -not directly, but via the cognitive prototype. This can be represented as follows:

Person X was angry/sad/ashamed/worried etc. =>  
person X thought something  
because of this, X felt something  
sometimes a person thinks something like this: [Y]  
because of this, this person feels something  
person X thought something like this  
because of this, X felt something like this

The child psychologist Paul Harris (1989:103) writes: *Thus, children do not begin their emotional lives by learning a script from their culture. They are born with the capacity to experience basic emotions of sadness, anger and joy when desirable goals are lost or blocked or achieved. They also come to understand that other people may experience those emotions.*

Harris's three scenarios (1<sup>st</sup> "desirable goals lost", 2<sup>nd</sup> "desirable goals blocked", 3<sup>d</sup> "desirable goals achieved") are clearly modelled on the English lexicon, although here, too, the "fit" is far from perfect (for example, when my goals are achieved, I'm likely to feel pleased rather than joyful; both joy and sadness can be disinterested and unrelated to personal "goals"; furthermore, the metaphor of "losing one's goals" is unclear and could be applied to apathy rather than sadness; anger can be caused by an insult rather than by an obstacle to one's goals, and so on. For further discussion, see Wierzbicka 1992a and b.)

But even if we assumed that the three cognitive scenarios formulated in terms of goals fitted the English folk-psychology well enough, they certainly don't fit that expressed in other languages. There is no reason to assume that these particular cognitive scenarios specified by Harris are innate, universal, and independent of culture. What *is*, in all probability, innate and universal, is, above all, concepts such as WANT, FEEL, I, HAPPEN, DO, NOT, GOOD and BAD; and also, certain ways of combining such concepts into meaningful configurations, such as, for example, 'I want this', 'I don't want this', 'I want to do something', 'I can't do anything', 'I feel something'.

But while the cognitive scenarios encoded in the English words *anger*, *sadness*, and *joy* (or Harris's somewhat arbitrary approximations of them) are not universal and cannot be plausibly regarded as innate, the basic conceptual pattern combining a cognitive component ('I think X')

with a feeling component ('I feel something') does seem to be universal; for all languages provide lexically encoded examples of it.

## 2.5. "Fear-like" words, "anger-like" words, "shame-like" words

Different languages "choose", so to speak, different cognitive scenarios as reference points for their emotional concepts, and no such scenarios are universal. At the same time, there are certain *components* of the cognitive scenarios which appear to be universal as reference points for emotion concepts. As a very rough approximation, these components can be described as "fear-like", "anger-like", and "shame-like". I will discuss these three categories in three separate sections (A, B, and C) below<sup>3</sup>.

A. All languages appear to have some words overlapping in meaning with English words such as *fear*, *afraid*, *scared*, *fright*, or *anxiety*. In fact, in many languages the family in question (which can be called, roughly and arbitrarily, the "fear" family) is much more differentiated than it is in English. For example, Bugenhagen (1990:208) makes the following comments about "fear-like" words and expressions in Mbula: *Life in an animistic society is very fragile. Dangers abound. Sickness, sorcery, malevolent spirits, jealous neighbours are all potential threats*. It is hardly surprising, then, that out of all the different emotions,

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<sup>3</sup> While the ways of talking about feelings not based on or associated with specific thoughts are outside the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting that all languages appear to have at least three words (or phrases) with a core meaning corresponding roughly to that of *hunger*, *thirst* and *pain*. These core meanings can be represented as follows:

*I am hungry (thirsty)* →

if a person doesn't eat (drink) anything for a long time

    this person feels something in the body

because of this, this person wants to eat (drink)

I feel like this now

*it hurts (I am in pain)* →

if something bad is happening to a part of a person's body

    this person feels something in this part of the body

this person wants not to feel this

I feel something like this now (in part X of my body)

fear appears to have the broadest range of encodings. Key parameters in delineating the various encodings are:

1. Does the fear have a particular object?
2. Does one fear for himself or for someone else?
3. Does one fear physical harm to oneself?
4. Is the feared entity proximate?
5. Is the fear the result of one's having done something?
6. Is the fear a response to having 'felt' some sensation?
7. Is the feared entity a spirit?
8. Is the fear a response to something having happened?

Given that all these "fear-like" words in both English and Mbula differ in meaning from one another, we cannot assume that all languages will have a word for "fear" in some constant sense. What we can hypothesize, however, is that all languages will have some word or words including the following two semantic components:

something bad can happen (to me)  
I don't want this to happen

These two crucial components can be combined with various other ones, and a language may have numerous lexical distinctions in this area, but the evidence available suggests that every language will have at least one word relating, roughly speaking, to "danger" and to "wish to avoid danger" ('something bad can happen to me, I don't want this to happen'). Given the human existential condition, this clearly makes sense.

