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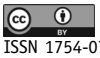
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Cross-Cultural Calibration of Words and Emotions: Referential, Constructionist, and Pragmatic Perspectives

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Abstract

Emotion-related words differ across societies and eras. Does this mean that emotions themselves differ in similar ways? Three perspectives on language-emotion relations suggest alternative answers to this question. A referential approach implies that any language's emotion concepts provide a potentially perfectible mapping of the emotional world. Constructionist approaches suggest that linguistic concepts shape culturally different emotion perceptions. By contrast, a pragmatic approach emphasizes the performative functions served by conversational uses of emotion words. From this perspective, emotional language is attuned to culture-specific requirements for aligning relations between people and objects. Thus, emotional utterances may be constituents of socially functional emotions rather than separate commentaries on them. Full understanding of cultural variation requires investigation of naturalistic emotional conversations in different societies.

Keywords
cultural differences, emotion concepts, linguistics, social functions

Over the last decade, a trickle then a flood of domestic products designed to cultivate the cozy state of comfort denoted by the Danish word "hygge" penetrated global markets. In medieval times, "accidie" denoted a sinful state of temporary sloth experienced by monks who could not summon the required energy to perform their religious duties (Harré & Finlay-Jones, 1986). On the Micronesian Atoll of Ifaluk, "lingeringer" conveys a gradually increasing feeling of irritation resulting from an accumulation of minor frustrating events (Lutz, 1988). None of these words translates directly into contemporary English. Even Anglophone names for so-called basic emotions (e.g., "anger" and "fear") fail to match up with semantically equivalent terms in many other languages (e.g., Jackson et al., 2019) and their meaning seems to fluctuate over time (e.g., Dixon, 2020). What do these historical and cultural variations in the apparent meanings of emotion-related words tell us about the different ways in which emotions themselves operate? Do differences in emotional vocabulary imply differences in corresponding affective states or simply reflect different ways of representing the same universal basic emotions?

Psychologists have typically sought to address these questions by searching (with limited success, e.g., Barrett, 2017) for signature patterns of "components" (e.g., appraisals, ANS responses, facial expressions) characterizing instances of emotion categories identified by English-language terms. But if emotion concepts differ across languages, why should the hunt for consistent phenomena start with Anglocentric concepts (Wierzbicka, 1999)? And what if the evolution of "emotional" lexicons has been shaped by forces other than a need for accurate and neutral descriptive representations of a separate set of psychological states?

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This article seeks to understand linguistic variation across cultures and eras by considering the implications of different possible relations between emotion language and emotional reality. I argue that emotion words should not be treated simply as names for pre-existing mental entities (Parkinson, 2019; 2020). They also help to shape self- and other perceptions of emotion, thereby leading to changes in how emotions are enacted. Further, emotion words are used in everyday conversation not only to describe experiences but also to influence other people's orientations to what is happening. To the extent that other "expressions" and manifestations of emotion also serve to align relations between people in relation to objects and events in the shared environment (Parkinson, 2008), the use of emotion words may provide one of a range of possible socially functional processes involved in emotional conduct rather than being a way of providing a separate commentary on any accompanying personal experiences (see also Haviland, 2003). From this perspective, cross-cultural and historical differences in emotional language may have developed to address specific needs for relation-aligning talk within local societal contexts. And these same local requirements may also have helped to generate culture-specific emotions.

Language-Emotion Relations

This section sets out three possible perspectives on relations between "emotion" words and emotions themselves and explores their implications for understanding linguistic variation across societies and eras. According to the first *referential* view, words provide an approximate descriptive mapping of the emotion domain that may require further specification in order to find the precise locations of genuinely separate emotions for scientific purposes. In the second *constructionist* view, the concepts associated with a society's "emotion" words shape the perception and categorization of affective phenomena and thereby help to constitute emotions rather than merely reflect their prior nature. The third *pragmatic* view focuses on the performative (e.g., Austin, 1962) functions of linguistic avowals and ascriptions that use "emotion" words and argues that delivering verbal statements containing emotion words provides one of many possible ways of aligning people's respective orientations toward objects and events. Thus, words are part of a socially functional emotional process rather than carriers of concepts that represent that process from elsewhere or contribute to its initial activation.

It is important to note that the three kinds of relation between language and extra-linguistic reality distinguished here are not mutually exclusive.[1] Emotional language may well work in all three ways, by providing descriptive representations, contributing to emotion perceptions, and exerting pragmatic effects on addressees. Furthermore, these three linguistic functions may be interdependent. For example, one of the reasons why emotional language can serve the pragmatic function of influencing other people is that it conveys shared referential concepts. Thus, an utterance conveying my "anger" with you may encourage you to apologize partly because this word describes a response to a blameworthy action. However, it is also possible that pragmatic functions take precedence by shaping the kinds of referential representations that are available in the first place. Pragmatically oriented linguistic representations may in turn help to construct emotions that perform similar interpersonal functions to those served by verbal avowals of emotion. In other words, the constructionist and pragmatic perspectives could potentially be combined to yield a more comprehensive understanding of language-emotional relations (cf. Lindquist et al., 2022). Before clarifying how this might work, it is useful to consider each of the three perspectives on language-emotion relations in more detail.

Referential Representation

Nouns are usually names for things. No surprise then that the most common perspective on emotion nouns is to view them as descriptive representations of their referents: emotions themselves. Thus, the English word "anger" seems to pick out a particular psychological object, which in principle might be separately identified without using language. Perhaps then, humans noticed distinct emotional things in their psychological worlds and consequently gave them names.

However, no-one believes that every single emotion word in every language refers to a wholly distinct affective entity or event. If so, English speakers would have separate emotions denoted by gloom, serenity, technofear, hanger, exuberance, ennui, and so on. And people speaking other languages would have a different set of equally specific and similarly numerous emotions. Even if we were to suspend disbelief and conclude that there really were just as many different kinds of emotion as emotion words, their overwhelming abundance and variability across different languages at different points in history would make the task of systematically understanding their distinctive qualities unmanageable.

Working out which of the available words genuinely describe distinct emotions presents two interrelated challenges. One of these is to develop criteria for determining that whatever is being described counts as an "emotion" in the first place. This is far from straightforward given that the psychological meaning of this more inclusive term only emerged relatively recently in the history of Anglophone society (e.g., Dixon, 2012), continues to undergo evolution as history unfolds, has no perfect equivalent in other languages (e.g., Wierzbicka, 1999), and seems to be fuzzy around the edges (Fehr & Russell, 1984).

