



Components of Emotional Meaning: A sourcebook

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CHAPTER

General introduction: A paradigm for a multidisciplinary investigation of the meaning of emotion terms

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Abstract

The chapter introduces the eight parts that structure the book. The first part presents the various disciplinary perspectives and theoretical approaches to the meaning of emotion words that have guided the construction of the GRID instrument. The second part describes the instrument itself, the multicultural empirical data collection, and the overall emotion structure empirically identified. The third part investigates the meaning structure of each emotion component separately. The fourth, fifth and sixth parts contain reports of a multitude of studies using the GRID instrument to address issues from psychological, cultural-comparative, and linguistic perspectives, respectively. Part seven presents a number of pertinent case studies. In the final part we take stock and propose further developments of the GRID paradigm.

Keywords: [introduction](#), [emotions](#), [GRID instrument](#), [disciplinary perspectives](#)

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Understanding the meaning of emotion terms is a shared interest across the different disciplines that study emotions, such as psychology, linguistics, cultural anthropology, sociology, history, and multidisciplinary cross-cultural research.

It goes without saying that emotion words play a central role in psychological emotion research. Frequently emotion words are used directly as stimuli or indirectly as response scales. But even when no emotion words are used, the stimuli have often been selected on the basis of ratings by experts on emotion words. An implication of this widespread direct and indirect use of emotion terms is that the results of most psychological emotion research depend on the meaning of the terms used. This dependence is often overlooked. It is implicitly assumed that people react to the meaning of emotion words just as intended by the emotion researcher. However, this assumption is highly problematic because emotions can be defined by focusing on

different psychological phenomena, including well-observable facial and vocal expressions, overt bodily reactions, as well as internal changes in motivational orientation that might or might not translate into observable behavior.

Comparative research between cultures in psychology, sociology, and anthropology has shown many cultural and linguistic specificities in the respective emotion lexica. When they go unnoticed, these specificities may bias cross-cultural emotion research, especially as English is generally used as the source or reference language in these studies. Moreover, some theorists claim that emotions are culturally constructed phenomena that fundamentally differ between cultural groups. According to this constructivist account, emotion words represent the result of this conceptualization process and they play a key role in passing on these culturally specific constructions.

Several linguistic research traditions focus on what emotion terms mean. Some traditions decompose the meaning of words into basic semantic features, whereas others look at the figurative uses of those words, and still others analyze the lexico-grammatical contexts in which emotion terms appear, in an attempt to define their meaning by looking at the company the words keep. In all of these cases, linguists try to derive the meaning of emotion terms from an analysis of actual language use.

Understanding the meaning of emotion words is thus a cross-disciplinary concern. Unfortunately, there is little exchange between the different disciplines involved. While they deal with the same problems at a conceptual level, their theoretical and methodological approaches are often so diverse that a fruitful exchange seems impossible. The present book reports a project that aims to ↪ create an instrument (the “GRID”) to study the meaning of emotion terms jointly from psychological, cultural comparative, and linguistic perspectives, encouraging a genuine exchange between these different disciplines and the different theoretical approaches within them. The GRID project is presented here in eight parts.

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Part I. Disciplinary perspectives and theoretical approaches to the meaning of emotion words

The first part of the volume presents the disciplinary perspectives and the theoretical approaches in which the development of the instrument has been embedded. In the first chapter, the componential approach to emotion definition, represented by the Component Process Model (CPM, Scherer 2001, 2005a), is presented (Chapter 1). The CPM, which forms the basis for the development of the GRID instrument, postulates that emotions are processes triggered by goal-relevant events and consist of synchronized activity in several human subsystems (cognitive appraisal, action tendencies, bodily reactions, expression, and feeling) in order to prepare the person for rapid action. Although the CPM represents only one theoretical account of emotion processes in psychology, it lends itself to developing an instrument for multidisciplinary use. Its integrative orientation and its open, dynamic architecture make it suitable to address the issues raised by very different theoretical approaches in the relevant disciplines. The remaining chapters present systematic overviews of the major issues and theoretical models put forward from psychological (Chapter 2), cultural-comparative (Chapter 3), and linguistic perspectives (Chapter 4) in the study of emotion words.

