

EMBODIMENT: THE INCARNATION OF FEELINGS IN LANGUAGE¹

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Abstract

Abstract concepts, but human experiences too, are constructed in language through the process of metaphorical mapping between a source domain and a target domain. One of the most basic sources of humans is the corporeal experience. Cognitive metaphors help us understand reality, but they also limit us. Some elements of the source domain are used, and their importance is amplified in the target domain, and some elements of the source domain are never used, these would remain hidden. This present study proposes a different modality of understanding emotionality expressed through language. A case study will help us present the new concept of “impressional representation”, described by Sándor Szilágyi N.

Keywords: cognitive metaphor, embodiment, impressional representation, emotions, semantics of depression

In the perspective of cognitive linguistics, abstract concepts become intelligible to us through the process of conceptualization, through which we transfer our concrete, sensory experiences, like experiencing space or our own corporeality, upon abstract concepts. The means which make possible the understanding of abstract domains through concrete categories, are called *cognitive metaphors*. Thus, the role of cognitive metaphors is structuring experience, and making it

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intelligible. Emotions are also conceptualized metaphorically, and the modality of conceptualization also defines the way we understand the feeling.³

1. Embodiment in cognitive metaphors of emotional states

In linguistics, the term *embodiment* refers to the way the conceptualization of some abstract notions is based on the perception of the human body. A large portion of the conceptual system is based on *image schemas*, which result from our physical experiences and interactions with our surroundings. We know several *image schemas*.⁴ The *container schema* represents the way we perceive our body. The human body is a container, which contains organs and bodily fluids. Several cognitive metaphors of emotions and states of mind use this schema of the container. (E.g. “I’m *in* distress”, “It boils *in* me”, “It *fills* my heart with joy”.)

The *part-whole* scheme also starts from experiencing corporeal existence; we ourselves are wholes, made of parts. For example, we consider our love *our other half*, we *gather together*, we *couple*.

The *contact* scheme is based on the experience of being connected, the primordial experience being the umbilical cord, or the need of attachment. The physical experience of being connected to something is at the basis of many metaphors. Words that are based on this schema: *attachment*, *dependence*.

The *centre-periphery* scheme is extracted from the physical experience of having limbs and a torso, and the vital organs being situated in the torso, the centre is more appreciated than the periphery. For example, the expressions *central problems*, *the core of the problem* are based on the metaphor: WHICH IS IN THE CENTRE, IS IMPORTANT.

The *source-path-goal* scheme is based on the physical experience of movement. Events, states of mind are conceptualized according to this schema. For example, the expression: *I have come to the end of my patience*.

In cognitive metaphors, we distinguish two domains: the *source domain* and the *target domain*. The target domain is understood and described through the means of the source domain. This is why, in the majority of cases, the two domains cannot be switched, there is a unidirectionality. Some elements of the

³ CRAWFORD, L.E., „Conceptual Metaphors of Affect”, in *Emotion Review*, 2009, 1/2, 129–139 (130).

⁴ KÖVECSES Zoltán – BENCZES Réka, *Kognitív nyelvészet*, Budapest, 2010, 134–135.

source domain correspond to the elements of the target domain. This correspondence system between the two domains is called *metaphorical mapping*.⁵ Lakoff and Johnson define three types of metaphors:

Orientational metaphors systematize groups of target domains. These metaphors are based on the directions of orientation: *up-down*, *inside-outside*, *centre-periphery*. For example: the metaphors of HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN appear in the expressions: *Jumping up in joy. I was feeling down. I'm plunging. I feel like coming down.*

Ontological metaphors classify abstract notions of the target domains into general categories. The abstract notions, situations, states, surfaces, unlimited physical objects are described with the help of source domains, such as: physical objects, materials, recipients.⁶ For example: *the wheels of the mind* – THE MIND IS A MACHINE; *out of one's mind* – THE MIND IS A CONTAINER, *he could not control his fear* – FEAR IS A WILD ANIMAL, *he was overflowing with joy* – JOY IS A LIQUID.

