Cross-Cultural Componential Analysis on Affect Attribution of Emotion Terms

Oliver C. S. Tzeng, Rumjahn Hoosain, and Charles E. Osgood

Accepted February 23, 1987

One concern of studies of emotions is that of the underlying denotative components of the meanings of emotional terms, whether people are actually cognizant of them or not. In this study, we evaluated the characteristics of 10 emotional denotative components and their hierarchical ordering in attribution to 22 emotion concepts across 23 different human societies. Empirically, a quantitative model, developed by Tzeng and Osgood (1976), was used to link the relationship between affect measures of the emotion concepts and their characteristics on denotative components. It was found that the 10 denotative components functioned extremely well in predicting the affect for individual cultures and also for the 23 cultures as a whole. Cross-cultural comparisons revealed some significant differences among the components in predicting indigenous affect attributions for different cultures. Finally, the nature and dynamics of such intercultural differences were discussed in reference to the issue of independence between affect and cognition.

1This research was planned and carried out as a part of a cross-cultural research project of our laboratory. It was completed during Dr. Rumjahn Hoosain’s visiting professorship at Purdue University School of Science at Indianapolis for his sabbatical leave from the University of Hong Kong. The authors wish to express their gratitude to our foreign colleagues who participated in the data collection for this study.
2Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis.
3University of Hong Kong.
4University of Illinois.
5Address all correspondence to Dr. Oliver Tzeng, Director, Osgood Laboratory for Cross-Cultural Research, Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis, P.O. Box 647, Indianapolis, Indiana 46223.
INTRODUCTION

Emotion is a universal human experience. On the other hand, it is possible that cross-cultural meanings of "equivalent" terms referring to certain emotions have different underlying significance to the respective indigenous peoples. Without a common framework, comparison and cross-cultural understanding is impossible. Actually, without some kind of framework, comparisons of studies within the same language/culture community could be similarly untenable. Kagan (1984), for example, advocates that common terms for emotions be replaced with new constructs specifying target and occasion. The latter, of course, are aspects of the emotion situation that give it a characteristic significance. It would be useful for understanding and comparison if a set of underlying cognitive features can be shown to be universally valid as components in the usage of emotion terms, and furthermore, if the hierarchical order of the salience of these components can be determined.

Theories of emotion are concerned with three aspects of this phenomenon—namely, the neurophysiological, the motor-behavioral, and the subjective-experiential, as well as their interrelations (Izard, Kagan, & Zajonc, 1984). But superimposed on these concerns is the question of the relationship between emotion and cognition, since it is obvious that cognitive factors have a lot to do with emotions (see Lazarus, 1982), although there are views that affective arousal can be independent of cognitive appraisal (Zajonc, 1984). It would appear that when we talk about cognition and emotions we can be referring to either (1) cognition of the antecedent stimuli resulting in certain emotions, (2) cognition of one's behavioral, neurophysiological, or subjective responses to these antecedents, or (3) cognition of the results of one's responses. Cognitive appraisal of any emotion probably comprises some combination of these three categories, although there is some question about whether the person involved need be aware of such appraisals (Lazarus, 1982). People may not always be able to elaborate their cognitive appraisals through deliberate, rational, or conscious processes. This does not have to mean that there is no such framework that guides how we act. The fact that people do differentiate emotions and act accordingly suggests that they are sensitive to the dimensions on which emotions differ. Of course, one way in which people differentiate emotions is to describe them with diverse labels. By looking at the way people use emotion names, we can grasp the underlying cognitive structure with which they use to perceive emotions. The validity of such a hypothesized structure, of course, would have to be tested.