



Components of Emotional Meaning: A sourcebook

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CHAPTER

p. 490

39 Emotion term semantics in Russian–Ukrainian and Ukrainian–Russian bilinguals

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Abstract

This chapter investigates emotional meaning construction in two bilingual groups: native (L1) speakers of Russian and Ukrainian from the same region (city of Kyiv, Ukraine), from the same social group (university students), and with the same age, and comparable cultural exposure. Given these similarities and the typological affinity of the languages at stake, the expectation was that the meaning profiles of emotion terms obtained from both groups would exhibit no, or minimal differences. However, this expectation is only partially confirmed by the data, as distinct and pattern-like differences emerge between the samples in emotion regulation. Specifically, negative emotion terms (including opposing interpersonal terms such as *anger* or *hate*, and fear-related terms) score robustly higher on emotional control in the L1 Russian group than in the L1 Ukrainian group. The chapter concludes with a discussion of three possible *post hoc* interpretations of this pattern.

Keywords: [emotion term semantics](#), [bilinguals](#), [Russian](#), [Ukrainian](#), [emotion regulation](#)

Subject: [Developmental Psychology](#), [Social Psychology](#)

Collection: [Oxford Scholarship Online](#)

39.1 Introduction

Research on emotions in bilingual populations shows that the interaction of emotion concepts in the mental lexicon of bilinguals can lead to the consolidation of comparable concepts in the two languages, so that the words referring to those concepts become closer in meaning (e.g., Pavlenko, 2005, 2008 for overviews). In this chapter, we aim to verify this contention, focusing on the meaning profiles of emotion terms in two bilingual groups: native speakers (henceforth L1) of Russian and Ukrainian from the same region (city of Kyiv, Ukraine). Given both the evidence cited above and the specific characteristics of our samples, the expectation is that the meaning profiles of emotion terms would exhibit none, or minimal and non-systematic differences between the two bilingual groups.

On the cultural side, the two target groups are indeed very similar: 166 L1 Russian (102 females; mean age, 23.7) and 147 L1 Ukrainian speakers (89 females; mean age, 22.3) come from the same social group (university students), are of the same age (means 22.3 and 23.7, respectively), and have the same culture exposure (all gaining maturity after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and having lived in Ukraine for all their lives)². A more general reason to expect a high between-group homogeneity is that, although the distribution of L1 Ukrainian and L1 Russian speakers in Ukraine is roughly the same (Khmel'ko, 2004, cf. also the latest all-Ukrainian census <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/>), about two thirds of the Ukrainian population identify themselves as culturally Ukrainian only (62.9%), and 22% more respondents report to have a “mixed” type of cultural self-identity (Khmel'ko, 2004). This puts the percentage of people who identify themselves as culturally “Russian only” to a scarce 10% (see Table SM 1³). Agreeably, many culture scholars argue that the interaction of languages and cultures within the Ukrainian society is a gradual ↴ consolidation of closely-related languages and cultures, and that the ethnic differences are neither of a fundamental, nor of a confrontational character (e.g., Lanovenko et al., 1998; Masenko, 2004).

Two more linguistic factors contribute to the minimization of the differences between the two groups. Firstly, the languages at stake are typologically very close, as both belong to the same language subfamily (Eastern-Slavic languages) within a broader family of the Slavic languages. Secondly, 21 out of 26 of Russian–Ukrainian emotion word pairs included in the analyses are cognate words—that is, words that have the same etymological origin (see Table 39.1). Although the common origin of words alone does not guarantee a higher similarity in the synchronic meanings of the words (cf. Boster, 2005), the fact that these cognates are simultaneously the *best matches* of the corresponding English terms (the pre-requisite for inclusion into the GRID analyses), suggests a high semantic similarity of the emotion words at stake.

