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# METAPHOR — AND — EMOTION

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*Language, Culture, and Body  
in Human Feeling*



ZOLTÁN KÖVECSES

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# Metaphor and Emotion

## Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling

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## *Metaphor and Emotion*

Are human emotions best characterized as biological, psychological, or cultural entities? Many researchers claim that emotions arise either from human biology (i.e., biological reductionism) or as products of culture (i.e., social constructionism). This book challenges this simplistic division between the body and culture by showing how human emotions are to a large extent “constructed” from individuals’ embodied experiences in different cultural settings. Zoltán Kövecses illustrates through detailed cross-linguistic analyses how many emotion concepts reflect widespread metaphorical patterns of thought. These emotion metaphors arise from recurring embodied experiences, one reason why human emotions across many cultures conform to certain basic biological-physiological processes in the human body and of the body interacting with the external world. Moreover, there are different cultural models for emotions that arise from unique patterns of both metaphorical and metonymic thinking in varying cultural contexts. The view proposed here demonstrates how cultural aspects of emotions, metaphorical language about the emotions, and human physiology in emotion are all part of an integrated system. Kövecses convincingly shows how this integrated system points to the reconciliation of the seemingly contradictory views of biological reductionism and social constructionism in contemporary debates about human emotion.

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*For the boys and Zsuzsi*

# Preface

In a widely read and influential book on the neurobiology of the emotions, Joseph LeDoux (1996) draws the following conclusion:

Emotions evolved not as conscious feelings, linguistically differentiated or otherwise, but as brain states and bodily responses. The brain states and bodily responses are the fundamental facts of an emotion, and the conscious feelings are the frills that have added icing to the emotional cake. (p. 302)

In a way, the present book can be seen as a response to these conclusions. While I am convinced by many of LeDoux's claims, including the idea that emotions did not evolve as conscious feelings, I cannot accept the second part of his conclusion. This is not only because I come to the emotions from a more humanistic perspective than he does, but also because the evidence I will present in the chapters to follow tells me that "conscious feelings" play a much more important role in human emotions than LeDoux appears to attach to them.

Conscious feelings are often expressed in or, indeed, are shaped by language, and thus the study of language can reveal a great deal about them. Of course, one must have the appropriate kind of linguistics to say anything interesting about emotions and emotional feelings. LeDoux bases his claims on an unsatisfactory kind of linguistics, in which emotion language consists only in literal emotion words, such as *fear*, *anxiety*, *terror*, *apprehension*, that classify and refer to a preexisting emotional reality (the brain states and bodily responses). This can only lead to an oversimplification of the many subtle ways in which emotion and language interact. Obviously, LeDoux, a neurobiologist, cannot be expected to provide us with a linguistics that provides further insight into the nature of the relationship between emotion and

emotion language. In this book I regard providing what I take to be the appropriate kind of linguistics for the job at hand as the main methodological contribution to the study of emotion.

Once we give up simplistic views of emotional language, a whole new "world" of emotional feelings unfolds before us. Emotion language will not be seen as a collection of literal words that categorize and refer to a preexisting emotional reality, but as language that can be figurative and that can define and even create emotional experiences for us. Does this new approach mean that I want to discard the body from a study of emotions? I do not intend to do anything of the sort. On the contrary, I want to bring together three threads of emotion research into a coherent whole that avoids the weaknesses of each pursued separately. The three threads include the research done on how the human body behaves in an emotional state, the research on how cultural and social factors influence and shape emotional experiences, and the research on emotional language from a cognitive linguistic perspective. In other words, my major goal is to provide a new synthesis in the study of emotion, that is, to bring together language, culture, and body in such a way that we get a relatively complete and integrated account of emotional phenomena in human beings.

In the process of creating this synthesis, several issues in the study of emotion and emotion language will have to be clarified. These include, but are not limited to, the following: What is the relationship between the objectively measurable responses of the body in emotion and the subjectively felt emotional experiences of people as described by language? In a way, this is perhaps the major issue pursued in this book and can be seen as a rephrasing of the "body-language" issue just mentioned. Second, what is the relationship between culture and the conceptualization of emotion through language? In other words, does the conceptualization of emotions vary with radically different cultures? Or, is it universal? Or, is it both at the same time? If it varies, as we can reasonably expect to be the case, is the variation without constraint? Third, how are the emotions organized in our conceptual system? Are they organized as an overarching unitary system or as separate systems? This is a highly interesting question, because, as we will see, there is a certain incongruence here between what some neurobiologists (such as LeDoux) suggest for the emotions and what our linguistic analysis tells us about the conceptualization of emotions. We can further ask in this regard whether this incongruence is a predictable and systematic difference between emotions as pertaining to



the brain and body, on the one hand, and emotional feelings as conceptualized by organisms having consciousness and language, on the other. Fourth, how can we place in the mind emotions as described on the basis of language? How is emotion related to rational thought and morality in our conceptual system? Do they form separate systems in our naive view of the mind, or are they somehow unified, as can be determined from linguistic evidence?

