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## THE BINARY-PARADIGM IN LANGUAGE AND EMOTION

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### ***Abstract***

*Emotions are key issues in human existence especially with regards human relationship. Emotions have different types and forms and are perceived differently by different people just as they are communicated in different languages. Emotions are the expression of feelings which comes from the mind. Language is a medium of communication and emotions cannot be noticed until they are communicated. Hence it could be said that a connection exists between language and emotion but the point of connect may not be as visible. It is as a result of such uncertainty that this paper seeks to examine the connecting point between language and emotion. Using a secondary source of gathering data and a content analysis method, the study finds out that language is the principle medium of communication and has been in existence since the creation of man while emotion signifies a reaction involving certain physiological changes. The study reveals that language is connected to emotion as language affects emotional expression, enhances as well as constitutes emotion itself. It further found out that deaf people also use facial expressions while they are using sign language to express their own emotions. The study concludes that language in itself is emotionally structured such that most expressions suggest their meaning revealing a salient fact that language has a connection with emotions and emotions are expressed in language.*

**Keywords:** Language, binaries, paradigm, communication, perception

### **Introduction**

Communication between human beings is an integral part of our existence. It is the medium through which messages are passed from one person, group of persons to another person or group of persons. Though animals also have their own language and they do communicate too, the human language of communication is unique. This feature is one of the many features that differentiate humans (higher animals) from animals (lower animals).

This communication occurs in different forms which may be verbal or by gesture which means even the deaf and dumb since they have a means of communication, can also express emotion using a particular language. The means through which human beings communicate is called language. There are many languages and these languages emanate from ethnic groups. Language is used to communicate so many things. Among the many things languages communicate is emotion. The many different languages that exist have a point of connection with emotion. These emotions as expressed in language vary from one language to the other.

Deaf people also use facial expressions while they are using sign language to express their own emotions or to describe the emotions of others, through the use of the same range of emotional facial expressions used naturally by the general population e.g. happiness, anger, sadness etc. (Carminati & Knoeferle 2013). They also use facial actions which provide sign language prosody, which function in sign language like intonation in spoken languages.

Emotion is a thing concerning the mind. It is a matter of the mind. It is related to feelings (how a person feels about

something at a given period of time). It is something that cannot be seen, measured or touched but can be felt (abstract) and its existence is generally known and accepted.

Therefore, in order to understand the connection between language and emotion, it is pertinent to take a peep into what language is as well as what emotion is.

**Language:** Language is a means the human use which constitutes spoken and written words as a communication system. It is the principle method of human communication, consisting of words used in a structured and conventional way and conveyed by speech, writing or gesture. This paper therefore views language to be what is referred to exclusively as the words people use to describe emotional states. So what is emotion?

Language maybe defined as a system of communication used by a particular country or community (Rai, 2019). To Chomsky, it is a set of sentences each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements (Chomsky, 1957 in Chomsky, 2000). Bloomfield on his part refers to language as the totality of the utterances that can be made in a speech community. This implies that the utterance produced by all the people in the community is called language. In Lyon's *Language and Linguistics* (1981) Sapir puts it that language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires through a system of voluntary produced sounds.

**Emotion:** Identifying what emotions are require not just a means to distinguish them from non-emotions but also from each other. The root of the word emotion comes from the Latin word for motion (Frijda, 1986 in Jang and Hillary 2015).

Emotion simply means a strong feeling about somebody or something. The term emotion is frequently and familiarly

used as synonymous with feeling (Lindquist, 2013). In psychology it signifies a reaction involving certain physiological changes, such as an accelerated or retarded pulse rate, the diminished or increased activities of certain glands, or a change in body temperature, which stimulate the individual, or some component part of his or her body, to further activity. Emotion can also be defined as a process of casually linked mental (appraisal, action tendencies, subjective experience) and behavioral (physiological, reactions, facial and vocal expression) elements (Reisenzein, 2007).

Since Aristotle, two different bases of definitional necessity for emotion have been distinguished: linguistic conventions and the structure of language-independent reality (Boyd, 1980). Presupposing this understanding of “definition”, Scherer's meta-theoretical position on the function and nature of a definition of emotion seems to be the following;

1. A definition of emotion is a prerequisite of meaningful theoretical and empirical research and the successful communication with others. In Scherer's words: a “systematic scientific approach” requires to “define central working concepts in universal, invariant, and consensual fashion”

2. A definition of emotion is a nominal definition, that is, it is based on a linguistic convention concerning the meaning of the term “emotion” (analogously for terms for specific emotion, such as “joy”, “fear” and “anger”).

This second assumption is not explicitly made by Scherer but is strongly suggested by his comment that “definitions cannot be proven but need to be consensually considered as useful by a research community”. The first assumption reflects a misunderstanding of the function of definitions in science (Bunge, 1967 in Rainer 2007).

