oped semantic methodology, the meaning of words such as feelings and emotions can be stated in a non-arbitrary way open to intersubjective assessment; and it is the absence of serious investigation of the semantics of “emotions”, rather than its exaggerated pursuit, which has long hindered the progress of research in this area.

In particular, by clarifying the issues from a semantic point of view, we can go beyond the debates on whether “emotions” are “biologically based” or “culturally constituted”, “private” and “internal”, or “public” and “social” (as if they couldn’t be all these things at the same time; cf. Leavitt 1996), and move on to investigate clearly formulated questions focussing on what people think, feel, want, know, say, and do; what happens in their bodies; how the thoughts, feelings, joys, and bodily events are linked (temporarily and/or causally); and also, how those links are perceived, and spoken about, by the “actors” and experiencers themselves, and what role the feelings (linked with culturally shaped thoughts and biologically based bodily events) play in the stream of life.

6 Why words matter

Human beings are “classifying animals”: they categorize both the contents of the world in the structure of categories and put labels on them. Among other things, they categorize feelings, including “thought-related” ones (which I will call, for convenience, “emotions”), and they do so differently in different speech communities. Generally speaking, the labels do not match across language boundaries. For example, speakers of English use categories such as sad, angry, disgusted, and happy, whereas the speakers of Ifaluk use different, non-matching categories such as fago, song, waires, and ker (cf. Lutz 1988; Wierzbicka 1992a), whilst speakers of Malay use categories such as sedih, marah, jijik and gembira, which are different again.10

Until recently many scholars refused to believe that the categorization of “emotions” can differ from language to language and insisted that at least some “emotions” must be linguistically recognized in all languages. There can no longer be any doubt, however, that this is not the case. Although much more is known about this diversity now than twenty or thirty years ago, the basic fact that in principle “emotion words” don’t match was known at that time too. Even an extreme “universalist” like Paul Ekman, who has claimed for decades that the same “basic emotions” (i.e. happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, and surprise, cf. e.g. Ekman 1973: 219–20; see also Ekman 1993, 1994a and b) are recognized in all cultures, acknowledged more than twenty years ago that the Dani people of the New Guinea Highlands, whose faces and “emotions” he had studied in the field, “don’t even have words for the six emotions” (Ekman 1975: 39).

Undoubtedly, the “emotion lexicons” of different languages show similarities as well as differences (I will discuss these similarities in detail in chapter 7). But it is essential to recognize the diversity, too, and to abandon the idea that all languages must have words for something as “basic” and as “natural” as “sadness”, “anger”, “fear”, “happiness”, “disgust”, and “surprise”.

It might seem that once the basic fact of lexical diversity has been recognized the battle against ethnocentrism in the study of “emotions” has been won, but this is not the case either. For even when this fact is acknowledged, many scholars feel free to dismiss its importance and to affirm that behind or beneath this lexical diversity there lies cross-cultural uniformity. For example, the psychologist Paul Harris (1995: 355) writes: “what is in dispute is whether we can draw any conclusions – other than lexical conclusions – about the emotional universe of a culture by examining its emotion lexicon”. If one takes this attitude, one feels free to dismiss the lexical categories of any distant culture in favour of one’s own – and to fall back, once again (as Harris does), on English lexical categories such as sadness, anger, and so on, to identify what really matters to people in that other culture.

Ekman (1993: 384) has claimed that “no one to date has obtained strong evidence of cross-cultural disagreement about the interpretation of fear, anger, disgust, sadness, or enjoyment expressions”. But how could anyone obtain such evidence if the key interpretive categories “fear”, “anger”, “enjoyment”, etc. are taken for granted from the outset and built into the research project itself?

I, for example, as a native speaker of Polish, would never interpret Ekman’s smiling faces in terms of “enjoyment”, because there is no such category in the Polish lexicon. I agree with Ekman and Izard that smiling faces do convey a universal, culture-independent message, but would argue that this message can only be represented accurately in terms of universal, culture-independent concepts; and I would propose as the core of this message the formula “I feel something good now” (see chapter 4).

Speaking of the “uncritical presumption that in their emotional lives human beings anywhere are by and large essentially alike”, Needham (1981: 99) remarked that “it calls for very little acquaintance with history or ethnography to provoke the serious doubt that this view can be correct”, and he added: “For a comparativist, the prime field of evidence is presented by vocabularies of emotion in different linguistic traditions; and the first lesson is that simply in the numbers of emotions discriminated they diverge very greatly”. But many influential recent
writers on “emotions” have simply ignored such warnings, and some continue to do so.

As William James noted, we know from introspection that, on the one hand, we are capable of a great variety of feelings, and on the other, that these different feelings are not clearly separated from one another and cannot be counted. James pointed out that upon this largely nebulous world of feelings every language imposes its own interpretive grid.

if one should seek to name each particular one [of the emotions] of which the human heart is the seat, it is plain that the limit to their number would lie in the introspective vocabulary of the seeker, each race of men having found names for some shade of feeling which other races have left undiscriminated. If we should seek to break the emotions, thus enumerated, into groups, according to their affinities, it is again plain that all sorts of groupings would be possible, according as we chose this character or that as a basis, and that all groupings would be equally real and true. (1890: 485)

Thus, the way people interpret their own emotions depends, to some extent at least, on the lexical grid provided by their native language. To take an example from ethnobiology, two different creatures (e.g. a large nocturnal moth attracted by lights and a clothes moth) may be classified as “the same kind of creature” in one language (e.g. in English) and as “two different kinds of creature” in another language (e.g. in Polish śm and môł respectively), and conversely, two different animals (e.g. a mouse and a rat) may be classified as “two different kinds of animal” in one language (e.g. mouse and rat in English) and as “the same kind of animal” in another language (e.g. nezumi in Japanese). The same applies to “emotions”; whether or not two feelings are interpreted as two different instances of, essentially, “the same emotion” or as instances of “two different emotions” depends largely on the language through the prism of which these feelings are interpreted; and that prism depends on culture.

