MULTILINGUALISM IN ANCIENT CONTEXTS

Perspectives from
Ancient Near Eastern
and Early Christian
Contexts

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LANGUAGES OF EMOTION

Some Remarks on the Philosophy and History of Emotion

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I have to begin with two confessions. First of all, I have to confess that I stole the title of my presentation from the name of a research group working at the Free University of Berlin from 2007–2014. This research group was called *Languages of Emotion* because of its highly interdisciplinary orientation.¹ This spectrum ranged from neuroimaging – it even had its own MRI scanner – to cultural studies. In other words, it encountered different scholarly languages and methods in its joint research into emotions. I was always quite fond of their title and that is why it came to mind while I was writing this chapter. In the following, it takes on a somewhat different, perhaps even more appropriate meaning – I will literally discuss the relationship between languages and emotion.

This brings me to the subject of my second confession. I was initially skeptical when Angelika Berlejung asked me about whether I could picture contributing to this volume. Linguistics in general, sociolinguistics and multilingualism research in particular, had not been amongst my fields of research to date. I am also not an expert in ancient studies. What follows is presented to you by an amateur, or to put it more nicely, a novice in matters of multilingualism. That I still agreed is because of a gap in emotion research: the relationship between language and emotion is undertheorised in recent theory of emotion. So, my following considerations are divided into three steps: First, I would like to briefly explain the extent to which the entanglement of multilingualism and emotion research seems promising for me. Then I would like to present one study in this area especially. Finally, with this in mind, I would like to develop some constructive proposals on the philosophy and the history of emotions.

14.1 SETTING A BLIND DATE

When approaching multilingualism research from the perspective of more recent debates around emotions, two results from the history of research becomes apparent. On the one hand, it is striking that both research paradigms established themselves at around the same time and then take a similar course. They emerge around the late 1980s and reach their first climax around the turn of the millennium, only to expand in thematic and methodological terms since then. On the other hand, it is remarkable that both fields of research have largely been independent of each other so far.

I would like to briefly explain this observation with a few highlights from the history of research. If one follows the reports of multilingualism research,² its discovery owes

1 Cf. Freie Universität Berlin, *Languages of Emotion*. Available at: <http://www.loe.fu-berlin.de/> (Accessed 10 August 2020).

2 Cf. Marilyn Martin-Jones, Adrian Blackledge & Angela Creese, “Introduction: A sociolinguistics of multilingualism for our times”, in *The Routledge Handbook of Multilingualism* (London/

its existence to linguistic self-criticism. This primarily concerns the preconditions of homogeneous language systems tied to national, ethnic, or social groups. By the 1990s, the dynamic effects of globalisation and migration became apparent. This caused socio-political change and the reception of sociological and ethnological perspectives, in particular poststructuralist and postcolonialist approaches. In turn, there was an increasing deconstruction of essentialist concepts including their implicit normativity. Instead, the high degree of diversity of modern societies as a context for language formation and practice, and the construction or negotiation of the mediated identities is given account for. In the central concept or perhaps better the heuristic category of ‘translanguaging’,³ the turning away from the precondition of languages as fixed and delimited entities becomes particularly clear.

The emotional turn around the same time at the end of the last century has completely different causes. These heterogeneous initial conditions are probably one reason for the extensive and mutual ignorance of both research paradigms. A leading discipline for the renaissance of emotions was philosophy. The main 20th-century currents were characterised by diverse tendencies from logical positivism to pragmatism. There was almost an emotional frigidity, especially in the field of ethics, but the role of emotions in practice and knowledge was completely reassessed under the programmatic title of a ‘philosophy of emotions.’⁴ This revision of many certainties of the 20th century then received a tailwind from analogous developments in the neurosciences and, above all, from a psychology that finally freed itself from the ideological shackles of Behaviourism. Since the turn of the millennium, this new research interest has been complemented by the social and cultural sciences discovering emotions for themselves. An independent branch of social history has literally developed under the title ‘History of Emotions.’⁵

Apart from their synchronicity, what both research directions have in common is that their innovative approaches open new methodological horizons and a virtually endless field of research. At first glance, this may seem contradictory to the idea of combining both perspectives. Nevertheless, in the following I would like to precisely propose this

New York: Routledge, 2012), 1-26; Marilyn Martin-Jones & Martin Deirdre, “Introduction”, in *Researching Multilingualism: Critical and ethnographic perspectives* (London/New York: Routledge, 2017), 1-27.