After the notions were framed and systematized by the ontological metaphors, they can be structured further with the help of *structural metaphors*. For example, if our mind is a machine, it might be possible that our mind does not work in the morning, because we wake up with a rusty mind.

Many times, sooner or later, our clients ask us questions, formulations referring to the concept of LIFE: *What am I doing with my life? Is this life anymore? I do not want to live this life anymore.* Life, in spite of being as palpable as it is, is an abstract concept. One of the conceptualizations we use when talking about life is: LIFE IS A GAME. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson identify the metaphor LIFE IS A GAMBLING GAME: *I'll take my chances. The odds are against us. I've got an ace up my sleeve. It's a toss-up. If you play your cards right, you can do it. He's a real loser. Where is he when the chips are down?*⁷

The cognitive metaphor LIFE IS A GAME appears in the following expressions: *he played his life, he's playing with his life, he lost his life, doing something as a game, lucky life, risking his life.*

There are several aphorisms based on this metaphor:

⁵ KÖVECSES Zoltán, *A metafora. Gyakorlati bevezetés a kognitív metaforaelméletbe*, Budapest, 2005, 20–28.

⁶ KÖVECSES, 2005, 96–98.

⁷ LAKOFF, George – JOHNSON, Mark, “The Metaphorical Structure of the Human Conceptual System”, in *Cognitive Science* 4, 1980, 195–208 (198).

Life is a chess game with God. (Herman Hesse)

Life is a game no one can retire from, taking their winnings. (André Maurois)

Though most cognitive metaphors are unidirectional, in this case, we can say that THE GAME IS LIFE. The metaphor appears in the following expressions: *playing is his life (a child's), the game of life, the game can be amorous, it can be lively and colourful, etc.*

Actually, both metaphors can be questioned, because we defined the cognitive metaphor as a transfer of knowledge from a concrete domain upon the abstract domain, and in this case, both domains are abstract. The concept of GAME is one of the concepts that cannot be determined or described, because there is no universal definition which would contain all kinds of games. Wittgenstein proposes *the principle of family resemblance* for defining the categories of games, since there are no essential common markers or distinctive markers for the different kinds of games.⁸ Likewise, the concept of LIFE is hard to define in a categorical conceptual system, because it does not have main and secondary categories. We could possibly try to describe it based on *scenarios*, thus coming to definitions like: “life is a sexually transmitted disease which causes death.”

Even if the two metaphors – LIFE IS A GAME, THE GAME IS LIFE – are questionable, we can attempt to make a metaphorical correspondence between the two concepts.

THE GAME	LIFE	FUNDAMENTAL MOTIVATION
The frame of the game (space, time, randomness)	The frame of life (space, time, randomness)	FM1
The atmosphere of the game (happiness)	The atmosphere of life (happiness)	FM2
The rules of the game (rigidity, flexibility)	The rules of life (rigidity, flexibility)	FM3
The finality of the game (loss, win)	The finality of life (loss, win)	FM4

⁸ KÖVECSES–BENCZES, 2010, 29.

We can see that basically, in the four domains of conceptualizing life as a game, the four fundamental existential motivations (FM) described by Alfred Längle⁹ can be recognized. Just like a healthy game, a healthy life also needs these four criteria: to have space (FM1), to be felt (FM2), to have boundaries (FM3), and to open up new perspectives (FM4).

Language is a key element, any psychotherapeutic orientation remains a *talk-ing cure*, as Freud has defined it. David Peat defines a specific *linguistic field* between the client and the therapist, in which semantics and syntax are used in a stylized and limited fashion. This linguistic field has a diagnostic and a prognostic value.¹⁰

Keeping with the example of life as a game, we can observe the way people talk about life. The cognitive metaphors help us understand reality, but they also limit us. Some elements of the source domain are used, their importance is amplified in the target domain, and other elements of the source domain would not be used, they would remain hidden. For example, with the metaphor LIFE IS A GAME, we might use the FINALITY element (*I've lost my luck, my time, years, my life*), the RULES element (*I couldn't afford to play*), the FRAME element (*I lost ground, lost the match of my life*), but we might not be able to use the ATMOSPHERE element (*I felt like on a stage, I felt like in a game, I felt scorned, I feel like a loser*).