**B.** All languages appear to have a word which shares two semantic components with the English word *anger*. These two components are:

I don't want this to happen  
I want to do something because of this

In many languages, these two components are combined with a "negative judgement" component: 'someone did something bad', but this doesn't have to be the case. For example, the Ilongot word *liget* (see Rosaldo 1980), which can refer to, for example, "fierce work in one's garden", clearly does not include such a component. But *liget*, too, refers to something undesirable: the idea that people may think that I am not as

good as other people. In addition, *liget* (glossed by Rosaldo, inter alia, as "energy") contains (like *anger*) an "active" component 'I want to do something'.

In the case of *angry* (*angry with*) and many other similar words in other languages, this "active" component refers to a punitive or retaliatory action, which in general terms can be represented as 'I want to do something to this person (because of this)'. But not all languages have a word including such a component; and, for example, *liget* does not. While the "liget" of young men taking part in a head-hunting expedition may seem to be highly compatible with such a component, the *liget* of people working "fiercely" (that is, with *liget*) in their gardens is clearly not.

In the case of *liget*, the absence of a component 'I want to do something to this person' may seem to be due to the absence of a component 'this person did something bad'; but the assumption that someone did something bad (present in *anger* but absent from *liget*) does not always lead to the presence of such a punitive or retaliatory component. For example, the Ifaluk word *song* (Lutz 1987, 1988) does imply a negative judgment ('this person did something bad') but does not imply a desire for punishment or retaliation ('I want to do something to this person because of this'). What all these words (*anger*, *liget*, *song*, and so on) do imply, is a desire for action ('I want to do something because of this'), where the causal subcomponent 'because of this' refers to something undesirable or unacceptable ('I don't want this to happen').

It should be noted that the word encoding the two components posited here as possibly universal does not have to coincide with the word usually translated into English as *anger* (*angry*), and that it doesn't have to be a particularly salient word in the emotion lexicon. For example, in Javanese the word *nesu*, usually glossed in English as *angry*, apparently doesn't include in its meaning the component "I want to do something (because of this)". On the other hand, the word *ngamuk*, roughly 'uncontrollable rage', which clearly does include this component, is less salient, more marginal in Javanese than *nesu* ('annoyed/upset/resentful').

Salient or not, however, it can be said that the Javanese word *ngamuk* ('uncontrollable rage') does fit the bill; for although it doesn't mean the same as *anger* it does, nonetheless, include in its meaning the two components posited here as universal: 'I don't want this to happen', 'I want to do something because of this'.

Why should all languages have (if they do) an emotion term comparable (in two cognitive components) to *anger*? Some may seek an answer to this question in theories of "aggression" as a (supposedly) common ingredient of "human nature". But words like *liget* or *song* cannot be legitimately described in terms of "aggression", for they lack the crucial component 'X wants to do something bad to Y'. One cannot say, therefore, that if "fear-like" words are universally associated with an impulse, or need, to run away, "anger-like" words are universally associated with an impulse, or need, to fight.

Rather, we have to conclude that "anger-like" words (including those like *liget* and *song*) document a universal human impulse, and need, to "act" (to do something), in order to prevent the occurrence, or the repetition, of some undesirable events. Clearly, this, too, makes sense in terms of the universal human condition.

Turning now to "shame-like" emotions, we must note, first of all, that the area in question is particularly variable, and that the idea that all languages would have a word identical in meaning to the English *shame* (or that all cultures would have a concept matching the English concept 'shame') is profoundly mistaken. (See e.g. Harkins, 1996).

Nonetheless, it seems likely that all languages have a word (or words) referring to what might be called "social emotions" (cf. Goddard 1995). This means, above all, words referring in their meaning to 'people' and to what people may think about us, and in particular, conveying a concern about "bad things" that people may think about us. More precisely, the cognitive components in question can be represented as follows:

people can think something bad about me  
I don't want this

Judging by lexical evidence, a concern of this kind appears to be universal, and it is universally linked with feelings. The universal core meaning of the words in question can, therefore, be represented as follows:

someone thinks something like this:  
people can think something bad about me  
I don't want this to happen  
because of this, this person feels something

Why should all languages have a word linking feelings with other people's (real or imagined) disapproval? Presumably, because we are not Robinson Crusoes, and have to live among other people, and with other



people. In the highly individualistic modern Anglo culture, this concern for other people's possible disapproval may appear to have diminished, and the importance of the concept of 'shame' has indeed diminished in modern times. (See e.g. Lynd 1958; Braithwaite 1989.) At the same time, however, another "social" emotion — 'embarrassment' — emerged and came to play a key role in this culture (Scheff and Retzinger 1991; Quinn and Holland 1995).

