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Human Emotions: Conceptualization, Categorization, and Linguistic Manifestation

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Abstract

This paper focuses on human emotions, in view of how human emotions are conceptualized, categorized, and manifested in natural language, from the perspective of the componential appraisal theory of emotion in the first place. The nature of emotion is discussed; the components and functions of emotion are examined. Scientific literature is reviewed on the issue of differentiating emotion from the other types of affect. Feeling as one of the components of emotion proper is individuated in terms of qualia, bearing on phenomenology of human emotions. Certain ways of distributing emotion concepts into emotion categories are shown, based on the linguistic manifestations of these concepts; the key role that language plays in the formation of emotion concepts is emphasized. Basic emotions are characterized in terms of their universal biological nature that is independent of the variety of human languages and cultures. Verbal report on emotions is shown to rely on the cognitive mechanism of awareness and on linguistic naming; virtues and vices of this report are discussed. Emotion qualia are shown to emerge or transform with the emergence or transformation of the words that denote respective emotions, as a unique testimony of the dynamics of emotions in synchrony and in diachrony.

Keywords: Emotion, Emotion category, Emotion concept, Emotion name, Emotion qualia

1. Introduction

Conceptualization and categorization of human emotions have become traditional interests of research in the fields of psychology, behavioral and social science (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000; Buck, 1999; Charland, 1997, 2002, 2010; Frijda, 1986, 1994, 2000; Goldie, 2000; Gordon, 1987; Izard, 1992; Lewis, Haviland-Jones, & Feldman, 2008; Lindquist, 2013; Mandler, 1984; Ortony & Turner, 1990; Russell, 1991, 2003; Schachter & Singer, 1962; Scherer, 1998, 2000, 2004a,b,c, 2005a,b; Scherer et al., 2004; Zachar, 2006 among others). Yet, the question about the *nature of emotion*, as well as that about the *difference between emotion and the other affect phenomena*, has not received a unanimous and exhaustive answer so far. Utter confusion characterizes both theoretical and applied research on emotions (Scherer, 2005b, p. 314); in the psychology of emotions definitions often overlap, and are not infrequently vague, too (Frijda, 2000; Scherer, 2005a,b).

2. The Componential Appraisal Theory of Emotion

Among the existing scientific approaches to emotion, we distinguish *the componential appraisal theory*, which is psychological in orientation, and in which the conceptualization and categorization of emotions are based on the manifestation of emotions in natural language, while **emotion** *per se* is defined as a basic (i.e., irreducible to smaller components) intentional (i.e., perceived by the subject and directed at a certain object that this subject evaluates) reflective (i.e., singled out, analyzed, and correlated by the subject with a certain situation and with this subject's action as a positive possibility of cognizing one's self and the world, including the other subjects) state. Emotion is both a state consisting of certain components and a process in which a dynamic coordinated interaction and a gradual change and mutual transition of these components co-occur, elicited by the cognitive mechanism of appraisal, whereby the subject evaluates each specific emotional episode, this being a sequence of emotional states that unfold over a certain time regarding a certain object as the major theme of this episode (Scherer, 2005a,b).

3. Results & Discussion

3.1 Nature of Emotion

Emotion is a phenomenon of interconnected and synchronized changes that occur in a number of systems of a subject's organism in response to external or internal stimuli that are evaluated by this subject as significant. The basis of the subject's emotionality is *the cognitive mechanism of appraisal*, as the subject evaluates these stimuli for their novelty, pleasantness, goal-directedness, controllability, and compliance with norms. The evaluation is based both on the specific properties of each emotional episode and on the subject's previous experience and current expectations. The evaluation is simultaneous, momentary, and complex; it prepares the subject to accumulate cognitive, behavioral, and physiological resources in order to adequately respond to a given stimulus. Emotions are continuous and ever-present; they are constantly changing, allowing the subject to adapt to the events of life that are continuous, ever-present, and ever-changing, too. The *function of emotions* is protective and consists in preserving and improving the life of human subjects.

The connection between the subject's *body systems and their functions*, on the one hand, and the *components and functions of emotion*, on the other, according to (Scherer, 2005a, p. 698), is as follows: the evaluation of objects and phenomena is associated with the central nervous system (information processing) and bears on the cognitive component of emotion (appraisal proper); systemic regulation affects the central nervous system, the neuroendocrine system, and the autonomous nervous system (readiness to react, and readiness to function / maintenance of functioning) bearing on the neurophysiological component of emotion (bodily symptoms); preparation and direction of action interact with the central nervous system (functioning), bearing on the motivational component of emotion (action tendencies / direction of action); connection of reaction with behavioral intention occurs in the somatic nervous system (action), bearing on the component of motor signs (facial expressions, voice signals, gestures, body movements); access to and control over the internal state of the organism and interaction with the external environment get exercised by the central nervous system (control) and bear on the component of subjective feeling (emotional experience).

