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Author

Lutz, Catherine

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SITUATION BASED EMOTION FRAMES AND
THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF EMOTIONS

Catherine Lutz

1. Introduction: Anthropological Approaches

The question for this panel concerns the relevance of models of emotion for general theories of internal representation and processing. The particular question which I will address is that of the contributions which an anthropological or comparative approach can make to an understanding of emotional representations and emotional 'tasks'. In particular, I would like to suggest that we begin by looking at the way people themselves frame emotional experience and interactions. Much of this framing structure, moreover, is culturally provided and culturally variable. It can be seen in emotion word meanings, in the logic of emotional response, and in explicit ethnotheories of emotion.

Anthropologists have begun to document a diversity of theories of mind and self (e.g., Geertz, 1976; Leenhardt, 1979 (1947); Rosaldo, 1980; Strauss, 1977; White, 1981). Cultural knowledge systems, or 'ethnotheories,' explain why, when, and how emotion occurs, and they are embedded in more general cultural theories about the person, internal processes, and social action. The examination of these culturally constituted systems of knowledge can play two important roles in achieving the goals of cognitive science. In the first, we encounter ourselves in the other by seeing our own knowledge structures contrastingly highlighted. This is consonant with cognitive science's often stated aim of converting tacit understandings into explicit ones. Beliefs about the self are among the most tacit in any culture, as it is with them that intrapsychic and social reality are framed and felt. As Abelson (1979) has pointed out, one person's knowledge may appear to another as belief. Our 'knowledge' about emotion may turn out to be largely belief on cross-cultural inspection and comparison.

This is related to the second role for cross-cultural comparison in cognitive science which is that we may learn from, as well as about, the theories of other systems. For example, the emotion words of other cultural groups may have different referents or slice up the affective pie in different ways than do English emotion terms. If one of the aims of cognitive science is to develop an abstract, logical, and unambiguous language for a scientific psychology, the ethnosemantics of emotion will be an important topic of inquiry. A true science of affect needs a language which is transcultural.

Our most basic Western ideas about what constitutes humanness -- ideas which are dramatically evident in debates over whether computers can "feel emotion" -- form an implicit frame for our inquiries. The nature of this frame explains why emotion has been neglected, not only in cognitive science,

but in social science generally. The traditional and still current concern has been with emotion as physical sensation. Internal feelings are presumed to be the primary referents of emotion words, and they are therefore seen as difficult to talk about -- emotions are, in this cultural framework, internal, private, pre-verbal states. Affect is not accidentally omitted from the classic social science problem termed 'language and thought'.¹ Although it has more recently been acknowledged that one may think about how one feels and feel about how one thinks, the dichotomy of cognition and affect remains fundamental even in attempts to 'bridge' the gap between them.

We have value stances, moreover, towards the concepts and relations of our theories, and we are ambivalent about emotion. On the one hand, cognition is seen as 'higher' in evolutionary and other senses than emotion. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) present some striking evidence in English metaphors that emotion is so viewed. Metaphors which they term 'orientational' indicate that 'good', 'high status', 'control', and 'rational' are 'up', while 'bad', 'low status', 'being controlled', and 'emotional' are 'down' (1980: 14-17). The mature person ideally controls affect with thought. 'Intelligence', as that term is commonly defined in American English, refers to cognitive abilities, with 'emotional ability' being somewhat of a contradiction in terms.²

Emotion is instinctual, inchoate, formless, but at the same time it may also be positively valued. In scientific psychological terms, emotion is motivational and causes behavior. It is the life force, a sacred center. To claim emotion for computers, then, is sacrilege. For the above reasons, attempts at the 'cold' examination of a 'hot' topic (Abelson, 1963) appear to us, as Americans, both quixotic and profane.