It is ethnocentric to think that if the Tahitians don’t have a word corresponding to the English word sad (Levy 1973), they must nonetheless have an innate conceptual category of “sadness”; or to assume that in their emotional experience “sadness” – for which they have no name – is nonetheless more salient and more relevant to their “emotional universe” than, for example, the feelings of tōiha or pe‘ape‘a, for which they do have a name (although English does not). Ekman (1994b: 147) dismisses Levy’s report “that the Tahitians do not have a word for sadness, and do not recognize the constellation of sad behaviour as caused by the loss of a loved person” with the following characteristic comment: “this is not sufficient to assert that the relationship between the sadness Antecedent and sadness responses is absent in that culture . . .

The Tahitians did show sad behaviours in response to loss even though they did not label it as sadness, and attributed those responses to illness rather than to loss”. Ekman doesn’t consider the possibility that the Tahitians’ interpretation of their own experience might be just as valid as his (i.e. an outsider’s) interpretation of it. He is convinced that what the Tahitians, unbeknown to themselves, “really feel” is “sadness”.

Obviously, there is no reason to think that Tahitians are incapable of feeling “sad”; but neither is there any reason to believe that the speakers of English are incapable of feeling “tōiha” or “pe‘ape‘a’.

Above all, there is no reason to think that “sadness” is more important or more “universal” than “tōiha” or “pe‘ape‘a’. The conceptual categories of “sadness” or “anger” are highly relevant to the speakers of English, and also to the speakers of other languages which have words corresponding in meaning to the English words sad and angry or sadness and anger. In many other cultures, however, the conceptual grid provided by language is different. To quote Russell (1994: 14): “We speakers of English find it plausible that our concepts of anger, fear, contempt and the like are universal categories, exposing nature at its joints. One way to overcome the influence of such implicit assumptions is to emphasize alternative conceptualizations.”

The unselfconscious use of English emotion terms in the study of human emotions illustrates well what Smedslund (1992: 454) calls the empiricist Zeitgeist of contemporary psychology. He writes:

There appears to be no awareness of the conceptual grid through which our experiences are filtered and in terms of which our descriptions must be made. The . . . metaphor of a distinction between the study of the world as seen through lenses and the study of the lenses through which the world is seen, is helpful here. Both are necessary for the process of achieving scientific knowledge. However, empiricism is exclusively focused on what is experienced and ignores the study of what is presupposed in, or structures, that experience.

As in other areas of research, investigation of “emotion” vocabulary is a necessary first step for identifying the object of our inquiry. We cannot say anything about “anger” if we don’t know what we are talking about, and to know what we are talking about we must first analyse the meaning of the word anger. As Shweder (1994: 32) puts it, “anger” is just an “interpretive scheme” imposed by speakers of English on raw emotional experience. There are countless other interpretive schemes which can be imposed on similar experiences, and the one associated with the English word anger can hardly be regarded as providing privileged access to some language-independent psychological
of people from another culture. Second, it is only by studying words that we can go beyond words. For example, if we are interested in "emotions" and uninterested in words (as for example Ekman (1994a) professes to be), we still have to take enough interest in words to notice that English words such as sadness, enjoyment, or anger are no more than the cultural artifacts of one particular language. As Edward Sapir warned, "the philosopher needs to understand language if only to protect himself against his own language habits" (Sapir 1949[1929]: 165).

"Emotion" is "expressed" or communicated at every level of language, including grammar and intonation; it is also expressed in facial gestures such as frowns and raised eyebrows or in bodily gestures such as kisses or foot-stamping. All these facets of "emotion" need to be studied cross-culturally. None of them, however, can be studied effectively if the researcher doesn’t "protect himself against his own language habits".

To insist that words matter is not the same as "to define emotions as emotion words" or to "reduce emotion to a kind of meaning" (cf. Leavitt 1996: 552). Of course an "emotion" is no more an "emotion word" than an illness is an illness word. Nor is an emotion or an illness reducible to a "meaning". But one can’t discuss either "emotions" or illnesses without using some words, and if we don’t want to mistake our own folk-taxonomies for "natural", objectively valid categories (a practice spectacularly illustrated recently by Stephen Pinker’s discussion of "human emotions" in his How the Mind Works)11 we had better pay some attention to words.

A good example of the consequences of failing to do this is provided by Ernest Becker (1962: 39) in his The Birth and Death of Meaning:

The question "What fact is the most basic to an understanding of human motivation?" can be answered with just one word: anxiety. Anxiety is a prime mover of human behaviour, and many will do anything to avoid it . . . In fact, one is tempted to coin still another definition, and call man "the anxiety-avoiding animal" . . . Freud, who spent a lifetime trying to uncover the mainsprings of motivation, devoted an entire work to the problem of anxiety.