The two main differences between *shame* and *embarrassment* appears to have to do with what is seen as an objective basis for people's possible disapproval in the case of *shame*, and with the 'people here now' aspect of *embarrassment* (one can feel *ashamed*, but not *embarrassed*, when alone). The two concepts can be represented as follows (for detailed discussion, see Wierzbicka, in press):

*Shame* (X was ashamed)

- (a) X felt something because X thought something
- (b) sometimes a person thinks:
- (c) "people can know something bad about me
- (d) I don't want people to know this
- (e) if people know this they can't not think something bad about me
- (f) when I think about it, I can't not think the same"
- (g) when this person thinks this this person feels something bad
- (h) X felt something like this
- (i) because X thought something like this

*Embarrassment* (X was embarrassed)

- (a) X felt something because X thought something
- (b) sometimes a person thinks:
- (c) "something is happening to me now not because I want it
- (d) someone knows about it
- (e) this person is thinking about me
- (f) I don't want people to think about me like this"
- (g) when this person thinks this, this person feels something bad
- (h) X felt something like this
- (i) because X thought something like this

As the first explication suggests, the Anglo concept of 'shame' links, so to speak, social concerns with a feeling of responsibility: people can think something bad about me because they can know something bad about me (most likely, that I did something bad). 'Embarrassment', however, is linked with the thought that some people can think something bad about me, but not because of something bad that they can know about me: they are here and can think something bad about me *now* because of something that happened to me right now (most likely, they saw what happened to me). There is no moral basis to 'embarrassment', then, but this doesn't make the feeling any less powerful.

We could say, then, that the (Anglo) concept of 'shame' links social concerns with moral concerns, whether the modern Anglo concept of 'embarrassment' explicitly dissociates the two. In many other cultures, no such distinction is drawn. But the core components of "social emotions", postulated here (tentatively) as universal are relevant to both 'shame' and 'embarrassment', as well as to those concepts (lexicalized in many other languages) which combine in one semantic entity ideas separated in English under *shame*, *embarrassment*, and also *shyness*.

people can think something bad about me  
I don't want this to happen

It is interesting to note that of the three potentially universal categories discussed here, two -"fear-like emotions" and "anger-like emotions"- correspond to two hypothetical "basic human emotions" which seem to "appear on every list" (Plutchik 1994:57), whereas the third one -"shame-like emotions"- does not. This fact may be due to the prevailing biological emphasis of the literature on "basic emotions", whereas the complex extending over "shame", "embarrassment", and "shyness" has clearly a social focus (although Darwin, (1872/1955) for one, did not hesitate to posit a biological basis for some "social emotions", linking "shame" with the biological phenomenon of blushing. See also Izard 1991; Tomkins 1987; Nathanson 1992).

## 2.6. "Fear-like" emotions vs. "shame-like" emotions

In an earlier work on the conceptualization of emotions (Wierzbicka 1986) I pointed out, with reference to Hiatt's (1978) work on "Australian Aboriginal Concepts", that not all languages appear to

distinguish, in their lexicons, "fear" from "shame". In particular, Hiatt (1978:185) pointed out that in the Australian language Gidjingali (now called Burarra) the same word *-gurakadj-* appears to cover, loosely speaking, both "fear" and "shame", and he described the following range of situations in which he recorded the use of this word:

1. A meeting decides to put an end to two notorious killers. Two volunteers later make a surprise attack. When they report a successful outcome, a spokesman for their grateful countrymen replies: 'Good. Now we can sleep in peace, defaecate, urinate, go back to the camp, get up, urinate, defaecate, and so on, for we were afraid (*ara-gurakadj-a*) of those two men'.
2. A baby cries as I approach a family group. His mother says: 'He is afraid (*a-gurakadj-a*) of you.'
3. A woman says she was afraid (*ng-gurakadj-ira*) of encountering a ghost.
4. A man sees a naked woman approaching. He feels embarrassed (*a-gurakadj-a*).
5. Gidjingali men are circumspect with respect to their mothers-in-law and sisters (they must not utter their names, look at them, go near them etc. (...)) When asked why, a man replies that he is ashamed (*ng-gurakadj-a*).
6. In 1960 police arrested two young men for a felony committed in Darwin. At the time of their arrest, they were participating as novices in a Kunapipi ceremony at Maningrida, and as such were under strict injunction to keep away from women and children. After police had conducted them through the general camp, men spoke of the widespread shame/fear(?) that had been caused (*ngubura-gurakadj-a*).
7. A man, on deciding that it is time to arrange his son's circumcision, speaks first to the lad's MMB (mother's mother's brother). He indicates that he does not wish to raise the matter with the boy's mother, as this would cause him (the boy's father) embarrassment (*ng-gurakadj-a*). (Hiatt 1978:185)

Hiatt considers the possibility that in all situations the word in question implies both "fear" and "shame", but he rejects it as incompatible with some of the examples, and suggests instead a common core: "a strong impulse to retreat from the stimulus" (Hiatt, 1978:186).

