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Verbal communication of emotion in foreign language and intercultural learning

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Communicating emotions in an intercultural setting may be challenging. This study suggests teaching expressive language for use in various settings and encouraging greater exposure to L2 through authentic media materials, will allow students to observe expressive language in diverse contexts.

This study aimed to determine how English language learners from various cultural backgrounds verbally communicate their emotions. Carefully selected emotion-eliciting videos were shown to various groups of students and their reactions, as well as their follow up interactions were recorded. The results revealed that participants experienced a range of emotions while watching the videos, but they refrained from reactive responses. While most participants have knowledge of various emotion words, few actually used expressive language to communicate their emotions. Most participants chose not to verbally express their emotions while watching the videos. These results could indicate both a lack of formal instruction regarding expressive linguistic forms, and a lack of everyday socialization in English.

intercultural pragmatics

emotion expression intercultural foreign language

１．研究開始当初の背景

A common belief is that people's feelings determine their linguistics choices, communicative behavior and the course of a conversation in social interactions. Therefore, when it comes to verbal expression of emotion, one can assume that it is being constructed in the place of a social interaction, with its meanings being negotiated and interpreted based on interactants' existent knowledge (pragmatic and sociolinguistic). In other words, the meaning behind the verbal expression of emotion is negotiated in the place of interaction and adjusted to our own and to our conversational partner's pragmatic and sociolinguistic knowledge. And if this were true, one could argue that foreign language learners need to adjust their verbal communicative behavior to express emotions across languages and cultures. In the field of linguistics this is called "linguistic emotivity" and is defined as something that "refers to emotional attitude and response, the feeling of being moved, as well as culture-based feelings and sentiment expressed through the use of linguistic and related signs" (Maynard, 2002, p.3). The present study assumes that emotivity is an aspect that may have strong implications on foreign language learners' pragmatic development.

２．研究の目的

This study aimed to determine how English language learners verbally communicate emotions when using English as a lingua franca in an intercultural setting. Therefore, this study formulated two research questions:

> (1) What linguistic forms do EFL students produce to conceptualize and express emotions in English?
> (2) In other words, what emotion terms, expressive function words and expressive syntax do they use?

３．研究の方法

The present study was conducted in three stages: (1) preparatory stage – viral videos selection, (2) data collection – focus group discussions and (3) data analysis and diffusion stage. In preparation for the focus group discussions, viral videos were carefully chosen as emotion-eliciting stimuli to assess whether all English language learners use similar linguistic expressions to communicate their emotions. Viral videos were chosen over descriptive text in the belief that their visual impact would be much stronger and create a more realistic setting in spite of the controlled environment. After creating a database of viral videos, only three were selected to be used in the study, as they elicited a range of emotions, therefore providing the best opportunity for participants to use a range of expressions in their reactions.

　　　　The first video is a Christmas ad from 2018 holiday campaign of the Erste Group, a financial institution that serves Central and Eastern Europe. The ad tells Henry's story, a lonely hedgehog who faces challenges fitting in with other animals at school due to his sharp spines. Despite his struggles and sadness, his classmates come together to find a solution. They buy him a present filled with packing foam to cover his spines, allowing him to interact with others without causing harm. This video went viral as soon as it was released, and it currently has over ninety million views on YouTube.

　　　　The second video is a short animated film directed by Andrew Cadelago from 2012. The story centers around an elderly woman attempting to purchase some cookies from a vending machine. Facing difficulties retrieving a stuck bag of cookies, she eventually succeeds and goes outside to enjoy her snack on a bench. Shortly thereafter, she discovers a young man sitting on the bench, was also eating her cookies. Angered by this, she confronts him, but he remains oblivious due to listening to music and texting on his phone. In an effort to capture his attention, she unplugs his headphones and continues her protest. A struggle ensues over the last cookie, culminating in the man splitting it in half and offering her one half. Frustrated, the woman smashes the cookie and boards her train. Upon being asked for her ticket, she finds a full bag of cookies in her purse, realizing she had mistakenly eaten the young man's cookies and regretting her earlier actions.