What is most striking about this passage is Becker’s substitution of the English word anxiety for the German word Angst employed by Freud. Clearly, Becker believed that he was in full agreement with Freud, and indeed that he was only developing Freud’s ideas. In fact he was talking about something else: anxiety, not Angst (for a discussion of the differences between the two concepts see chapter 3). As a result, Becker’s theory of human motivation and human nature misrepresented Freud (cf. Gaylin 1979: 49–51).
Curiously, research into the meanings of “emotion terms” in different languages is occasionally attacked even by linguists, who are sometimes so eager to emphasize the importance of non-lexical manifestations of “emotions” in language that they seem to deny the value of lexical research altogether. For example, Taylor and Mbense (1998: 221) conclude their valuable study of metaphors in Zulu talk about “emotions” with an attack on the present writer as someone interested in lexical semantics:

In spite of a number of uncertainties in the interpretation of our data, we would like, nevertheless, to stress the methodological point that the issues discussed in this paper would simply not have arisen (and so could not have been addressed at all) if we had restricted our attention merely to the lexical semantics of the noun ulaka and the verb thukathela, in the style of Wierzbicka’s studies.

Although the phrase “Wierzbicka’s studies” is in the plural, the only reference to my work on “emotions” is to an article entitled “Sadness” and ‘Anger’ in Russian” in the same volume (Athanasiadou and Tabakowska 1998). This paucity of references suggests that the authors are unaware of my numerous non-lexical studies of “emotions”, such as, for example, the extensive study of Russian and Polish expressive derivation in Wierzbicka 1992a; the studies of different attitudes to feelings associated with different grammatical frames (Wierzbicka 1988a and 1995a); the study of emotive interjections (Wierzbicka 1991); the study of emotions in discourse (Wierzbicka 1994d); or indeed my study of similes as a means for describing feelings, published at a time when most present-day cognitive linguists were still faithful practitioners of Chomsky’s anti-semantic transformational grammar (Wierzbicka 1973). (See also the numerous non-lexical studies included in the volume on emotions which I edited a decade ago, Wierzbicka 1990e.)

But while I fully agree with Taylor and Mbense (1998) that the linguistic study of “emotions” should include not only lexicon but also grammar, phraseology, similes, metaphors, and so on (as my studies over a quarter of a century demonstrate), I believe that the lexicon is also very important. The insouciant way in which Taylor and Mbense are prepared to use the English word anger in talking about the Zulu ways of speaking suggests that they still haven’t grasped the danger of ethnocentrism inherent in such practice. The very title of their paper “Red dogs and rotten meals: how Zulus talk about anger” is misleading, to say the least: it is “Anglos” who speak about “anger”, not Zulus. Much as Taylor and Mbense despise lexical studies, the Zulus speak not about anger but about ulaka, and so if we want to understand the Zulu perspective as feelings we should indeed take an interest in what ulaka means, rather than imposing on them the perspective encoded in the English word anger.

I am not suggesting that everybody who wants to study the Zulu perspective must engage in lexical research. For example, the study of Zulu metaphors presented by Taylor and Mbense is, in my view, valuable and informative as it is (despite the misleading title and glosses). It is a pity, however, that these and other cognitive linguists who don’t engage in lexical semantic investigations themselves find it necessary to try to underscore the value of their own work with attacks on lexical research (cf. e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987; for discussion see Wierzbicka 1986b), without which the multiple perspectives on human experience reflected in “emotion” terms in different languages would never be revealed and the perspective reflected in twentieth-century English would continue to be mistaken for one which is universal, innate, and simply “human”.

7 Emotion and culture

The literature on “emotions” often contrasts “biology” with “culture”, as if the two were mutually exclusive. It is worth remembering, therefore, that it was actually a psychologist (William James), not an anthropologist or linguist, who said that the categorization of feelings depends on “the introspective vocabulary of the seeker”, which in turn depends on his or her language and culture (James 1890: 485). James held that feelings represented the subjective experience of biological (physiological) events, but he recognized that feelings can be categorized in a variety of ways, and that they are differently categorized in different cultures. This is not to say that there are no common threads (I will discuss some of these in chapter 7). But the diversity is very considerable indeed.

The meaning of English “emotion words” has actually changed a great deal in the course of history. Had Shakespeare been interested in proposing a basic “emotional keyboard” (cf. Shweder 1985: 200) it would have been different from that proposed by twentieth-century psychologists – even if it contained some of the same words, for example angry. The view of anger as something that can be manipulated – “controlled”, “vented”, “released”, left “unresolved”, “directed” at this or that target, “stirred up”, “repressed”, “expressed”, “suppressed”, and so on (for examples see, e.g. Pendergrast 1998: 23, 24, 219, 242, 243, 364) – is entirely modern and goes far beyond the semantic range of the Shakespearian anger (cf. Logan 1998; also Stearns and Stearns 1986). It also goes beyond the range of the supposed equivalents of anger in other languages (for example, Polish). In fact, the Polish
words closest to the English anger and angry are so different from them in meaning that it would be virtually impossible to translate into Polish perfectly “normal” sentences in twentieth-century English such as the following one (for detailed discussion, see chapter 2, section 4): “Dying people may feel angry . . . Some people feel angry at God for allowing them to get sick, at their doctors for not being able to find a cure, at the government for putting money into weapons instead of medical research, or at the world in general” (Callanan and Kelley 1993: 44).