It is not quite clear, however, whether in Hiatt's view, the Burarra people do or do not distinguish two distinct emotions: something comparable to the English *shame* and something comparable to the

English *fear*. Although he looks for a common core he nonetheless repeatedly talks of "two emotions", for example:

I have argued that, although situations arise among the Gidjingali in which fear and shame may be felt simultaneously, other situations occur in which only one or the other is present. Nevertheless, the same term is used in all three cases. Why should this be so? Perhaps it is because both emotions manifest a strong impulse to retreat from the stimulus, viz. snakes, ghosts etc. in the case of fear; mothers-in-law, sisters etc. in the case of shame. (Hiatt 1978-1:186)

On the basis of Hiatt's data (confirmed by personal information from other linguists who have worked on Burarra and related languages) I concluded (in Wierzbicka 1986) that a distinction between "fear-like" emotions and "shame-like" emotions is probably not universal.

In the intervening decade, however, a comprehensive Burarra dictionary has been published (Glasgow, 1994), which provides more information on the question and which allows us to see the situation in a different light. Most importantly, the dictionary shows that there are two different words in the language (the adverb *gona* and the verb *gurkuja*) which can be said to be associated with "an impulse to withdraw". While these two words are both glossed with reference to both "fear" and "shame", the primary gloss offered for *gona* is "ashamed", and the primary gloss offered for *gurkuja* is "show fear"; be frightened; be afraid". Both these primary glosses and the illustrative examples suggest that *gona* is in fact more "shame-like", and *gurkuja* more "fear-like". Particularly illuminating is the following example, in which both the putative "fear/shame" words occur:

*wurra an-ngaypa jawina gala barra a-gurkuja burrwa wurra  
gama gorlk rrapa minypa gona a-ni apula ngaypa rrapa gun-ngaypa  
janguny.*

*'But my disciple must not be afraid of people and like be ashamed of me  
and my story.'*

The word translated in this case as "afraid" is *gurkuja* and the one translated as "ashamed" is *gona*, and it seems that although "people" are mentioned in the first case, and not in the second, in fact the first word (*gurkuja*) implies the "fear-like" thought 'something bad can happen to me', whereas the second implies the "shame-like" thought 'people can think something bad about me'.

This is not the place to undertake a detailed discussion of *gona*, *gurkuja*, and other related words in Burarra. From the data now available, however, it emerges that while the language doesn't have words

corresponding exactly to *fear* and *shame*, it does have two words which could be roughly described as "fear-like" and "shame-like" (bearing in mind that what is really meant is a contrast between a "fear-like" component 'I don't want something bad to happen to me' and a "shame-like" component 'I don't want people to think bad things about me').

Available evidence suggests that the two Burarra concepts in question are indeed closer to one another than *fear* and *shame* are in English; nonetheless the Burarra data are not incompatible with the set of emotional universals proposed here.

As Hiatt suggested, avoidance (the "strong impulse to retreat from the stimulus") is, no doubt, the key factor in the apparent closeness of the "fear-like" and "shame-like" emotion concepts in Australian languages. Nonetheless, the available evidence suggests that Burarra, like other Australian languages, does draw a distinction between, roughly speaking, "fear-like" feelings and "shame-like" feelings.

## **2.7. "Good feeling"**

The three categories singled out here as possibly universal ("fear-like", "anger-like" and "shame-like" feelings) may strike the reader as being all "negative": what about happier, more "joy-like" and "love-like" emotions?

Before discussing such "happier" emotion concepts in any detail, let us note, first of all, that emotions labelled here as "anger-like" do not necessarily involve any "bad feelings" at all. In particular, the Ilongot concept of *liget* (as described by Michelle Rosaldo, 1980) is not necessarily linked with "bad feelings".

The semantic component proposed here as the universal common core of the category in question is 'I don't want this; I want to do something because of this'. What is "negative" about this category is the volitive component 'I don't want this' (which it shares with "fear-like" and "shame-like" categories), but the "hedonic tone" of the emotion does not have to be negative ("bad").

Turning to "positive" emotions like *joy* and *happy*, we must note, first of all, that some languages appear to rely largely on the collocation "feel good", and may not have any words comparable to *joy* and *happy* apart from this collocation.

But of course, negative generalizations may be due to the limitations of our knowledge rather than to limitations in emotional lexicons. It is interesting to note, in this context, that the prediction

concerning Australian languages by Hiatt (1978:181) may have been overly negative:

After inspecting a small number of lexicons, I predict that all Aboriginal languages possess words for the following emotional states: anger, fear, sorrow, jealousy, and shame. In the context of Aboriginal society, I would call them the dramatic emotions. Words referring to affection and contentment may also be widespread, though I suspect that in Australia the tranquil emotions have not obtained the same degree of verbal representation as their counterparts.

In the intervening two decades a number of detailed dictionaries and descriptive studies of Australian languages have appeared which show that words for "positive feelings" (comparable to *happy* or *joy*) do exist in the languages in question (cf. Goddard 1990, and 1994, Evans 1992, Henderson and Dobson 1994). Obviously, the matter requires further investigation.

