



## **THE SEMANTICS OF EMOTION WORDS ACROSS CULTURES: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE**

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### **Abstract:**

Emotions are universal, yet their linguistic representation differs across cultures. This paper explores how emotion words are categorized in different languages, highlighting both universal structures and cultural variations. Through an analysis of existing literature, this study examines how emotions are perceived, categorized, and influenced by linguistic relativity. The research finds that while emotions are broadly classified along dimensions of valence, arousal, and dominance, cultural norms shape their interpretation and expression. These findings have implications for cross-cultural communication, psychology, and artificial intelligence.

**Keywords:** Emotion semantics, cultural variation, linguistic relativity, cross-linguistic study, valence, arousal, dominance.

### **Introduction**

Emotions play a crucial role in human interaction, influencing behavior, cognition, and communication. However, the way people perceive and express emotions is deeply shaped by language and culture. Some emotional experiences appear universal, while others are linguistically and culturally specific. The relationship between language and emotion has been a key area of interest in psychology and linguistics, particularly in understanding whether emotions are biologically universal or culturally constructed [Ekman, 1992; Wierzbicka, 1999]. This study examines how different cultures structure their emotional



lexicons, focusing on the universal principles and culture-specific variations in emotion semantics. It explores three key aspects: the universal dimensions of emotion categorization, the cultural influences on emotion perception, the role of linguistic relativity in shaping emotional understanding.

### **Literature Review**

Emotions are fundamental to human experience, yet their perception, expression, and categorization vary across cultures and languages. While some researchers argue for a universal structure in emotional experiences, others emphasize the role of cultural and linguistic diversity in shaping how emotions are understood and expressed. The relationship between language and emotion has been widely studied, focusing on whether emotions are biologically hardwired or socially constructed through cultural and linguistic frameworks. As Jackson [2019] found that emotion words in 2,474 languages are organized around valence and arousal, indicating a common framework despite linguistic differences. Ekman [1992] identified six basic emotions with universally recognized facial expressions, though cultural display rules affect how they are expressed [Russell, 1994]. Whorf [1956] and Majid [2012] provided evidence that language influences the categorization and recall of emotions, while Wierzbicka [1999] demonstrated that some emotions—such as the Japanese *amae* or German *Schadenfreude*—have no direct equivalents in other languages. Pavlenko [2005] showed that bilingual speakers experience emotions differently depending on the language used.

### **Methodology**

Cultural and language differences play a role in how basketball players recognize and understand emotions. Given that language shapes thought and emotion categorization [Whorf, 1956; Majid, 2012], this research explores whether athletes from different linguistic communities interpret and express emotions differently in a competitive sports environment. A total of 32 basketball players participated in this study, representing Uzbek, Russian, American, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Japanese, and Filipino nationalities. Participants were between 18 and 30 years old, with at least two years of basketball experience. Their linguistic backgrounds varied, with some being monolingual and others bilingual,



allowing for an additional analysis of how language influences emotional perception.

### **1. Emotion Perception Survey**

Participants completed an anonymous 15-question survey designed to assess, for instance, when asked about the meaning of anger, Japanese and Filipino players often described it as a source of motivation, whereas Uzbek and Russian players viewed it as an emotion that should be controlled. This variation highlights the role of cultural norms in shaping emotional interpretations.

### **2. Facial Emotion Recognition Test**

In the second phase, participants took part in an experimental test adapted from Ekman's [1992] facial expression research. They were shown images of emotional expressions and asked to identify the emotions displayed.

### **3. Bilingual Emotion Processing Analysis**

To explore linguistic influence, bilingual participants were assessed to determine if their emotion perception differed when using different languages [Pavlenko, 2005]. For example, Russian-American athletes rated anger as a motivating force in English but as a disruptive emotion in Russian. This supports the idea that language plays a role in shaping emotional experiences. Survey results were analyzed using chi-square tests to identify statistical differences in emotion perception across cultural groups. Experimental test results were evaluated based on reaction time and accuracy.

## **Results**

Basketball players from diverse backgrounds interpret emotions differently due to cultural and linguistic differences. The results are divided into three sections: survey findings, facial emotion recognition test outcomes, and bilingual emotion processing analysis.

### **1. Emotion Perception Survey Results**

Survey responses indicated clear cultural differences in how emotions are understood and expressed in basketball.