The two closest Polish counterparts of the English anger are złość and gniew, with the corresponding verbs złościć się and gniewać się, and the adjectives zły (literally, “bad”) and gniewny. The verb złościć się (often used about children) has pejorative connotations and suggests something like a temper tantrum; the adjective zły (with the object in the accusative and the preposition na) means something like “cross (with someone)”; the adjective gniewny refers to outward expression, not an inner feeling, and the verb gniewać się (which takes an object in the accusative case with the preposition na) suggests a position of authority and an exercise of power (for example, a mother can gniewać się na a child, typically, by scolding the child). Clearly, none of these words is compatible with the situation of the dying person who feels angry at God, at the doctors, and at the world; to say that someone is zły na Pana Boga or gniewać się na Pana Boga or złości się na Pana Boga (“is angry at God”), literally “at Lord God”) would sound humorous. The nouns złość and gniew are not really applicable to this situation either; gniew is analogous to wrath and it could only be directed at someone who (in the experiencer’s view) “has done something bad”, not at doctors who were not able to find a cure and not at “the world” or any other impersonal force, phenomenon, or thing.

What this example shows is that an apparently basic and innocent concept like anger is in fact linked with a certain cultural model and so cannot be taken for granted as a “culture-free” analytical tool or as a universal standard for describing “human emotions”.

Examples of this kind provide an answer for those who, like Paul Harris, ask “whether we can draw any conclusions – other than lexical conclusions – about the emotional universe of a culture by examining its emotion lexicon”. The answer is that by examining the meaning and the use of words like anger and angry in contemporary English we can indeed learn a great deal about the “emotional universe” of the speakers of contemporary English. “Emotion words” such as anger reflect, and pass on, certain cultural models; and these models, in turn, reflect and pass on values, preoccupations, and frames of reference of the society (or speech community) within which they have evolved. They reflect its “habits of the heart” (Bellah et al. 1985) and the comitant “habits of the mind”. The English anger and angry (with their current range of meanings) both reflect and reinforce what Bellah et al. 1985 call the “therapeutic culture” in modern Anglo society; and the shift from the Shakespearian wrath to modern anger both reflects and constitutes an aspect of the democratization of society and the passing of the feudal order (cf. de Tocqueville 1953 [1835–40]; Stearns and Stearns 1986).

Let me adduce here two more Polish examples: the word of tęsknota (noun) and tęsknić (verb) and the adverb przykro.

Tęsknota is cognate with the Russian тоска and with words like tesknost or teškoba in other Slavic languages. In the course of the nineteenth century, however, tęsknota, which had previously had a more general meaning of something like malaise, developed a meaning focussed specifically on pain associated with separation from loved people and places. In this new meaning, it acquired the status of one of Polish culture’s key words (for detailed discussion see Wierzbicka 1986a and 1992a; see also Hoffman 1989). Both the semantic change and the cultural salience of tęsknota were clearly associated with the partitions of Poland by the neighbouring powers at the end of the eighteenth century, the national uprisings (especially that of 1830) which followed them, and the resulting “Great Emigration”. For those forced into exile, and among them the political, literary, and artistic elite of the nation including the poet Adam Mickiewicz and the composer Fryderyk Chopin (Frédéric Chopin), the pain of exile became one of the dominant themes. The increasingly frequent use of the words tęsknota and tęsknić in Polish emigré poetry and prose no doubt contributed to the emergence of this new “emotional key concept”, which can be roughly described as a combination of nostalgia, painfully missing someone, and a longing to be reunited with them. It would be hard to find a clearer example of a culturally constructed and historically based “emotion concept”.

The word przykro, to which I have devoted a separate study (cf. Wierzbicka forthcoming a) can also be seen as one of Polish culture’s key concepts. Roughly speaking, it describes a kind of “bad feeling” arising in interpersonal relations when someone fails to show us the warmth or affection or, more generally, “good feelings” that we expect from them. The causeer of the bad feeling doesn’t have to “hurt our feelings” in any way, it is enough that he or she doesn’t show us affection. The cultural implications of this key concept seem quite clear: it points to the great value that Polish culture places on showing people warmth, or, as one says in Polish, serdeczność (from serce “heart”). The importance of the value of “serdeczność” in Polish culture, reflected both in the word serdeczność and in the semantically related word
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przykro (roughly, pain caused by lack of serdeczność), is also supported by other evidence, linguistic and non-linguistic (for detailed discussion see Chapter 6).

Naturally it is not only the lexicon which provides clues to the "emotional universe of a culture". Grammar does too, as do phraseology, discourse structure, gestures, intonation, interjections, swearwords, forms of address, culture-specific facial expressions and bodily postures, gestures, and so on. For example, it is clearly significant that "active" verbs like rejoice have all but disappeared from modern English usage, giving way to "passive" adjectives like happy or pleased; or that those "emotion verbs" which remain tend to have pejorative or humorous connotations (cf. e.g. fume, fret, sulk, pine, enthuse, rage, and so on; for detailed discussion see Wierzbicka 1988a, 1995a).

Similarly, the Russian "emotional universe" is reflected in Russian expressive derivation, including notably the numerous "diminutive" suffixes with different emotional shadings encoded in each of them (for detailed discussion see Wierzbicka 1992a; see also Friedrich 1997). It is also reflected in the culture-specific phraseology centred on the human body and expressive bodily (and facial) behaviour (cf. Jordanskaia and Paperno 1996; for detailed discussion see chapter 5).

All these aspects of both verbal and non-verbal communication need to be studied, and to be studied across cultures. We also need to study different cultures' "cultural scripts", which implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) tell people what to feel, and what not to feel, and what to say and do, or not say and do, when they feel something (see chapter 6). To study all this, however, we need reliable analytical tools and a reliable methodology. I believe that such a methodology can be provided by the Natural Semantic Metalanguage, to which I will now turn.