I would propose that we proceed on the assumption that the terms 'cognition' and 'affect' represent, not dual and separate processes (Zajonc, 1980), but ideal types placed at the ends of a true continuum of more or less immediate and more or less motivated processing of events or situations. While emotion is the human potential for extremely high speed and action-oriented processing, emotions are culturally constructed concepts which point to clusters of situations typically calling for some kind of action. Many of these situation clusters will be universal while some will be environmentally specific. In the simplest example, one language group may code sudden events and dangerous events under the same rubric while another community might distinguish them. Those situations which will be universally framed together via emotion words will be those for which responses -- such as movement towards others or flight -- are shared and necessitated by the requisites of human social life. As D'Andrade has pointed out, a person who simply 'thought' coolly about acquiring food would have little chance of survival if that thought were easily extinguished and did not motivate remembering and action (1980: 16).

Such an affectless person could note that someone was in the process of stealing her car but, in the absence of anger, could be easily called off to play bingo.

Why do human communities need emotion words? It is not simply to name internal states. Emotion words are important primarily as communicators of one's perception of the occurrence of a particularly salient situation frame. The use of emotion words can often involve "backwards inferencing" on the part of listeners about the events which led up to the speaker's statement (White, 1979). In using emotion words, people also communicate the behavior which is likely to follow on their part. As one of the most crucial functions of social groups lies in their organization and regulation of individual behavior, emotion words are necessary for the most efficient and judicious coordination of plans, understanding, and behavior. By clustering situations which share action plans and other dimensions of meaning, emotion words facilitate such coordination both on the intra- and the inter-psychic levels.

2. Emotion Frames

The framing of emotion occurs at many levels. What has been and is here meant by a 'frame'? Interest in the framing of knowledge and social interaction has been widespread in social science. Attempts have been made to find person-centered, rather than investigator-originated, breaks in the stream of mental and social reality with a view to understanding how the psychologically and culturally constructed framed units organize human experience. These units have been a variety of cognitive ones (Minsky, 1975; Rumelhart and Ortony, 1976); they have been linguistic units which frame one or more concept, logical relation, or cultural proposition (Black and Metzger, 1965; Rosch, 1977); they have been situational units whose definition is a function of the transformation of "physical space and chronological time... into social space and social time" (McHugh, 1968: 3; see also Hall, 1977: 129-140); they may be contexts of interaction, the bracketing of which transforms an event into one with fundamentally different meanings and epistemological and behavioral entailments (Bateson, 1972: 177-193; Goffman, 1974); and on the most global level cultural groups are themselves framed by shared knowledge systems, customs, and world view -- an event which is framed in an East African culture may have very different meaning than that 'same' event framed in French culture. Cross-cultural and interpersonal understanding -- emotional and otherwise -- occurs only to the extent that there is a shared and agreed upon or a constructed frame for interaction.

There appears to be a growing recognition in psychology that the more inclusive frames are just that, rather than simply variables, and that the more micro-level frames are embedded in them. This is seen in the increasing concern with what is termed 'world knowledge'. It is also seen in the recent interest in metacognition (A. Brown, 1978; Flavell, 1976, 1978). Metacognition, or

thinking about thought processes, is the ability to introspect about, monitor, and control those processes (Brown and Barclay 1976: 72). More basically, the term metacognition has been used to refer also to the awareness of the existence, nature, variables, and integration of cognitive processes (Wellman, n.d.). The importance of examining the phenomenon of metacognition lies in its potential role in the molding of more micro-level processes.

There is an important bridge to be built between these notions about metacognition and emerging anthropological concerns with ethnotheories of self and psychological process. Although work in metacognition has tended to be based on the assumption that these abilities and knowledge are culture-free, the child develops in a cultural milieu replete with explicit and implicit ideas about how one internally and socially operates. The child receives training in metacognitive skills in the context of that culture's typical learning settings. The psychologist's metacognitive skills and the anthropologist's ethnotheories thus constitute and constrain each other.

