Patterns of Affect Across Corpora

In the emotion profiles described in Chapter 2, the focus was solely on individual emotion terms. This means that these profiles include occurrences for all sorts of different types of affect (emoted, unemoted, directed, undirected and so on), as there is no way of automatically knowing how an emotion term is used in discourse by looking at its frequency. As suggested in Section 3.3.5, it is only by looking at context and patterns that we can make some hypotheses about the meaning and functions of emotion terms. This is the aim of this chapter, which reports some of the findings of an analysis of the lexico-grammatical patterns of 15 emotion terms (see Table 3.1) in the BRC. The description focuses on L1 and R1 patterning, and is limited to detailing those patterns that are most frequent in each sub-corpus.\(^1\) For example, ‘m is the most frequent L1 collocate of surprised in conversation, but not, be and was are also common. Nevertheless, the main focus is on ‘m surprised. Furthermore, I only mention functions of emotion terms that seem to cut across the usage of several terms – meaning that for example the noun affection is not discussed in detail in news reportage and academic discourse because it seems to have a distinct patterning.

Three aspects of this analysis should thus be kept in mind:

- The patterns/functions that are outlined as particularly important for a given register are not the only patterns/functions to occur in that register.
- A pattern/function that may be characteristic for a given register may also occur (more infrequently) in one of the other registers.
- Patterns/functions that occur very commonly across all corpora are mostly disregarded.
Additionally, the findings represent only tendencies, since in some cases the frequencies are not high enough to warrant general conclusions. In the following, I describe each of the four sub-corpora in turn in terms of its affect patterns: conversation (4.1), news reportage (4.2), fiction (4.3) and academic discourse (4.4). I also compare affect triggers across the four corpora (4.5).

4.1 Conversation

The first common function of emotion terms in conversation is to express overt authorial affect (usually in the present tense). This is either realized by a directed or by an undirected affect pattern (with undirected affect patterns, the trigger has to be retrieved from elsewhere). This function is especially common with four emotion terms: the adjectives *surprised* and *disappointed*, and the verbs *surprise* and *hate*. Thus, the most frequent L1 collocate of *surprised* is *’m*, followed by *not*. Typically, we find:

- *I’m surprised* + *that*-clause (usually without *that*)
- *I’m surprised*
- *I’m not surprised*

(1) **David** Dad! You’re not allowed to <pause> to talk like that to people’s dog. And especially dogs we know.
   **Jane** *I’m surprised* the boys let it run their garden [sic].
   **David** What <pause> well it was David <pause> David’s idea, don’t blame me. (BRC, KCH 6395)

(2) **Albert** he had a <pause> Honda Civic engine in it! <voice quality: laughing> Oh, oh dear <end of voice quality>!
   **June** I shouldn’t think anybody’d insure it!
   **Albert** I’m *surprised*! (BRC, KB1 4164)

(3) well I mean *I’m not surprised* they don’t wanna take a picture of our garden cos it’s a mess but er I’d have thought he would have taken a picture of yours and sold you one. (BRC, KBG 1094)

(4) **None** My cat scares the dogs. <laugh>
   **Cherrilyn** *I’m not surprised!* (BRC, KBL 3446)

It becomes clear that some of these imply some sort of negative evaluation, as shown in (1) by the answer ‘don’t blame me’, but others seem more neutral in this respect, for example (4).