

THE EMOTIONAL TURN IN LINGUISTICS:

Applications to the teaching/learning of foreign languages

(Handout)



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- **“Without emotion, no Language” (Zonder gevoel geen taal: Van Berkum’s 2011 inaugural lecture title at Utrecht University, in Foolen 2015) → If a human being doesn’t have the drive or the motivation to talk about something, then speech will be very restricted.**
- **A mutual interest, a positive attitude and a bond of trust are necessary ingredients;** otherwise the verbal interaction dies down quickly. (Foolen, 2015: 241)
- **Sharing emotions is a crucial social activity** which forms part of everyday conversation and interaction and helps us maintain both our mental and physical health.
- **A good language teacher should be a good communicator,** and consequently should be able show empathy for and arouse emotions in her/his students.
- **It is hard to socialize or function in any language using emotionless textbook phrases.**
- **Research on language acquisition** has shown that language has its own line of development, starting in the womb, but developing in the context of emotion-interactive exchange (Bloom 1993). When this context fails, language development is impaired (**Ontogeny**)
- An important part of the self-domestication of early hominids had to do with the **control of emotions (Phylogeny).**
- **Emotions** → a key factor in the comprehension not only of human nature but also of human language and communication.
- **Linguistics/Cognitive Linguistics** → conceptualization and expression of emotion as a natural function of language.
- **20th century Linguistics** → Focus on the referential function of language and the linguistic code per se.
- **21st century** → A polyphonic rise of emotivity in every scientific field, a paradigm shift → the **emotional turn in Linguistics.**
- **The expression and conceptualization of emotion** as a complex evolutive process → a pragma-linguistic phenomenon which shows the relationship brain-body-world within a dynamical system (Gibbs 2010, Alba-Juez & Alba-Juez 2012), which reflects the sequential cyclic structure sense-think-act in DST



- The scholars who have studied human emotions have **not yet reached a consensus as to which the basic emotions are or how many there are.** Their complexity makes them difficult to define.

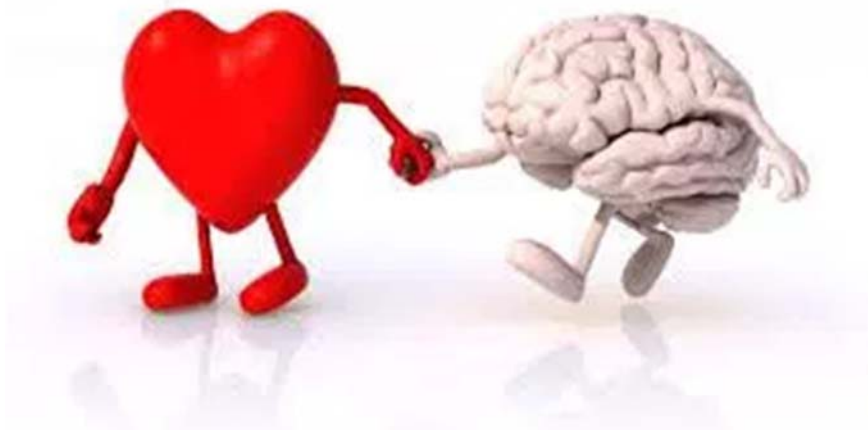
- **Definition of emotion from a cognitive linguistic point of view** → “a complex internally represented knowledge system having a primarily evaluative function within the human organism”. (Schwarz-Friesel, 2015: 161).
- **Different perspectives on emotion:**
 - The neurobiological perspective** → Concerned with the neural and neurochemical mechanisms underlying emotion and mood.
 - The cognitive linguistic perspective** → the idea that emotions have a physiological substrate is not rejected, but it argues against the dangers of making universal claims on the basis of language-specific categories (relativistic view). Cognition is strongly connected to both language and emotion. The relationship between cognition, language and emotion is then of crucial significance for understanding humans and their interaction with their surroundings.
 - The cultural psychological perspective** → Also a relativistic approach, which mainly stresses the differences between Western and Eastern societies.
 - The social constructivist perspective** → Emotions can be analyzed at social, psychological and/or biological levels: “At each level it is possible to identify broader systems of behaviour, of which emotions are part”. “Each emotion is based on a particular set of appraisals or evaluative judgements” (Averill, 1982: 19).
- **Some categorizations of emotion are not universal:** English *frustration* has no equivalent in Arabic (Russell 1991: 426); *disgust* has no exact equivalent in Polish (Russell 1991: 428); *terror, horror, dread, apprehension & timidity* have no equivalent in Gidjingali, where one word, *gurakadj*, suffices (Russell 1991: 430).
- **Important facts to be considered when teaching the vocabulary of emotions in the language classroom:** a) Borders between categories of emotion are fuzzy and vague, rather than clear-cut; b) Membership within a category is a matter of degree rather than all or none; c) Different categories tend to overlap one another rather than to be mutually exclusive: Some categories overlap each other almost completely, others to a high degree, others to a minimal degree, and some not at all.
- **Emotions help us classify and evaluate the world we live in,** position and define ourselves to other people, objects, states and events, evaluate our own behavior and mental states, and react to specific situational circumstances.
- One attempt to model evaluation and emotion within *Systemic Functional Linguistics* → **APPRAISAL THEORY** (Martin & White, 2005).
- **Emotion in the language classroom** → **two main areas to consider:**
 1. **Affective facts linked to teaching/learning of an LX** (motivation, management of emotions in the classroom, etc.).
 2. **‘Emotional competence’ in the LX, leading to “emotional bilingualism”.**
- **Emotion has received relatively little attention in SLA literature** (see however Brown 1973, Curran 1976, Krashen 1981, MacIntyre 2002). The only emotional variable that has been extensively researched is **language learning motivation** (e.g. Dai & Sternberg 2004, Gardner and Lambert 1959).
- **Emotion is at the basis of any learning or absence of learning** → “When a stimulus is positively assessed in a learning situation, it will have a positive effect