The second challenge is that words with apparently "emotional" meanings often carry connotations that are not directly related to the psychological phenomena that they supposedly denote. In short, they seem to do things in

addition to naming particular emotions. For example, many emotion words are used specifically when the represented emotion is relatively high in intensity (Ortony et al., 1988), and therefore convey information about the quantity as well as the quality of emotion. Examples in the English language include "terror," "rage," and "ecstasy." This complicates the already tricky task of distinguishing synonyms from words with genuinely different referents. How can we tell whether the apparent difference between the meanings of "terror" and "fear" reflect the nature of the emotions they pick out or simply mark differences in intensity of the same emotion?

Emotion words often carry other nonemotional connotations too. For example, words such as "Schadenfreude," "homesickness," and "grief" seem to convey information about the context in which the emotion occurs in addition to the emotion itself. Again, this makes it more difficult to determine whether they denote emotions that really are different from those denoted by words with less obvious (or more generic) contextual connotations. Of course, formulating emotions as intentional states that are always about something (e.g., Gordon, 1974) means that any "emotion" word carries some implications about the likely situation in which the represented state occurs, but how do we tell which contextual (and appraisal-related) implications are intrinsic to the denoted emotion and which are extrinsic? For instance, there is no obvious way of finding out whether "Schadenfreude" refers to a specific affective state or simply describes pleasure that happens to be experienced in a particular set of circumstances, specifically when a disliked person suffers (see also Russell, 1978).

Another set of examples is provided by the range of words representing concepts relating to "anger" (*seky*) in the Malagasy language spoken in Madagascar. Scheidecker (2020, p. 53) argues that the most consistent difference in the meaning of these words relates to "the social relation between the person experiencing the anger and the person held responsible for the eliciting event." In particular, the narratives provided by Scheidecker's informants suggested that varieties of "retaliatory anger (*may fo, lolom-po, magnapoko, kakay*) are usually embedded in interactions between unrelated or distantly related individuals of the same gender and age group" (Scheidecker, 2020, p. 54). By contrast, words representing forms of "'disciplinary anger' (*heloky, mivoto tenda, sosoty, botsy*) were used in narratives in which a senior responds to the disobedience or norm violations of a junior" (Scheidecker, 2020, p. 55). According to Scheidecker, these differences in represented social context lead to differences in the way that anger is regulated, thereby changing the nature of the overall experience. For example, one of his informants reported being less likely to suppress any urge to strike out when experiencing retaliatory anger toward a stranger than when experiencing disciplinary anger toward a relative. But again, how can we determine whether all the Malagasy words in these two categories represent the same emotion of "anger" (or *seky*) as it occurs in different social situations and consequently gets regulated in different ways, or whether each picks out a distinctive and culturally specific emotion (that may intrinsically include a regulatory process as one of its subcomponents, e.g., Kappas, 2011)?

Other connotations of emotion words seem to relate to what the speaker thinks or feels about the denoted emotion or the person experiencing it rather than that emotion itself. For example, one of the differences between the meanings of "anxiety" and "fear" is that the former word is more likely to imply that the emotional reaction reflects the person's dispositional tendency to feel threatened rather than an objectively threatening aspect of the situation. In addition to attributional implications, emotion words can also convey evaluations of the denoted emotion as good or bad things to feel or of the person experiencing them as right or wrong to feel them. These emotionally extrinsic evaluative connotations should be apparent when contrasting "panic" and "fear" or "serenity" and "happiness." More generally, many apparent emotion names entail normative considerations relating to the appropriateness of adopting a particular relational orientation in a given situation in addition to denoting that relational orientation itself. The meanings of words with connotations of this normative kind are correspondingly more likely to differ across cultures that have different emotional norms.

Taken together, these considerations lead to the conclusion that we cannot establish the distinctness of an emotion simply by identifying an apparently emotional word with a distinct meaning. Even if English-speakers consistently apply such a word only under a particular set of circumstances, that does not mean that it represents a specific affective experience rather than connoting distinctive extrinsic considerations invoked by surrounding circumstances (including cultural norms and perceiver impressions). For example, showing that US participants are consistently more likely to report "awe" than "amazement" or "interest" when watching a video showing the mushroom cloud resulting from a nuclear explosion (Cowen & Keltner, 2017) tells us that the meaning of that word for that group of English speakers applies better to their reactions when framed by that kind of situation and whatever thoughts, impulses, and normative concerns they associate with it. However, this fact alone does not warrant the inference that the identified commonality of meaning relates directly to a distinct denoted emotion rather than other evoked impressions relating to the scale of the event, its incomprehensibility, moral ambiguity and so on, none of which are necessarily intrinsic to the emotion itself. In short, identifying differences in the meanings of different "emotion" words does not prove that those differences are located squarely within their apparent emotional referents. This need not matter for those referentialists who simply wish to document their semantic implications. However, if the aim is to calibrate emotions words

with separable nonlinguistic emotions, it also becomes important to consider their other connotations, if only to find a way of removing them from consideration in the search for an underlying emotional meaning.

Investigating linguistic distinctions. If different "emotion" words sometimes refer to the same or similar emotions but also carry implications about extrinsic nonemotional considerations (such as purity, duration, intensity, cause, context, regulation, evaluation of the emotional person, normative appropriateness of the response, and so on), how might researchers determine which words pick out genuinely distinct emotions in the cleanest possible way? Various methods are available to help with this task, many of which rely on informants' perceptions of semantic relations. For example, Shaver et al. (1987) collected 213 words collated from various lists of "emotions" and asked 112 US undergraduate psychology students to rate how good an example of the general "emotion" category each of those words was. Based on this procedure, the researchers selected a smaller set of 135 words representing relatively better examples of emotion. Next, another 100 psychology students sorted cards showing these words into piles containing words with similar meanings. The researchers then computed semantic similarity scores based on how many students put each pair of emotions in the same pile and derived a hierarchical classification from these scores. They concluded that the most basic level of the conceptual hierarchy providing the clearest set of distinctions divided the emotion words into six categories. Labels for these categories (determined by identifying the words which participants included in corresponding piles most frequently, and excluded from these piles least frequently) were "affection," "happiness," "depression," "anger," "fear," and "amazement." However, the researchers noted that the sixth category, which contained only three items, was potentially an artifact of relaxing the good-example inclusion criterion at the initial word-screening stage and leaving "surprise" in the list only because prior researchers had considered its referent to be a universal basic emotion for different reasons (e.g., Ekman, 1972, and see below).

Shaver et al.'s (1987) study provides evidence about how US undergraduate students taking psychology courses distinguish the meanings of English-language "emotion" nouns, thereby offering a provisional answer to the question of which of these words pick out distinct concepts. If participants' similarity judgments were systematically informed by their shared understanding of the specifically emotional meanings conveyed by the presented words (implicitly factoring out any emotionally extrinsic connotations), then the derived clusters may help to clarify which emotions are cleanly distinguished in this part of the Anglophone world.

