

**BABEŞ–BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, CLUJ-NAPOCA**  
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**LINGUISTIC FORMS OF DISCUSSING EMOTIONS**  
**and their Role in the Psychotherapeutic Process**

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### **Abstract**

The subject of my doctoral dissertation is talking about states of spirit and emotional states. As a psychologist, I believe that one's own feelings are the most important in a person's life, since these are the dynamic part of one's personality, which make one not only a thinking, but also a sentient being. Examining everything that we experience in our souls (emotions, feelings, moods) requires the connection of at least two disciplines: linguistics and psychology. Since in psychology the dominant cognitive paradigm of today does not assume talking about the soul at the scientific level (in the sense it will be discussed below), so I tried to approach the subject of my research from a linguistic perspective, not forgetting that people and their spirit could not be thoroughly grasped in any discipline.

One of the aims of my research is to investigate whether the meaning structure of words indicating emotional states is organized exclusively through notional conceptualization and the principles of cognitive metaphor theory, or there is another way of naming and talking about our emotions. In the first part of my dissertation, I present the definitions of emotional states and emotions, as well as the line-up of psychological and linguistic researches.

When using the word *emotion* in an interdisciplinary framework, we need to be very careful, as the linguist may mean something different by it than the psychologist, and it may mean something entirely different even to the latter, depending on what kind of orientation it belongs to.

In accordance with Szilágyi N. Sándor (2012, 2015), I consider it important that the two systems operating in human behaviour, mind and soul to be in harmony with each other. Therefore, it is not enough to talk about conceptual representations that define our thinking, and even to define our emotions in its terms, but also to take into account the representations of our souls and impressional representations. There is no extensive literature on impressional representation, but with this doctoral dissertation, I would like to contribute to this. Stern's concept of amodal representation seems to be close enough to what Szilágyi N. Sándor called impressional representation. Uniform vision of the world provided by the characteristics of amodal perception (shape, intensity, rhythm) can be extended to the language, also. The

perception of the shape is important in a unified view; hence, I also examine the relationships between emotional states and spatial patterns.

In the second, practical part of my dissertation, I identify cognitive domains and metaphors in psychotherapeutic protocols. The extent of the corpus used for investigation is not large, but it was necessary only for observing the relationships between different types of mental disorders and emotional states, and for characterizing various disorders in different ways on the basis of cognitive domains. The states of spirit and emotional states tracked in the corpus can also be identified by the characteristics of impressional representations. The majority of the cognitive domains was related to space, so I also examined the relationships between emotional states and spatial patterns.

The second part of the analysis of the linguistic material presents the results of a questionnaire survey aimed at examining how our emotion words fit into the structure of the linguistic world along the values. Starting from the spatial organization that can be seen in the system of verbal prefixes (or coverbs) of the Hungarian language (Szilágyi 1996), I asked the participants to associate words that indicate spatial locations, directions, and words referring to emotional states. The hypothesis of the questionnaire research was that there is a value structure organized along the spatial directions in the language, according to the principle of attracting of solidary values, and this is reflected in our emotion words and their system. In the linguistic world model, words indicating emotional states occupy different “places”. The second question of the research referred to what extent these “places” are universal, and how dependent they are on linguistic conventions. For this reason, I extended the questionnaire research to Romanian and Chinese, which have no well-developed system of coverbs similar to the Hungarian system. Spatial locations in the research were denominated by postpositions/prepositions and local adverbs. Finally, the results of the questionnaire research were interpreted from a linguistic, and also, a cultural point of view.

### **Structure**

The first chapter presents the main directions of emotional research from a cognitive linguistic, psychological, and neurobiological point of view. My theoretical foundations have three main prerequisites: the phenomenological approach, the existential psychotherapeutic approach, and the cognitive metaphor theory.

In the second subunit of the first chapter, I draw up a distinction between conceptual and impressional representations. Characteristics of impressional representations are similar

to those described by Ch. Osgood on the basis of his research on the semantic differential and the experiences of D. Stern from the pre-verbal period.

