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Components of Emotional Meaning

A sourcebook

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Preface

Klaus R. Scherer

The idea that gave rise to the research reported in this book is, as is often the case in science, due largely to serendipity and chance events. However, as is also frequently the case, the time had to be ripe for serendipity to play its role. What had slowly ripened as the idea was born was the conviction that emotion was best defined as an episode during which different subsystems of the organism are tightly coordinated (and can thus be considered as *components* of emotion) in order to allow optimal adaptation to environmental contingencies. This definition emerged during the development of a new breed of appraisal theories (following the pioneering work of Arnold and Lazarus; see Schorr, 2001), as the theorists in this tradition converged on the claim that emotions were to be seen as processes that are elicited and differentiated by the appraisal of relevant events (see Scherer, 1999a, 2005a). This influential theoretical development occurred at a time when a group of European emotion researchers created, with the help of the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris and its director, Clemens Heller, a consortium of their laboratories, designed to facilitate collaboration on different projects and jointly train their young researchers. During one of the meetings of the consortium, I happened to discuss the thorny issue of emotion labels and the differences between languages (an issue which is directly related to the question of how many emotions are distinguished in different languages and cultures, and what counts as a "real" emotion) with Nico Frijda. Both of us had an inkling that the key to the question might have to do with the fact that different emotion labels (especially across languages) reflect the different components of emotion, as postulated by both of us, to a different degree. For example, some words seem to focus on the cognitive appraisal configuration that gives rise to an emotion (e.g., irritation), whereas others might focus more on physiological manifestations, expressions, or action tendencies (e.g., rage). This led to the idea that this approach might provide a royal road to defining and potentially measuring the meaning of emotion words in different languages.

Like many good ideas that are generated while drinking wine, this one was not immediately pursued, as other priorities determined our research agendas. But, also like other good ideas, this one lingered in my mind and I decided to pursue the goal of measuring the meaning of emotion words empirically via component ratings in a cross-cultural and cross-language setting. I had been encouraged in this by the success of a large cross-cultural study on the self-report of emotion experiences (ISEAR, Scherer & Wallbott, 1994) and of an expert system allowing the differentiation of emotion (GENESE, Scherer, 1993), which had demonstrated the feasibility of differentially assessing the different emotion components through self-report. Having generated the idea of an empirical study, I published the first formal proposal for this work (Scherer, 2005a), suggesting the use of a design feature approach to create a *grid* of features and emotions. This proposal included a first version of a profile of features for different components and a set of emotion words.

But a plan is not enough. It took a second chance event for it to be put into action. During a meeting on cross-cultural psychology in Budapest in 2003, an old friend, Ype Poortinga, introduced me to Johnny Fontaine, who had carried out a series of extremely interesting culture-comparison studies of emotion (Fontaine et al., 2006). Johnny came to visit our group in Geneva and we discovered a great deal of overlap in interests, as well as complementary skills and approaches, and

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decided to work together. In the meanwhile, we had received funding from the Swiss federal government to form a National Center of Competence in Research (NCCR) in the Affective Sciences (the Swiss Center for Affective Sciences). With the support of the NCCR and of the University of Geneva, we were able to found, with the help of Pierre Dassen, an International Consortium on Cross-Cultural Research on Affect to serve as an organizational framework for a “GRID study.”

The ensuing research activity was greatly facilitated by a third happy coincidence, namely the presence of a competent cognitive scientist with extensive computer skills in our group, Etienne Roesch, and the collaboration with interested colleagues in the European HUMAINE (Human Machine Interaction and Emotion) network of excellence. The first version of the GRID questionnaire (via controlled web administration) was run in Geneva, Gent, and York/Belfast, and the results published by Fontaine, Scherer, Roesch, and Ellsworth (2007). The initial phase of the collaborative research was greatly enhanced by Phoebe Ellsworth's precious input, largely on the occasion of a cross-cultural psychology conference on the Greek island of Spetses in 2006, which also served as a launching pad for securing the collaboration of research teams from many different countries.

A final propitious event was the arrival of Cristina Soriano, a cognitive linguist who had worked on metaphoric expressions of emotion, as a consequence of our Center recruiting a postdoctoral fellow for an interdisciplinary research focus on Language and Culture. She organized the data collection with over 20 teams in as many countries and also enriched the conceptual and theoretical background of the study with pertinent input from linguistics.

Without these serendipitous and chance effects, neither the GRID research nor this book would exist. However, the most important factors for the success of this ambitious endeavor have been the competence, enthusiastic interest, and hard work of all those concerned, in particular the large number of collaborators in this intercultural study in over 25 countries and almost as many languages. Many of them are also co-authors of this book and have contributed to the data collection, several meetings and symposia, and the writing of the book in a truly interdisciplinary spirit. As one might imagine, the editorial process of bringing together contributions of scholars raised in very different scientific traditions was not an easy matter, especially given the fundamental differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches and different habits of establishing evidence. Despite these circumstances, the reviewing and resubmitting process went very smoothly, thanks to the interdisciplinary background of the editorial team and the strong spirit of cooperation on the part of the various groups of authors.