However, even then the findings do not tell us whether "emotion" words fall into similar categories in other languages and across other cultural groups. Although Shaver et al. (2001) reported similar clusters of Indonesian "emotion" words, more radical differences have been reported in societies that are less similar to North American ones (including those with languages without any word for the general category of "emotion," e.g., Lutz, 1982). A recent study by Jackson et al. (2019) directly compared a much wider range (2474) of languages using available data about colexification—the use of the same word to denote semantically related concepts (e.g., "upset" to denote both "anger" and "distress"). The investigators found that languages used in geographically closer societies had relatively more similar patterns of colexification of "emotion" terms. However, the only consistent colexificatory tendencies across all sampled languages corresponded to distinctions between positive and negative emotions and between emotions involving high and low levels of arousal (see also Russell, 1983; Russell et al., 1989). In other words, languages do not usually colexify positive and negative emotions (e.g., by using a single word representing both "anger" and "joy") or high-arousal and low-arousal emotions (e.g., by using a single word representing both "calmness" and "excitement"). However, several languages do colexify pairs of specific emotion categories that English speakers represent as distinct from one another (e.g., the word-form *dard* in the Sirkhi dialect of Dargwa colexifies "anxiety" and "grief").

One possible implication is that speakers of different languages experience different sets of distinct emotions. Alternatively, it may be that all humans experience pleasure and arousal but specific emotion categories are culture-specific linguistic artifacts (e.g., Russell, 1991, and see below). Despite growing challenges to their universalist assumptions, however, a number of contemporary psychologists still work from the assumption that some human-wide discrete emotions genuinely exist but get lumped together and formulated in different ways by different languages (e.g., Keltner et al., 2019). A plausible reason for such cross-language differences is that different emotional distinctions are differentially useful and relevant in different cultural and ecological contexts. For example, being able to deploy finer-grained concepts representing subcategories of anger-like emotion might serve important functions in societies where there is greater variety in the actions and goals pursued by different individuals and groups, leading to wider diversity in interpersonal and intergroup conflicts. An emotion (or set of emotions) with greater cultural significance may become *hypercognized* (Levy, 1973) so that a richer vocabulary develops around it. Correspondingly, emotions with less cultural significance may be *hypocognized* and consequently end up underrepresented in a society's lexicon.

Investigating nonverbal distinctions. Researchers seeking to develop a neutral scientific language for distinguishing

putative universal emotions need to find a way of circumventing local cultural factors that have shaped their linguistic representation. This usually involves taking account of non-linguistic criteria when formulating distinctions. For example, Ekman et al. (1972) arrived at their initial list of discrete "basic" emotions partly on the basis of evidence about perceived relations between linguistically marked Anglo-American emotion categories and photographs of facial expressions. Words were retained as names for basic emotions if participants viewing the photographs consistently selected the predicted verbal label. This procedure resulted in the inclusion of the questionably emotional word "surprise" (Ortony, 2022, and see above) because a distinctive facial expression was consistently perceived as indicating its presence, but the omission of some other candidate "emotions" initially proposed by the researchers (e.g., "shame" and "contempt") because the available facial pictures were not allocated to the predicted category reliably enough by participants of both genders (Ellsworth, 2014).

In fact, the use of facial markers to distinguish emotion categories brings similar problems to the use of linguistic data. Like words, facial expressions may only acquire consensual emotional meanings when the emotions that they denote have sufficient cultural significance to merit symbolic representation. When people use these facial expressions to convey emotion-related meanings, other emotionally extrinsic connotations may be communicated too. This means that we can't count on cross-cultural consistency in the emotional meanings of faces either. Indeed, current evidence suggests that perceived associations between preselected photographs of many "emotion" expressions and "basic emotion" labels decrease as researchers sample populations which are increasingly remote from Anglophone societies (e.g., Crivelli et al., 2017; Gendron et al., 2018; Nelson & Russell, 2013).

If facial expressions don't provide markers of putatively universal emotions, where else can researchers look to ground their concepts? Perhaps other measurable emotion-related variables that are less directly susceptible to normative influences or semantic indeterminacy might provide a more solid basis for establishing which words are associated consistently with distinct emotional meanings. However, patterns of neither autonomic (e.g., Siegel et al., 2018) nor central nervous system activity (e.g., Barrett & Wager, 2006; Lindquist et al., 2012) seem to correlate strongly with the induced or observed states associated with English-language labels that supposedly represent basic emotions. Pinning down a consistent referent for these words presents continuing problems.

Reformulating linguistic distinctions. Where does the apparent variability in response profiles leave those researchers who remain committed to the identification of universal and discrete basic emotions? Scarantino (2015, 2018) has argued that a scientifically coherent emotion category need not pick out a consistently distinctive pattern of bodily responses. The integrity of the associated concept instead derives from the single underlying psychological process that is activated whenever the putative emotion occurs. For example, formulating emotions as modes of action readiness (e.g., Frijda, 1986) implies that the particular way that each one prepares the body and mind to address the same kind of functional concern differs depending on the specific object at which the readied action is oriented and the specific context in which that object is confronted. Indeed, many theorists believe that a crucial adaptive benefit of emotional processes is precisely that they are more flexible than reflexes or fixed action patterns, thereby permitting relatively fast but context-sensitive adjustments (e.g., Smith & Ellsworth, 1987). Thus, a consistent and distinctive emotion of "anger" may involve different patterns of neural and bodily activity when the goal blockage that it is designed to push against comes from an antagonist standing directly in front of the angry person rather than a recalcitrant operator at the other end of a phone line. Attributing the range of situationally sensitive response profiles to a common causal process provides an alternative basis for establishing the distinctness of the underlying emotion.

Scarantino (2015) acknowledges that even adopting this criterion may not be enough to rehabilitate the status of English-language words such as "anger," "fear," and "disgust" as names for discrete "basic" emotions. A further issue concerns those ethnolinguistic concepts themselves (see also Fiske, 2020; Griffiths, 1997). Everyday language has evolved to serve different purposes to those necessitated by scientific enquiry and has consequently arrived at normatively biased and potentially overinclusive categories. Just as Anglophone laypeople once believed that whales and dolphins belonged in the category of "fish," the contemporary vernacular concepts denoted by words such as "anger," "fear," and "disgust" include some instances that are not actually attributable to the same underlying process as other instances. To make scientific progress, researchers therefore need to refine the available folk concepts so that they only include exemplars that are governed by a common generative mechanism.