However, all that is needed for these purposes is a description that allows one to demarcate, at least roughly, the class of emotions, and thereby to identify one's study object to oneself and others. Notable also is that the connect between language and emotion is realized in communication.

**Differences in Emotion Perception:** A long-standing research program examines individual differences in emotion recognition accuracy and its correlates. For example, women are better at emotion recognition, as are people of higher education levels and socioeconomic status (Hall et al., 2009). As mentioned above, accuracy with emotional expression and perception fall within the larger umbrella of emotional intelligence (Mayer et al., 2008), which has expanded interest in the subject.

There is an advantage to people who can recognize emotions well - better social adjustment, better school performance, and even better workplace success across a wide range of industries and job types (Elfenbein et al., 2007). That said, being exceptionally good at recognizing emotions can also make people uncomfortable if they feel others are eavesdropping on their private feelings (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002).

Given their importance in emotional functioning, are people good at expressing emotions generally good at recognizing emotions? The answer appears to be yes. Accumulated evidence suggests a positive association between expression and perception when expression is measured in terms of ability (Elfenbein & Eisenkraft, 2010).

**Emotional Expression:** Emotional experience creates urges that need to be released or contained. The first type of urge is to physical action. Each distinct emotion is related to specific action tendencies (Frijda, 1986 Jang and Hillary 2015), which are psychological and physiological responses that ready the

individual to respond adaptively to the most pressing issues in their environments (Cosmides & Tooby, 2000). For example, happiness promotes social bonding, anger leads us to address problems in a relationship, and contempt leads us to reinforce a social hierarchy. The social functional perspective on emotion argues that these action tendencies serve functions in promoting group living (Morris and Keltner, 2000). Even if an emotion does not appear functional at every instance, it remains available in the repertoire because in some cases it helps social groups, like family units, to thrive or even simply remain intact. The second type of urge created by emotional experience is emotionally expressive behavior. Why we express emotion is explained by the Organon model (Buhler, 1934 in Jang & Hillary 2015). He articulates three distinct functions:

- (1) Symptoms convey the authentic internal experience of a speaker, which provides information to others about their states, intentions, attitudes, and likely future behaviors;
- (2) Signals convey requests for actions from other people; and
- (3) Symbols convey information about an event or object, in the way that spoken language represents our thoughts and environment.

**Forms of Emotion:** Humans are uniquely equipped to express a variety of emotions using various form and languages, having the specialized neural circuitry and muscular structures that allow for a range of expressions that stand unrivaled compared to other species (Burrows, 2008). Emotional expression takes on many forms. First, push factors create outwardly observable cues. Long-standing theories point out that emotions are composed of both subjective feeling states and physiological responses (Darwin, 1872 in Blagojce & Stanojoska, 2012). Physiological markers of emotion experience include facial expressions, nonverbal

components of vocal expressions, galvanic skin response, respiration, heart rates, bodily posture, and muscular movement (Barrett et al., 2011). Any of these changes can provide visible cues to others, even if they were not necessarily meant for an audience.

Secondly, we evolved pull factors through the ability to manipulate the most outwardly visible of nonverbal cues, namely facial expressions, vocal tone, and body posture. Facial expressions are the most salient mode of expressions for humans, especially because humans are uniquely equipped with the complex facial muscular structure that can produce many differentiated emotional expressions. Perhaps for this reason, the bulk of study on emotional expression has focused on the face (Russell et al., 2003). However, humans also have expressive control via vocal chords and body languages, which makes emotion expressions multimodal in nature (Russell et al., 2003).

**Types of Emotion:** There are different types of emotions that have an influence on how we live and interact with others. The choices we make, the actions we take and the perceptions we have are all influenced by the emotions we are experiencing at a given time.

PaulsEckman during the 1970s identified six basic emotions and they are: happiness, sadness, fear, disgust, anger and surprise. He later included; pride, shame, embarrassment and excitement.

1. Happiness: of the different types of emotion, happiness tends to be the one that people strive for the most. It is often defined as a pleasant emotional state that is characterized by feelings of contentment, joy, gratification, satisfaction and well-being. This type of emotion is usually expressed through; Facial expression like; smile, Body language like a relaxed stance or Tone

of voice.

The things we think will create happiness tend to be heavily influenced by culture and language is an integral part of human culture.