Table 39.1 Russian and Ukrainian words used in GRID

#	English	Russian	Ukrainian	#	English	Russian	Ukrainian
1	contempt	prezrenie	prezyrstvo	14	pleasure	udovol'stvie	nasoloda
2	disgust	otvraschenie	vidraza	15	pride	gordost'	gordist'
3	anger	zlost'	zlist'	16	happiness	schast'ye	schastya
4	irritation	razdrazhenie	rozdratuvannya	17	contentment	udovletvorennost'	zadovolennya
5	hate	nenavist'	nenavyst'	18	love	lubov'	lubov
6	jealousy	revnost'	revnoschi	19	disappointment	dosada	shkoda
7	fear	strah	strah	20	compassion	sochuvstvie	spivchuttya
8	anxiety	trevoga	tryvoga	21	guilt	vina	provyna
9	stress	stress	stres	22	shame	styd	sorom
10	despair	otchayanie	vidchaj	23	sadness	grust'	smutok
11	surprise	udivlenie	podyv	24	being hurt	obida	obraza
12	interest	interes	interest	25	envy	zavist'	zazdrist'
13	joy	radost'	radist'	26	justified anger	gnev	gniv

Note: for better readability, Russian and the Ukrainian emotion terms are transliterated from Cyrillic into Latin letters. In **bold** are the non-cognate words.

The only parameter that sets our two groups apart is the fact that the participants come from two different “student subcultures” determined by differences in educational styles at the two universities where the participants were recruited. Specifically, the L1 Ukrainian group are students of the National University “Kyiv-Mohyla academy,” the first university in Ukraine to adopt, back in 1992, the Western system and style of education, including the system of earning credits, free choice of the disciplines to be studied, more individual student work, and overall more emphasis on individual initiative, responsibility, and critical thinking. In addition, the Kyiv-Mohyla academy has been, ever since 1992, an authentically Ukrainian university, promoting patriotism and national pride, as well as freedom of expression and democracy in the classroom. In contrast, the L1 Russian group was recruited from students of Russian philology at Kyiv National Taras Shevchenko University, a most reputed, old, and conservative university in the country. This educational institution relies on more formalistic principles of education promoting little personal choice (with almost all academic courses being obligatory for both attendance and the taking of exams), and with an overall more authoritative style of teaching that encourages the students to follow the existing academic regulations, and where emotional control, obedience, and recognition of academic hierarchy are promoted.

p. 492

39.2 Results

Two types of findings confirm our expectation of little between-group variation in L1 Russian and L1 Ukrainian bilinguals. Firstly, the overall correlation of Russian and Ukrainian samples is 0.88, which clearly points to a high between-group similarity. Secondly, the same pattern is suggested by the profile correlations at the term level: the correlations of 26 Russian and Ukrainian emotion terms are considerably high and range from 0.76 to 0.93 (see Table SM 2). The only exception is disappointment words: Russian *dosada* (“disappointment/frustration/vexation”) and Ukrainian *shkoda* (“upset/regret/pity”) correlate at 0.69, but this exception is more of a translation issue than a case of a genuine semantic divergence. Russian *dosada* is defined in reputed dictionaries as “a feeling of irritation, dissatisfaction that arises from a mishap or an insult” (Ozhegov, 1990; translation by the first author) and can be regarded as an anger word in Russian (Ogarkova, Soriano, & Lehr, 2012). At the same time, *shkoda* is defined as “a feeling of frustration/disappointment about having lost something,” and is thus a disappointment/pity word.

However, computing the correlations of the 142 GRID emotion features across the 26 emotion terms reveals 27 features that correlate below 0.7, and thus are clearly deviant in meaning across the samples (see Table 39.2). These features pertain to all emotion components (except Feeling), but are unevenly spread across the GRID feature inventory. For example, deviant features in the Appraisal component constitute 22.5% of the total number of features in this component, Bodily reaction features are deviant in 16.6% of cases, 26.9% of the emotional Expression features correlate very low across the samples. The main regularity, however, is that all emotion regulation features (100%) correlate below 0.7, and the correlations get indeed very small, ranging from 0.13 on “showed the emotion less than s/he felt it” to maximally 0.53 on “showed the emotion more than s/he felt it.” In summary, these findings suggest a consistent, pattern-like deviation in *emotion regulation* as part of the meaning of Russian and Ukrainian emotion terms as rated by the two bilingual student groups.

p. 493

Table 39.2 Deviant (C <0.7) features across the 26 emotion terms in L1 Russian and L1 Ukrainian samples