For Scarantino (2015), it is a mistake to presuppose that everyday English-language "emotion" words pick out genuine basic emotions (see also Fiske, 2020). To get a fix on scientifically coherent psychological processes, we need to develop more tightly bounded basic emotion concepts that should be labeled by neologisms such as "*defensive basic anger*" and "*unconditioned basic fear*" (Scarantino, 2015, p. 363). Arriving at the right concepts requires researchers to identify which instances of the more inclusive folk-language category are generated by a common causal mechanism.

This recommendation raises a number of issues. First, how specific would the refined basic emotion categories

need to get before they could provide the requisite level of conceptual coherence? Unless the generative causal mechanisms are themselves specified in sufficiently broad and abstract terms, there is a risk that the resulting range of reformulated basic emotions would approach the unmanageable number of existing folk names for emotions. Second, the reformulated concepts would only retain a loose relation to vernacular "emotion" categories, making it debatable whether we'd really end up with a taxonomy of "emotions" at all. Third, Scarantino's starting point for the re-specification procedure is still the particular folk language of English, with all of its ideological biases and normatively motivated omissions (e.g., Blasi et al., 2022). Choosing any other single language as the initial reference point for identification of basic emotions would clearly bring similar problems (Fiske, 2020). Then again, it is not clear that sampling concepts from a wider range of human languages would yield a consistent set of discrete emotion categories in the first place (Jackson et al., 2019, and see above).

A different set of concerns arises from Scarantino's focus on emotion names as descriptive representations of pre-existing nonlinguistic phenomena. If applying folk concepts to experience also makes a difference to how psychological episodes unfold and contributes to perceptions of their discreteness, then abandoning those folk concepts risks losing purchase on a range of significant "emotional" processes operating both within and across cultures (Parkinson, 2017). The possible language-dependence of emotions is discussed further in the next section.

Construction

For many researchers working from a referential perspective, emotion words are designed to pick out pre-existing discrete emotions but sometimes fail to codify the correct distinctions between them. Proponents of the constructionist perspective focus instead on how words contribute to the production of emotions and the distinctions between them, by giving categorical form to experiences that would be less differentiated without their application. How might this work? A number of alternative versions of psychological and social constructionist theory have answered this question in different ways (see also Barrett & Russell, 2015; Mesquita & Parkinson, in press). In this section, I focus on some of the more influential formulations.

The basic assumption of psychological constructionist theories is that emotions are made from more generally applicable psychological processes rather than emotion-specific ones (Barrett & Russell, 2015). A key raw material for emotion construction is "core affect" (e.g., Russell & Barrett, 1999) which consists of the degrees of pleasure and arousal that the person is experiencing. Core affect has a dimensional structure (e.g., Russell, 1980). Taken alone, it cannot explain people's perceptions of emotions as distinct from one another. Distinctness or perceived distinctness of apparently discrete emotions instead arises from a separate process of categorization that depends on the linguistics concepts available.

Russell (2015) and Barrett (2017; Barrett et al., 2015) have different views about the nature of this categorization process and about its precise consequences for emotional experience (Moors, 2022). For Russell, emotion categories are encoded as prototypical scripts that shape people's perceptions and interpretations of experienced affect. For Barrett, categorization involves a process of perceptual simulation that directly produces distinct emotional experiences, expectations, and behavioral tendencies. The following subsections elaborate further on these two psychological constructionist views and a third social constructionist alternative developed by Averill (1980).

Psychological construction of emotion perceptions. Russell (2003) draws an analogy between how people perceive emotions and how they identify constellations in the night sky. Lay astronomers are confronted with a scattering of points of light without any obvious configural organization, but our ancestors developed representations of animals and mythical figures that could be superimposed onto this astral array, allowing their descendents to join some of the dots. If we know where the imaginary lines should be drawn, we can see patterns that provide a simplifying structure to our perceptions. However, the resulting constellations are not really out there in the places that we are looking; they are a product of the way in which we mentally represent what we see. Because different representations are available in different societies and at different stages of history, different groups of people end up seeing the same things in different ways.

So too with emotions, according to Russell (2003). What is available for perception is core affect constituted by pleasure and arousal, the unfolding situations in which we experience it, the objects to which it is attached, and our changing thoughts and inclinations about them. The emotion concepts provided in any shared language allow us to package together these diverse phenomena in ways that produce an apparent structure. But that structure is not governed by any integrative set of emotional processes and varies depending on the specific concepts that language makes available. "Emotions" thus reside in the eyes of English-speaking perceivers not anywhere else in their psychological environment.

In Russell's (2003; Fehr & Russell, 1984) view, the concepts encoded by emotion words are not defined by necessary and sufficient criteria that allow sharp lines to be drawn around them. Instead, they are represented by prototypes (e.g., Rosch, 1973) that identify a central exemplar with which putative instances of the category are compared. Emotional prototypes take the form of scripts (e.g., Schank & Abelson, 1977) that set out the usual chronology

of the events that they represent. If whatever is happening corresponds more closely to this prototype across its many represented sequential features, classification as a member of the category is more likely. Emotion concepts have fuzzy boundaries because each of the inclusion criteria are probabilistic and not all of them need to be satisfied for an episode to be classified as an instance of the relevant category.

Application of prototypical representations to affective experiences does not directly bring a corresponding emotion into being in Russell's (2003) model. The construction process operates at the level of labeling and perception, producing an "emotional meta-experience" (Russell, 2003, 2015) rather than any differentiated emotional state. However, classifying your experience as "anger" or "fear" etc., may also encourage activate regulatory strategies that shape future behavior (Russell, 2003). It also seems possible that activated emotion concepts may prime related thoughts and attune the cognitive system to aspects of the situation that are more prototypical, thereby shaping the ensuing episode so that its prototypicality increases. Both these processes potentially lead to more differentiated emotional episodes as well as more differentiated emotion perceptions.

Psychological constructionist accounts rarely emphasize the interpersonal elements of representational processes, but these too may contribute to the production of differentiated concept-congruent conduct. For example, someone else's perception that you are "angry" may encourage them to be defensive, retaliatory, and antagonistic in return. To the extent that another person's antagonism features in the "anger" prototype, your detection of it may then lead you to see yourself as "angry." It may also encourage you to engage in reciprocal antagonism, thereby reinforcing the other person's initial categorization of you as "angry" and making the interpersonal emotion cycle (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008) a more vicious one. Indeed, emotion categorization may operate as a socially distributed process (e.g., Hutchins, 1995), with meaning consolidating as a function of interactions between more than one person. This kind of co-constructed emotional categorization process is difficult to disentangle from the relational pattern that it both represents and influences as the interpersonal episode develops and unfolds in real time (see also Parkinson, 2020).