Identifying emotional states from the verbal formulations of clients is a serious challenge to the therapist. Metaphorical expressions of emotions and states of mind, of all the verbal formulations, represent the *via regia* to understanding the human soul.

Feelings express our personal relation to the world and ourselves, and the individual is in fact ineffable (*omne individuum est ineffabile*), and largely unknowable to others. The therapist engages in a process intended to assist the client in expressing the ineffable and understand the incomprehensible. Knowing the semantic and emotional components of the language is indispensable in this step.

Janusz Bańcerowski identifies 8 domains in conceptualizing positive feelings: SPACE, TEMPERATURE, PRESSURE, COLOUR, OBJECT, POWER, BEING, VIEW.¹¹

⁹ LÄNGLE, Alfred, "Ce anume îl mișcă pe om? Motivația existențială a persoanei", in *Analiza Existențială* 2, 1-2, 2000, 18-31.

¹⁰ <http://www.f davidpeat.com/ideas/langling.htm#psycho>. [September 05, 2013.]

¹¹ BAŃCZEROWSKI, Janusz, "A pozitív érzelmek konceptualizálásának néhány kérdése", in *Magyar Nyelvőr*, 2005, 71-78.

Movement in SPACE has a primary role in the process of conceptualizing emotions. These movements are, most often, tied to an organ or a body part. The organ is a container, and the movement is happening *from inside outwards* or *from outside inwards*.

For example: **THE HEART** / from outside inwards: *my heart filled with joy,*

THE HEART / from inside outwards: *I have emptied my heart from love, what dwells in my heart must come to light – the love that dwells in the heart,*

THE EYES / from outside inwards: *eating with your eyes,*

THE EYES / from inside outwards: *the eyes lit up with joy, something flickering in one's eyes, love's light burning in one's eyes.*

The eyes are considered the *mirror of the soul*, they reflect the inner state. We have many expressions which express the relation between sight and emotions: *his vision was troubled, he was blinded by emotions, do something with one's eyes closed.*

Movement can proceed not only on the inside/outside axis, but the whole body is trained in movement. We know the following expressions: *dance with joy, cry with joy, radiate happiness.*

LIGHT and WARMTH are also used for conceptualizing positive emotions: *her face radiated with happiness, her face radiated light, having a warm look, shining with joy, the light of his eyes, his eyes burning with desire.*

The PRESSURE domain is related to the CONTAINER domain. When the container is full, the pressure will grow: *we can pop*, not only from envy, but also, *from joy*. The conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS A FLUID IN A CONTAINER can be found in the majority of emotions: joy, anger, guilt, fear. The OBJECT domain appears in these ontological metaphors of emotions. Emotion is conceptualized through the form of a substance, it is a fluid filling the body. Some of the expressions that certify this metaphor are: *calmness flooded on me, the desire grows in me, I boil with anger.* Emotion as fire appears in the expression *I breathe fire.*

The way we speak about feelings, emotions, suggests the presence of a BEING in us: *love is born in the human heart.* The POWER domain appears in relation to many emotions: *we are filled, overcome, defeated, overwhelmed* by feelings, emotions.

2. Language and feeling

From a linguistic point of view, Wierzbicka distinguishes *feelings* and *emotions*. The feeling is closer to the universal human experience, but the verbal expression of emotion depends on the language, this is why it cannot be used in a genuine study of the human nature.¹² While studying different cultures, Wierzbicka identified some *conceptual primitives* and *lexical universals*. Due to their universal character, these make intercultural communication possible. With these basic concepts, which cannot be reduced to others, all other concepts can be understood. The following concepts exist in each language: FEEL, WANT, KNOW, THINK, SAY, DO, HAPPEN, IF. These concepts have the same meaning in all languages.