As for "love-like" emotions, in many languages words referring to them appear to be linked with thoughts of "bad things" happening to people, and so to be akin, in some ways, to "pity", "compassion", "sadness", and even "anguish" rather than to "happiness" or "joy". The Ifaluk concept of *fago*, glossed by Lutz (1988) as "love/sadness/compassion", is a good case in point, as is also the Russian *žalost'*, which could be loosely glossed as "loving compassion", or even "sorrowful loving compassion" (cf. Wierzbicka 1992a; Zalizniak 1992).

To illustrate, it will be useful to quote at some length what Levine (1981:110-111) says about the Nyinba language of Nepal: The Nyimba moral system includes no precept and provides no grounds for the evaluation of love in the generalized western sense. Nor is there any comprehensive term or concept to describe the idea of 'love', whether divine, parental or sexual. Although the relations between close kin, particularly parents and children, are informed by a special moral bond, the nature of this bond is not seen as a suitable topic for discussion and is thus poorly articulated. Parents speak of having a feeling of 'compassion' or 'compassionate love' (Tib. *snying rje*) for their children, but this, ideally, should be disinterested concern, comparable to the feeling of compassion prescribed towards all sentient beings by Buddhist ethics (...) Less commonly, parents may describe their children, as well as other close kin and friends, as persons 'they hold dear' (Tib. *nga'i gce ba*). This, like expressed sentiments of 'compassion', is typically applied to dependent and weaker persons. However, it also seems to imply a state of exclusive emotional attachment.

In the Nyimba moral system emotional attachments are identified with the desire for material goods and condemned as covetousness or greed (Tib. *'dod pa*), considered one of the cardinal vices. All such attachments are thought to produce mental suffering, simply because they give rise to frustration and inevitable sorrow. Furthermore, this is a state of mind said to increase the individual's concern with worldly existence and thus to interfere with his pursuit of salvation. Sexual relationships are presumed to be especially conducive to the development of interpersonal attachments and to be motivated by -or to motivate- carnal desire, known as *dödchag* (Tib. *'dod chags*; these are considered a type of *'dod pa*). There is no other term which can be used to describe the sexual 'love' of husbands, wives or lovers; nor is there any positive valuation of this phenomenon.

If we believe Levine (and other similar reports) we will have to accept that "love" (in the English sense of the word) is not a universal human notion. However, it seems possible that all languages have some word or words implying a desire to do good things for someone else, presumably modeled, prototypically, on the relationship between mothers (X) and their children (Y), and that this can be represented as follows:

person X wants to do good things for person Y

It would be nice to be able to think that all languages have some words acknowledging a kind of feeling associated with "wanting to do good things for another person". At this stage, however, we do not know whether this is indeed so.

In an earlier work (Wierzbicka 1992a:146-7) I have argued against the common assumptions that "love" is a universal human emotion, pointing out that the concept "love" is no more universal than, for example, the Ifaluk "fago", and I think the point is valid and important. I would now add that all languages may nonetheless recognise, lexically, a distinct type of emotion linked with the semantic component 'person X wants to do good things for person Y'. But the matter requires further investigation.

## **2.8. "Smile" and "cry"**

Turning now to the links between feelings and the body, we will note, first of all, that all languages appear to have some word or words comparable in meaning with *smile* or *laugh*, and some word or words comparable in meaning with *cry* or *weep*.

The distinctions between 'smile' and 'laugh' or between 'cry' and 'weep' are by no means universal, and the words described here as "comparable" to *smile* and *laugh* or *cry* and *weep* do not have to correspond to these in meaning exactly, but apparently some shared components *can* be identified. These components can be formulated as follows:

*cry/weep*

I think: something bad is happening

I feel something bad

*smile/laugh*

I think: something good is happening

I feel something good

I have formulated the core meanings of smiling/laughing and crying/weeping in a first person mode, on the assumption that such behaviours can be (and usually are) interpreted as if they were messages. I will now turn to other bodily behaviours, which are normally assumed to be involuntary and which are likely to be interpreted as "symptoms" rather than "messages".

## 2.9. Emotions described via external bodily symptoms

It seems likely that in all languages one can talk about "emotions" by referring to externally observable bodily events and processes understood as symptoms of inner feelings. For example, in English one can say:

*She blushed.*

*She got pale.*

*Her hands were trembling.*

*Her lips were trembling.*

*Her eyes got round [with fear].*

*When I saw this, my palms started to sweat.*

and so on, intending such sentences to be understood as referring to emotions rather than only to bodily events. Presumably, the folk model behind such sentences can be interpreted as follows:

something was happening to part Y of X's body

people could see this

because of this, people could know:



this person feels something now  
because this person thinks something now

Unlike in the case of "smiling" and "crying", I am not suggesting that all languages will have special words referring to such symptoms. For example, while English has the special word *blush*, presenting a visible bodily process as a symptom of emotion, in many other languages (for example, in Russian) the closest equivalent of *blush* is simply something like "get red", with no special reference to emotions. What I think might be universal in this area, is the very fact that visible bodily events and processes (such as getting red in the face) may be treated as symptoms of emotions, that is, may be reported (in everyday discourse) with the intention of conveying information about a person's feelings (related to this person's concurrent thoughts).