As can be seen from the way I have stated some of the major concerns of this book, my basic interest in the emotions is threefold: (1) How do we talk about the emotions in English and other languages? (2) What folk theories of the emotions do these ways of talking reveal about particular emotions and emotion in general? And (3) how do these folk theories relate to other "neighboring" folk theories (such as that associated with human relationships) and scientific theories of emotions? In other words, I have to state up front that, strictly speaking, I do not have a theory of emotions myself. The theory of emotion I arrive at is not mine in the sense that it was not my intention to construct, and so have not constructed, another expert or scientific model of emotion that can be claimed to be "true" of emotions and that can be falsified by others. What I attempt to present here is what I take English and other languages to reveal about the emotions and to offer these folk conceptualizations of emotions based on language. On the one hand, this is accomplishing very little, compared to the many large-scale and comprehensive scientific models that supposedly reflect the "true" nature of emotion; on the other, it is accomplishing quite a lot, considering that emotion language deals with many important facets of emotion and thus provides a complex picture of emotion, as well as considering that it is this rich picture unfolding from language that corresponds to what human beings consciously feel when they experience an emotion. If we want to see what our "conscious feelings" involve, we have to take our language and our folk theories about the emotions seriously.

Although I believe that this book raises many important issues concerning the nature and role of human feelings in the emotions, I do not claim that it raises all of them (or even that it can always satisfactorily deal with the ones that it does raise). One such issue is the causal and functional aspects of emotion in the larger context of human action and cognitive functioning. The approach that I am advocating here can say little about this aspect of emotion, and I do not feel it is necessary or worthwhile for my purposes to go into it at all. Others

have done this job and I accept and respect their work (see, e.g., Frijda, 1986; Leventhal and Scherer, 1987; Oatley and Johnson-Laird, 1987). I will only discuss this line of work when it bears directly on issues having to do with emotion language.

Some of the questions raised here will get answered only toward the end of the book; some others will be answered as we go along. The first chapter offers an overview of recent theories of emotion language and raises some further issues in connection with the study of emotion from a linguistic point of view. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 introduce the key findings of cognitive linguistics as they relate to the emotions. In particular, they emphasize the figurative nature of emotion language and, more important, the metaphorical character of our folk models of emotion. Chapter 5 offers the key theme in our folk theoretical thinking about emotions, the idea that we view emotions as forces that turn a "rational" self into an "irrational" one. We will find a single master metaphor (namely, the metaphor *EMOTIONS ARE FORCES*) that organizes much of our thinking about emotion. Chapter 6 contrasts this finding with the case of human relationships, such as love, marriage, and friendship. I will show that there are major systematic differences between the metaphorical conceptualization of emotions and that of human relationships.

Chapter 7 provides a discussion of the nature of folk models that structure emotion concepts and argues that they are inherently metaphorical, not literal as currently claimed by Naomi Quinn. Another issue the same chapter deals with is how the folk models of emotion are related to expert or scientific theories of emotion. This leads us to the question whether all scientific theorizing can be regarded as a version of folk psychology. Chapters 8 and 9 attempt to answer the question whether the conceptualization of emotions as revealed through language is universal or culture-specific. The answer is based on a detailed investigation of several unrelated languages (English, Chinese, Japanese, Hungarian, Wolof, Zulu, etc.). Finally, chapter 10 pulls together the various threads in the discussion of the several issues and offers a synthesis in which language (conceptualization), body, and culture naturally come together in a unified account of human emotion.

What is the relationship between this book and my previous work on emotion? The short answer is that the present work is *not* a summary of what I have done before (e.g., Kövecses, 1986, 1988, 1990). On the contrary, this book throws a different light on several issues that I

have dealt with in earlier publications and it raises several new issues that perhaps I should have dealt with before but have not. Overall, the main difference between my previous work and this study is that in this book the emphasis is on emotions in general and the larger issues connected with them, and not on particular emotion concepts. There have been many new developments in both cognitive linguistics and emotion research in recent years, and I have attempted to make use of these developments here. For example, Leonard Talmy's work on the role of "force dynamics" in language and conceptualization led me to the new idea that much of the language and conceptualization of emotions can be described in force dynamic terms (hence the master metaphor EMOTION IS FORCE), rather than in terms of individual and independent conceptual metaphors. As will be seen, this new approach has important implications for the study of emotional feelings. I have also learned a great deal from critiques of my earlier work. In this book, I respond to challenges by Naomi Quinn, Anna Wierzbicka, and others. Hopefully, the result is a new, more refined, and more convincing view of human emotion and the way we talk about it.