According to Wierzbicka's model, feelings are of two types: *cognitive* and *non-cognitive*. In the first case, the word FEEL is tied to a cognitive scenario, in the second case, the scenario does not contain thoughts.¹³

The linguistic analysis of words and expressions has a pivotal role in researching the domain of emotions and feelings. They cannot be avoided, since emotion is expressed on every level of language.

Wierzbicka's researches are consistent with the emotional theory of existential analysis. According to existential analysis' interpretation, emotional states have two categories: *feelings* and *affects*. The role of the affects is to protect life, and the feelings are meant to help one discover relevant values.¹⁴ Affects are connected to the somatic, psycho-physical needs (there is no cognitive scenario), and the feelings relate to the noetic dimension (there is a cognitive scenario). Längle distinguishes a third category: the *senses*.¹⁵ Sense and intuition are close to each other. What is intuited, is sensed, presentiment consists of this. Presentiment is

¹² WIERZBICKA, Anna, *Emotions Across Languages and Cultures: Diversity and Universals*, Cambridge University Press, Paris, 2005, 4.

¹³ WIERZBICKA, 2005, 4.

¹⁴ LÄNGLE, Alfried, "Emotionality – An Existential-Analytical Understanding and Practice", in TRNKA, R, BALCAR K, KUSKA M (Eds.), *Re-Constructing Emotional Spaces. From Experience to Regulation*, Prague, 2011, 41–62 (44).

¹⁵ LÄNGLE, 2011, 49.

the sense of what is essential in a situation, it is a kind of phenomenological feeling, an *intentional feeling*, as named by Max Scheler.¹⁶

Natural Semantic Metalanguage, as described by Wierzbicka, can be utilized for studying emotional states, and it is more useful than the Lakoffian theory of cognitive metaphors.

The sanogenetic character of the discussion about feelings, the lived emotions, and verbalizing what the client is feeling, is confirmed by countless empirical studies. Healing proceeds when pain, emotion, sentiment can be nominalised in its essence. This intuitive knowledge also appears in the Brothers Grimm's story, *Rumpelstiltskin*. If something can be named, it won't bother us anymore. But how can we objectify something ineffable? What is happening in the human soul, the inner emotional state does not have a correspondent in the exterior world? The primary function of language is expressing our internal states.

3. Impressional representation

Sándor Szilágyi N. asserts *the analogical nature of language*. The connection between signifier and signified is not arbitrary, the inner content of knowledge is, most of the times, expressed analogically. Analogical expression proceeds not only on the level of words, but also, on a grammatical level.¹⁷

Language and archaic thinking were built upon *impressional representations*, and conceptual thinking is based on *conceptual representations*. The author assumes that, for example, "sound symbolism cannot be explained on the basis of our concept-based and rational mind. Instead of conceptual representations (CR), which are a late and secondary product in the human evolution, we should consider our primary system of representations, made up not by conceptual, but impressional representations (IR). This system is nothing else but the continuance (in fact, the survival) of the pre-linguistic system of behavior, similar to that of the representations in the animals. While the CR-system has a digital and procedural strategy for information processing, the functioning of the IR system as a huge neural network is based on analogy, its main concerns being

¹⁶ LÄNGLE, 2011, 50.