3.2 Differentiation of Emotion and the Other Affect Phenomena

An emotional episode is characterized as a coordinated process in which the subject evaluates a stimulus and prepares to respond to this stimulus. Evaluation of the stimulus simultaneously involves the subject's body systems and the components of emotion, *synchronizing these systems and components in a specific way in each episode* (Scherer, 2005a,b), for example, in an episode of fear, in response to a stimulus evaluated as a threat, higher- and lower-order cognitive functions, feelings, and motor signs get synchronized; yet, outside this episode, they do not interact and remain independent of each other (Gerrans & Scherer, 2014).

It is the *extensive coordination of the subject's body systems* that is assumed to distinguish emotion from those affect phenomena that are often associated with emotion but are fundamentally different in nature, such as inclinations and preferences, moods, attitudes, and orientations, as well as interpersonal stances (Scherer, 2004b). Feeling is the type of affect that in the scientific literature tends to be associated with emotion as much as to be different from it. The componential appraisal theory defines feeling not as a separate affect phenomenon, but as one of the components of emotion: feeling bears on the regularities of interaction between appraisal mechanisms and psychosomatic reactions that together form the *subjective conscious experience* that accompanies each specific emotional episode (Scherer, 2000, 2005a,b) as **qualia** (Lewis, 1929), or qualitative characteristics of experience, which differ from propositional attitudes towards this experience, as qualia bear on phenomenology of this experience (how exactly this experience is felt by a subject; *happiness feels like this to me*, i.e. "I am the subject of a certain mental state that has a distinctive subjective character and is accessible to me introspectively"), but not on judgment about this experience (what a subject thinks about this experience; *I know that I am happy; I believe that I am happy; I doubt that I am happy*, etc., i.e. "the content of my propositional thought about a certain mental state of which I am the subject is evaluated by me as true or false") (Chalmers, 1995; Dennett, 1990, 2020; Nagel, 1974; Tye, 1986). On that, emotions belong to *phenomenal consciousness*, while verbal report on emotions belongs to *access consciousness*, bearing on logic and control that human reason exercises over activity, speech included (Block, 2008).

3.3 Categorization of Emotions

According to the componential appraisal theory, *emotion concepts* are divided into *emotion categories*, with this division based on particular *emotion names* in natural language(s), as it is reliance on language that ensures the psychological realism of such constructs (Scherer, 2005a), securing the connection between the scientific and non-scientific (naive, everyday) worldviews, as those humans who experience emotions and verbally describe their emotions during experiments for the purposes of scientific research, are not specialists educated in psychology of emotions. Meanings of words used by subjects to describe the emotions they experience bear primarily on the non-scientific worldview whose characteristic, unlike that of the scientific worldview, is dependence on that language and that culture that form this worldview as such. Thus, Scherer (2005a), analyzing the connections between emotion concepts in the scientific and non-scientific worldviews, emphasizes *the key role that language plays in the formation of emotion concepts* in the mind of people speaking this language, and maintains that a reliable scientific theory of emotions should, above all, be guided by linguistic data: if, in the evolution of languages, certain distinctions of certain emotional processes have become so significant that in meeting the needs of communication they have led to the emergence of different words or expressions to manifest these distinctions verbally, then it is these distinctions that should be taken into account by social and behavioral researchers (ibid., pp. 707-708).

Scientific theories of emotion are built taking into account the **conceptual categories of emotions** that have been determined experimentally, in particular, based on subjects' verbal descriptions of their emotions, as well as through linguistic analysis, such as when researchers work with dictionaries of a particular language to sample the words that name emotion concepts in this language, and to distribute these concepts into categories (Russell, 1991; Russell, Fernandez-Dols, Manstead, & Wellenkamp, 1995; Scherer, 2005a; Wierzbicka, 1999). For example, based on data from dictionaries and thesauri of English, German, and French, 36 conceptual categories were identified, in which emotion concepts are labelled by corresponding nouns and organized into center-peripheral structures in the form of fuzzy sets; the central concept in each category includes into this category several other concepts that are more or less peripheral, which is determined by semantic relations between concepts in this category, such as the relation of specification, for example, *hesitation is a type of anxiety*, or the relation of causation, for example, *boredom causes sleepiness*; the noun that names the central concept in each category organizes a synonymous sequence of nouns, each noun naming its respective concept from this category, such as HAPPINESS *cheer*, bliss*, delect*, delight*, enchant*, enjoy*, felicit*, happ*, merr** (Scherer, 2005a).