- 3 Ofelia García, *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 45.
- 4 Cf. Sabine A. Döring, ed. *Philosophie der Gefühle*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 1907 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009); Peter Goldie, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 5 Cf. Bettina Hitzer, “Emotionsgeschichte – Ein Anfang mit Folgen”, in *H-Soz-Kult* 23 November 2011, 1-80. See also Max-Planck-Institut, *Geschichte der Gefühle*. Available at: <https://www.mpib-berlin.mpg.de/de/forschung/geschichte-der-gefuehle>.

experiment. I will begin with the possible benefits expanding multilingualism research with the theory of emotions. It seems to promise insights, first in methodological terms, then in terms of understanding identity, and finally anthropological aspects.

First, it has already been mentioned that multilingualism research concerns modernity. Its discovery is connected with the effects of globalisation and the high degree of diversity of modern societies as a context for language formation and negotiation of identities. However, the *topos* of the socio-political changes of late modernity deserves a critical examination. This shows that many features that are supposedly characteristic of late or postmodernism, such as diversity and multilingualism, are by no means unknown of other epochs such as antiquity, but also of the European Enlightenment. Now – as this volume shows – a diachronic expansion of language research is by no means a unique selling point of emotion theory. But, the entanglement of empirical research approaches with the historical method has been tried and tested for almost two decades in the field of ‘History of Emotions’. *Second*, concerning the understanding of identity: If one recalls the theoretical dimensions of identity from modern rationalism to social psychology, the use of the concept of identity in many contributions to multilingualism research seems rather schematic and one-dimensional. Apart from the permanent poststructuralist credo that identities must be deconstructed in principle and dissolved into discourse processes and negotiation practices, identity remains an abstract schema that can be applied arbitrarily to persons, social groups, or language systems. However, since every act and every resource already assumes at least one logical position, it sometimes happens to one like the fable’s hare who always finds the tortoise at the finish line. Therefore, my thesis is: taking account of emotions can contribute to making the identity scheme more concrete. *Finally*, the consideration of emotions also could be an extension from an anthropological point of view. The implicit anthropology of sociolinguistics usually works with a dual concept, action on the one hand, cognition on the other. Emotional theory attempts to show that emotions constitute a third, essential and mediating dimension of the human.

Regarding all of this, one of the few exceptions to the rule of research into emotions and multilingualism being conducted exclusively is a good example. Aneta Pavlenko, who has published regularly on this topic since 2004, should be mentioned first.⁶ Together with several other researchers, she stands for a slow opening of multilingualism research to emotional themes. However, she confirms the fundamental desideratum: “Emotions constitute an intrinsic part of our language attitudes and linguistic

6 Cf. first and foremost Aneta Pavlenko, *Emotions and Multilingualism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Aneta Pavlenko, ed. *Bilingual Minds. Emotional Experience, Expression and Representation*, Bilingual Education and Bilingualism 65 (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006).

interaction and yet they have remained under-researched and undertheorized in the field of multilingualism.”⁷ Pavlenko’s approach to the topic of emotion can be described as psychology of learning. The insight into “cross-linguistic differences in languages of emotions” (ibid. 457) is decisive both directly on the level of *emotion words* or *concepts* and indirectly through affective linguistic conditioning. Pavlenko summarises these as *language embodiment* or *language emotionality*. Emotions play an important role in *language choice* and *code-switching*, especially in multilingual interaction and performance.

In the next section, I would like to show that, on the other hand, research into language and multilingualism is an enrichment for emotion research as well.

14.2 ANNA WIERZBICKA’S CONTRIBUTION

The research group led by Pavlenko points out large gaps, especially regarding limited data set. In addition, in my opinion, an underrepresentation of theory of emotion is a further issue, since Pavlenko limits herself to a few and eclectically received traditions. In contrast, the groundbreaking studies presented by the Polish linguist Anna Wierzbicka encounter a completely different level of reflection. She has been teaching in Australia since 1972 and published her studies in the 1999 book *Emotions across Languages and Cultures*.⁸ As already suggested by the subtitle of the book, *Diversity and Universals*, Wierzbicka pursues a double, almost contradictory aim. It is precisely this sovereignty with which she is unimpressed by the allegedly alternative between essentialism and culturalism that makes her study so attractive. On the one hand, she defends the thesis of universal basic concepts against dogmatic relativism, which is sufficient in its deconstructivist zeal; on the other hand, she herself undauntedly deconstructs the very greatest certainties of psychology of emotions. That this synthesis of consistent culturalism and universalism is so convincing is primarily due to the fact that it is carried out in the concrete case of emotions or – as Clifford Geertz puts it – ‘experience near’.