The concept of 'metacognition' should be seen, however, in the same ideal typical light in which we are here placing 'cognition', with 'metaemotion' coined to describe the more immediate and action-oriented processing of our processing. These metaskills can be conceptualized, like cognition and affect, as points along a continuum of delay and immediacy and of passivity and behavioral implication. To Brown and Barclay's list of metamemorial skills -- introspection, monitoring, and control (1976: 72) -- we must add, however, the evaluation of one's own cognitive and emotional processing. The skills of control and evaluation fall towards the same end of this continuum as does affect. People have knowledge concerning emotions and their place in the workings of the self and relationships, and they evaluate particular emotions (for example, 'righteous indignation is good', 'hate is bad', 'regret is good') and emotion in general. The inseparability of value and knowledge is seen in the fact that people in cultures which do not value a particular type of processing skill (such as intuition) will, according to the evidence accumulating in the fields of both metacognition and cross-cultural psychology, do less of such processing. Cultural values and knowledge determine what we term emotional experience, that is, they structure the way in which we frame events as salient, frame expressive communications from others as meaningful, and frame our own emotions linguistically and behaviorally.³

3. Ifaluk Theories of Emotion and Situation Frames.

The Ifaluk are a Micronesian people whose adaptation to their coral islet environment has been notably successful and resistant to colonial influences. Their one-half square mile atoll is densely populated, supporting 430 people on a diet extracted through fishing, horticulture, and gathering. Their society is organized

through the ranking of individuals based on their clan and lineage affiliations, gender, and age. Several chiefs head the matrilineal clans, and organize island-wide activities. The absence of physical aggression on Ifaluk marks it as one of the world's least violent societies. Ghosts of ancestral and other varieties are ubiquitous and dangerous, although they may also bring protection from typhoons and disease.

The Ifaluk have a rich body of knowledge about the nature of the person and emotion (Lutz, 1980, 1981). Although they do not distinguish emotion from thought, and do not have a monolexeme for either, they do label two closely related but nonetheless distinct types of internal processes, one more willful (tip-) than the other (nunuwan), more a product of individual desire than of social conformity or social intelligence. The Ifaluk words which we would call emotion words can be used to modify either of these two process terms.

The Ifaluk evaluation of emotion, that is, their metaemotional attitude, is a very positive one. Emotion is viewed as inextricably part of thought, and the correct understanding and behavioral enactments of emotions, both pleasant and unpleasant, are seen as signs of maturity. The mentally ill on Ifaluk are marked, in the indigenous view, by deficiencies in the ability to display both emotional and more technological understandings. Their view here interestingly converges with those of researchers recently working on the emotional-cognitive development of Down's syndrome infants (Cicchetti and Sroufe, 1976; Emde, Katz and Thorpe, 1978).

Emotion is a 'covert' category (C. Brown, 1974) for the Ifaluk. A domain of words exists which informants separate from others in sorting tasks. This domain includes words whose primary referents are organism-environment interactions. Ifaluk emotion words are defined by the situations in which people experience them. English emotion words, by contrast, foreground the organism response, with physiological signs (Davitz, 1969) taken as 'symptoms' of an internal event, rather than an external one. The two ethnotheoretical systems overlap to an important degree, however. While the Ifaluk have a less elaborate model of physiological correlates of events, some English emotion definitions point to the existence of a secondary situational model.

Joel Davitz, in his book The Language of Emotion, presents data on the meanings of emotion words for 50 American informants in a dictionary-like format. Data collection began in an open-ended manner, with people being asked to describe their experiences of each of 50 different emotions. A checklist was developed out of a large and representative sample of descriptive phrases. This checklist was presented to another 50 individuals to get comparable and quantifiable descriptors for the 50 emotions. The overwhelming emphasis on physiological state is evidenced, for example, in the definition of 'anger'. The following descriptions are listed in order of frequency (numbers in

parentheses are percentages of the sample who checked each item).

my blood pressure goes up... (72); I'm easily irritated... (64); I seem to be caught up and overwhelmed by the feeling (64); my face and mouth are tight, tense, hard (60); there is an excitement, a sense of being keyed up, overstimulated, supercharged (58); my pulse quickens (56); my body seems to speed up (54); there is a quickening of heartbeat (52); my fists are clenched (52) (Davitz, 1969: 35).