on the amount of attention and effort a learner will devote to it". (Dewaele, 2013: 21).

- **Crucial traits exhibited by effective language teachers are:** "An ability to communicate freely and to radiate positive feeling, an ability to develop close relationships with students" (Borg, 2006: 23), the inclusion of pertinent and appealing subject matters combined with non-threatening techniques which support group solidarity. In sum, an **ability to create a supportive and caring emotional environment.**
- **The perception of different selves is a general part of multilingual experience** (Pavlenko, 2006) → Importance of emotional bilingualism/multilingualism.
- A knowledge of **Politeness Theory and Appraisal Theory** may help the teacher choose the right emotional classroom strategies.
- **Exams and emotions:** In Crego et al's (2016) study, (negative) emotional coping strategies (venting negative emotions, negative auto-focus) were linked to increased academic stress, and positive emotional strategies were linked to reduced stress and improved academic performance.
- Nowadays, special attention is given to the question **how emotions determine and structure texts both at the micro- and the macro-structure.**
- Cognitive linguists describe **each emotion as a mental state or process with three main parameters (Swartz-Friesel, 2016: 162):**
 - Value** (positive or negative)
 - Duration** (they can remain for minutes, hours, days or years)
 - Intensity** (they can be strong or weak)Examples:
 - a) *His deep love made him happy/ His fierce hate almost destroyed him.* (Verbalization of **value**)
 - b) *His rage lasted exactly for 5 minutes. / His rage never left him for the rest of his life.* (Linguistic description of **duration**)
 - c) *He felt bad/very bad/ exceedingly bad/ as if he was in hell.* (Different markers of **intensity**)
- **Expression and conceptualization of emotion at the different linguistic levels:**
 - Morphological level:** E.g. Eng. *Sweetie*// Sp. *Mi amorcito*; *He is a super-good singer.*
 - Phonological level:** E.g. *Darth Vader* vs. 'Barth Faber'.
 - Lexical-semantic level:** E.g. Epithets with strong affective negative connotations (*nigger, bum, bitch, jerk*); words denoting attributes with high affective or moral value (*brutal, corrupt, cruel, mad, brave, selfish, eccentric, sin, lust, fraud*); emotional metaphors (*She was boiling with anger*).
 - Syntactic level:** E.g. Exclamative or optative sentence types (*How she suffers! //If only she could come!*)
 - Pragmatic level:** E.g. e- implicatures (*I'm pregnant* could have the emotional implicature that the speaker is happy, sad, angry or scared, depending on the conditions of the context), politeness strategies, use of emoticons in CMC, humorous/ironic discourse, swearing, use of silence in conversation.
- **To conclude:**

“...language has a heart as well as a mind of its own.” Ochs and Schieffelin (1989: 22)

NIHIL EST IN INTELLECTU QUOD PRIUS NON FUERIT IN SENSU (Nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses). St. Thomas of Aquinas, on an Aristotelian principle



THANK YOU!!!!

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