8 The Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) as a tool for cross-cultural analysis

This book proposes a new perspective on "human emotions". The basic idea is that language is a key issue in "emotion research" and that progress in the understanding of "emotions" requires that this issue be squarely addressed. "Human emotions" vary a great deal across languages and cultures, but they also share a great deal. Neither the diversity nor the universal aspects of "emotions", however, can be studied without an appropriate metalanguage. All attempts to study "human emotions" in terms of ordinary English (or any other natural language) are bound to lead to distortions, because every natural language contains its own "naive picture of the world" (cf. Apresjan 1992[1974]), including its own "ethnopsychology". By relying, uncriti-

cally, on ordinary English words we unwittingly fall prey to the "naive picture" that is reflected in them.

Nor can we transcend this "naive picture" by adopting the conventional technical language of traditional psychology, because this conventional language has developed on the basis of ordinary language and is coloured by the naive picture embedded in it. The reliance of many psychologists on folk-English distinctions such as that between emotion and mood is a good case in point. (Cf. Mandler 1975.)

The approach to "emotions" adopted in this book (and in earlier publications by the author and colleagues) seeks to break the dependence on any one natural language as the source of "common sense insights" by anchoring the analysis in universal human concepts and their "universal grammar". Both the universal concepts and their rules of combination (i.e. their "grammar") have been arrived at by empirical cross-linguistic investigations carried out by several linguists over many years and based on work with typologically diverse and genetically unrelated languages, including Chinese (Chappell 1986, 1991, 1994), Japanese (Hasada 1996, 1997; Onishi 1994, 1997; Travis 1997), Malay (Goddard 1995, 1996a), Lao (Enfield forthcoming), Mbula (Bügelhagen 1994), Ewe (Ameka 1990a and b, 1994), French (Peeters 1994, 1997), several Australian Aboriginal languages (Goddard 1991b; Harkins 1995, 1996; Harkins and Wilkins 1994; Wilkins 1986), and many others.

Most words in any language are specific to this particular language or to a group of languages, and are not universal. For example, neither English nor Spanish nor Malay has a word with a meaning corresponding exactly to the meaning of the German word Angst (see chapter 3). At the same time, evidence suggests that all languages have words with meanings corresponding exactly to the meanings of the English words good and bad, or know and want. This suggests that the concepts of "good" and "bad" (or "know" and "want") are universal, and can, therefore, be used as elements of a culture-independent semantic metalanguage.

To reflect the special status of such words as exponents of universal human concepts, I will render them in capital letters, as GOOD and BAD, or BUENO and MALO (Spanish), or BAAR and BURUK (Malay), thus indicating that they are being used as elements of a special semantic metalanguage. At the same time we can identify them with the meanings of ordinary English, Spanish, and Malay words (good and bad, bueno and malo, baik and buruk), and require that semantic formulae including these words be testable via natural language.

Since the words of ordinary language are often polysemous, we need to identify the meanings in question by means of certain "canonical"
sentences such as, for example, “this person did something bad”, “esta persona ha hecho algo malo” (Spanish), and “orang ini buat sesuatu yang buruk” (Malay), or “something good happened to me”, “algo bueno me ha sucedido” (Spanish), “sesuatu yang baik terjadi kepada aku” (Malay). Proceeding in this way, we can overcome both the incomprehensibility and unverifiability of a technical language relying on “experience-distant” concepts and the ethnocentrism of descriptions using a full-blown natural language such as ordinary English, in all its culture-specific richness.

Whether or not all languages do share a minimum of basic concepts is an empirical question, and one which colleagues and I have been pursuing on an empirical basis for many years. The results of these investigations have been reported in two collective volumes Semantic and Lexical Universals – Theory and empirical findings (Goddard and Wierzbicka 1994) and Meaning and Universal Grammar: Theory and empirical findings (Goddard and Wierzbicka forthcoming), as well as in my Semantics: Primes and Universals (Wierzbicka 1996a) and in Goddard’s (1998) Semantic Analysis: A practical introduction.

These results tend to confirm the thrust of centuries of philosophical speculations about “innate ideas” (Descartes, e.g. 1931[1701]), “the alphabet of human thoughts” (Leibniz, cf. Couturat 1903), the “midpoint around which all languages revolve” (Humboldt 1903–36, v.4: 21–3) and the “psychic unity of mankind” (Boas 1966[1911]). The main conclusion is that all languages do indeed appear to share a common core, both in their lexical repertoire and in their grammar, and that this common core can be used as a basis for a non-arbitrary and non-ethnocentric metalanguage for the description of languages and for the study of human cognition and emotion. This shared lexical core derived from empirical cross-linguistic investigations, is summarized in the following table:

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**Conceptual primitives and lexical universals**

| Substantives | I, YOU, SOMEONE(PERSON), SOMETHING(THING), PEOPLE, BODY |
| Determiners | THIS, THE SAME, OTHER |
| Quantifiers | ONE, TWO, SOME, MANY/MUCH, ALL |
| Attributes | GOOD, BAD, BIG, SMALL |
| Mental predicates | THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR |
| Speech | SAY, WORD, TRUE |
| Actions, events, movements | DO, HAPPEN, MOVE |
| Existence and possession | THERE IS, HAVE |