Contrast the meaning of 'anger' with the following definitions of the Ifaluk emotion word, song, which may be translated as 'justified anger'. "We are song from some gossip we hear [about ourselves which is not true], if someone talks a lot at us, [or] if the pig comes and eats food I just made." "If someone doesn't give me something I [legitimately] ask for, I'm song."

The evidence for the centrality of situation as a frame for Ifaluk emotional experience and understanding is found in several kinds of data. As just mentioned, folk definitions of emotion words are predominantly given in a form similar to the following, 'Emotion X is when someone steals my bananas', or 'If your child dies, then emotion Y'. Secondly, daily conversations abound in which emotion is explicitly discussed. Emotions of the self and others are spoken of in terms of their environmental or situational causes and correlates. Physical symptoms are not a salient topic of conversation. A third source of data is sorting tasks in which people were asked to pile-sort cards with Ifaluk emotion words on them. Post-test questioning of people about the rationale for their sorting decisions produces answers which most commonly cite a common eliciting situation or situation type, or alternately a sequence of situations (Lutz, 1982). Examples include, "These [emotion] words all go together because they all occur when we are interrupted in our work", and "They all involve something happening that we want [to happen]."

The Ifaluk logic of emotion is based on propositions about the parameters and meaning of commonly occurring situations. Why, then, and on what criteria do the Ifaluk frame something as a situation and frame diverse situations within the confines of a single emotion word? Let us return to the example of the word song, which has been translated as 'justified anger'. The prototypical situation which causes song is one in which another person has violated a cultural rule or value. Included are both situations where ego or a relative of ego suffers as a result and situations where it is simply cultural principle which is at issue, with no one directly disadvantaged as a result. Specifically, some of the commonly associated situations include hearing false gossip about oneself, encountering someone whose personality does not conform with the cultural values of generosity, calmness, even-temper, and respectfulness, being

excluded from the emotional and material support expected from kinspersons and others, and hearing of the violation of a taboo such as that against walking upright in front of the men's house.

'Anger' can also be defined by its situational correlates. Americans will define a frustrating situation as one in which anger typically occurs. 'Anger', according to Carroll Izard, arises in situations where one is

either physically or psychologically restrained from doing what one intensely desires to do. The restraint may be in terms of physical barriers, rules and regulations, or one's own incapability (Izard, 1977: 329-330).

Brown and Herrnstein define 'anger' as the "illegitimate disappointment of legitimate expectations" (1975: 274). Although their definition is more restrictive than that of Izard, they are not contradictory. As Brown and Herrnstein point out, legitimacy is "neither universally acknowledged nor unchanging" (1975: 279). America is a poly-cultural and complex society, and there is much disagreement over values, rules, and regulations. This, and the value placed on individual achievement, make it unsurprising, therefore, that 'anger' may be evoked in situations where one's own individual goals (based on one's personal sense of the legitimacy of those goals) are blocked. The restraints and rules which Izard speaks of as eliciting 'anger' in Americans are seen as the correct and moral order on Ifaluk. A separate term, ngush, describes the state of being required to conform to a valid cultural rule which is nonetheless frustrating of other individual goals such as comfort.

Although the goals of individuals will be occasionally blocked in every culture, the definition of the situation in which one is blocked will vary from culture to culture, as will the subsequent emotional reaction (Whiting, 1944). The socialization process results in the molding of goals. The American child comes to expect certain kinds of achievement from her or himself. "Standing on your own two feet", "Making it", and "Proving yourself" are cultural aphorisms which reflect the types of independence and achievement goals which are acquired. The Ifaluk child, on the other hand, comes to operate with goals dictated by the values of sharing and interpersonal dependence. The behavioral implications of these values are outlined in cultural rules which provide for the equal distribution of everything from food to children and, conversely, for the equal distribution of sacrifice and restraint. The 'crazy' person on Ifaluk is partially defined as one who spends too much time alone, or thinks only of her or his own needs. Important differences in the nature, and hence the translations, of song and 'anger' flow from these differences in culturally constituted goals. It is for such reasons that American 'anger' results from "incapability" (Izard, 1977) while song

results from the failure of the other to conform to group goals.