¹⁷ SZILÁGYI N. Sándor, "Hangulatfestés – de mit is festünk?", KÁDÁR Edit and SZILÁGYI N. Sándor (eds.), *Motiváltság és nyelvi ikonicitás*. Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, Kolozsvár, 2015, 23–42.

qualities, valences, intensity, simultaneity, salience, and, in the case of events, activity and schematic motion shapes.”¹⁸ This means that even before the appearance of language, humans already had a representation system, which had not been a conceptual system – the *primary representational system*. The emergence and development of conceptual thinking did not result in the disappearance of intuitive, IR-based thinking. In language, we can observe the activity of both the rational system, with the nerve centres, the left cerebral cortex, and the emotional intuitive system, with its own nerve centres in the right cerebral cortex and the limbic system. Emotional states are preverbal, they are part of the ancestral human experience. This is why talking about states of mind and emotions can more accurately be described based on specific dimensions of the impressional representation. The rational system operates with categorical concepts embedded in a hierarchical network. The concepts answer the question WHAT IS (THIS)?, and they are grammatically expressed by nouns. The IR system is much more dynamic, IRs do not result in clean-cut categories, but they can be characterised on the base of some antagonistic dimensions: *good – bad, strong – weak, active – passive*. Impressional representations respond to the question HOW IS IT?, and the grammatical categories are the adjectives, and to that OF WHAT HAPPENS?, expressed by verbs and adverbs.

In the *personal existential analysis*, we actually work with these impressional representations, which express impressions, images, symbols, and also, emotions – which we call *primary emotions* –, and often arriving to the conceptual representation of knowledge.

4. Case study: the semantics of depression

Let us consider an excerpt of a psychotherapy session. The client is 37 years old woman, and is suffering from depressive personality disorder.

– *It’s just... it’s just that I’m there again, that I can’t bear myself, and the feeling... the feeling is so horrifying inside of me, the one sometimes I feel I could free myself from, if I tore it out of myself, so, so it’s that: I would do almost anything, just, just not to feel like this, so it wouldn’t be like this.*

– *How is this horrifying feeling?*

– *(Silence)*

¹⁸ SZILÁGYI, 2015, 42.

– *What does it resemble?*

– *Like a dark tumbling, in which, an alternation of some kind of, an alternation of some, like... not images, it does not have the shape of images, but something like, like some powerful stuff. So once, this... it is very, very, very bad, it's when this is, but this, even from moment to moment, or it keeps on tumbling, and this tumbling also has a side that I need to do something, to free myself from this, a side of a powerful escape, of breaking free or something like that, so this, this is like I should go somewhere, I don't know what to do, but not this, so it's unbearable.*

And this tumbling also has another side, that "I give up", it's over, I, here and now, I don't know, I just lay down, I won't do anything, and it sucks, because at 6 a.m.... or at 7.30 at least I have to set off to work, and it's hard enough to deal with it.

And sometimes, there's the side of some kind of loneliness, which doesn't, which doesn't, I mean it doesn't let itself be influenced by the real surroundings, and in this, I feel like there's a wall around me, or I don't know, on a level where it doesn't matter at all if there are people around me, this category is completely unimportant to me, I could stay on the North Pole alone with a flag with the same effort, because I cannot connect to anyone at the given moment, I just can't, I just can't open the channel in a given situation, with anyone, because they are there, there are people around me, normal people, OK people, so the problem is with me, because as a whole, I'm like this, so I'm suffocating.

So, this part is really empty, and at a given moment, it's not in me, it's like there was a huge hole, where, where normally is that energy which makes me know how to love, which makes me make another step, ... from which something is born, I don't know what, something that makes me go outside, so in that place, there's a hole.

When analysing the linguistic material, we can see just how difficult it is verbalizing those horrifying "feelings", even though the written material does not show it as clearly as the audio material. I would first like to point on the visual character of the things related, even though the client affirms that *there are not images, it does not have the shape of images*. The *dark tumbling*, however, suggests a visual representation, but the dynamic character of the representation has an utmost importance, it is in constant motion. In this case, from a linguistic point of view, there is a symbolic comparison, the feeling is associated to the shape of movement.

The client attempts to describe this "tumbling" based on specific dimensions of impressional representations:

– the good/bad dimension: *very, very, very bad*; the tumbling is threatening: *I need to do something, to free myself from this.*

– the active/passive dimension: *it keeps on tumbling, it alternates.*

– the strong/weak dimension: *some powerful stuff, I tore it out of myself*

Equanimity can be formulated by the expression “*I feel I am in the right place*” or “*I feel at home*”. Inner turmoil is reflected by the fact that a certain imbalance is produced, an out-of-place-ness in the symbolic spatial structure of the linguistic universe. The imbalance hits an extreme in the client’s comparison to the *North Pole*. The opposite direction of the imbalance is *being surrounded by walls* – that is, no movement, which has the same pathological consequence.