Part II. The GRID instrument: Hypotheses, operationalization, data, and overall structure

The second part of the volume describes the construction, data collection, and overall results obtained with the new instrument. This instrument is called the GRID because it simply consists of a grid of 24 commonly used emotion terms and 142 features that refer to cognitive appraisals, bodily reactions, expressions, feelings, and action tendencies that potentially define emotion terms. The GRID instrument measures the perceived probability of each of these features to substantially contribute to the meaning of a given emotion word. The first chapter in this part (Chapter 5) describes and justifies the central hypotheses and related questions generated by the CPM and by other work in the psychological, cultural-comparative, and linguistic perspectives on emotion outlined in the first part of the volume. The chapter also provides an overview of the procedures that have been chosen for data analysis. The second chapter (Chapter 6) provides a detailed description of the extensive cross-cultural data collection with the GRID instrument. The final chapter in this part (Chapter 7) presents an overall analysis of the data with respect to the internal meaning structure of the emotion domain spanned by 24 major emotion terms, as measured by the GRID instrument, and examines the compatibility of this structure with componential, categorical, and dimensional approaches to the study of emotion.

Part III. Decomposing the meaning of emotion terms: Analysis by emotion component

p. 3 The third part of the book focuses on the separate emotion components. In the GRID instrument, each of the five emotion components has been operationalized by one or more major theories. The contribution of each of the individual emotion components to the meaning of ↵ emotion terms is investigated and discussed step by step in five chapters dealing with one component each: Feeling (Chapter 8), Bodily reaction (Chapter 9), Expression (Chapter 10), Action tendency (Chapter 11), and Appraisal (Chapter 12). A final chapter attempts to integrate the results across components (Chapter 13).

Part IV. Psychological perspectives

The fourth part of the book further reports different subanalyses of the GRID dataset from a psychological perspective. The replicability and relevance of the overall structure identified by the GRID instrument is investigated with different psychological (Chapters 14 and 15) and neuroscientific methods (Chapter 16). Moreover, this part demonstrates that the GRID instrument can be used to define the meaning of specific emotions (Chapter 17) and how it can contribute to the construction of theoretically well-grounded psychological assessment instruments in the emotion domain (Chapters 18 and 19).

Part V. Cultural-comparative perspectives

The fifth part of the book presents the use of the GRID instrument for cultural and linguistic comparative purposes. This part demonstrates how similarities and differences in the meaning of emotion terms between two or more cultural/linguistic groups can be identified with the GRID instrument (Chapters 20–22 and 24–26) and how the GRID instrument can be used to clarify the meaning of language-specific emotion terms (Chapter 23).

Part VI. Linguistic perspectives

In the sixth part, the GRID methodology is compared with approaches classically used in the linguistic analysis of the meaning of emotion words, namely the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach (Chapter 27), the Conceptual Metaphor approach (Chapter 28), and the Cognitive Corpus Linguistic approach (Chapters 29 and 30).

Part VII. Special topics

The seventh part of this volume consists of short, focused chapters on specific topics proposed by collaborators of the GRID project. These issues concern the challenge of applying the GRID instrument in non-Western groups with little experience in web-based testing (Chapter 32), the country-specific findings on the meaning structure of emotion terms (Chapters 31, 33–38 and 41), and the exploration of promising research avenues in which the GRID can be applied (Chapters 38, 40, 42, 43).

Part VIII. Taking stock and further development of the GRID paradigm

The last part of this book starts by presenting two shortened versions of the GRID instrument available for future use, namely the CoreGRID and the MiniGRID (Chapter 44). The CoreGRID captures the essential information in each of the emotion components, but with less than half of the features of the original instrument (68 items). The MiniGRID assesses the overall structure of the emotion domain with 16 features. Finally, the book ends (Chapter 45) with a discussion of the insights generated by the GRID study for the main disciplines involved in the study of emotion — words and their various theoretical approaches, as well as with a reflection on future developments of the paradigm, pertinent for emotion research in each of these fields and theoretical approaches.

In conclusion, the GRID paradigm, and the associated research program, presented in this book are intended for researchers and scholars who consistently rely on everyday emotion terms in their work. Emotions are elusive phenomena as evidenced by the lack of convergent agreement among emotion researchers on how to define the class as a whole and individual members of the class. At the same time, emotion words from everyday language are continuously used to refer to these phenomena both in daily discourse and in scientific work—largely because there are few alternatives to describe the fuzzy multicomponential episodes they refer to. This volume advocates the use of profiles of features selected on the basis of a domain specific approach—treating emotion in terms of synchronized changes in major components—as a promising framework to approach these elusive phenomena in a systematic way.