The descriptions of the symptoms referring to emotions can't be always literally translated into other languages, for their interpretation can be culture-specific (Cf. Iordanskaja 1986). For example, as pointed out by Hasada (1997), in Japanese a reference to "lowering one's eyes" (*mejiri o sageru*) would refer to feeling pleased or satisfied, as in the following sentence from a novel by Kobayashi:

[*Ero-jishi de aru*] *Subuyan kara denwa o uke, tachimachi MEJIRI O SAGERU kyaku bakari to wa kagiranu.*"

E: *True, some customers had to only receive a call from Subuyan [a pimp] to begin salivating (lit. 'lowering the edges of their eyes').*

Hasada comments on this example as follows: *Here the customers feel 'pleased' to get a call from Subuyan who introduced a girl to them.* However, in English the description of this Japanese facial expression would not be translated word-for-word like "drawing down the edge of one's eyes". This is because the equivalent English facial expression does not convey the intended meaning of the expression in the original text. It is translated as "salivating", which only partially corresponds to the original meaning, since it implies the customer's positive response, but expresses it through a different part of body: the mouth.

Similarly, in Chinese what is perceived as bodily symptoms of emotions are different from those recognized in English. For example, Chun (1996:3) cites the following expressions:

*la chang lian* → 'pull a long face'

*kua zhe lian* → lit. 'drop face'

*la xia lian* → lit. 'pull down face'

*bian lian* → lit. 'change face'

and comments: "All the above expressions describe that one gets angry and that therefore his or her face is no longer the same, and usually it appears to be long". In addition, Chun (1996:4) quotes the following expressions, also understood as referring to what she describes as an "angry face":

*zhang hong le lian* → 'swell up to red face'

*tie ching le lian* → 'metal green face'

*lian hong buozi cu* → 'red face thick neck'

## 2.10. Emotions described via internal "bodily images"

It seems likely that in all languages people can talk about cognitively-based feelings in terms of figurative "body images", referring to imaginary events and processes taking place inside the body, such as the following ones in English:

*When I heard/saw this, my heart sank.*

*It [the news, etc.] broke my heart.*

*I did it with a heavy heart.*

In contrast to the bodily "symptoms", discussed in section 2.9., bodily images presently under discussion combine similes (LIKE) with a counterfactual (AS IF) mode of thinking, roughly speaking along the following lines: X feels like a person who thinks [Y] and who feels because of this as if Z had happened in their body. More precisely, it can be represented as follows:

*I was boiling inside [with rage]. =>*

at that time [e.g. when I heard/saw X] I thought something (Y)

I felt something because of this

I want someone to know how I felt

because of this I say:something was happening inside my body

I think if Z was happening inside a person's body

this person could feel like this

[I don't say Z was happening in my body]

For example, a person who says "I was boiling inside (with rage)" does not really think that if some water were actually boiling inside their body they would feel like they are feeling now; rather, this person is consciously using an image which seems intuitively effective, and which can be counted upon to be understood only as an image, not as an actual likeness. Some examples from languages other than English:

POLISH

*serce mi pęka*

heart to-me is-breaking

'I experience painful emotions as if my heart were breaking'

*serce mi się ściska*

heart to me REFL is-squeezing

'I experience painful emotions, as if my heart were being squeezed'

*serce mi się kraje*

heart to-me REFL is-cutting

'I experience painful emotions, as if my heart were being cut to pieces'

*zrobiło mi się ciężko na sercu*

it-got to-me REFL heavy-ADV. on heart

'my heart got heavy'

*zrobiło mi się lekko na sercu*

'it-got to-me REFL. light-ADV. on heart'

'I felt as if a burden lying on my heart were removed'

MBULA (Austronesian; Bugenhagen 1990:205):

*kete- (i)malmal* 'angry' (lit. 'liver fight')

*kete- (i)bayou* 'very angry' (lit. 'liver hot')

*kete- (i)beleu* 'uncontrollably angry' (lit. 'liver swirl')

*kete- pitpit* 'get excited too quickly' (lit. 'liver jumps')

*kete- ikam keN* 'startled' (lit. 'liver does snapping')

*kete- biibi* 'too slow' (lit. 'liver is big')

*kete- kutkut* 'anxious' (lit. 'liver beats')

*kete- iluumu* 'at peace' (lit. 'liver cool')

*kete- pas* 'out of breath' or 'lose one's temper' (lit. 'liver removes')

*kete- paņana* 'calm, unmoved, long-suffering' (lit. 'liver is rock-like')

*kete- ise* 'aroused' (lit. 'liver goes up')

*kete- isu* 'take a rest' (lit. 'liver goes down')

*kete- pakpak* 'very angry' (lit. 'liver is sour')

For Chinese, Chun (1996) offers the following examples and comments:

1. *gan chang you dwang*

'one's liver and intestine are almost broken'

"This expression is used to describe that someone is in great grief, misery or sadness. One can say 'someone is crying like *gan chang you dwang*'.