2. Sadness: this is another type of emotion often defined as transient emotional state characterized by feelings of disappointment, grief, hopelessness, disinterest and dampened mood. Like other emotions, it is something that all people experience and it can be expressed in the following ways; crying, dampened mood, lethargy, quietness and withdrawal from others.
3. Fear: this is a powerful emotion that can also play an important role in survival. When you face some sort of danger and experience fear, you go through what is known as the fight of fight response. Your muscles become tense, your heart beat rate and respiration increases, and your mind becomes more alert, priming your body to either run from the danger or stand and fight (Kozłowska, et. Al., 2015). Fear is expressed in the following ways; Facial expression like widening of the eyes and pulling back the chin, Body language like attempt to hide or flee from the threat, Physiological reaction like rapid breathing and heartbeat.
4. Disgust: this is another of the original six basic emotions described by Ekman. It is an emotion that arises from irritation resulting from an unpleasant smell, sight or smell. Disgust can be displayed in a number of ways which includes; Body language like turning away from the object of disgust, Physical reaction such as vomiting, Facial expressions such as wrinkling the nose and curling the upper lip.
5. Anger: anger can be a particular powerful emotion



characterized by feelings of hostility, agitation, frustration and antagonism towards others. Like fear, anger can play a part in your body's fight or flight response. When a threat generates feelings of anger, one maybe inclined to fend off the danger and protect one's self. Anger is often displayed in the following ways; Facial expression such as frowning, Body language such as taking a strong stance or turning away, Tone of voice like speaking gruffly or yelling, Physiological responses like sweating or turning red and Aggressive behaviour like hitting, kicking or throwing away objects.

6. Surprise: surprise is usually quite brief and is characterized by a physiological startle response following something unexpected. This can be a positive, negative or neutral feeling. It is often characterized by; Facial expression like raising the brow, Physical response like jumping back and verbal reactions like yelling, screaming and gasping (Blagojce & Stanojoska, 2012).

**Language of Emotion in Communication:** Emotions would not be emotions without the urge to act and express (Davis, 1982 in Blagojce & Stanojoska, 2012). Therefore, Feelings play a vital role in communication between humans and even animals as communication also plays a great role in emotions. It plays such big role even among deaf and dumb and other physically challenged.

Emotional awareness means consciousness of one's emotions as well as that of others. Emotional consciousness or ability to understand feelings will help one succeed when communicating with others (McCroskey, 1982 in Ledoux, & Brown, 2017). This implies that if one is emotionally aware, one will communicate better. You will notice the emotions of the other people and how they are feeling influences the way

they use language to communicate. You will also better understand what others are communicating to you and why as Cochran & Claspell will put it, emotions lurk about upsetting well-ordered lives (Sally 2000). It therefore means that most times understanding how a person is communicating with you is more important than what is actually being said.

Therefore, to be able to communicate emotions better;

1. Consider other people's emotions
2. Consider your own emotions
3. Have empathy
4. Operate on trust

Most of humans are used to having an adversarial relationship with our difficult emotions such as; anger, fear, confusion, panic, sadness and depression. At the same time, we can grow attached to pleasant emotions as; happiness, joy and contentment. That is why Karla McLaren suggests that we view emotion as an enlightening messenger (McLaren, 2018).

### **Language and Emotion: The Point of Connect**

Humans are potentially unique from other species for following norms about displaying effect that match expectations about emotional experience in social contexts (Gallois, 1994 in Jang, & Hillary 2015), with display rules to de-intensify, intensify, neutralize, and mask displays with qualitatively different displays (Ekman, 1972 in Jang & Hillary 2015). This makes the display of emotions an interactive process between the physiological responses and the cultural, social, and interpersonal expectations that shape emotional expression. This is achieved using language either verbally or by gesture (Scherer et al., 2013).

Much publication suggests a link between language and emotions. One's parent language (mother tongue) is linked to

his/her later emotional perception and understanding because emotions are expressed in language. Hence, most likely access to emotional words shape the emotion that someone sees on another's face. Language and emotions have traditionally been viewed as separate elements of mental processing. Although language and emotion differ essentially, verbal communication expresses emotion through prosody (the study of the structure of poetry and the conventions or techniques involved in writing it, including rhyme, meter, and the patterns of verse forms), syntax (the ordering of and relationship between the words and other structural elements in phrases and sentence) and other means (Potter, 2009). In the following point, the point of connect between language and emotion are explained;

**How Language Affects Emotional Expression:**

Communication is universal. Regardless of what language you speak, humans aim to communicate with one another in order to achieve a common goal (Barnstein, 2014). Looking at the multi-lingual societies we live in, in emotionally heated moments, lingual tends to switch back and forth between languages, depending on which one can more appropriately express their feelings at that time. Speaking and body language generally go hand-in-hand for expressing emotions. While some form of body language may be considered universal, display of emotions vary from one language to another (University of Cologne, 2014).