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**Spanish Version**

Substantives: YO, TÚ; ALGUÉN; ALGO; GENTE; CUERPO
Determiners: ESTE, EL MISMO, OTRO
Quantifiers: UNO, DOS, ALGUNOS, MUCHOS, TODOS
Attributes: BUENO, MALO, GRANDE, PEQUEÑO
Mental predicates: PENSAR, SABER/CONOCER, QUERER, SENTIR, VER, OÍR
Speech: DECIR, PALABRA, VERDAD
Actions, events, movements: HACER, SUCEDER, MOVERSE
Existence and possession: HAY (EXISTIR), TENER
Life and death: VIVIR, MORIR
Logical concepts: NO, QUIZÁS, PODER, PORQUE, SÍ
Time: CUANDO, AHORA, ANTES, DESPUÉS, MUCHO TIEMPO, POCO TIEMPO, POR UN TIEMPO
Space: DÓNDE, AQUÍ, SOBRE, DEBAJO, LEJOS, CERCA, LADO, DENTRO
Intensifier, augmentor: MUY, MÁS
Taxonomy, partonomy: GÉNERO, PARTE
Similarity: COMO

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**Malay Version**

Substantives: AKU, KAU, SESEORANG, SESUATU, ORANG, BADAN
Determiners: INI, (YANG) SAMA, LAIN
Quantifiers: SATU, DUA, BEBERAPA, BANYAK, SEMUA
Attributes: BAIK, BURUK, BESAR, KEcil
Mental predicates: FIKIR, TAHU, MAHU, RASA, LIHAT, DENGAR
Speech: KATA, PERKATAAN, BENAR
Actions, events, movements: BUAH, TERJADI, BERGERAK
Existence and possession: ADA1, ADA2
Life and death: HIDUP, MATI
Logical concepts: TIDAK, MUNGGIN, BOLEH, SEBAB, KALAU
Time: BILA(MASA), SEKARANG, SELEPAS, SEBELUM, LAMA, SEKEJAP, SEBENTAR
This, then, is what the “alphabet of human thoughts” appears to look like. All complex meanings, in all conceptual domains, can be represented and explained as configurations of these sixty or so fundamental conceptual building blocks. For fuller discussion and justification of this set see the references given above.

What applies to the universal “lexicon of human thoughts” applies also to the universal “grammar of human thoughts” manifested in universal syntactic patterns. Empirical evidence suggests that despite the colossal variation in language structures there is also a common core of shared or matching grammatical patterns in which the shared lexical items can be used. This common core defines a set of “basic sentences” which can be said in any language and matched across language boundaries and it can be used as a natural semantic metalanguage for the description and comparison of meanings.

Thus, a configuration of conceptual primes such as “I feel (something) good now” appears to be universally possible and can therefore be plausibly proposed as the meaning of a smile, in preference to culture-specific English words like enjoyment or happy (see chapter 4). Similarly, configurations such as “I want to do something”, “I know I can’t do anything”, or “I know: something bad happened” also appear to be universally present and can be assigned as plausible semantic components to “emotion words” such as, for example, the English sadness and the Russian gryzhit’, helping to map the similarities and differences between them.

9 An illustration: “sadness” in English and in Russian

Like other so-called “emotion terms” (e.g. fear, joy, surprise, disgust, shame, and so on), the English word sadness has a meaning which purports to link a particular kind (or range) of feeling with a particular cognitive scenario. Typically, the feeling of “sadness” is triggered (according to the folk-psychology reflected in the word sad) by a combination of thoughts which can be represented as follows:

(a) I know: something bad happened
(b) I don’t want things like this to happen
(c) I can’t think now: “I will do something because of this”
(d) I know that I can’t do anything

For example, if I say that I feel sad because my dog died I mean (a) that something bad happened (my dog died); (b) that I don’t want things like this to happen; and (c) that I am not planning to do anything because of this (d) I realize I can’t do anything about it. In addition, I imply that while I think those thoughts I feel something—something “bad”.

This cognitive scenario (which is readily translatable into any other language) is presented in the meaning of the English word as typical rather than necessary, for one can say in English, for example, “I feel sad – I don’t know why” (cf. Johnson-Laird and Oatley 1989). What this shows is that by describing my feeling as “sadness” I would be saying, in effect, that I feel like a person does who actually thinks some such thoughts.

The full meaning of sadness can be presented as follows:

sadness (e.g. X feels sad)
(a) X feels something
(b) sometimes a person thinks:
(c) “I know: something bad happened
(d) I don’t want things like this to happen
(e) I can’t think now: I will do something because of this
(f) I know that I can’t do anything
(g) because of this, this person feels something bad
(h) X feels something like this

This, then, is one of the cognitive scenarios “singled out” by the English lexicon and encoded in the word sad. Other languages single out other cognitive scenarios, and draw different conceptual distinctions.

While the explication of sadness proposed above includes a prototypical scenario (shown here as the indented middle part), this type of prototypical scenario differs considerably from those proposed in current psychological literature, where no attempt is usually made to capture the invariant of a given “emotion concept”, or to analyse this concept via simpler and more universal concepts. As an illustration of these differences in approach, I reproduce below (in a slightly abbreviated form) the “prototype of sadness” proposed by Shaver et al. (1987: 1077).
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dictionary to another) the differences between the Russian and the English data are, nonetheless, too marked to be ignored. At the very least they show that neither pečal' nor grust' is marginal in Russian speech, the way melancholy is marginal in English. They also show that Russian has three common everyday words (or families of words) in the domain in which English has only one.

Given, then, that both pečal' and grust' are conceptual categories of great salience in Russian culture, and that they both correspond, to some degree, to the English sadness, how exactly are they related to one another (and to sadness)?

If one asks native speakers of Russian what the difference between grust' and pečal' is, they usually reply, somewhat vaguely, that one of these emotions is “more concrete” than the other, or “more serious”, “more definite”, “more general”, and so on. But a systematic study of the differences in collocations and grammatical frames of the two words and their derivational families allows us to capture the semantic differences in question in more precise terms.