Categories of emotions defined by their central concepts are ADMIRATION/AWE, AMUSEMENT, ANGER, ANXIETY, BEING TOUCHED, BOREDOM, COMPASSION, CONTEMPT, CONTENTMENT, DESPERATION, DISAPPOINTMENT, DISGUST, DISSATISFACTION, ENVY, FEAR, FEELING, GRATITUDE, GUILT, HAPPINESS, HATRED, HOPE, HUMILITY, INTEREST/ENTHUSIASM, IRRITATION, JEALOUSY, JOY, LONGING, LUST, PLEASURE/ENJOYMENT, PRIDE, RELAXATION/SERENITY, RELIEF, SADNESS, SHAME, SURPRISE and TENSION/STRESS (Scherer, 2005a, pp.

714-715), among which utilitarian and aesthetic emotions are distinguished. *Utilitarian emotions* are intense immediate reactions that ensure the survival and adaptation of the subject, preparing this subject for a certain action and giving the opportunity to recover and get reoriented in the environment, supporting this subject's motivation, as well as socializing and involving the subject into the community, etc. *Aesthetic emotions* are the subject's reactions to stimuli that do not threaten this subject's vital needs; these emotions are not associated with intense immediate evaluation and do not cause extensive coordination of the body's systems that would otherwise exhaust the organism (Frijda, 1986; Scherer, 2004c).

Each emotion has *a valence* and is characterized as positive, negative, or ambivalent in its terms. Valence is not a property of emotions *per se*, but is attributed to each emotion depending on its interpretation by the subject in the context of a specific emotional episode as a whole (Lambie & Marcel, 2002). Taking into account their valence, emotions have been organized in the form of a four-dimensional space formed by the following scales: valence of the emotional experience (positive or negative emotion), activation of the body's systems in the emotional episode (the subject is calm or excited), evaluation of the emotion in accordance with the goal that the subject has (emotion facilitates or hinders the subject's achieving this goal), ability of the subject to control the emotion (emotion is either controllable or not) (Cowie et al., 2000; Scherer, 2005a,b). Distribution of emotion concepts in this space was confirmed experimentally, in the composition of 16 emotion categories: PRIDE, ELATION, HAPPINESS, SATISFACTION; RELIEF, HOPE, INTEREST, SURPRISE; ANXIETY, SADNESS, BOREDOM, SHAME/GUILT; DISGUST, CONTEMPT, HOSTILITY, and ANGER (Scherer, 2005a, p. 723).

3.4 Basic Emotions

Any scientific categorization of emotions remains provisional, however, as it is assumed that emotion categories are standardized tools that will be used differently depending on the needs of particular research. Interest in the universality of human emotions, with humans taken as a biological species, independently from particular languages and cultures, prompted distinguishing **basic emotions** (Ekman, 1980, 1992, 1999, 2015; Ekman & Davidson, 1994; cf. Izard, 1971, 1992; Tomkins, 1962, 1984) that are innate and differ primarily in their "biological signatures," that is, in the facial expression of an individual experiencing a particular emotion (emotions are "coded" by facial muscles; the degree of intensity of an emotion is "coded" in the same way, nonverbally), and also in the physiological processes that run in the individual's body (including the brain and nervous system) when this particular emotion is experienced. According to Paul Ekman (1980, 1992, 1999, 2015 and other works), basic emotions are anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise, which are discrete precisely according to their biological characteristics that can be traced throughout the entire evolution of these emotions as such (cf. Darwin, 1998).

Basic emotions are utilitarian in nature and play an important role in the adaptation of subjects to significant life events that occur frequently and are defined as prototypical. Given their biological nature, frequency, and prototypicality, basic emotions are characterized as **modal** (Scherer, 2005a, p. 707), as they do not capture the entire spectrum of human emotionality, but

only one, statistically significant, mode as one of the essential properties of emotion that due to its universal biological nature is manifested evolutionarily in the human face and body.

Each human emotion, be it basic or not, has a unique *response profile* in terms of physiological symptoms, motor signs, and action tendencies that together constitute the subject's response to a stimulus in a particular emotional episode (Harrigan, Rosenthal, & Scherer, 2005; Stemmler, 2003). Motor signs (facial expressions, voice signals, gestures, body movements) acquire special significance due to their role in subjects' social interaction (Scherer, 2005a). Emotion names perform the same role in social interaction: words are signs that subjects use to describe the emotions they experience.