According to the existential analysis, the symptoms of depression can be grouped into three categories: 1. decrease of perception of reality, 2. feeling of impotence, 3. feeling empty.¹⁹

The distorted perception of reality is formulated by the client: she places herself on the *North Pole*, an uninhabited place, a position that cannot be influenced by her surroundings. Her impotence also appears in some parts of the dark tumbling: “*I give up*”, *it’s over, I, here and now, I don’t know, I just lay down, I won’t do anything.*

The feeling of impotence also appears in the impressional representations’ dimension: the person is helpless facing what is *very, very, very bad*. The feeling of emptiness appears in the visual image of the *hole*.

After this psychotherapy session, where the client attempted to describe that *horrifying feeling*, being asked if the visual image of the HOLE, the WALL, or the TUMBLING, ALTERNATING, SHIFTING movements reminded her of something, she suddenly remembered the image of a lift, of an experience she has been through years ago, as a child. We have subsequently asked her to describe the experience:

“An automatic door, it closes, and I cut my feelings off. This is the experience which prevents me to live a life more alive, in which there are feelings, treasures, friendships, nuances, colours... Happiness and suffering, failure and challenge. When this door closes, I ‘freeze’, and a cataleptic appears from behind the doors,

¹⁹ LÄNGLE, Alfried, “Depression oder Selbst-PreSSION? Existenzanalytische Grundstrukturen und Therapie psychogener und noogener Depressionsformen.”, in LÄNGLE, A., FUNKE, G. (Hg.), *Mut und Schwermut, Existenzanalyse der Depression. Tagungsbericht der GLE*, 1987, Nr. 3/87, 94–128.

whose world is devoid of feelings, or better said, a lonesome world, black and white, and square...

At the beginning of today's session, I had thought that the door was merely a symbol, and that it came to me randomly. But then, the moment came when I realised that what became symbolic, is as real as it comes, from my past, something I stirred up day by day, until it became an automatic mechanism.

I have been living at the 9th floor, and whenever I stepped into the staircase, waiting for the lift, I tried to restrain myself in a way that by no means could anything be seen on me, which could set off a nervous crisis in my mother, and it was enough for her to discover any trace of emotion in me. And because of this, this was safety then, it meant survival, killing my feelings, joy and pain alike.

Today, I don't live in that house anymore, and I don't need to do this. Today, I can allow myself, and I want to allow myself to feel. I want to face my fear rooted in me, in order to be free. Today, I have a 'home' where I can feel anything without being punished. Today, I have people around me, which, even if only up to a certain limit, but accept me with my feelings... I don't have to live a cataleptic life. I want to LIVE!"

5. Conclusion

In this study, I presented the way we attempt to formulate and verbalize our emotional experiences, and in order to do this, I chose an approach opposite to the psychosomatic approach "*from soul to body*". Cognitive linguistics' theory shows us the direction "*from body to soul*". Our verbal expressions are based on our corporeal, sensorimotor experiences, so they are, in a way, embodied.²⁰ Our emotions, however, are also self-embodied, there are no emotions without corporeal implications. Not only the source domain, but the target domain is *embodied*, too. According to the new researches, others' emotions are understood through a process of embodiment, we relive the presented emotions in our own body. Studies show that understanding emotional language requires the simulation of the motor components of the given emotion.²¹

²⁰ CRAWFORD, 2009, 137.

²¹ Idem.

Therefore, it requires courage to let ourselves be embodied in the emotional life of the clients, our discussion partners, because when *their hearts ache*, our heart aches too, and when *their heart leaps*, we can leap with joy too.

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