To begin with, pečal' is much more readily described as “deep” than grust' is (glubokaja pečal', glubokaja grust'). Similarly, the adjective pečal'nyj – in contrast to grustnyj – co-occurs readily with the adverb gluboko “deeply”, as the following example illustrates:

Duvovnaja bezkrylošč', bezdarnost' russkoj revolucii močč dostavljat' zloruđno uduostvlenie vseem ee vragam. No čto fak tu gluboko pečal'nyj (grustnyj) dlja russkago naroda i ego buduščego. (Fedotov 1981[1938]:103)

“The spiritual squalor of the Russian revolution can be a source of Schadenfreude for its enemies. But it is a tragic [lit. deeply pečal'nyj] fact for the Russian nation and its future.”

In the literature on human “emotions”, the situation often adduced as the prototypical situation of “sadness” is that of one’s child (or other beloved person) dying. In Russian, grust' (described by Uryson (1997: 442) as a “not deep and not very intense feeling”) would not be normally linked with such a situation. Pečal' might, although given Russian cultural attitudes more dramatic emotions such as gore (grief/sorrow) or otčajanie (despair) would probably be regarded as more natural.

Just as pečal' is more readily described as “deep” (glubokaja) than grust', so grust' is more readily described as “light” (in weight) or “passing” than pečal' (mimoletnaja grust', ?mimoletnaja pečal', legkaja grust', ?legkaja pečal'). This is consistent with the fact that an expression such as pečal'noe lico (roughly, “a sad face”) implies a permanent characteristic, whereas grustnoe lico (“a sad face”) is more likely to refer to a passing emotion. It is also consistent with the fact that one can say

A “prototypical scenario” of this kind includes lots of ideas which may come to mind in connection with the concept of “sadness”, but it does not separate essential features from more or less accidental ones. For example, something like “an undesirable outcome” may indeed be a necessary part of the “sadness scenario”, but “withdrawing from social contact” or “slumped, drooping posture” is not. (Listing various possible ways of behaving which may be associated with “sadness” is no substitute for defining sadness: on the contrary, in order to be able to say meaningfully that a sad person is likely to cry or to assume a slumped, drooping posture we must first be able to define sad independently.)

The NSM approach seeks above all to distinguish the essential from the optional, to capture the invariant, and to break complex concepts into maximally simple ones, relying exclusively on independently established conceptual primes and lexico-grammatical universals.

English–Russian dictionaries usually offer two Russian words as equivalents of the English word sad: grustnyj and pečal'nyj (cf. e.g. Falla et al. 1992). The noun sadness is usually given two glosses: grust' and pečal', although sometimes a third Russian word, toska, is also added (cf. e.g. Falla et al. 1992). This implies that grustnyj and grust' mean the same as pečal'nyj and pečal' (as well as sad and sadness). In fact, however, this is not the case.

Both grust' and pečal' are common, everyday words in Russian (unlike, for example, melancholy in English). In fact, they are both much more common in Russian speech than sadness is in English. Toska, glossed sometimes as “sadness”, also has an extremely high frequency in Russian speech (cf. Wierzbička 1992a).

Although figures that can be found in frequency dictionaries are only broadly indicative (if only because they differ from one frequency
pogruzit’sja v pećal’ “to sink into pećal’” but not *pogruzit’sja v grust’ (cf. Mostovaja 1998).

The adverb grustno can occur in the so-called dative construction, which indicates a purely subjective perspective (the feeling may be inexplicable, and not externally manifested); but the corresponding adverb pećal’no cannot occur in this construction:

Mne grustno.
to-me sad-ADV
“I feel sad.”
*Mne pećal’nno.

Grust’, like sadness, may not have any clearly identified cause, but pećal’ is more similar in this respect to the English words sorrow and grief. One cannot feel sorrow, grief, or pećal’ without being aware of the cause of the feeling. The dative construction with the adverb grustno, on the other hand, is particularly suitable for referring to a feeling with no identifiable cause:

Emu bylo grustno, on sam ne znal počemu.
to-him was sad-ADV he (himself) didn’t know why
“He felt sad, he himself didn’t know why.”

This difference in the grammatical behaviour of the two alleged synonyms suggests that pećal’ – but not grust’ – is based on a conscious judgment: “this is bad”. Grust’ implies that one feels like a person who is making some such judgment, but pećal’ implies that one is actually making the judgment. The dative construction implies that the feeling is, as it were, involuntary and inexplicable, whereas pećal’ implies that the feeling is due to a conscious and as it were intentional thought. Presumably, this is why the dative construction *mne pećal’no (“I feel sad”, literally, “to me it is sad”) is unacceptable, whereas the corresponding version with grustno is perfectly natural.

Though the dative construction is particularly suited to the expression of “vague sadness”, the noun grust’ can also refer to such a situation, whereas the noun pećal’ cannot.

On čuvstvoval kakuju-to grust’, on sam ne znal počemu.
?On čuvstvoval kakuju-to pećal’, on sam ne znal počemu.
“He felt some sadness, he himself didn’t know why.”

While the Oxford Russian Dictionary (Falla et al. 1992) glosses sad as “grustnyj, pećal’nnyj”, the corresponding Russian nouns are glossed differently: “grust’ – sadness, melancholy”, “pećal’ – grief, sorrow”. These glosses are in keeping with the fact that melancholy needs no identifiable cause, whereas grief and sorrow do.

