

// __ "basic", "universal" feelings (emotions ...) in metaphors?

Dear Wierzbicka:

I read your paper on "Emotional Universals" (Language Design 2 (1999, 23-69)):

https://elies.rediris.es/Language_Design/LD2/wierzbicka.pdf

Even though, as it seems, "universals" mean something different to me (in order for particulars to unifyingly share certain commonalities, they don't need to be "standard", the same across all particulars), my interest on universals comes from my own research trying to (somehow) prove through corpora research that the mind-body link/consciousness, universals, Hume's "problem of induction", ... are essentially related:

https://www.amazon.com/gp/customer-reviews/R115QLRWYD52M8/ref=cm_cr_dp_d_rvw_ttl?ie=UTF8&ASIN=9514592638

I especially found interesting and/or "questionable" the following points you made:

* just feelings per se are -definitely not- what matters most in one's life. Feelings always happen in tandem with and as part of our experiences and thoughts/conscious states. Even when we dream, we "feel through" the narrative of our dreaming and we remember both aspects when we wake up and we know well at times the kinds of "feelings" we want to be right/true, aren't;

* neither the (inner and outer) conscious intersubjectivity, nor our apparently unconscious reactions are specifically "standard" enough to be considered (what you call) a universal (in Darwin's (misinterpreted) Expressions and Emotions in Man and Animal's sense);

* somatic/physiological reactions (such as GSR), apparently originating in our CNS are illusive while trying to take them as "measurable", "objective", "parallel" representative demonstrations of emotions. Some Pacific ocean islanders are able to consciously dilate their eye pupils while diving;

* different people don't relate to their feelings in the same way (all one needs to do is visit a different country not as a tourist (some, but not all, of it is mimetic)) and individuals within a people do not all "feel" or think in the same way about matters. I would also add that specific cultures in a society ("culturing" certain codes, mindsets in kind of a division of conscious labor way), such as "cartoonists", "doctors", "politicians", "poets", "police", "artists" (even musicians as they differ from visual artists), ... differently "appropriate" and "feel" through their reality;

* your paper emphasizes linguistic aspects too much in what I take as some expressive, behavioristic way. I think in our day to day communicative interactions "words" and "phrases" are just part (I would argue not even the most important) of what goes on, how one's individual consciousness is engaged. Some scholars have argued (in jest?) that the Hopi native American language would have been better to describe the Theory of Relativity, but the fact is that it was discovered by a German Physicist of Jewish descent, who was not religious but renounced his German citizenship when he was a teenager, was considered to be a loser by his professors and had great difficulties while trying to find a job in the German/Swiss/European milieu of the late XIX, early XX century.

Anyone could still see that the ways in which certain "words" and "phrases" are used tell us something, but how exactly that something is tractably grounded in anything real is, IMO, what we don't know. I don't think that: "one's language is the limit of one's world" (the conscious dynamics between the two (language-world) is what matters). I notice all kinds of multi-kulti kids here in Germany talking in all kinds of mostly not European languages break into German to say "genau", which literally means "exactly", "right"; but if someone says to you "right" in (U.S.) English as you talk to him/her, that would mean: "you don't need to keep talking, explaining that to me" and/or "I don't want to talk to you". In German it is used as they talk as some sort of interpersonal checkpointing device (in an almost somatic, kind of sexual way) to make sure that "they are on the same page". I find sweet that multi-kulti kids do that, but generally speaking, I find that silly, somewhat amusing, anxiety provoking (and if I didn't know German people -worryingly illusive-). I see as a reassuring safeguard that people are "different", think in different ways (in a biological-diversity kind of way). In a similar way, in Miami/USA, people you would think of as gringos based on their English and manners, would break into (Cuban) Spanish to say "come mierd[a]jería" (literally "shit eater", as adj.: idiot, as verb: time wasting idiocy) while referring to a stupid person or incident.

There are also the "Maracanaço" kinds of conscious blind spots. People may "consciously" choose "not to talk about" (and/or address in untrue, irrational ways) a relevant event. The [Brazilian wikipedia page](#) clocks at 2178 words with 14 references and 3 external link, the [English](#) one (mostly a linear translation) at 2103 with 27 and 1 (in Spanish), while the [Spanish](#) (written with some teeth) at 3026 (39%+) with 14 and 7. I assure you that Spanish speaking people in Latin America don't have anything against Brazilian people.

A formal mapping of people's expressive reactions to what goes on in their mind seems illusive (unless you could read their mind, but that would be an entirely different matter ;-)). There is also the case of gringos whose media does them the favor of thinking for themselves and has brainwashed them to an extent that they actually believe that they are doing the universe a favor by "being themselves". Would you then take seriously the U.S. media?

* the dynamics of such "boundary" delineated by certain "words" and "phrases" and our social, cultural and individual consciousness requires more study. Žižek mentioned in his „Weniger als Nichts“ that Jeremy Bentham pointed out that we can't dodge reality, even if we, personally, culturally and/or socially, would consciously know that we were "just" messing with our own devices. Think about the speculations in the stock market, the mythic and highly overrated belief in "self-wheeling 'progress'", the latest "freedom loving" wars spearheaded by the U.S. and British government, all those stockpiled nukes, ...