3.5 Awareness and Naming in Verbal Report on Emotions

Verbal report is believed to provide the most reliable and perhaps the only access that researchers have to subjects' emotional experience (Feldman, 1996, p. 47). However, verbal report has faults, as it cannot but change or even distort the emotional experience that a subject describes using words (Charland, 2005; Scherer, 2005b), which is due, above all, to the cognitive mechanism of **awareness**. Conscious experience, and even more so first-person verbal report on this experience, is impossible without awareness: it is awareness that allows a certain emotion to emerge into this subject's consciousness and thereby to become an emotional experience *per se*, one that is present and integral in this presence (Naotsugu & Adolphs, 2007): this experience is individual, unique, non-static, changeable, heterogeneous, multifaceted, but at the same time inseparable and indivisible – and ineffable. Emotional experience is "a certain experience-in-itself" that cannot be grasped except by awareness that forms and shapes it and, in doing so, changes it (Charland, 2005, p. 246). Awareness requires that the subject's attention be directed at this subject's emotional experience, which *disrupts the continuity and integrity of this experience*, thereby changing it (Lambie & Marcel, 2002): the emotional experience that has emerged into consciousness is no longer immediate, but is mediated, and captures only part of this experience, but never captures this experience as a whole.

In verbal report, the *act of awareness* of an emotional experience is naturally followed by the *act of naming* this experience with words, in which the emotional experience, already mediated by consciousness, is mediated further, as words map the mind's content and impose on emotional experience certain cultural, social and individual schemas (Scherer, 2005b) that stereotype emotional experience, making it stable, recognizable, and repeatable, so that subjects' rational behavior in the society is formed. Thus, verbal report on emotional experience never corresponds to this emotional experience as such, but only approaches this experience in its (in)completeness. Moreover, verbal report depends on the "emotional vocabulary" (ibid.) of both the subject and the language that this subject uses, as this vocabulary determines the scope of words available to be chosen and used in verbal report.

4. Concluding Remarks

A new word that appears in a language, as well as the choice made by the subject in favor of a particular word from among those existing in a language, testify to the need of manifesting

a particular emotional experience that otherwise remains ineffable. Granularity as singling out and detailing a particular emotional experience is an important characteristic of **dynamics of emotions** in synchrony (Feldman, 2017; Reitsema, 2022) and in diachrony (Plamper, 2015), and also in panchrony (Vakhovska, 2024), whereby a change that bears on an emotion name entails a change that bears on an emotional experience, and also signals that this latter change has taken place, both *in the history of a particular language* (Vakhovska, 2023) and *in the speech of a particular human subject* (Watt, 2016), as long as a new emotion name allows one to manifest a previously unknown emotional experience or to detail an already known one.

In English, for example, the new word *sǎd* (Middle English) replaced the old word *unrōt* (Old English) to denote the qualia of sadness. This change was caused by interaction of extra- and intra-linguistic factors, and meant a qualitatively different subjective experience of sadness, and also became the cause for such a qualitatively different experience, since, along with the change of the word, a change occurred in the corresponding fragment of the English worldview: English speakers began to understand and feel sadness differently, "seeing" sadness differently with their mind's eye, too. The word *unrōt* "sad" was motivated by the archaic image of fire (red color, a masculine symbol; to be sad means to be away from the sacred fire, as opposed to *rōt* "joyful," where to be joyful means to be near the sacred fire, performing a ritual of worshiping the Deity). The word *sǎd* was motivated by the archaic image of water (blue color, a feminine symbol; to be sad means to be filled with bad water that came from the lower world and filled one's body up to the head, clouding the mind). This different understanding of sadness was prompted by the archetypes of the collective unconscious: the images of fire and water are characteristic transformations of these archetypes in consciousness, – and was also guided by sociocultural dynamics of the English-speaking community (Vakhovska, 2023; cf. Meyer Spacks, 1995; Sullivan, 2016).

On that, the SADNESS concept in its diachronic variation in the English worldview happened to have at least two names – the words *unrōt* and *sǎd*, – each of which testified to the dynamics of sadness: *sadness felt differently* when named by these different words. *Sadness will feel differently* if a person (a native speaker of modern English, in our example) learns such words for sadness as *toska* or *saudade* (Watt, 2016, pp. 237, 258), as these new words will show to this person previously unknown nuances in the emotional experience of sadness: when one learns new words for an emotion, new feelings inevitably follow (Feldman, 2023), but one needs to go further because one needs to understand where these words came from, and what ideas about human life and behavior these words have unnoticeably brought along, – words for emotions are not neutral labels, as they are loaded with certain cultural values and expectations, and convey imperative ideas about who humans think they are (Watt, 2017).

Thus, phenomenology of any emotion emerges or transforms with the emergence or transformation of the word that denotes this emotion, which uniquely testifies to the historicity of this emotion and of the word that denotes it. *The prospect of this paper* is in studying human emotions synchronically, diachronically, and panchronically by virtue of their names in different languages.

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