Psychological construction of emotional experiences. Unlike Russell (2003), Barrett (2017) contends that emotion categorization produces differentiated emotions and not just changed perceptions of affect (i.e., distinct emotional experiences rather than merely emotional meta-experiences). This deeper form of construction is made possible by her reformulation of emotion representation as a context-dependent embodied simulation of multimodal perceptual information rather than an exclusively mental process that compares semantic features with an abstractly specified emotion prototype. More specifically, Barrett (2017) argues that emotion categories are represented as sets of situation-specific memory traces of the internal and external signals associated with use of the relevant emotion word. Correspondingly, emotions themselves are treated as perceptions of what the body is doing (in particular, its levels of pleasure or arousal) in a particular context, thus similarly combining interoception and exteroception. In Barrett's (2017, p. 30) own words: "An emotion is your brain's *creation* of what your bodily sensations mean, in relation to what is going on around you in the world."

These mutually compatible formulations of categorization and emotion help to close the theoretical gap between these two processes making it seem more plausible that categorization constitutes emotion itself. However, they also raise the question of where the input for the categorization process that generates emotion comes from in the first place. Barrett's (2017) view is that many of the interoceptively registered internal changes that contribute to emotional experience arise as a consequence of the brain's predictions about requirements for metabolic energy (body budgeting or allostasis). But if the categorization process is detecting the body's capacity to deal with specific challenges and threats presented by the environment, then categorization starts to sound like a form of appraisal, which is widely believed to cause emotion in models that don't make specifically constructionist assumptions (see also Moors, 2022). Indeed, many appraisal theories (e.g., Lazarus, 1991) have also proposed that emotions are activated by perceptions of challenges and threats and the individual's capacity to cope with them (see Moors, 2022). If the bodily changes that cue the emotion category and hence the emotional experience are in fact produced by a form of appraisal, then categorization itself stops being the primary cause of the emotion. What additional work does categorization then need to do in the process of emotion generation, apart from adding a linguistic label to the action preparation that has already been initiated?

Barrett's (2017) view is that specific emotions have less internal integrity than most appraisal theories imply. Instances are not linked by any common essence or core relational theme (Lazarus, 1991), but rather by the culturally provided concept associated with the emotion word. This concept may lump together a diverse set of context-marked memory traces that lack any distinctive interconnections apart from the consistent use of a word to represent them. In Barrett's (2017, p. 138) terms, "any two emotion concepts, like 'Surprise' and 'Fear,' need no consistent fingerprints to distinguish them. So we, as a culture, *introduce* mental similarity using words." But if there were no consistent perceivable differences between the events picked out by different emotion categories prior to the application of the different emotion words, how did these words get differentially associated with those events in the first place? Why would any society come up with a name for a diverse set of experiences without any overlapping features? In response to this

question, Barrett might argue that the word's meaning consolidates around the interrelated goals served by the behavioral tendencies it encodes rather than any consistent patterns of bodily response. In that case, however, the key factor needed to produce the emotion again seems to be activation of those goals rather than detection of one of the various patterns of interoceptive and exteroceptive information associated with the emotion word.

Psychological constructionist theories mainly focus on the effects of emotion categorization and pay less attention to the sociocultural origins of the concepts on which that categorization depends (Lindquist et al., 2022). Although Barrett's and Russell's writings acknowledge the relevance of these prior processes, neither author provides a complete account of how they might operate as part of a more extended emotion construction process. In this regard, it seems clear that understanding the point of using emotion words within any society can help to make sense of the cultural forces that have shaped the differentiation of emotion concepts, emotion perceptions, and potentially emotions themselves. In the next subsection, I discuss Averill's (1980) social constructionist theory of emotion, which more directly addresses this complementary part of the story.

Social construction of enacted emotions. Averill's (1980) theory focuses squarely on the cultural functions served by emotions, formulated as transitory social roles. From his perspective, a person follows a cultural script when getting emotional rather than representing a prior affective experience in culturally scripted terms. And the point of the script is not to impose perceptual order on otherwise loosely arranged components but rather to navigate a path through situations where societal norms clash with one another.

Averill has applied this analysis to a range of different emotional syndromes in different historical and cultural contexts (e.g., Averill, 1985; Averill et al., 1990; Averill & Nunley, 1988), but his most extensive work addresses the Anglo-American phenomenon of "anger" (Averill, 1982). In his view, getting angry is a strategy for resolving the conflict between pacifistic and retributional norms in the United States and many other Western societies. These norms encourage mutually incompatible behaviors when an individual is insulted or threatened. On the one hand, pacifistic norms encourage people to turn the other cheek or not dignify the provocation with any response. On the other hand, retributional norms encourage people to stand up for themselves, retaliate, or at least threaten to do so. So any deliberate adoption of a retaliatory stance is warranted by one set of norms but discouraged by a conflicting set that specifically prescribes an opposite conciliatory stance. To resolve this conflict, the transitory "anger" script allows people to behave in a way that demonstrates their willingness to fight back without that action seeming intentional. Their "anger" is perceived by socialized members of their culture (including themselves) as something that has come over them in the heat of the moment rather than being any premeditated act.

In my view, Averill's argument that emotions are "disclaimed actions" (Griffiths, 1997, p. 140) tends to overstate the level of deliberation behind adoption and enactment of emotional roles under many circumstances. If patterns of angry behavior are orchestrated not only by the actor's internalized script but also by the ongoing responsiveness of the other people around who share similar culturally derived perceptions and expectations (see Parkinson, 2012), then there is less need to see all anger instances as premeditated yet self-deceptively disowned. When an Anglo-American adopts an angry stance, other people make complementary adjustments to their own relational positions that are partly shaped by their own representations of how anger normatively unfolds. The emerging mutual positions of interactants thus provide structure to the angry response in a socially distributed way without the need for any prior strategic intention on the part of the actor (see also Mesquita & Parkinson, in press; Parkinson, 2019).

According to this reformulation of Averill's theory, the words that any society uses to represent emotions capture a set of shared expectations about how people should conduct themselves when facing normative conflicts. Thus, the "anger" script not only specifies individual response components and the prototypical contexts in which they occur, but also prescriptive guidelines about how people should conduct themselves when angry or when dealing with others who are angry.

Interim conclusions. I have argued that constructionist accounts of language-emotion relations provide important insights into the effects of linguistic categorization. Representing your own and other people's experience in emotional terms is not a self-contained perceptual response to what is happening but something that changes the way in which the emotional episode subsequently unfolds. However, a full understanding of this postrepresentational process also requires attention to the normative factors that have helped shape the cultural evolution of the emotion representation in the first place. These normative considerations produce concepts that have prescriptive as well as descriptive content, meaning that they provide guidelines for appropriate emotional conduct as well as an interpretative framework for perceiving emotions. The prescriptions carried by emotion representations are also likely to differ across languages and cultures meaning that linguistic differences may reflect as well as affect differences in how emotional episodes are enacted.