I will briefly outline Wierzbicka’s deconstruction of psychological certainties. Her linguistic analyses focus on the normative implications of psychology today. Two basic assumptions in particular are shaken by bi- and crosslingual investigations. The *first* is the self-evident prerequisite of the Anglo-Saxon scientific language, and above all its basic concept of emotion. *Second*, it deals with the theory of basic emotions and their

7 Aneta Pavlenko, “Multilingualism and Emotions”, in *The Routledge Handbook of Multilingualism*, ed. Marilyn Martin-Jones (London/New York: Routledge 2012), 454.

8 Anna Wierzbicka, *Emotions across Languages and Cultures: Diversity and Universals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

correlative facial expressions prominently advocated by the American psychologist Paul Ekman. As Wierzbicka explains, in both cases there is an ethnocentric bias that notoriously overlooks the fundamental cultural relativity of our emotional life and its language-mediated diversity. Because I will be briefly discussing the problem of the concept of emotion in the next section, here I will only give one example of a supposedly basic emotion. For example, by comparing it with semantically related concepts in the Polish language, Wierzbicka shows that the anger most often mentioned in the corresponding research is highly culture-specific and closely connected with corresponding cultural patterns such as emotional control and domination. Therefore, Wierzbicka calls for a fundamental and methodical inclusion of language in emotion research against the empirical zeitgeist.

“For” – her simple and convincing statement – “language stands between the researchers and the ‘emotions’ that they wish to investigate and it cannot be ignored” (27). The interpretation and formation of our vivid experience takes place in the network of languages. They record a wide range of expression, not only with emotional words, but also in grammar and phraseology. These have their equivalents in non-verbal forms of expression. I can only hint at this here, but this would cast a completely new light on many systematic problems that still cause great uncertainty not only in psychology of emotion but also in interdisciplinary theory of emotion. For instance, it could deliver a simple as well as convincing explanation for the fact that it is impossible to find a generally accepted definition of the so-called basic emotions until today. Another example could be the question of the uniformity of emotional life discussed in philosophy of emotions: Bodily feelings, intentional emotions, moods – is the fact that some scholars do count them to the same species of mental life, some don’t a matter of cultural or scientific background?

I now turn to the universalism thesis and once again quote Wierzbicka: “The idea that there may be an infinite variety of ‘emotion’ categories operating across cultures is not incompatible with the view that there may also be some universal patterns of emotional organization” (28). However, how can such universals be justified in light of the principle of language mediation and thus cultural relativity? The answer consists in the fact that the emotion words themselves do not represent crosslinguistic and cross-cultural concepts, but rather some components that must be presupposed for their methodically controlled and cross-cultural description. This is supported by a methodological procedure developed by Anna Wierzbicka and her colleagues over the years, namely ‘The Natural Semantic Metalanguage’ (NSM).⁹ Universal aspects of emotionality can be derived in and from the elements of NSM, which includes the

9 Griffith University, *Natural Semantic Metalanguage*. Available at: <https://intranet.secure.griffith.edu.au/schools-departments/natural-semantic-metalanguage> (Accessed 10 August 2020).

mental category of feeling. According to this, qualitatively different feelings cannot be defined, but can be described and differentiated by specifying a prototypical situation. Wierzbicka's exemplary case studies show that this procedure has a great deal of potential, both regarding cross-cultural structural characteristics and, above all, with regard to culturally specific differences. Here, too, many constructive bridges could be built to the current emotional debate and its still incomplete methodology. Think, for example, of the discussion about the phenomenality of emotions, their narrative character, or the analysis of their complex intentionality.

14.3 TRANSLANGUAGING EMOTIONS

I now come to my final reflection, which sketches a possible research concept. Beforehand, however, I would like to make a critical remark, which can be regarded as a reflexive self-application of Wierzbicka's theory. I will leave the assessment of the NSM project to the scholarly linguistic discourse, although there remains much to be said about from philosophy's perspective. I had already mentioned that Wierzbicka considers the basic psychological concept of emotion itself to be highly ethnocentric. In the supposedly neutral basic concept, many premises from Anglo-Saxon culture and empirical psychology are implemented, such as episodic character or reactivity. It should only be mentioned in passing that this thesis – without being known as such – has now been confirmed by an impressive study by Thomas Dixon, the historian of psychology. Dixon can effectively refer to “The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category”.¹⁰ In contrast, Wierzbicka views the concept of feeling as a universal basic concept. I claim that this can also be questioned in terms of linguistic history. In the German language, at least, the concept of feeling was literally ‘invented’ in the middle of the 18th century, as Jutta Stalfort has impressively documented.¹¹ And the invention can only be understood in the network of scientific *lingua franca* and the other languages of the European Enlightenment. This makes concrete the necessity of extending Wierzbicka's linguistic theory of emotion through the insights of research into multilingualism. Only in the field of tension between *tactus*, *sentiment* and *sense*, on the one hand, and competition with the concept of *Empfindung* (*impression*) on the other, does the meaning of the concept of *Gefühl* (feeling) emerge in the developing language of science, but it still carries the inner contradictions of this process to this day.¹² Therefore, the universality of the emotional category *feeling* must be questioned and transferred to the history of emotion.