Component	Feature	C	%
Appraisal	familiar event	0.38	22.5
	unpredictable event	0.47	
	caused by chance	0.68	
	caused intentionally	0.39	
	consequences predictable	0.55	
	consequences negative for somebody else	0.69	
	required an immediate response	0.38	
Bodily reaction	felt weak limbs	0.66	16.6
	heartbeat slowing down	0.54	
	breathing slowing down	0.68	
Expression	did not show any changes in face	0.42	26.9
	did not show any changes in gestures	0.68	
	decreased the volume of voice	0.53	
	produced a short utterance	0.63	
	produced a long utterance	0.65	
	changed the melody of her or his speech	0.50	
	did not show any changes in vocal expression	0.62	
Action tendency	wanted to be in control of the situation	0.26	15.0
	wanted to hand over the initiative to someone else	0.69	
	lacked the motivation to do anything	0.66	
	wanted to be hurt as little as possible	0.55	
	wanted to tackle the situation	0.13	
	experienced the emotional state for a long time	0.46	
Regulation	tried to control the intensity of the emotional feeling	0.44	100
	showed the emotion to others more than s/he felt it	0.53	
	showed the emotion to other less than s/he felt it	0.13	
	hid the emotion from others by smiling	0.43	

Note: only features with correlations (C) below 0.7 are listed. %, the percentage of low-correlating features in the respective emotion component.

To investigate the nature of variation on emotional regulation between the two sets of words, a Principal Component Analysis on the four regulation features across the Russian and Ukrainian samples has been conducted. The results clearly point at one bipolar factor: *controlling expression* (“tried to control the intensity of the emotion,” “showed the emotion less than s/he felt it,” “hid the emotion by a smile”, positive pole) versus *enhancing expression* (“showed the emotion more than s/he felt it”, negative pole). Comparing the regulation scores of Russian and Ukrainian terms on this factor suggests that the Russian labels for negative emotions score on average higher on the control side (see Table 39.3). Specifically, both the opposing interpersonal terms (*hate, being hurt, irritation, disappointment, jealousy*) and fear-related terms (*shame, despair, fear*) terms score much higher on regulation in Russian. Taken together, these findings suggest two display rules: inhibiting an outright manifestation of socially disruptive emotions (e.g., *hate*) and not showing weakness (e.g., *fear*), both of which appear to be more salient in the meaning profiles of Russian negative emotion terms as compared to the corresponding Ukrainian ones.

Table 39.3 Regulation scores of Russian and Ukrainian emotion terms

Word	Ru	Ukr	Dif	Word	Ru	Ukr	Dif
jealousy	1.91	-0.49	2.40	happiness	-1.17	-1.80	0.63
fear	1.36	-0.72	2.07	contempt	0.86	0.26	0.61
disappointment	1.60	-0.30	1.91	anxiety	0.87	0.37	0.50
irritation	1.12	-0.68	1.80	pleasure	-0.69	-1.03	0.34
being hurt	0.93	-0.87	1.79	interest	0.29	-0.03	0.33
despair	0.58	-0.97	1.55	love	0.33	0.38	-0.05
hate	1.47	0.17	1.30	surprise	0.20	0.43	-0.23
shame	2.00	0.92	1.08	compassion	-1.91	-1.66	-0.25
anger	-1.06	-2.02	0.96	sadness	-0.11	0.27	-0.38
contentment	0.64	-0.24	0.89	guilt	0.11	0.80	-0.69
stress	0.60	-0.28	0.88	joy	-1.53	-0.65	-0.88
pride	-0.17	-1.03	0.86	disgust	-0.03	0.96	-0.99

Note: Dif, difference in the regulation scores of Russian and Ukrainian emotion terms; Ru, Russian; Ukr, Ukrainian. For better readability, English translations of Russian and Ukrainian words are used.

39.3 Discussion

The hypothesis tested in this study—on the minimal and unsystematic divergences in how L1 Russian and L1 Ukrainian speakers would rate the emotional terms in their native languages—has only been partially confirmed by our analyses, and only with regard to the overall similarity between the samples and the profile correlations at the term level. The correlations at the feature level reveal a different picture, namely, systematic differences emerge regarding the ways of regulating emotions labeled by several negative emotion words in the two languages. The very pattern of these feature-based deviations suggests that the negative emotion terms (opposing interpersonal terms and fear-related terms) score higher on the control side in the L1 Russian group than in L1 Ukrainian group.