Pragmatics

The different perspectives on language-emotion relations considered so far have focused mainly on the referential

concepts associated with emotion words. The present section shifts attention from the semantics to the pragmatics of emotional language, addressing in particular the interpersonal functions served by making emotional statements in conversational contexts. The ideas behind many pragmatic approaches originated in the ordinary-language philosophy of Wittgenstein (1953) and Austin (1962). Recent developments in conversation analysis (e.g., Sacks, 1992) and discursive psychology (e.g., Edwards & Potter, 1992) have subsequently led to an investigation of language as it is actually used rather than armchair reflection about its operation. The aim is to understand what words do when delivered in statements that are heard by other people in real-world settings and not what they might mean to an abstracted language user.

Appraisal functions of emotion statements. Words can perform a variety of social actions in addition to merely describing objects and events. When the representative of the jury says "guilty" at the appropriate stage of a British trial in response to the judge's properly formulated question, the delivery of that word transforms the defendant into a criminal (Austin, 1962). When two people take marriage vows at an official wedding ceremony in front of the necessary witnesses in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, the two people are legally bound together. When I promise to meet you at a certain time and place without sarcasm, I make a commitment to be there, and give you the right to be offended if I fail to show up.

What social actions are performed when people make emotional statements? According to the ordinary-language philosopher, Bedford (1957), "emotion words are part of the vocabulary of appraisal and criticism" (p. 294) rather than "names for feelings" (p. 281). In his view, then, the principal function of statements using emotion words is not to provide information about internal states but rather to present judgments and evaluations of people, objects, and events (a "judicial function," p. 298). For example, saying that I am angry with you is an act of blame in many Anglo-American societies. It is a declaration that presents your conduct as negligent or otherwise reprehensible. Correspondingly, saying that I am embarrassed serves to criticize my own conduct and conveys my commitment to social expectations that I was temporarily unable to meet.

How do first-person English-language emotion statements perform these appraisal functions? One possible answer is that they conjure up the semantic representation of the presented emotion concept in hearers, who then make inferences about how the speaker is appraising what is happening. For example, you may interpret my verbal expression of anger as indicating that I am experiencing an unpleasant reaction to something you have done that I consider blameworthy. In other words, you might be reverse engineering an other-blame appraisal from my reported emotion based on your knowledge that anger is caused by seeing someone else as to blame (e.g., Hareli & Hess, 2010). You then need to decide how to react to this inferred appraisal of you as blameworthy, perhaps by apologizing to me or professing your innocence.

One issue with this account is that it requires a separate set of principles to explain the hearer's response. Simply surmising that I perceive you as blameworthy in itself does not seem sufficient to explain why you feel compelled to address my blame by acknowledging or denying its appropriateness. We need to introduce notions of relational management or norms about defending reputation to explain your motivation for addressing the implications of the inferred meaning.

From Bedford's (1957) perspective, emotion words don't name objects in the first place but instead are primarily used to evaluate or criticize someone or something. In this case, the hearer simply needs to respond to the speaker's evaluative act with a complementary act of shared evaluation or the presentation of a counter-evaluation. In the terms of Austin's (1962) analysis, saying "I am angry with you" has the illocutionary force of an act of blame and the perlocutionary effect on the hearer is either to accept that blame or resist and deflect it (see also Parkinson, 2021).

Preference structures in emotional conversations. The normative pressure to respond to illocutionary speech acts in particular ways has been investigated by conversation analysts. Sacks (1992) introduced the notion of an adjacency pair as an organizational unit where one speaker's contribution to a two-person conversation is followed by an interlocking and relevant response from the other speaker. In many cases, however, different possible responses to the first speaker's contribution are equally relevant. For example, an invitation may be either accepted or refused by the person who receives it. In cases, such as this, a *preference structure* (Pomerantz, 1984) governs the second speaker's response. Because acceptance is the preferred response to an invitation, an accepting utterance can be delivered straightforwardly and without hesitation. By contrast, the dispreferred response of refusal requires additional conversational work such as provision of an excuse, initial deflection of topic, hesitation, and so on. The invitee may say something like: "I would love to come, but unfortunately …" or "As it happens, May 5 is exactly the date when …" Thus, the observed characteristics of the second part of an adjacency pair reveal the preference structure that is in operation and provide evidence about the specific nature of the illocutionary force exerted in the first part of the adjacency pair.

If emotional statements are evaluative, critical, or judicial, as implied by Bedford (1957), what responses are they designed to encourage in hearers? According to Levinson (1983), the preferred response to a judgment is an acceptance of that judgment. For example, if I say "that was a great movie," the preferred response from you would be along the lines "yes, it was" or "it was terrific, wasn't it?" By

extension, the preferred response to the appraisal presented in an emotion statement should acknowledge the validity of that appraisal (Parkinson, 2021). If I say that "I blame you," the preferred response would be for you to agree that you are to blame. However, saying that "I am angry with you" seems to carry additional force than simply saying "I blame you." It implies that your blameworthy act has consequences for things that matter to me, and that I care about. It carries the threat that I may be willing to retaliate or seek reparations from you. My anger statement thus encourages more than a simple acknowledgement of blame. Its illocutionary force includes a solicitation of your commitment to make amends, to apologize and ideally to express complementary guilt, thereby demonstrating that you care about the same things that I care about.

The illocutionary force of "anger" statements obviously differs depending on the subject and object of the ascribed anger as well as the broader linguistic and relational context (see also below). For example, when first-person anger is directed at a third-person rather than second-person object (i.e., when I say that I am angry with her rather than you), it is often an appeal for the hearer to take the speaker's side against a putatively blameworthy antagonist, and to agree both that they are to blame and that the consequences of their actions are serious enough to need addressing. Elaboration of the many possible things that emotion words can do when used in different ways requires systematic research across a variety of contexts (see also below).

Culture-specific pragmatics. If the pragmatic account of first-person English-language emotion statements presented above is valid, then it becomes important to consider the specific evaluative, critical, and judicial functions served by using particular emotion words such as "anger" when seeking to understand how their meanings have developed in Anglo-American societies. Correspondingly, if we want to compare the meanings of emotion words from different languages then assessing the pragmatic functions of their usage in local conversations takes precedence over trying to distill any semantic meaning or pin down their putative referential function in naming psychological states. Along these lines, Lutz (1988) conducted an anthropological investigation of "emotions" (or their closest local equivalent) on the Micronesian atoll of Ifaluk. One of the words that Ifaluk people use when talking about "their insides" ("niferash") is "song," glossed by Lutz as "justifiable anger." If we want to understand the similarities and differences between "song" and English-language "anger," then we need to compare the pragmatic functions served by usage of these two words in real-world conversations.

