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Compassion and Sympathy in British English and Polish: A Cultural Linguistic Perspective

The focus of our cross-cultural investigation is to compare conceptualisations of compassion and sympathy *emotion clusters* in British English and Polish.

Meaning clusters involve senses that are usually only partially overlapping. Some of our thinking tends to be more *effable*, i.e., possible to express in a language, while a large part of it remains more felt than expressed, more imagined than put in words. Katz's *Principle of Effability* (1978), proposing that every thinkable thought in natural language can be encoded and expressed by a sense of some sentence in language, does not stand up to criticism pronounced by semioticians, philosophers and linguists. Thus, what is communicated verbally is not in one-to-one correspondence with our thinking and feelings. (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2012). Ontological categories expressed verbally in one language are left non-verbalized in another. Thus they are only partially, i.e., *approximately*, aligned to similar, albeit not identical concepts in another language (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2012) and that is why users refer to them in terms of clusters of meanings rather than by a single form.

Three methodologies were employed to compare pride in British English and Polish. The GRID instrument (e.g., Fontaine et al. 2013) employs a system of dimensions and components, which bring about insight into the nature of emotion prototypical structures. The cognitive corpus linguistics approach provides information on the metaphoric uses of the terms and frequencies and distributional patterns of relevant linguistic patterns. In the online sorting methodology graphical representations of emotion clusters were created on the basis of the frequency of co-occurrence of each emotion with the other emotions in the categories that were formed by the participants.

The results show that *compassion* is characterised more positively than its Polish counterpart, *współczucie*, which is consistent with the relatively more individualistic conceptualisation of *compassion* that is more likely to have a self-focus on the help that one might offer a suffering individual vis-à-vis the relatively more collectivistic conceptualisation of *współczucie* that possibly has a more outward focus on the suffering of an individual in need of help. Other results showing the greater association between *współczucie* and *wstyd* (shame) suggests that *compassion* and *współczucie* might also differ conceptually in terms of compassion type, with the former possibly being characterised by *genuine* compassion and the latter by *submissive* compassion.

Further results show that *sympathy* has a more central location in its cluster structure than its Polish equivalent, *sympatia*. Additionally, it was found that *sympatia*, polysemous in Polish between the senses of compassion and fondness/liking, has a relatively more positive valence than *sympathy*.

References

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