This latter finding can have three *post hoc* interpretations, each illustrating the usefulness of the GRID approach for hypothesis generation and deserving further exploration in future studies. Firstly, the systematic differences in the emotion regulation features can relate to the between-group differences at the *sub-cultural level*. Specifically, the observed divergence can be hypothesized to be a result of a more authoritative and hierarchical academic environment of the L1 Russian group (which encourages repression of negative emotions among students), and the more democratic environment of the L1 Ukrainian group (where freedom of (emotional) expression is being promoted). Testing this hypothesis requires running additional GRID studies in non-student groups, to rule out the possibility that larger cultural differences are at stake.

Secondly, a possibility stands that our findings highlight the existence of *biculturalism* in contemporary Ukraine, where L1 Ukrainian speakers exhibit a closer resemblance to Ukrainian culture, whereas L1 Russian speakers have a more pronounced bias to Russian culture. Verification of this hypothesis requires conducting additional GRID studies in a monolingual Russian group from Russia and in a group of monolingual Ukrainians from Ukraine, with the aim of seeing if monolingual samples would exhibit the same (or more pronounced) divergence with respect to the emotional regulation features. Should this expectation be confirmed, a theoretical challenge would be to interpret the findings. For socially disruptive emotion words (but not for the fear-related ones), the interpretation can elaborate along the individualism/collectivism axis of cultural variation, which suggests more regulatory control over negative other-directed emotions like anger in collectivistic societies (cf. Hofstede, 2001). Although no research has directly compared Russian and Ukrainian populations, previous studies involving a *tertium comparationis*—a Western, typically an Anglo-Saxon society—showed that Russians are more collectivistic than Ukrainians. For instance, several studies show that while Russians remain more collectivistic than British (Tower et al., 1997) and Americans (Realo & Allik, 1999), Ukrainian females display a more pronounced tendency for individualism than American women (Shafiro et al., 2003).

The third hypothesis which our finding generates relates to the processes in the mental lexicons of bilinguals. Here, the possibility is that, rather than dealing with the process of *concept consolidation*, we are observing the process of emotion *concept restructuring* (Pavlenko, 2008: 154). On this hypothesis, the meanings of Russian and Ukrainian emotion words (existing in parallel in the mental lexicon of bilingual speakers) have, under the influence of the principle of language and cognitive economy, gone apart to cover a wider spectrum of the emotion domain. As a result of this differentiation in meaning, one set of negative emotion words (Russian) has come to denote emotional experiences that imply more regulatory effort in their experiencers, whereas another set of words (Ukrainian) has come to embrace the words of roughly the same meaning but diverging from the former set in that they do not imply a heightened emotional control. Testing this hypothesis would require complementary studies with Russian and Ukrainian monolingual samples and two additional studies where Russian and Ukrainian bilinguals rate the emotion words from their second language (L2). The hypothesis would be confirmed if two conditions are simultaneously true: (1) the meaning profiles of emotion words obtained from monolingual speakers do not show a systematic divergence on the emotion regulation, and (2) all L2 ratings confirm the findings of the present study—that is, when, regardless of whether the emotion words are from bilinguals' L1 or L2, Russian negative emotion words diverge from their Ukrainian cognates on emotion regulation. Should confirmatory evidence be obtained for this hypothesis, the challenge would nevertheless remain to explain the mechanisms under which specifically Russian, but not Ukrainian negative emotion words have acquired the connotations of an enhanced emotional control.

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Notes

- 1 Correspondence concerning this chapter should be addressed to Anna Ogarkova, Swiss Center for the Affective Sciences, 7 Rue des Battoirs, CH-1205, Geneva, Switzerland, e-mail: Anna.Ogarkova@unige.ch
- 2 These numbers include the participants who rated the standard set of 24 GRID words, and another group who rated an extra set. In addition to the 24 standard GRID words, two more were added to the questionnaire: “envy” (Russian *zavist*’ and Ukraine *zazdrist*’) and “justified anger” (Russian *gnev* and Ukraine *gniv*).
- 3 All supplementary materials (SM) are available at the GRID website: <http://www.affective-sciences.org/GRID>. See Appendix 1 (“Availability”) for further details.