Lutz's (1988) ethnographic observations provide us with an initial basis for this comparison. Her general conclusion was that the people of Ifaluk use first-person ascriptions of song to express moral judgments of other people who have failed to live up to accepted norms about social relations, sharing resources and so on. Thus, according to Lutz (1988, pp. 155–156), "When this term is used, an assessment is being made; the speaker is saying, 'Something immoral or taboo has happened here, and it ought not to have happened.'" However, to avoid direct confrontation with others in a community where people are often in direct face-to-face contact with each other, those expressing song usually deliver their condemnation to third parties rather than alleged offenders themselves. The function served by song statements taking a third-person object is to solicit similar condemnation of the target's actions by others. According to Lutz (1988, p. 162): "Each time a person declares 'I am song' is a gambit or bid in an effort to install a particular interpretation of events as the definition of that situation to be accepted by others. [In many cases] … the opening bid is accepted and the force of public opinion sides with the person who first asserts that the situation is one of rule violation and hence one of justifiable anger."

In the Ifaluk language, "song" is distinct from other emotion concepts that also seem comparable to English-language "anger." For example, "lingeringer" is used when people suffer a mounting series of minor frustrating events, and "nguch" is specifically directed at relatives who fail to fulfill their obligations. English also has distinct anger-related words such as "indignation," "frustration," and "dismay," but differs by also including the more general term "anger" which can be used across a wider range of contexts. It also seems more common for Anglo-Americans to say that they are "angry" with the person that they are talking to than for inhabitants of Ifaluk to express "song" directly at its target.

Do these differences between usages of different emotion words in different languages tell us something about differences in the emotional lives of the people who use these words? From a referential perspective, the associated concepts might simply be making more or less fine distinctions between subvarieties of universally experienced emotions depending on their different levels of cultural relevance in each society (e.g., hypercognition and hypocognition, Levy, 1973). Or the words might encode culturally significant contexts in addition to the universal emotions experienced in those contexts. It is true that there are sufficient parallels between "song" and "anger" to make it plausible that their linguistic differences are about granularity and selective emphasis rather than the fundamental nature of their referents.

From a pragmatic angle, there are also commonalities between the functions and effects of using these words. Both "song" and "anger" avowals deliver accusations and allocate blame. However, "song" avowals serve the purpose of upholding a shared moral order to a greater extent than most "anger" avowals, which are more often oriented to individual rights and expectations within interpersonal relationships. Relatedly, first-person "song" statements are relatively more likely to come from the "chiefs" as uncontested moral authorities on Ifaluk. They also carry more

weight when delivered by people occupying more exalted positions in the social hierarchy because those people have greater power to impose sanctions on the moral offenders identified by song ascriptions. Although "anger" exerts a greater influence on other people when expressed by more powerful individuals in Anglo-American societies too (e.g., van Kleef et al., 2006), formal pronouncements of "anger" are less commonly used in public condemnations of those whose conduct is presented as offending the broader community. In this sense, the pragmatic meaning of "song" is bound to be different from that of "anger" because its illocutionary force depends on the specific social and institutional arrangements that prevail on Ifaluk.

Pragmatics and emotional reality. How does emotional language relate to emotions themselves according to the pragmatic perspective outlined in this section? If, as Bedford (1957) argued, emotion nouns are not names for psychological objects, what exactly is it that needs to be calibrated against emotion talk to understand the language-reality connection? One useful way of addressing this question is by considering how appraisals feature in emotional language and other kinds of emotional process.

Above, I outlined how a referential approach might deal with the pragmatic functions of emotion talk by drawing on Hareli and Hess's (2010) reverse engineering model. The idea behind this and other inferential accounts (e.g., de Melo et al., 2014) is that real occurrent emotions are psychological states caused by appraisals (i.e., implicit or explicit judgments and evaluations of what is happening to the person, see Lazarus, 1991). The second assumption, familiar from the referential perspective outlined above, is that emotion words (and facial expressions) are names for psychological states that constitute real emotions. Thus, telling someone that you are (or that somebody else is) "angry," "elated," or "hopeful" activates the descriptive concept associated with that emotion word so that they know what kind of psychological state you are referring to. They also know that this psychological state is typically caused by a particular kind of appraisal, and this knowledge allows them to work backwards from their emotion attribution to an inference about what that appraisal might be. Thus, saying "I am angry" leads you to conclude that I must also perceive someone else as to blame for a bad thing that has happened to me.

By contrast, Bedford's (1957) pragmatic approach to emotional language implies that using emotion words is already a process of making an appraisal of something. By saying that I am angry, I am not describing a psychological state caused by a separate appraisal of other-blame but performing an act of blame directed at a particular social object. So where does emotion itself come into this process? One way of answering this question is to extend pragmatic assumptions beyond the realm of language use and into the domain of other kinds of emotional enactment and "expression." For example, some social functional accounts see emotions as relational actions directed at particular objects that serve the purpose of changing or maintaining other people's orientations toward those objects (e.g., Parkinson, 2008; 2019). From this perspective, emotions, like emotion statements, are acts of appraisal and not separate psychological states caused by appraisal. Similarly, so-called facial "expressions" of emotion may be interpreted as interpersonal moves designed to influence other people rather than as signs or symptoms of internal affective states (Crivelli & Fridlund, 2018; Parkinson, 2021). Taken together, these ideas suggest that emotion talk performs similar social functions to other aspects of the emotional process. Like facial activity, and other aspects of a person's emotional orientation to what is happening, it serves to align relations between people and objects in the shared environment.

According to this relation-alignment approach (e.g., Parkinson, 2008; Parkinson, Fischer, & Manstead, 2005), the kinds of emotion that emerge in any society depend on the local social arrangements that position individual and collective actors with respect to each other and to events in their shared environment. Some abstract aspects of these sociomaterial relations are likely to be universal, such as those pertaining to the regulation of social distance, distribution of resources, and management of social and practical threats. However, each of these abstract concerns is instantiated in culture-specific ways that vary depending on local institutions and ecological factors.