2. *xin ru dao ge*

'one's heart is painful like cut by a knife'

"This expression is used to describe that one is in a very painful situation because of sadness, grief, or misery."

3. *wu zhang ju lie*

'five organs all broken'

"This expression is used to describe that one is in great anger and that therefore his or her internal organs are all broken".

4. *xin ji ru fen*

'one's heart is anxious like burning'.

"This expression describes that one is in great anxiety like fire burning".

5. *xia po dan*

"One's gallbladder is often linked with courage by the Chinese. If one is very courageous or brave, he or she is said to be *hen you dan liang* (have much gallbladder). On the contrary, if one is terrified badly, then he or she is said to be *xia po dan* (gallbladder broken from fear)".

Finally, for Kayardild (an Australian language) Evans (1994:212) offers the expressions *mildalatha bardaka* 'feel grief stricken', which means literally 'cut through one's stomach'; and *bardaka warriliija* 'feel uneasy', which means literally 'stomach causes itself to go away'.

## 2.11. The grammar of emotions

It seems likely that all languages draw some grammatical distinctions in the area of emotions, thus reflecting different perspectives on emotions, available to speakers within one culture. Roughly speaking, different constructions may present an emotion as "involuntary" or as "uncontrollable", or as "overwhelming" and "irresistible", or as "active" and in some sense "voluntary", and so on.

It is too early to say whether any such perspectives on emotions are universal, but the general statement -that speakers of any language have more than one mode for conceptualizing emotions- seems plausible enough.

To illustrate. In English, the predominant way of describing emotions is by means of adjectives and quasi-participles:

*He was angry/sad/happy/afraid.*

*She was worried/disgusted/surprised/amazed/ashamed.*

These adjectives and quasi-participles present the experiencer's emotion as a state. In some cases, however, there is also a verbal mode of expression, which implies a more active attitude on the part of the experiencer:

*She worried/grieved/rejoiced(archaic).*

What this "active" attitude means is that the experiencer is thinking certain thoughts for some time and thus is as it were generating certain feelings in himself or herself (a process which -though not necessarily voluntary- in principle could be stopped):

X was thinking something for some time

because of this, X felt something (Y) for some time

Another grammatical construction allows speakers of English to talk of their feelings as overwhelming. This is done by means of a noun with the preposition *in*, which suggests a container image (cf. Wierzbicka 1986; Mostovaja 1996): *She was in panic/ in despair/ in ecstasy/ in agony.*

In other languages distinctions of this kind play a much greater role than they do in English. For example, Russian grammar includes the following three constructions for the description of, roughly speaking, "sadness" (see Wierzbicka 1990):

1. *On byl grusten.*

he-NOM.was-MASC sad-MASC

2. *Emu bylo grustno.*

he-DAT (it)was-NEUT sad(ADV) NEUT

3. *On grustil.*

he-NOM sad(VERB)-PAST.MASC

All these sentences can be roughly glossed as 'he was sad', but in fact they differ in meaning. In particular sentence (2) implies that the sadness was involuntary and was, so to speak, "happening to the experiencer", whereas (3) implies active involvement by the experiencer, and suggests that he is bringing about his own sadness by thinking certain thoughts (and also, that he is somehow displaying it). The reality of these semantic differences is manifested in further grammatical facts, such as, for example, that the verb *grustit'* (infinitive), in contrast to the adjective *grusten* and the adverb *grustno*, takes the preposition *o*, characteristic of verbs of active thinking:

'He was thinking about her.'

6 *On grustil o nej.*

'He was "saddening-himself" about her.'

'He was making himself sad by thinking about her.'

7 \**On byl grusten o nej.*

'He was sad about her.'

8 \**Emu bylo grustno o nej.*

'He experienced sadness about her.'

Finally, for Mbula, Bugenhagen (1990) lists as many as five different "experiential constructions", (in addition to "body images"), each suggesting a different conceptualization of emotions. For example, "fear" can be reported in the following three constructions, among others ("S" stands for "subject", PSR, for Possessor, and NMZ, for nominalization):

*N-io aŋ-moto.*

1S 1S-fear

'I am afraid'

*Kuli-ŋi-moto*

skin-1S.PSR 3S-fear

'Something makes me feel uneasy' (lit. something frightens my skin)

*Moto-ŋa-na i-kam yo.*

fear-NMZ-3S.PSR 3S-do/get 1S.ACC

'I was terrified.' (lit. fear got me)

(For numerous further illustrations, see e.g. Bugenhagen 1990, Ameka 1990, Wierzbicka 1992a).