* language usage also has some societal, all-encompassing conscious articulations/mechanisms. Cuban people are known for liking music, dancing and constantly cracking jokes about absolutely everything. A Cuban comedian said that: "funerals turn out to be so bad, because people don't rehearse them" and some well-known actor voice over(ing) children comics real time got so carried away with his jestful impersonation that he was temporarily suspended/"punished" for jokingly using crass "bad words" ("¡Esto es de pinga queridos amiguitos!") while all children watched the only TV channel on a Sunday morning. The Cuban government worries about political jokes (using them as butt) and at times has expressed their concerns to have in no time jokes doing the rounds. Cuban people don't drink tea at 4 PM or go to pubs. There is a peculiarly Cuban mental state called "jodedera", "cuero". It is a form of not entirely relaxing mental exercise in which friends (instead of paying so-called psycho whatever wearing expensive shoes and with their characteristic mannerism) gather to interchange with one another quite vertical, possibly downright offensive comments framed as well-articulated, sophisticated jokes. Gringos don't have that mental state at all. They find it time-wasting, "disrespectful". They don't even understand when their own comedians go about their business, "not even while dressing as clowns": [Bloomberg Defends NYPD's Controversial Stop And Kiss Program](#). I found so unbelievably stupid that people could not understand that those were just jokes, that I showed that video to my own teenage students in the Bronx/NYC. They didn't find it funny at all. Their reactions were mostly: "if a 'pig' tries to kiss me ...", "what is even the point of those jokes?" Friends explained to me that people would not take anything relating to the NYPD as jokes, that such worrying fears have a grip on your CNS.

I wouldn't quite know how to draw value judgments from such differences. Some would say that Cuban people do that as a some sort of self-help psycho-therapy to protect themselves from the conscious requirements of living under an explicit and open dictatorship, but other point out that they have always been like that. Psycho professionals have noticed and studied that one of the "universal", "standard" characteristics of folks with dangerous mental illnesses is that they lack a sense of humor. I don't know how to extrapolate that to a people. While poking fun at their politicians, Cuban people use such skills to vertically make fun of themselves (which I find very healthy, but some other people find "stupid", "crazy") to an extent that even people who see the good in those "question-authority", political jokes find it offensive. Michael Moore's documentaries and the Onion skits very mildly go into such conscious awareness territories. Does that mean that they don't have enough material to poke fun at, e.g., the pretentious stupidity of their politicians and their "freedom-loving" bs? Are Cuban people (have they always been) so afraid of their government?

* Anthropologies on aboriginal people are best (far enough from our own bias), but impressions from multi-kulti people (born from foreign parents, who came as little children, as grown children or youth, as well as adults with and without professions) along with their characters (how well they are able to deal with their own "anger", ...) would also be useful.

* do all animals startle as a reaction to a sudden stimuli to their nervous system? Do we, human animals, in the pre-verbal stages, as well? Or, do startling reactions happen after a stable nervous state has been "learned"?

* at which point in the pre-verbal stages, a theory of mind (as essential basis for intersubjective communication) appears as part of an individual's conscious development in [social animals](#)?

* how emotions go through developmental phases in which they are encoded by society. What are the most common pre-verbal emotional reactions? Are "fear", "rab(b)ia" and "shame" the most primitive, basic, "standard" feelings?

* "rab(b)ia" is not an Italian, but Latin word, they use it (same word and meaning) in Spanish, Portuguese, as well

* Yes, "anger" like any other thoughts/feelings is intersubjective, but I don't think that any "English" (or any other language's) concepts have "characteristic cognitive scenarios". What is considered to be "bad" is not only very elastic all the way to its very self-serving edges, but it also depends greatly on "quality of implementation issues". "Psychologists" (not only in the U.S. but also other "'democratic' countries") "proudly" and "patriotically" offer their "expertise" to the government while participating in government-paid (by abusing tax payers) social control as well as harassment, persecution and torture of individuals, and that way of "justifying salaries", they say, is "legal". It is true that ideas and feelings can't be just floating on one's mind; so, they tend to be acted upon somehow, but most of the times that "cognitive scenario" described in your paper is safely channeled in abusive ways, which you did not mention. Think of the [Rosenhan](#) and [Zimbardo](#) social experiments and the constant "freedom-loving" wars.

* There are certain cultures: comedians, cartoonists and poets, which have a keen sense of the individual, cultural and societal aspects of consciousness. Take, for example, the beautifully enchanting lyrics of this song introspectively explaining "rabia" and how to work yourself out of it by foremost being very conscious of one's own emotional pangs: [Días y flores](#) (days and flowers) with [a translation of the lyrics and an analysis, interpretation of sorts](#). "Rabia" is intersubjectively dealt with in a "productive" way. His sweetheart, helped him through and, at the end of the day, had her cake and ate it, too. The same poet and singer, Silvio Rodríguez, has many other songs in which he introspectively approaches "feelings" through true to matters iterations with some teeth: [Oh, Melancolía, ¿Qué hago ahora?](#) (extrañarte fue también bello/missing you was also beautiful), [Sueño con Serpientes](#) ("dreaming of 'snakes'" (dealing with one's own spiritual "monsters")). In wondered to which extent the reason why Bob Dylan got a Nobel Prize was because he is some gringo and anyone who is able to appraise what I mean will understand my point.

* You mentioned that lists of feelings have been compiled throughout the ages by various scholars. In the Hegelian sense of "history", have the paradigms, notions and metaphors (PeNeM) of particular Zeitgeists been studied as they relate to their conscious engagements from Myths to their engineering and social technologies? Do you know of Anthropologies about how poets, comedians and cartoonists have artistically rendered "basic emotions" and people's take on their art?

RCL