　　　　The third video is a short animated film by Southeastern Guide Dogs, titled Pip. This film won various awards at film festivals and was viewed by millions around the world. It narrates the heartwarming journey of a small but resilient puppy with a generous heart, determined to overcome challenges and eventually become a Southeastern Guide Dogs dog. All three chosen videos elicit a range of emotions, from sadness to happiness, anger and frustration to excitement and surprise.

　　　　The second stage involved conducting the focus group discussions. All participants who

volunteered for the study were students at a private university in Tokyo, and at a large national university near Tokyo, and all of them were in their 20's. Predominantly from Asian countries, international participants included students from China, Hong Kong, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, but also from some European countries, such as Italy, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine. One of the conditions for the English language learners to participate was to have a TOEIC (Listening and Reading Test) score higher than 550, the rough equivalent of B1 level or higher on the CEFR scale. Discussions lasted about an hour and each group included on average, two Japanese and two international students. All participants were strongly encouraged to come with their friends or classmates. The rationale behind this requirement was that by being in the company of familiar faces, students would feel more comfortable reacting and sharing their emotions.

Two pilot studies were conducted in order to test the most suitable amount of videos to be shown within one hour, as well as to adjust the researcher's involvement in terms of mediating the discussion. As students seemed rather passive awaiting guidance from the researcher during the pilot studies, some guiding questions were created and used in all focus group discussions to facilitate students' discussions when and if needed. The guiding questions are as follows:

> Share your impressions about the video while emphasizing the emotions it triggered.
> How did the video make you feel?
> What words/phrases came to your mind when watching the video?
> Would you have reacted in a different way if you were alone or with close friends when watching the video?

Although Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2020, p. 158) warn against turning a focus group discussion into a question-answer session, the guiding questions were found crucial to get the discussion started in most cases. However, in order to keep the researcher-moderator's involvement to a minimum, some questions were repeated or follow up questions were added, only when it was deemed necessary. On such occasions, the discussion either stopped or failed to develop naturally, or quieter participants needed an extra question or comment to boost their confidence and allow them to join in the discussions. On the other hand, when the discussion developed naturally and all participants were engaged, the moderator did not intervene by asking follow-up questions.

The third stage included data analysis using qualitative methods. Adopting an emic perspective, while acknowledging that "reality is socially constructed as people's experiences occur within social, cultural, historical or personal contexts." (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2020, p. 15), the data was analyzed by empirically observing patterns in order to comprise a corpus of the encountered expressions of emotion. While recording all emotion-laden words as well as other expressive linguistic forms used by students during their interactions, thematic analysis was employed following the six phases given by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation of the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

４．研究成果

Studies into emotions and multilingualism (Dewaele, 2010, 2013) reported on various factors of individual variation, such as linguistic history, present language use and socio-biographical variables. For example, the age of onset of a foreign language acquisition and its context plays a crucial role, along with the frequency of use and socialization in that language. Although the present study did not analyze the factors affecting the use of the expressive linguistic forms, the findings also point towards individual variation including most of the above-mentioned factors. For example, most international students showed knowledge of certain expressive idiomatic phrases that most Japanese learners did not. This could be related to the fact that international students have been more exposed to English language in their daily lives. Another reason is related to students' personal backgrounds and the history of their linguistic journeys – some of them studied in English at international schools, while some studied in the public system with not much exposure to English besides the classroom.

Previous studies also emphasize that L1 is typically preferred for communication of emotion (Pavlenko, 2005; Dewaele, 2010), but there is evidence towards some additional spoken languages that could take a dominant position depending on the frequency of socialization in that language. Pavlenko (2005, 2012) explains why L1 usually feels to be more emotional, emphasizing the fact that in childhood languages are learned with the full involvement of the limbic system and emotional memory, in contrast to the fact that when languages are learned later in life they may rely more on declarative memory, and thus create a feeling of detachment and disembodiment. While all these findings shed some light into the complexities involved with the

use of expressive language, there is little research on how English language learners make use of these linguistic forms when they are in an intercultural setting, where knowledge of socio-cultural norms and communication styles is not as useful as when they communicate in more homogeneous settings (for example, English learners and Australian English speakers' interactions).

