

A STUDY ON EMOTIONS IN COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

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Abstract:

The title of the research paper, is presented as a theoretical paper for the study. The research paper will outline and discuss a method of emotions in communication that mingled with cultural perception. The aim of this method is to integrate recent developments in emotions research into a communication-theoretical framework in the study.

Cultural studies of emotions originated from anthropology, sociology and psychology. The first accounts of emotion from a cultural perspective were ethnographic, and described emotions as *idiosyncratic*. Researchers such as Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson and Jean Briggs described unique emotional phenomena and stressed emotions as culturally determined. For example, Briggs lived among the Utku Inuit and described a society where anger and aggression almost never occur, despite the common western notion that anger is a primitive universal emotion. Although these ethnographic studies point to considerable cultural differences, no general conclusions can be drawn from them regarding what cultural aspects affect emotions, or what level the culture influence. For example, it might be that the same emotions are experienced by all human beings; however the events that evoke them or the reactions they cause differ across cultures.

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Introduction

In other words, emotional communication is conceptualized as a process of mutual influence between the emotions of communication partners. To further elaborate this general concept of emotional communication, we developed four working definitions, each based on a different theory of emotion. (1) The first working definition is based on neuroscience models, (2) the second on appraisal theories, (3) the third is based on the prototype approach, and (4) the fourth on social constructionist theories of emotion. The four emotion theories mentioned were chosen because each of them provides an explicit and detailed account of the processes that give rise to emotions. Emotional brain systems have two functions: First, they analyze the emotional meaning of stimuli. This is accomplished by associative pairing of stimulus features with innate emotion elicitors. Most interesting, emotion expressions of others seem to count among these innate emotion elicitors. At least, one knows for sure that emotional brain systems are critically involved in the processing of expression of others. Second, emotional brain systems control a variety of emotional responses such as hormone release, activation of the autonomic nervous system, vocal, facial, and motor expression, allocation of cognitive resources to the situation that elicits emotion etc. Taken together, these functional properties of emotional brain systems lead to the following conclusion: If the same brain systems that give rise to emotions are also involved in the expression of emotions and in the processing of expressions of others, then emotion expression will lead to an activation of similar brain systems in communication partners. Thus, on the basis of neuroscience models of emotion, emotional communication can be defined as a process of reciprocal activation of emotional brain systems.

More recent studies on culture and emotion use social psychology tools in order to find general cultural principles that affect emotions. These studies are often based on the classification of cultures according to certain values, such as the values suggested by Hofstede in *Culture Leadership and Organizations*; or the emotional manipulations observed by Khen Lampert in *Traditions of Compassion*.

Shame and culture in the work context

Shame is an automatic involuntary response to a personal failure attributed to the self. The failure is relative to other's expectations, thus shame is a social emotion that involves self-consciousness. A study examined the effects of shame on salespersons in Holland (an individualistic culture) and the Philippines (a collectivistic culture). They found that bad experiences with clients led to similar shame emotions in both cultures. However, the responses to this shame were opposite: shame caused Dutch salespersons to withdraw and to perform poorer on their job, apparently because they directed most of their mental resources inwards, to defend the self. Filipino salespersons felt shame all the same; however, the shame caused them to put more efforts in building relationship and thus to perform better on the job. Moreover, Filipino salespersons demonstrated more Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB) after experiencing shame. The reason for this is that in collectivistic cultures shame signals that social harmony has been hampered and that the individual should act to rebuild it.

Emotional Expressions

- Eastern cultures, and their emotional expressions, "have been largely left to speculation, and often labeled "mysterious," and "deviant"."(Miyahara) Miyahara, referencing a study conducted on Japanese interpersonal communication, goes on to explain that the Japanese "are low in self disclosure, both verbally and non-verbally...Most of these attributes are ascribed to the Japanese people's collectivistic orientations."(Miyahara) This study conducted shows how the Japanese people, members of the Eastern culture, have a relatively low expression of emotion. "Emotional moderation in general might be expected to be observed in collectivist cultures more than in individualistic cultures, since strong emotions and emotional expression could disrupt intra-group relations and smooth social functioning."
- Western cultures tend to express their emotions more freely, although sometimes it not always acceptable. "A Finnish man once told one of us that Finns are in general suspicious of adults who do not control their expression of emotion, especially in public."

It shows that some cultures do not trust those who express their emotions freely. In another study comparing the relationships among American and Japanese people found, "People in individualistic cultures are motivated to achieve closer relationships with a selected few, and are willing to clearly express negative emotions towards others." This shows that people living in individualistic cultures express their emotions, even the negative ones, towards others. This is completely opposite of the findings of a collectivistic culture in the study. This opinion is absolutely based on personal perception of the study.

Theories of Cultural Emotion Expression

- **Somatic Theories of Emotions**
- Somatic theories of emotion deal with the bodily responses to emotions.
- **Cognitive Theories of Emotions**
- Cognitive theories of emotions deal with the perception or judgment of emotions, rather than the bodily responses.
- Each type of theory deals with the different responses to an emotion, and which is more important, the bodily response, or the perception of the emotion in everybody's life.

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