In the third subunit of Chapter 1, I deal with the relationship between emotions and space. Emotional states always describe a kind of relationship between the perceived object or inner state, and the emotional state of the experiencer, even when it seems that our perception has no identifiable “object”. We can identify this relationship in the categories of spatial characteristics. It could also be said that the most secure place in a person’s life is their own spatial coordinates, and if these trembles one has to face psychopathological problems. Therefore, it is important to examine how space is present in emotional states expressed in speech.

In the second chapter I examine two topics: first, I briefly introduce some of the features of talking about emotions and states of spirit in a psychotherapeutic situation, and then I analyse in detail the relationships of certain emotions and emotion words with different spatial locations and relations, which also serve as the basis for many linguistic expression forms.

Emotions and states of spirit are not the accessories of the external environment but are inside; they can be experienced and undergone. Therefore, speech about emotions is a more complex process than the communication about the outside world at two regards. In the case of speech about emotions, we need to find linguistic possibilities to be able to talk about our emotions that often cannot even be easily described. There are separate words for the more important and distinctive emotions, but the details and character of such emotions can be made more (or less) comprehensible to others in comparisons or metaphors. This is especially true when we do not use speech for talking about our emotions, but for expressing them.

As presented in the third chapter, my research has sought answer to whether the relationship of emotions with space and relations is basically just a very common language convention, or the impressional representations of the emotions themselves have a spatial pattern that is not based on conventions, and linguistic expressions convey this symbolically. The latter can be supported, for example, by the fact that strong association of UP as a spatial location and happiness can be observed in many languages of the world, even ones with completely different structures.

I have also tried to find an answer to this question by conducting a questionnaire survey aimed at studying associations between emotional states and different spatial locations and relationships. The questionnaire was compiled with the help of Google’s questionnaire editor and delivered to people via the Internet. People were asked to choose the spatial location and

relation words perceived as more suitable to the feeling suggested by the given emotion words. (The order of the individual questions was random in each case.) Thus, I was able to examine the association of emotion words with space expressions, apart from the linguistic context, by themselves.

However, the language could not be completely ruled out, because the feeling words and choice options offered in the questionnaire were in Hungarian. That is why I also prepared the Romanian version of the Hungarian questionnaire and translated it into Chinese too, adapting it to that language, in order to get an overview in processing the results of how the language influences the answers by comparing the three language samples. In addition to the Hungarian, the typologically quite different Romanian language was also chosen, because in Hungarian the spatial relations of emotions are largely expressed by the rich system of verbal prefixes (or coverbs), and in the absence of these in Romanian this is not possible. The Chinese sample was needed because the cultural background in Hungarian and Romanian is similar in many respects, but the Chinese background is quite different from them. The questionnaire requires spatial associations for 57 emotion words in eight emotion categories, based on the categorization of Goleman (1997).

### **Conclusions**

In my dissertation, I intended to find out how our words of emotional state can express our feelings and emotions. As we have seen, the expression of emotion has many ways: it can manifest itself at the level of semantics, syntax, and style. Psychological theories analyse what we can call emotion, what components it has, and linguistic theories are about our linguistic devices meant to express our emotional states. Cognitive linguistics discusses emotions on a conceptual level, similar to other abstract concepts. However, the way we talk about our emotional states cannot be described solely by the conceptual metaphoric mapping of the source and target domains. Most psychotherapeutic orientations suggest that the emotional states of a person are much more subtle, and can be described by comparisons, complex images, and synaesthesia, rather than conceptual mappings. But if we intend to find a common denominator for all of these, we need to introduce the notion of impressional representation. The impressional representation provides the unified world view that children still have.

If we limit research to emotion nouns, we can only approach these with the method of cognitive metaphors, as our emotion nouns carry an abstraction of knowledge. We try to wrap up internal experiences that use the properties of observable objects and phenomena. The

metaphorical conceptualisation of emotion words is most often based on the physical symptoms of emotion, which also explains why the majority of our cognitive metaphors for emotions are universal.