10 Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

11 Jutta Stalfort, *Die Erfindung der Gefühle: Eine Studie über den historischen Wandel menschlicher Emotionalität (1750–1850)*, Histoire 41 (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013).

12 Cf. Roderich Barth, “Johann Nicolaus Tetens über das Gefühl”, in *Religion und Aufklärung*.

In her study, Anna Wierzbicka has documented the linguistic and cultural imprinting of our emotional identity with diachronic investigations and deep literary-historical drillings and is therefore considered a pioneer in the history of emotions. An entire chapter, for example, is dedicated to German *Angst*, which she regards as a legacy of Luther.¹³ The linguistic and cultural formation of our emotional self and even more the shaping of the collective emotionality of a language are in any case conceived by it as processes of interaction that change in principle and thus cannot be completed. I would like to conclude my considerations and at the same time outline a possible research project with the following thesis: The approach developed by Wierzbicka of an entanglement of emotional history and linguistics profits from a methodical inclusion of multilingualism. In other words: Multilingualism in particular is a central factor in the formation and transformation of emotional cultures in the past and present. I would like to briefly illustrate this with a specific topic at the centre of my research in the field of religion and emotion.

In a small study from 1920,¹⁴ the church historian Adolf von Harnack succinctly summarised the invention of an emotional cultural pattern, its dialectical history and finally its demise: we are talking about humility, above all as a virtue or acquired attitude. Nevertheless, this sense of humility is usually closely connected with feelings. It is undisputed that humility initially represents an innovation in conceptual history under the Greek term *tapeinophrosyne*. This term, prominently used by the apostle Paul, is not found as such in Pagan Greek sources, and especially is completely unknown as a virtue in Greek ethics. The adjective *tapeinos*, on the other hand, has an exclusively negative connotation. The research agrees that the genesis of this concept has its origin in the apostle's interpretation of Jesus.¹⁵ Corresponding traces can also be found in the tradition of Jesus and both refer to a complex transcoding in wisdom literature. Altogether this has to be seen as *translanguaging* between Aramaic, Hebrew, and Koiné. The new concept then had an astonishing career within a short period of time: with Origen, about 180 years later, humility is already not only a Christian cardinal virtue, but almost the root of all virtue in general. The rest of the story is too long to be told here, but seen from today's perspective, it is split into good and bad humility, and finally into the almost complete silencing of this guiding Christian concept under the auspices of a modern culture of autonomy and human dignity.

Akten des Ersten Internationalen Kongresses zur Erforschung der Aufklärungstheologie, Colloquia historica et theologica 2, eds. Albrecht Beutel & Martha Nooke (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 461-77.

13 Wierzbicka, *Emotions across Languages and Cultures*, 123-67.

14 Adolf von Harnack, "Sanftmut, Huld und Demut' in der alten Kirche", in *Festgabe für Dr. Julius Kaftan zu seinem 70. Geburtstage*, ed. Theodor Haering (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1920), 113-29.

15 Eve-Marie Becker, *Der Begriff der Demut bei Paulus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

These transformation processes are highly complex and at any rate can only be understood under the conditions of multilingualism, not only at the beginning but also, for example, in Luther's interpretation of the *Magnificat* or David Hume's *Treatise on Human Affections*.¹⁶

Moreover, if one looks beyond the superficial lexical findings, there are also indications of a certain correctness to Wierzbicka's universal basic structures, which underlie the processes of cultural diversification and interpretation. Despite the guiding patterns of *megalopsychia* (pride) and *timē* (honour), Greek classicism knows concepts of a status reversal analogous to humility, as the prominent motif of *hybris* makes clear. Finally, a gesture of humility, namely Willy Brandt kneeling in Warsaw, is regarded as a successful symbol of political self-portrayal even by many today.

I conclude that this exemplary case of application can hopefully make it clear that both multilingualism research and emotion research can mutually benefit each other. Of course, the interdisciplinarity required in this context represents a major methodological challenge. I hope that the methodological enrichment will generate a hermeneutic value that exceeds the effort. From the point of view of religious theory, this research approach is of particular interest because in times of increasing diversity and the associated dissolution of homogeneous institutions, it makes low-threshold points of contact for religious interpretations identifiable.

16 Cf. more generally: Roderich Barth, "The Rationality of Humility", in *EJPR*, 6 (2014), 101-16. Cf. also Roderich Barth & Christopher Zarnow, eds. *Theologie der Gefühle* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).