**Importance of Emotional Expression:** 78% of Uzbek and Russian players emphasized the need for emotional control, whereas Japanese and Filipino athletes viewed emotions like anger as motivational.

**Emotion-Sport Association:** Joy (94%), anger (82%), and determination (76%) were the most commonly linked emotions to basketball across all groups.

**Perception of Specific Emotions:** Anger was the most culturally variable emotion. Japanese and Filipino participants saw it as an internal motivator, while Uzbek and Russian athletes considered it an emotion that should be controlled.

## 2. Facial Emotion Recognition Test Results

The experimental test revealed significant cultural variations in emotion recognition accuracy and reaction time.

**Recognition Speed:** Uzbek and Russian participants identified anger and disgust 20% faster than other groups. In contrast, Japanese and Filipino players recognized emotions like worry and shame more accurately.

**Accuracy of Emotion Identification:** American and Kazakh players showed the highest accuracy in recognizing joy, while Russian and Uzbek participants excelled in identifying anger. Japanese and Filipino athletes had higher accuracy in detecting shame and sadness.

**Cultural Influence on Misinterpretation:** 36% of participants misinterpreted certain emotions based on their cultural background. For example, Uzbek and Russian athletes often misidentified worry as concentration, while Japanese participants occasionally confused pride with arrogance.

## 3. Bilingual Emotion Processing Analysis

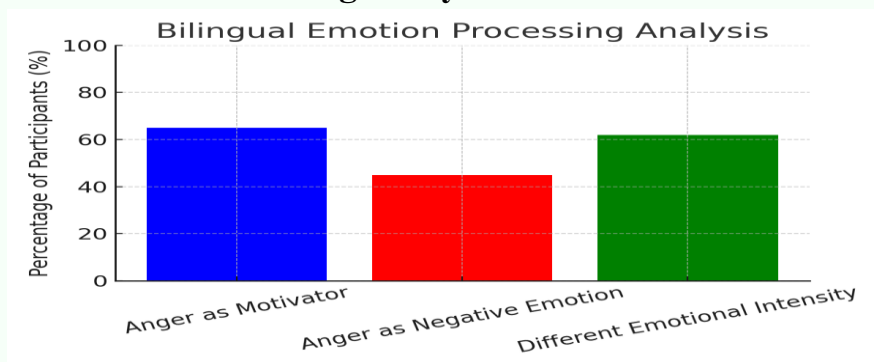


Diagram 1. Bilingual Emotion Processing Analysis



Among bilingual participants, language influenced emotion perception. Contextual Shift in Emotion Perception: Russian-American players rated anger as a motivator when tested in English but as a negative emotion when tested in Russian. Similar shifts were observed among Uzbek-Russian and Kazakh-Russian participants.

Language-Dependent Emotion Understanding: 62% of bilingual players expressed that they felt different levels of emotional intensity depending on the language used. For example, Japanese-English bilinguals described "happiness" differently in each language—linking it to calmness in Japanese but to excitement in English.

These results suggest that cultural background significantly influences emotion perception in sports, particularly in recognizing and interpreting anger, joy, and shame. Additionally, bilingualism alters emotional processing, supporting the idea that language plays a crucial role in shaping emotional experiences. The findings highlight the importance of cultural awareness in team dynamics, as misunderstandings in emotional expression can impact communication and performance in basketball.

## **Discussion**

While emotions are universally recognized, their interpretation varies by culture and language. Uzbek and Russian players viewed anger as something to control, while Japanese and Filipino players saw it as motivation, reflecting cultural differences in emotional expression. Bilingual participants' emotional perceptions shifted based on the language used, supporting the linguistic relativity hypothesis. This highlights how emotions are shaped by both biology and culture. These findings have practical applications in sports psychology and multicultural team dynamics. Future research could explore similar patterns in other settings, such as workplaces or education.

## **Conclusion**

We may see how culture and language shape emotional perception. While emotions have universal components, their interpretation varies across cultures, with bilinguals demonstrating shifts in emotional responses based on language. These findings highlight the role of cultural norms and linguistic relativity in



emotional cognition. Understanding these differences has practical applications in psychology, communication, and AI. Future research could examine how multilingualism influences emotional processing and how cultures conceptualize complex emotions, fostering better cross-cultural understanding in a globalized world.

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