In concluding, I want to thank, in the name of the editors of this volume, all of the contributors to this ambitious research enterprise, including the collaborators who, for various reasons, could not write a chapter in this volume. Our special thanks go to Anna Ogarkova for recruiting many research collaborators for the Slavic language families and writing a chapter that makes a central contribution to the review of the literature and the theoretical foundation of the work reported in this volume. We also thank Etienne Roesch for programming the initial version of the GRID instrument, the technical staff of the NCCR (Natascha Michel, Urs Richle, Olivier Rosset and Julien Savary) who supported the smooth running of a multilingual questionnaire online, Christelle Gillioz and Samidh Shrestha for their help in manuscript preparation, and the staff at Oxford University Press for a stellar editing and publishing effort.

Last but not least, we very gratefully acknowledge the financial support from a number of institutions who have made this ambitious research and the preparation of this book possible: the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), the Swiss Network for International Studies (SNIS), the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO), the University of Geneva, Ghent University, and the European Research Council (ERC).

Geneva, July 2013

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General introduction: A paradigm for a multidisciplinary investigation of the meaning of emotion terms

Johnny J. R. Fontaine, Klaus R. Scherer,
and Cristina Soriano

Understanding the meaning of emotion terms is a shared interest across the different disciplines that study emotions, such as psychology, linguistics, cultural anthropology, sociology, history, and multidisciplinary cross-cultural research.

It goes without saying that emotion words play a central role in psychological emotion research. Frequently emotion words are used directly as stimuli or indirectly as response scales. But even when no emotion words are used, the stimuli have often been selected on the basis of ratings by experts on emotion words. An implication of this widespread direct and indirect use of emotion terms is that the results of most psychological emotion research depend on the meaning of the terms used. This dependence is often overlooked. It is implicitly assumed that people react to the meaning of emotion words just as intended by the emotion researcher. However, this assumption is highly problematic because emotions can be defined by focusing on different psychological phenomena, including well-observable facial and vocal expressions, overt bodily reactions, as well as internal changes in motivational orientation that might or might not translate into observable behavior.

Comparative research between cultures in psychology, sociology, and anthropology has shown many cultural and linguistic specificities in the respective emotion lexica. When they go unnoticed, these specificities may bias cross-cultural emotion research, especially as English is generally used as the source or reference language in these studies. Moreover, some theorists claim that emotions are culturally constructed phenomena that fundamentally differ between cultural groups. According to this constructivist account, emotion words represent the result of this conceptualization process and they play a key role in passing on these culturally specific constructions.

Several linguistic research traditions focus on what emotion terms mean. Some traditions decompose the meaning of words into basic semantic features, whereas others look at the figurative uses of those words, and still others analyze the lexico-grammatical contexts in which emotion terms appear, in an attempt to define their meaning by looking at the company the words keep. In all of these cases, linguists try to derive the meaning of emotion terms from an analysis of actual language use.

Understanding the meaning of emotion words is thus a cross-disciplinary concern. Unfortunately, there is little exchange between the different disciplines involved. While they deal with the same problems at a conceptual level, their theoretical and methodological approaches are often so diverse that a fruitful exchange seems impossible. The present book reports a project that aims to

create an instrument (the “GRID”) to study the meaning of emotion terms jointly from psychological, cultural comparative, and linguistic perspectives, encouraging a genuine exchange between these different disciplines and the different theoretical approaches within them. The GRID project is presented here in eight parts.

Part I. **Disciplinary perspectives and theoretical approaches to the meaning of emotion words**

The first part of the volume presents the disciplinary perspectives and the theoretical approaches in which the development of the instrument has been embedded. In the first chapter, the componential approach to emotion definition, represented by the Component Process Model (CPM, Scherer 2001, 2005a), is presented (Chapter 1). The CPM, which forms the basis for the development of the GRID instrument, postulates that emotions are processes triggered by goal-relevant events and consist of synchronized activity in several human subsystems (cognitive appraisal, action tendencies, bodily reactions, expression, and feeling) in order to prepare the person for rapid action. Although the CPM represents only one theoretical account of emotion processes in psychology, it lends itself to developing an instrument for multidisciplinary use. Its integrative orientation and its open, dynamic architecture make it suitable to address the issues raised by very different theoretical approaches in the relevant disciplines. The remaining chapters present systematic overviews of the major issues and theoretical models put forward from psychological (Chapter 2), cultural-comparative (Chapter 3), and linguistic perspectives (Chapter 4) in the study of emotion words.