In attempting to compare emotion words across cultures, it can be seen that neither can the referent be assumed without examination of ethnopsychological theories in which they are embedded nor can the translation process be anything but primary. The translation of song as 'anger', or even as the more accurate 'justified anger', tends to erroneously suggest that the two terms share common referents and webs of ethnotheoretical meaning. A first step towards improving the accuracy of translation of emotion words might be to use situations rather than feeling tone as the primary criteria for mapping an emotion word in one language onto one or more emotion words in another language (Lutz, 1980).

Three final suggestions are in order about the general relationship between situation and emotion. Although the storage of emotional meaning in situation frames is particularly explicit in Ifaluk ethnotheory, the work of Minsky (1975) and others suggests that the situation might be a universal frame for many kinds of experience, as it represents an especially efficient way of storing related bits of information. The efficiency of this storage method might be enhanced, moreover, by certain types of metaemotional evaluations and controls and by developed metacognitive approaches to the situational coding of emotion.

Secondly, the function of emotion words may importantly consist of their linking of situations in a culturally meaningful way. 'Anger' links a certain group of situations, while song links another. Cultural adaptation calls for varieties of responses to the same 'objective' circumstances. Situations are correlated by their shared relationship to a particular cultural value and by the types of action which follow from them. Emotion words code these environmental correlations, and thus provide for understanding of self and social life.

Finally, the situations which are correlates and constituters of emotion in Ifaluk ethnopsychological theory are commonly occurring ones, such as confronting a task for which one is ill-prepared, observing a rule violation, or having one's child fall ill. These situation based emotion frames organize behavior through their links to action plans. Schank and Abelson claim that frequently encountered events usually require the development of accompanying scripts. These scripts are "highly stylized ways of executing planboxes" (1977: 96), while plans are the ranges of choices dictated by a particular goal. Thus we expect that Ifaluk cultural values, from which many individual goals originate, would contribute both to the framing of situations under a common emotion term, and to the available interactional script that dictates behavior in the emotion defined situation. We and the Ifaluk need emotion words to communicate definitions of the situation and intended plans of action. This and other ethnopsychological theories have much to teach us about the cultural

blindness which we take with us to the study of affect. Through the comparative investigation of emotion frames, including the linguistic, situational, and ethnotheoretic, we may be able to identify those frames which emerge only in particular environmental circumstances and those which are universally meaningful.

Notes

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1. There are various forms in which the Whorfian hypothesis on the linguistic determination of thought may be construed from the strongest, in which non-verbal cognitive activity is patterned by language, to the weakest, in which only the perception of absent stimuli (i.e., memory) is strongly influenced (Miller and McNeil cited in Lemon, 1981: 202-203). If we include affect as part of the same continuum of internal processing on which thought is found (see below), the modeling of relationships between language and other processing will need to take account of both affect and cognition. We should expect that, under certain types of conditions of emotion activation, one or another version of the Whorfian hypothesis may apply.

2. For views of emotion as intelligence, see D'Andrade, 1980:15-17; Lutz and LeVine, n.d.; Meichenbaum, 1980: 274-278.

3. The sociologist Arlie Hochschild's (1979) notion of 'emotion work' is relevant here as a conceptualization of the way in which emotion knowledge structures ('feeling rules' in her scheme) affect emotional experience itself. In her view, these structures are provided by ideology and, in particular, by social 'feeling rules'. These rules govern not only behavior, but feelings themselves, and hence are not merely the 'display rules' of Ekman (1974).

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