According to Leff (as referred to by King 2006), the formation of emotion words takes place in four phases: non-differentiated physical experiences, non-differentiated physical and psychological experiences, non-differentiated psychological experiences, progressive differentiation of limited psychological experiences. According to Leff, not every language reaches the fourth stage, in his opinion, references to physical experience in English have lost their original meaning, and became metaphors. The historical process of expressing emotions in this sense can also be conceived as a way from somatization to psychologization.

One of the novelties of my doctoral dissertation is that I have studied not only emotion nouns, but also adjectives and verbs referring to emotional states. Examining psychotherapeutic protocols, we have seen that in most cases the emotional state cannot be labelled by the clients; however, they try to verbally grasp their own state of spirit according to shape, intensity, and rhythm. Emotional states are a dynamic part of our personality; therefore, we can grasp the shape of a particular emotion in verbs. In the research, if not in case of all emotions, but I have identified shapes that may be characteristic of the particular emotion: the shape of sorrow and sadness is the wave, the fear is the foliage, the anger is the flutter, the love is the giggling (dynamic deformation). There are “voluminous” and “surface-like” feelings. Positive emotions are more voluminous, take more space, either at the level of shape (cheerfulness curls), or at the level of location (most positive emotions have reached high frequency of association – up, front, close – in multiple dimensions). Negative feelings are more surface-like, both in shape (bad mood flattens), and in location occupied in space (usually they show high frequency in only two dimensions). So, our emotional states have their shapes, because we talk about them in this matter, and it is also expressed in our preferential attachment of emotions to shapes, as in projective psychological tests.

Our emotional states also have a kind of rhythm, which can also be understood from emotion-expressing verbs: sadness is more melodic (musical), fear is more regular (pounding, knocking), and anger has low tonality, but also rhythmic (it rumbles), and a more irregular rhythm is associated to love (laughter related to giggling).

In our emotional states, being in space is not only perceived in the shape of a figure, but also in the fact that emotion is “located” in the linguistic world. The spatial structure expressed by the system of phrasal verbs and adverbs and organized on the basis of the values identified in the language can be justified not only on the basis of a detailed linguistic text



analysis, but also statistically, as the majority of people feel that the places and relationships expressed in UP – FRONT – CLOSE and DOWN – BEHIND – FAR belong together.

This association is not limited to a single language. Another novelty of my doctoral dissertation is that in addition to the Romanian language, I could compare the frequency of associations in the Hungarian sample with that in the Chinese one. The structure of the Chinese language is completely different from the Hungarian, but in the case of most emotions, the pattern of associations with the spatial dimensions was similar. According to King (2006), emotions can be captured along three components: physiological reactions, mental state, and social relationships. However, the Chinese expression of emotion, in opposition to the Western cultures, favours physiological states. Most intercultural psychiatric research focused on depression and found that Western patients with depression are more likely to stress psychological symptoms (sadness, hopelessness, feeling of worthlessness), compared to depressed non-Western people, who prefer physical symptoms (insomnia, stomach problems, physical pain).

According to Matisoff (quoted by King 2006), in Eastern and South-Eastern Asian languages, expressions about emotions contain more nouns referring to internal organs (liver, spleen, kidney, bile, intestines), than in Western languages. According to Matisoff, in the Eastern languages, there is no sharp boundary between the body and soul, and he distinguishes three types of psycho-nouns (psycho-nouns are nouns that contain an explicit psychological reference and are translated into English as words such as *heart, mind, spirit, soul, temperament*): mostly mental nouns that include words such as the English *mind, soul, spirit*; basically ambiguous nouns that also refer to physical manifestations and mostly physical nouns that refer to organs.

In spite of the aforementioned cultural differences, emotional states in the two linguistic worlds receive similar “spatial” locations. The differences revealed as a result of statistical analysis, which appear among the spatial structures of linguistic worlds along the values, fit into the earlier researches on the intercultural study of emotions.

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