Part II. **The GRID instrument: Hypotheses, operationalization, data, and overall structure**

The second part of the volume describes the construction, data collection, and overall results obtained with the new instrument. This instrument is called the GRID because it simply consists of a grid of 24 commonly used emotion terms and 142 features that refer to cognitive appraisals, bodily reactions, expressions, feelings, and action tendencies that potentially define emotion terms. The GRID instrument measures the perceived probability of each of these features to substantially contribute to the meaning of a given emotion word. The first chapter in this part (Chapter 5) describes and justifies the central hypotheses and related questions generated by the CPM and by other work in the psychological, cultural-comparative, and linguistic perspectives on emotion outlined in the first part of the volume. The chapter also provides an overview of the procedures that have been chosen for data analysis. The second chapter (Chapter 6) provides a detailed description of the extensive cross-cultural data collection with the GRID instrument. The final chapter in this part (Chapter 7) presents an overall analysis of the data with respect to the internal meaning structure of the emotion domain spanned by 24 major emotion terms, as measured by the GRID instrument, and examines the compatibility of this structure with componential, categorical, and dimensional approaches to the study of emotion.

Part III. **Decomposing the meaning of emotion terms: Analysis by emotion component**

The third part of the book focuses on the separate emotion components. In the GRID instrument, each of the five emotion components has been operationalized by one or more major theories. The contribution of each of the individual emotion components to the meaning of

emotion terms is investigated and discussed step by step in five chapters dealing with one component each: Feeling (Chapter 8), Bodily reaction (Chapter 9), Expression (Chapter 10), Action tendency (Chapter 11), and Appraisal (Chapter 12). A final chapter attempts to integrate the results across components (Chapter 13).

Part IV. **Psychological perspectives**

The fourth part of the book further reports different subanalyses of the GRID dataset from a psychological perspective. The replicability and relevance of the overall structure identified by the GRID instrument is investigated with different psychological (Chapters 14 and 15) and neuroscientific methods (Chapter 16). Moreover, this part demonstrates that the GRID instrument can be used to define the meaning of specific emotions (Chapter 17) and how it can contribute to the construction of theoretically well-grounded psychological assessment instruments in the emotion domain (Chapters 18 and 19).

Part V. **Cultural-comparative perspectives**

The fifth part of the book presents the use of the GRID instrument for cultural and linguistic comparative purposes. This part demonstrates how similarities and differences in the meaning of emotion terms between two or more cultural/linguistic groups can be identified with the GRID instrument (Chapters 20–22 and 24–26) and how the GRID instrument can be used to clarify the meaning of language-specific emotion terms (Chapter 23).

Part VI. **Linguistic perspectives**

In the sixth part, the GRID methodology is compared with approaches classically used in the linguistic analysis of the meaning of emotion words, namely the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach (Chapter 27), the Conceptual Metaphor approach (Chapter 28), and the Cognitive Corpus Linguistic approach (Chapters 29 and 30).

Part VII. **Special topics**

The seventh part of this volume consists of short, focused chapters on specific topics proposed by collaborators of the GRID project. These issues concern the challenge of applying the GRID instrument in non-Western groups with little experience in web-based testing (Chapter 32), the country-specific findings on the meaning structure of emotion terms (Chapters 31, 33–38, and 41), and the exploration of promising research avenues in which the GRID can be applied (Chapters 39, 40, 42, 43).

Part VIII. **Taking stock and further development of the GRID paradigm**

The last part of this book starts by presenting two shortened versions of the GRID instrument available for future use, namely the CoreGRID and the MiniGRID (Chapter 44). The CoreGRID captures the essential information in each of the emotion components, but with less than half of the features of the original instrument (68 items). The MiniGRID assesses the overall structure of the emotion domain with 16 features. Finally, the book ends (Chapter 45) with a discussion of the insights generated by the GRID study for the main disciplines involved in the study of emotion

words and their various theoretical approaches, as well as with a reflection on future developments of the paradigm, pertinent for emotion research in each of these fields and theoretical approaches.

In conclusion, the GRID paradigm, and the associated research program, presented in this book are intended for researchers and scholars who consistently rely on everyday emotion terms in their work. Emotions are elusive phenomena as evidenced by the lack of convergent agreement among emotion researchers on how to define the class as a whole and individual members of the class. At the same time, emotion words from everyday language are continuously used to refer to these phenomena both in daily discourse and in scientific work—largely because there are few alternatives to describe the fuzzy multicomponential episodes they refer to. This volume advocates the use of profiles of features selected on the basis of a domain specific approach—treating emotion in terms of synchronized changes in major components—as a promising framework to approach these elusive phenomena in a systematic way.

Part I

Disciplinary perspectives and theoretical approaches to the meaning of emotion words