An intercultural setting where English is used as a lingua franca, brings together so many other factors that could influence one's choice of words. Apart from the language proficiency and the frequency of socialization in that language, the place of the interaction, the dominant linguistic behavior of that place of interaction, along with socio-pragmatic norms and relationships with the other interlocutors, may all be unconsciously contributing factors. Considering all these factors, and the messiness of intercultural communication in general, the results of this study can be divided into three themes following the data analysis. The first theme – _use of basic emotion words_ – looked at participants' use of linguistic forms to conceptualize and express emotions in English, while the second theme – _use of expressive linguistic forms_ – examined the expressive function words and expressive syntax they used to communicate their emotional reactions. Finally, the third theme – _use of personal experiences to describe emotions_ – identified students' preferences for using personal experiences and stories to relate to the ones in the videos. By doing so, they tried to analyze and interpret the emotions through the lens of their own experiences.

First, to identify linguistic forms that conceptualize and express emotions, the researcher took notes of basic emotion word use, as well as adjectives and adverbs related to emotion expression. The discussions held after watching the videos revealed that most students have knowledge of various emotion words associated with a range of emotions describing feelings of sadness, anger, enjoyment, anger, surprise, etc. In other words, most students were able to identify and name the emotions triggered by the videos using words that describe those emotions, such as sadness (I felt sad), happiness (I felt happy), anger (I felt angry), sympathy (I felt compassion), etc.

Second, to categorize the expressive linguistic forms reported by students, the researcher compiled a list of words and phrases students reported they wanted to say out loud while watching the videos. Most students chose not to verbally react during the videos, as some did not feel comfortable enough to do it and some felt compelled to control their emotions considering the artificial nature of the setting. Therefore, expressive linguistic forms such as, idiomatic expressions (What the hell!, Oh, you gotta be kidding me!), sympathetic expressions (Oh, poor thing!, Poor guy!), expressive interjections (Wow!, Oh!, Ah!, Ugh!, What?!, Aww!), and expressive interjections combined with descriptive sentences (Oh! That's so nice of them!, Wow…she's so strong!, He's so rude!) were identified. In addition, most participants preferred not to verbally react to communicate their emotions while watching the videos with one exception. One group out of the eight participant groups, that included 4 female students – 2 Japanese and 2 German – chose to verbally react while watching the videos. Expressive language as in expressive interjections Oh!, Aww!, Oh, cute!, Wow!, Oh…no! were uttered repeatedly mostly by three of the students in this group.

Finally, when prompting to discuss about the emotions the videos triggered, most participants focused on discussing the messages of the videos, how they relate to the characters in the videos, as well as its connections to reality. Some students tried to make analogies between the story in the videos and their own lives, while emphasizing the relatable parts as well as the unrealistic ones. The first video elicited the most discussions as students could relate to the hedgehog – either by being the foreigner who does not fit in because they look different or the student who was bullied by their peers. One student opened about their own bullying experience and how they needed to pull through as nobody around was willing to help to avoid them getting bullied as well. Their use of language enforced their views as they expressed surprise and strong disbelief (You must be kidding me!). The unrealistic nature of the hedgehog's classmate's kind gesture had other students also question how realistic this situation is, with some discussing whether they are trying to accept him as he is or trying to change him so that he fits in. On the other hand, the same story triggered students to discuss how they felt compassion, while the encouraging, sweet story of the hedgehog made them feel happy and cozy.

Many previous studies point out that Japanese commonly express emotion in different ways when they interact with people from the _uchi_ circle versus when they interact with people from the _soto_ circle. Maynard (2005) describes the uchi/soto distinction as concepts of social territory. She further explains the uchi/soto as social and psychological spaces identified among Japanese speaker to differentiate between uchi – the intimate (as in inside, private group) circle and soto – the outside circle (as in external, public group). Despite this probably being true, what the analysis revealed is also little knowledge of emotion vocabulary and expressive linguistic forms. This could be attributed to several factors, such as lack of formal instruction regarding expressive linguistic forms, lack of exposure to English, lack of everyday socialization in English,

as well as individual differences and dominant L1 emotional behavior, as other studies suggested. Therefore, some of the pedagogical implications of this study could further suggest teaching expressive language that could be used in a variety of settings, as well as encouraging more exposure to L2 via authentic media materials that will allow them to observe the use of expressive language in a variety of settings.

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