**Language Constitutes Emotion:** Language can certainly communicate emotions but growing research also establishes the fact that language also constitutes emotions by cohering sensations into specific perceptions of “anger”, “disgust”, “fear”, and more (Costa, & Dewaele, 2012). Language is primarily spoken, although it can be transferred to other media, such as writing. If the spoken means of communication

is unavailable, as may be the case among the deaf, visual means such as sign language can be used. A prominent characteristic of language is that the relation between a linguistic sign and its meaning is arbitrary. The dances of honey bees, for example, can be used only to communicate the location of food sources.

Evidence that language helps constitute emotion comes from studies that experimentally disrupt participants' access to linguistic emotion concepts and find a corresponding disruption in motion perception. In several such studies, participants were manipulated access to words for linguistic emotion concepts using a method called semantic satiation and demonstrated impairments in emotion perception, using two different perceptual measures (Barrett, 2006).

Access to linguistic emotion concepts impairs emotion perception. It stands to reason that increasing accessibility to linguistic emotion concepts might enhance perceptual categorization, causing individuals to see facial expressions in terms of specific emotion categories. Indeed, prior to the development of language, people only reliably differentiate between pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral expressions (e.g., a person looks longer at any unpleasant face, whether fearful, angry or sad, after habituating to happy faces (Lindquist, 2013).

**Accessibility to Language Enhances Emotion:** Consistent with the idea that accessible emotion words shapes how body states are experienced, it is discovered that participants who felt unpleasant while knowledge about “fear” was accessible, were more likely to behave in a fearful manner (i.e., be risk averse) than participants who felt unpleasant while knowledge about “anger” was accessible. Participants who felt unpleasant while emotion knowledge was not particularly accessible, or participants who felt neutral, while knowledge

about “fear” was accessible (Lindquist & Barrett, 2008). Another recent study demonstrated that the accessibility of emotion words during a stressful task actually shapes participants' resulting cardiovascular profile.

Participants who labeled their emotions while completing a stressful mental arithmetic task showed physiological responses consistent with an experience of threat (i.e., increased total peripheral resistance; TPR, relatively reduced cardiac output), whereas participants who did not label their emotions experienced a physiological profile more consistent with active coping (i.e., decreased TPR, increased cardiac output) (Kassam & Mendes, 2013). Together, these findings point to the constructionist hypothesis that the presence of emotion words during the experience of affective states shapes participants' behavior, physiology, and perhaps even their experiences

**Language Relativity in Emotion Perception:** There is evidence from cross - cultural research that People who speak different languages perceive emotion differently from one another. For example, emotion perception in speakers of Herero, a dialect spoken by the remote African Himba tribe, and American English speakers. Whereas English speakers created relatively distinct piles for anger, disgust, fear, sad, happy and neutral faces, Herero-speakers did not fit in this so called “universal” pattern (Griffiths, 1997 in Lindquist, MacCormack & Holly Shablack 2015). **The Role of Language in Emotion:**

Even labeling the piles in advance with translations of emotion words did not help the Herero-speakers' performance. Importantly, the Herero – speakers sorted similarly to one another, suggesting they understood the instructions but were using different perceptual cues than the English - speakers to guide their sort (Gendron et

al., 2014).

Herero – speakers might have performed differently than English – speakers because the perceptual representations anchored by emotion words vary across languages. Although this hypothesis has yet to be addressed with Herero - speakers, data from Chinese and from English speakers is suggestive.

Chinese and English – speakers were presented with videos of computerized facial muscle movements that changed over time and in random patterns. For instance, videos sometimes depicted furrowed brows, a relaxed nose and a scowl (consistent with the Western English representation of “anger”) and other times depicted furrowed brows, a scrunched nose and a smile (not consistent with any Western English emotion category) (Comrie, 2000).

**Cultural Differences in the Expressing Emotion:** Two major mechanisms underlie the cultural differences in emotion that have long been observed, namely norms and styles. Norms govern our display rules and decoding rules, and both of these vary substantially across cultures. Notably, cultures that value greater social harmony tend to inhibit the expression of negative emotion (Frijda, 1992 in Jang, & Hillary 2015). Styles of emotional expression also vary. According to dialect theory, the specific cues we use to express our emotion. For example, the configuration of facial muscles, acoustical properties of the voice – differ subtly across cultures (Elfenbein, 2013). Dialect theory was developed to explain the finding of in-group advantage, namely that accuracy tends to be higher when perceiving emotions expressed by members of the Same versus different cultural group due to greater familiarity .

## **Conclusion**

Language has a connection with emotions and emotions are expressed in language. The different languages of the world

express emotion in different ways. A particular expression, to a particular language tells of the state of mind of an individual at a given point in time. Language does not only constitute emotion but also affect emotional expressions. Emotional expression is rooted in language and is relative as it varies from one language to the other. Irrespective, language and emotion have a connecting point.

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