Discursive flexibility. Following Bedford (1957), the provisional account of the pragmatic functions of emotion statements sketched out in the previous sections of this article exaggerates the level of coherence that characterizes actual language usage. This simplification was achieved partly by focusing on concocted and ostensibly typical examples of sentences that people might plausibly utter. When we investigate real-world language delivery, the story becomes more complicated. In fact, emotion words are deployed in a variety of ways (Fiske, 2020) and serve a wide range of possible rhetorical functions in different linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts (Edwards, 1999). For example, Edwards' (1999) discursive analysis of talk during relationship-counselling sessions shows how formulations of a person's conduct using words such as "anger" and "jealousy" can either present it as symptomatic of the emotional person's underlying psychological pathology (e.g., their dispositional "jealousy" produces "angry" over-reactions), or as something justified by the extremity of an external provocation (e.g., their "jealousy" and "anger" arise from repeated betrayals). "Anger" avowals made by English speakers are clearly not always simple acts of blame directed at a specific target. They can also serve as claims or confessions about acting

irrationally in the heat of the moment. They can function to counter accusations about acting out of calculated malice. And so on.

According to Edwards (1999), the multiplicity of emotional meaning itself serves a function by allowing speakers to adjust their formulations to meet the specific requirements of the current contextualized conversation: "It is because people's emotion displays (thus categorized) can be treated either as involuntary reactions, or as under agentive control or rational accountability, as internal states or public displays, reactions or dispositions, that emotion discourse can perform flexible, accountability-oriented, indexically sensitive, rhetorical work. For doing talk's business, people require conceptual resources that are inconsistent, contradictory, fuzzy and to-be-indexically-specified" (p. 288).

Rather than seeing abstract emotion concepts as underlying the pragmatic effects of emotion talk, Edwards treats pragmatics as primary and the conceptual representations of emotions that are available to speakers as necessary consequences of the functions that emotion statements are designed to perform. In particular, the absence of firm and fixed boundaries around emotion categories (e.g., Fehr & Russell, 1984, and see above) and the polysemy of emotional words (Fiske, 2020) are not prior causes of inconsistency and looseness in emotion talk, but rather linguistic features that develop precisely because pragmatically oriented emotion talk needs to operate in context-sensitive and adjustable ways. In other words, "Categories have to be like that to do talk's business, not simply reflect how the world is, or how minds work" (Edwards, 1991, p. 537).

The functional flexibility of emotion talk further complicates cross-cultural comparisons. It implies that different societies not only have different words that perform different kinds of appraisal functions, but also different ranges of functional usages for each of those words that are sensitive to different kinds of context. If so, it becomes less surprising that different languages do not consistently include single words corresponding to the generic English-language concept of "emotion" (Wierzbicka, 1999, and see above) to cover all of the more specific varieties of situated utterance that are possible. Societies may well generalize linguistic categories on the basis of pragmatic functions that are more significant for them than those of presenting an appraisal of events to others or naming a putative internal state (e.g., see Fenigsen et al., 2020, on cultural differences in use of "I-language"). And given that the resulting higher-level concepts are also designed for context-sensitive deployment in talk, there is no guarantee that the functions they cover remain unitary or consistent under all circumstances either.

The upshot is that some of the culture-specific words whose English translations have broadly "emotional" meanings may not exclusively serve appraisal functions (if they have those functions at all). It also remains possible that not all Anglophone emotion words are equally fuzzy, polysemic or pragmatically oriented. Some of them may even translate more directly than others into other languages, potentially because they refer to universally experienced psychological processes. So far, none of the proposed candidates for English-language basic emotion terms seem to meet the criteria of translatability or universality, but that need not mean that no words in any language serve as specific markers for consistent, human-wide affective experiences. Whether such experiences would qualify specifically as "emotions" either in vernacular English or in scientific discourse is a different question. Unless the pragmatic and referential parameters of the word in question showed some commonality with those of other words that laypeople and scholars want to call "emotions," it is hard to see why anyone would want to treat it as an important or central exemplar of the category.

Conclusions

This article has argued against the view that emotional language operates simply as a system of descriptive representation that maps more or less accurately onto our emotional lives. Instead, societies develop different linguistic tools for aligning the specific sociomaterial relations that are most relevant to their practical and ideological concerns. Using these linguistic tools exerts forms of social influence that often follow similar principles to other ways of getting "emotional" about things.

From this perspective, studies that compare the referential concepts associated with emotion words across societies or eras only reveal a partial picture of cultural differences in emotional processes. Emotional languages have developed not only to encode distinctions between putatively separable psychological states but also to perform pragmatic evaluative and relation-aligning functions. Understanding these functions requires attention to how emotion words are used (and to what effects their usage has on other people) in different settings within and across cultures (see also Kockelman, 2003; White, 2005). Such research should provide the grounding for the development of specific hypotheses about the cultural evolution of diverse emotional meanings and linguistic functions (see also Lindquist et al., 2022).

Ethnographic research already suggests that many human societies have developed linguistic resources that serve relation-aligning functions broadly analogous to those documented for some English-language "emotion" words (e.g., Lutz, 1988, and see above). However, the specific functions served by these words seem to differ depending on prevailing patterns of social relations, inequities in access to resources, the relative importance of group solidarity and individual identity, as well as more idiosyncratic local arrangements. The same functional requirements also exert corresponding effects on the nature of other emotional processes involving nonverbal and bodily engagement with what is happening, yielding loosely packaged sets of culture-specific linguistic and nonlinguistic emotional resources.

The aim of this article was to direct attention to the role of pragmatic considerations and not to contest the fact that emotion words are also associated with descriptive concepts that represent emotions and that can change the ways in which emotions are perceived and experienced. The problem with many previous approaches to emotional language is that they are selective rather than fundamentally wrong. One reason for their selectivity is the guiding assumption that the primary function of emotional language is to represent emotional reality and that any perceptual and pragmatic effects of emotion words are secondary consequences of the descriptive concepts associated with them. As we have seen, Edwards' (1991) analysis raises the alternative possibility that descriptive concepts have developed to serve prior pragmatic functions in the first place. From this perspective, emotion concepts are the way that they are partly because they need to be used in emotion avowals and ascriptions that perform context-sensitive conversational actions. The general relations, overlaps, and interdependencies between semantic and pragmatic processes (e.g., Camp, 2012; Devitt, 2021) are beyond the scope of the present analysis. I take no strong position here on whether pragmatic or semantic processes take primacy or whether they can be rigorously disentangled in practice. However, I do want to say that without sustained research into the deployment and interpersonal reception of emotion talk in a range of real-time, real-world settings, we can never hope to attain a complete understanding of how emotions themselves operate and how their operation differs across societies, organizations, and more local settings.

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Note

1 They are not exhaustive either. For example, Wilce (2014) raises the additional possibilities that people may experience emotions about words (including emotion words), and that vocalizing may itself have an emotional component to the extent that making specific sounds, intonations and muscle movements involves distinct sensations and feelings.

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