On the other hand, one might say that grief and sorrow are both “more personal” than pećal’: they refer to “something bad that happened TO ME”, whereas pećal’ implies that “something bad happened” (not necessarily to me), and also, more generally, that what happened results in a situation which is seen as “bad”, too. In particular, the adjective pećal’nnyj is frequently used to describe objective situations, and to imply a negative evaluation of such situations, as in the following examples:

vместе с ними судили ix mašinistku Veru Laškovu i Alekseja Dobrovol’skogo, sygravšego pećal’nuyu (*grustnuyu) rol’ provokatora.
(Amal’r’k 1982: 41)

“Together with them, they put on trial their typist, Vera Laškova, and Aleksej Dobrovol’ski, who had played the pitiful (pećal’nuyu) role of agent provocateur.”

Consider also the following line from a poem by Lermontov:

Pećal’n’no ja smotru na ěto pokolenie.
sadly I look-1s on this generation
“I look with sadness on this generation.”

The phrase pećal’n’no smotru clearly implies an evaluation (“I think the state of this generation is bad”). The use of the adverb grustno would imply “a sad look” (i.e. a sad facial expression) rather than a negative evaluation.

The Oxford Russian Dictionary also cites the phrases pećal’nnyj konec “dismal end” and pećal’nnyy resul’taty “unfortunate results”. Although the dictionary assigns both pećal’nnyj and grustnyj a second meaning glossed as “grievous”, no similar phrases are offered for grustnyj and the second sense of grustnyj is glossed in fact as “grievous, distressing”, whereas the second sense of pećal’nnyj is glossed simply as “grievous” (without “distressing”). Though a little confusing, these choices are consistent with the idea that pećal’nnyj implies an objective evaluation, whereas grustnyj refers to a personal reaction to a situation.

All these considerations bring us to the following explications (the contrasting parts are shown in capitals):

pećal’
(a) X felt something BECAUSE X THOUGHT SOMETHING
(b) sometimes a person thinks:
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(c) "I know: something bad happened
(d) THIS IS BAD
(e) I don't want things like this to happen
(f) I can't think now: I will do something because of this
(g) I know that I can't do anything"
(h) because this person thinks this, this person feels something BAD
(i) X felt something like this
(j) because X thought something like this
(k) X thought about it for a long time
(l) X felt something because of this for a long time

grust'
(a) X felt something
(b) sometimes a person thinks:
(c) "I know: something bad happened NOW
(d) ____________
(e) I don't want things like this to happen
(f) I can't think now: I will do something because of this
(g) I know that I can't do anything"
(h) because this person thinks this, this person feels something for a short time
(i) X felt something like this

The differences between the two explications can be summarized as follows.

First, the feeling of grust' is described only via a prototype ("X felt something like this"); no actual thoughts are attributed to the experiencer. In the case of pečal', however, a thought ("something bad happened") is in fact attributed to him/her (component (j)). This difference accounts for the possibility of using grust', in contrast to pečal', in the case of an unidentifiable cause.

Second, in the case of pečal' the negative evaluation of the event ("something bad happened") is generalized and extended beyond this event as such: "this is bad" (component (d)).

Third, in the case of pečal' the feeling (as well as the underlying thought) is portrayed as extended in time (components (k) and (l)). In the case of grust', time is left unspecified. This accounts for the fact that mimoletnaja grust' "a passing sadness" sounds better than mimoletnaja pečal' (cf. Uryson 1997).

Fourth, the feeling associated with grust' is not presented in the explication as a "bad feeling". Since the underlying thought (in the prototypical scenario) refers to a "bad" event ("something bad happened"), the explication invites the inference that the feeling caused by it is a "bad" feeling, but the explication does not state this explicitly. In the explication of pečal', however, the feeling is specified as "bad" (component (h)). This difference accounts for the fact that grust' can be sometimes described as svetlaja "luminous", whereas pečal' normally cannot (except in poetry).

Fifth, the triggering event is presented in the explication of grust' as current or recent ("now", component (c)), where no such reference to the present is included in the explication of pečal'.

It will be clear from the foregoing discussion that while both grust' and pečal' have a great deal in common with the English sadness, they both differ from it in some respects. Unlike sadness, pečal' has to have a definite cause, it has to imply a negative evaluation of some event or state of affairs, as well as a "bad feeling", and it has to extend in time; and grust' differs from sadness in implying (prototypically at least) a short term feeling and not necessarily a "bad one". (The death of a child, frequently mentioned in the literature as a "prototypical antecedent" of "sadness", could hardly be linked with grust'.) Thus, each of the three words considered here (sadness, grust', pečal') has its own distinct meaning. There is of course no reason to think that one of these words corresponds to some universal cognitive scenario (let alone a distinctive universal pattern of autonomic nervous system activity, cf. Ekman 1994b: 17), whereas the others do not.

It could be said that the differences between grust', pečal', and sadness are relatively minor. As noted earlier, however, there are languages (like Tahitian; cf. Levy 1973) where the closest counterpart of sadness differs from it so much that the language can be said to have no counterpart of sadness at all (not even an approximate one). The main point of this section was not to claim that Russian, like Tahitian, "has no word for sadness", but rather to demonstrate the methodology which can be used for comparing any "emotion concepts", no matter how different, both within a given language and across languages and cultures.

10 The scope of this book

The main theoretical themes of the book have been introduced in this chapter; but they will reappear in various contexts in other chapters as well. Throughout the book, the focus is on both cultural diversity and "emotional universals". The unity of the analysis lies in its methodology: looking at the phenomena discussed through the prism of the same universal human concepts.

Chapter 2 presents a systematic account of several dozen "emotion