In bringing this book to its final form, I have received a great deal of encouragement, help, and constructive criticism from Keith Oatley, Ray Gibbs, and Csaba Pléh. Their comments on a previous version were extremely helpful. Encouragement for the project also came from Julia Hough of Cambridge University Press. In addition, she provided me with all the moral, emotional, and material assistance that an author could wish for.

George Lakoff gave me his generous support throughout this project, and long before it. I am also indebted to his 1996 Metaphor class at UC Berkeley for reading the manuscript and providing many valuable suggestions concerning both examples and content. I also had some of the best students one can have at home in Budapest, who discussed many aspects of this book with me in several courses. Especially valuable suggestions came from Szilvia Csábi, Zsuzsanna Bokor, Orsolya Lazányi, Judit Szirmay, and Mónika Pacziga. Szilvia Csábi also gave me invaluable assistance in producing the final typescript.

Several Americans have helped me collect linguistic material for this book. Cheryl Chris, Lars Moestue, Joseph Vargo, and Ted Sablay conducted dozens of interviews for me with other native speakers of American English. The students in my 1996 Language of Emotion

seminar at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas gave me many good ideas and patiently helped me clarify thoughts that were just being worked out at the time.

Gary Palmer was the first reader of an early manuscript. I have learned a great deal from our discussions of each chapter. His ideas are present in several parts of this book. Len Talmy gave me valuable feedback on the chapter dealing with force dynamics and John Taylor provided helpful comments on my discussion of Zulu emotion language.

Needless to say, I am grateful to all these people.

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Budapest

# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page xi</i>
1 Language and Emotion Concepts	1
2 Metaphors of Emotion	20
3 Emotion Metaphors: Are They Unique to the Emotions?	35
4 Events and Emotions: The Subcategorization of Emotions	51
5 The Force of Emotion	61
6 Emotions and Relationships	87
7 Folk Versus Expert Theories of Emotion	114
8 Universality in the Conceptualization of Emotions	139
9 Cultural Variation in the Conceptualization of Emotion	164
10 Emotion Language: A New Synthesis	182
<i>References</i>	201
<i>Author Index</i>	211
<i>Subject Index</i>	213
<i>Metaphor and Metonymy Index</i>	216

# 1. Language and Emotion Concepts

This chapter describes some aspects of emotion language that have not yet received a great deal of attention but are clearly important in the study of emotion concepts. Most important of these is the role of figurative language in the conceptualization of emotion. Do metaphor and other figurative language matter at all in how we think about the emotions? Do metaphors simply reflect a preexisting, literal reality, or do they actually create or constitute our emotional reality? Is it of any consequence that speakers of English use expressions like *boiling with anger*, *being swept off one's feet*, *building a relationship*, and *being madly in love*?

I will suggest that it is of serious consequence. If we are not clear about why people engage in this way of talking, we cannot really understand why lay people categorize the emotions as passions, while some experts categorize them as states and others as actions; if we do not pay a great deal of attention to figurative language, it is impossible to see precisely how the lay view of emotion differs from the lay view of human relationships or that of rational thought or morality; if we do not examine this kind of language, we will never understand why we have the theories of emotion in psychology, philosophy, and anthropology that we do; and if we do not analyze this kind of language in cultures other than our own, we will never find out whether the way we think about our emotions is shared (and, if it is, to what extent) by speakers of other languages. I will contend that metaphor, and figurative language in general, does matter in all of these issues, and crucially so.

But in order to see in precisely what ways metaphor matters in all this, we have to clarify first what we mean by the language of emotion; second, what the competing theories of emotion language and

emotion concepts are; and third, what the more specific issues are that emerge in connection with emotion language. The survey to follow is divided into three sections: (1) words and emotion, (2) meaning and emotion, and (3) some issues that inevitably arise in the study of everyday conceptions of emotion.

As is obvious from the goals above, I will not deal with certain important aspects of emotion language and emotional implications of language in general. I will have nothing to say about the syntactic, phonetic, and pragmatic properties of this language, although a great deal of high-quality work is being done in all these fields (see, e.g., Iván Fónagy's extremely interesting work, such as Fónagy, 1981, on the relationship between emotion and human sound systems).

## **Words and Emotion**

When they deal with emotion language, many scholars assume that this language simply consists of a dozen or so words, such as *anger*, *fear*, *love*, *joy*, and so forth. I will challenge this view in this section and claim that this is just a small fraction of our emotion language. I will briefly discuss the most general functions and organization of emotion-related vocabulary, and then focus attention on a large but neglected group of emotion terms.