What such grammatical facts suggest is that in all cultures people conceive of emotions as being experienced in many different ways, especially in relation to human will: in some emotions, the experiencer can conceive of himself/herself in a more or less agentive role, as a person in charge of the feelings, whereas in others, the experiencer perceives himself/herself as someone to whom something happens, independently of, or even against, their will. This flexibility in the interpretation of emotions may well be another emotional universal.

### **3. Conclusion**

Since all languages appear to have a word for the concept 'feel', we can assume that this concept is an integral part of the universal folk model of a person, that is, that in all cultures people attribute feelings to other people, as well as to themselves (cf. D'Andrade, 1994).

Furthermore, evidence suggests that in all cultures people distinguish linguistically (and in particular, lexically) between different kinds of feelings. Apparently, in all languages some 'feelings' are lexically linked with 'thoughts' (in the form of words comparable in their over-all semantic structure to English words such as *angry*, *afraid*, or *ashamed*).

It seems likely, too, that in all languages there are some words linking 'feelings' with the body, such as *hungry*, *thirsty*, and *pain* or *hurt* in English.

In all languages, there also seem to be ways of speaking that link feelings based on thoughts with events or processes involving the body -a fact strikingly consistent with many scholars', especially psychologists', emphasis on the biological aspect of "emotions". First of all, these ways of speaking suggest that some externally observable bodily behaviours (in particular, facial behaviours) are seen universally as voluntary or semi-voluntary modes of expressing and communicating cognitively based feelings (e.g. "cry/weep" and "smile/laugh"). Second, they suggest that some visible and/or audible (that is, also externally observable) bodily events and processes may be seen, universally, as involuntary symptoms of cognitively based feelings (such as, for example, *blush* in English). Third, all languages also appear to have conventional bodily images, that is, expressions referring to imaginary events (and processes taking place inside the body used as a basis for describing the subjective experience of

feelings assumed to be based on thoughts (such as *my heart sank* in English).

It also appears that the major universal mode for describing cognitively based feelings is in terms of a comparison, that is, via LIKE, and that in this, the main human strategy for talking about feelings is analogous to the main human strategy for talking about colours. If *gold* (Adj.) means, essentially, 'looking like gold', and *blue*, 'looking like the sky (when one can see the sun) or like the sea (seen from afar)', so *afraid* means, roughly, 'feeling like a person who thinks: something bad can happen to me, I don't want it', and *heart-broken* means, roughly, 'feeling like a person who thinks: something very bad happened to me, and who feels because of this as if their heart were broken'.

While internal bodily images focus on the subjective aspect of feelings and on their possible links with essentially unknowable processes going on inside the body, the full cognitive scenarios associated with certain kinds of feelings often point to social and moral concerns, and to aspects of interpersonal interaction. For example, they reflect concerns about "bad things happening to someone", or about "good things happening to someone else (and not to me)", about "someone doing something bad", about "someone wanting to do good things for someone else", or about "other people thinking something bad about me".

This mode of discourse, referring to feelings but linking them with evaluative and "people-oriented" cognitive scenarios, is of course highly compatible with the emphasis of anthropologists such as Lutz (1988) or White (1992) on the social, interpersonal, and moral character of discourse about "emotions" in many non-Western societies, and on the culture-specific nature of the modern Western (especially Anglo-American) "therapeutic" discourse, with its focus on introspection into one's subjective internal states.

Feelings are subjective, and they appear to be universally thought of (at times) as related to what is happening in the body; but they are also often thought of as based on certain recurrent thoughts — cognitive scenarios shaped by the particular culture.

Since in common human experience the content of feeling-provoking thoughts influences the feeling, one can legitimately say that not only "emotion-concepts" but feelings themselves are also influenced by culture. Since, furthermore, in common human experience cognitively-based feelings often trigger or influence bodily feelings, it makes sense to



suggest that bodily feelings, too, (and perhaps even some bodily processes associated with them) may be indirectly influenced by culture.

There is no real conflict between the view that human feelings can be "embodied" and have a biological dimension and the view that they are "socially constructed" and have a cultural dimension. There is also no real conflict between a recognition of cross-cultural differences in the area of "emotions" and a recognition of similarities.

There can be no doubt that the ways of thinking and talking about feelings prevalent in different cultures and societies (and also different epochs; cf. e.g. Stearns & Stearns 1986) exhibit considerable diversity; but neither can there be any doubt about the existence of commonalities and indeed universals. The problem is how to sort out the culture-specific from the universal; how to comprehend the former through the latter; and also, how to develop some understanding of the universal by sifting through a wide range of languages and cultures rather than by absolutizing modes of understanding derived exclusively from our own language.

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