### *Expression and Description*

A first distinction that we have to make is between expressive and descriptive emotion words (or terms or expressions). Some emotion words can *express* emotions. Examples include *shit!* when angry, *wow!* when enthusiastic or impressed, *yuk!* when disgusted, and many more. It is an open question whether all emotions can be expressed in this way, and which are the ones that cannot and why. Other emotion words can *describe* the emotions they signify or that "they are about." Words like *anger* and *angry*, *joy* and *happy*, *sadness* and *depressed* are assumed to be used in such a way. We should note that under certain circumstances descriptive emotion terms can also "express" particular emotions. An example is "*I love you!*" where the descriptive emotion word *love* is used both to describe and express the emotion of love.

The categories of descriptive and expressive emotion terms are analogous to Searle's (1990) categories of assertive and expressive

speech acts, in that descriptive terms have an assertive function and expressive terms often constitute expressive speech acts.

In this work, I will be concerned only with that part of the emotion lexicon that is used "to describe" emotional experience. As we will see below, this is a much larger category of emotion terms than the one that "expresses" emotions.

### *Basic Emotion Terms*

Within the category of descriptive emotion words, the terms can be seen as "more or less basic." Speakers of a given language appear to feel that some of the emotion words are more basic than others. More basic ones include in English *anger*, *sadness*, *fear*, *joy*, and *love*. Less basic ones include *annoyance*, *wrath*, *rage*, and *indignation* for anger and *terror*, *fright*, and *horror* for fear.

Basicness can mean two things (at least, loosely speaking). One is that these words (the concepts corresponding to them) occupy a middle level in a vertical hierarchy of concepts (in the sense of Rosch, 1975, 1978). In this sense, say, *anger* is more basic than, for example, *annoyance* or *emotion*. *Anger*, because it is a "basic-level" emotion category, lies between the superordinate-level category *emotion* and the subordinate-level category of *annoyance*. This is depicted in Figure 1.1.

The other sense of "basicness" is that a particular emotion category can be judged to be more "prototypical" (i.e., a better example) of emotion than another at the same horizontal level (again, "prototypical" in the sense of Rosch, 1975, 1978). This horizontal level coincides with the basic level of the vertical organization of concepts. For example, *anger* is more basic in this sense than, say, *hope* or *pride*, which, in the previous sense, are on the same level (see Figure 1.2).

These organizations of emotion terms have been extensively studied in the past decade for English (e.g., Fehr and Russell, 1984; Shaver,

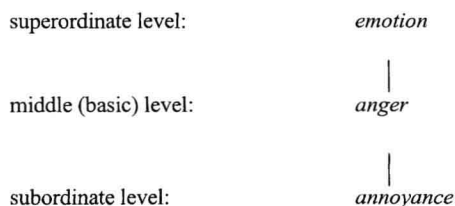


Figure 1.1. Levels of emotion terms in a vertical hierarchy



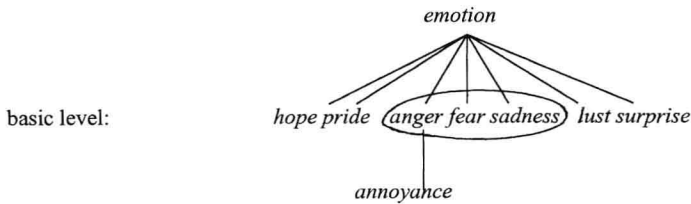


Figure 1.2. Prototypical vs. nonprototypical emotion terms on the horizontal level of conceptual organization. (The circle indicates that, e.g., *anger*, *fear*, and *sadness* are better examples of emotion terms than *hope*, *pride*, *surprise*, and *lust*.)

Schwartz, Kirson, and O'Connor, 1987). Cross-cultural research along these lines is just beginning. Using a methodology borrowed from Fehr and Russell (1984), Frijda, Markan, Sato, and Wiers (1995) arrive at five general and possibly universal categories of emotion in 11 languages. These basic emotion categories include happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and love. Smith and Tkel-Sbal (1995) investigate the possibility that emotion terms are prototypically organized in the Micronesian language of Palau, and Smith and Smith (1995) attempt to do the same for Turkish.

#### *Metaphor and Metonymy*

There is another kind of emotion-related term, the group of figurative terms and expressions. Since figurative terms also describe (and do not primarily express) emotions, this is a subgroup within descriptive terms. This subgroup may be larger than the other two groups combined. Here, unlike the previous group, the words and expressions do not literally “name” particular kinds of emotions, and the issue is not how basic or prototypical the word or expression is. The figurative words and expressions that belong in this group denote various *aspects* of emotion concepts, such as intensity, cause, control, and so forth. They can be metaphorical and metonymical. The metaphorical expressions are manifestations of conceptual metaphors in the sense of Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Conceptual metaphors bring two distant domains (or concepts) into correspondence with each other. One of the domains is typically more physical or concrete than the other (which is thus more abstract). The correspondence is established for the purpose of understanding the more abstract in terms of the more concrete. For example, *boiling with anger* is a linguistic example of the very productive conceptual metaphor ANGER IS A HOT FLUID (cf. Lakoff and