Exploring "happiness" and "pain" across languages and cultures

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Abstract: This paper argues that the cross-linguistic study of subjective experience as expressed, described and construed in language cannot be set on a sound footing without the aid of a systematic and non-Anglocentric approach to lexical semantic analysis. This conclusion follows from two facts, one theoretical and one empirical. The first is the crucial role of language in accessing and communicating about feelings. The second is the demonstrated existence of substantial, culture-related differences between the meanings of emotional expressions in the languages of the world. We contend that the NSM approach to semantic and cultural analysis (Wierzbicka 1996; Gladkova 2010; Levisen 2012; Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014a; Wong 2014; among other works) provides the necessary conceptual and analytical framework to come to grips with these facts. This is demonstrated in practice by the studies of "happiness-like" and "pain-like" expressions across eight languages, undertaken in the present volume. At the same time as probing the precise meanings of these expressions, the authors provide extensive cultural contextualization, showing in some detail how the meanings they are analyzing are truly "cultural meanings". The project exemplified by the volume can also be read as a linguistically-anchored contribution to cultural psychology (Shweder 2004, 2003), the quest to understand and appreciate the mental life of others in a full spirit of psychological pluralism.

Keywords: cross-linguistic semantics; Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM); happiness studies; pain research; language and culture.

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1. "Happiness" and "pain"

This special issue simultaneously deals with two hot topics – "happiness" and "pain" – across a number of languages and scholarly disciplines. The premise is that in the fast-growing fields of happiness studies and pain research, a cross-linguistic perspective is largely lacking. As a result, scholars often underestimate the scale of cultural diversity. We attempt to bring to the attention of scholars in these fields the striking and fascinating diversity in ways of talking about and conceptualizing such human experiences. While in full agreement with many social scientists and economists that self-reports are the bedrock of happiness research, the volume

presents a body of evidence highlighting the problem of translation and showing how local concepts of "happiness" and "pain" can be understood without an Anglo bias.

The double inverted commas around the words "happiness" and "pain" are intended to signal that these English words cannot be presumed as valid and self-explanatory meta-categories. They are merely labels of convenience in the dominant global language. As a matter of fact, extensive cross-linguistic research has demonstrated that there are no precise lexical semantic universals in the domain of emotion, and that the specific meanings of the emotion words of any language are often heavily "culturally coloured" (Russell 1991; Wierzbicka 1999; Harkins & Wierzbicka eds. 2001; Goddard 2010). This means that English-specific words like *happiness* and *pain* can have no special claim to epistemological priority, and that using them even as rough-and-ready labels runs a risk of introducing a biased discourse that is centred on the Anglo cultural perspective.

In so saying, we place ourselves in opposition to the self-confident assertion (by Diener, Lucas & Oshii 2002: 64) that "researchers succeeded in developing scientific methods for studying subjective well-being" and that "the scientific study of subjective well-being is now poised to grow into a major scholarly and applied discipline." As explained in section 2 below, we believe that it is impossible to put the scientific study of well-being, or any subjective phenomenon (including "pain"), on a sound footing without a systematic and non-Anglocentric approach to language.

Reflecting on the issue of cross-cultural variability in emotional meanings and emotional experience, the late philosopher Robert Solomon (one of the founding members of the International Society for Research on Emotion), remarked:

> With people from a very different culture, however, the inaccessibility of emotion presents us with a genuine dilemma. How do we interpret their behaviour, their expressions, and their reports without simply assuming (in the absence of evidence) that their feelings are the same as ours? How do we extrapolate from what we see and hear to what they feel, to the emotion itself? How would we recognize or understand differences? Anthropologists, long faced with this problem, have adopted a number of not always satisfactory solutions …. Translation itself presents a deep problem in such matters… What we have to translate, in effect, is not a word but a whole culture, to see how an emotion—and the name for that emotion—fits into the systematic worldview, language, and way of life of the society. (Solomon 1995: 256)

Solomon's remarks imply the need for a framework of inquiry that is capable of capturing subtle nuances of meaning, and at same time capable of "taking on" big cultural themes. We will expand on this shortly, arguing that the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach to meaning and cultural analysis can answer this need.

In the meantime, though, a few words are in order about the choice of subject matter for the present set of studies. First, why "happiness"? Simply because, impelled by a confluence of factors, something like "happiness fever" appears to be manifesting itself in global discourse. To quote just two observers, the historian Darrin McMahon (2006: xiv) has written: "[H]appiness is now a global concern, one with roots, however shallow or deep, in many different cultural and religious traditions"; and the philosopher Sissela Bok (2010): "Not since antiquity have there been such passionate debates as those taking place today about contending visions of what makes for human happiness". Equally as notable as its global reach is the fact that the topos of "happiness" appears in a very wide (and apparently widening) set of academic disciplines, including not only psychology, political philosophy, and cultural anthropology, but lately in economics and even in computer science (cf. e.g., Hudlicka 2003). As for "pain", it is with us always, and arguably has a stronger claim to being a genuinely global concern than "happiness". In the Western tradition, understanding and dealing with "pain" has been the province of doctors, nurses, therapists, and ministers of religion, but in modern times medical science has engaged extensively with the study of "pain".

In our view however – and this is supported by the studies in the present collection – the lack of a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective has so far painted a rather deceptive and homogenous picture of these two contrasting "poles" of human experience. [Note 1] What is needed is a broader, cross-cultural picture of "happiness" and "pain". Such a picture, critical of Anglocentrism, has been developed in persuasive detail in various works by Anna Wierzbicka (e.g. 1999, 2006, 2009, 2014), by Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014a: chapters 5-6), and in the present special issue by Levisen (this volume), Wierzbicka (this volume), and Ye (this volume).

The studies in this volume build on a deep long-term research effort by Anna Wierzbicka and others in the NSM research community. The approach has made several important contributions to the field: (a) advocating for a cross-cultural perspective anchored in a universal metalanguage, (b) continued efforts to arrive at an insider's view of the emotion concepts of different languages, (c) devising methods for articulating the prototypical cognitive scenarios that, arguably, form an essential part of emotion concepts (Ye 2013).

There is a substantial NSM literature on emotion concepts and emotional expressions across many languages, going right back to Wierzbicka (1972, 1973). Most notable are Wierzbicka (1999), Harkins and Wierzbicka (eds. 2001), and Enfield and Wierzbicka (ed. 2002), three book-length efforts dedicated to the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural investigation of emotions. Despite these important precedents, the present volume is special in its selective focus on two contrasting emotion domains across a variety of languages and cultures.

2. Why language (and metalanguage) matters

Language matters crucially to how we gain access (both as individuals, and as scholars and scientists) to human feelings and thoughts. Philosophers like Robert Solomon are well aware of this fact, but many psychologists, psycholinguists, and even some linguists, are prone to underestimate the epistemological importance of words for understanding other people's feelings and thoughts, and the extent to which such words can be (to use a mix of metaphorical expressions) culturally anchored, culturally flavoured, and culturally freighted.

The epistemological point is that accessing the quality of other people's subjective experience necessarily depends on self-reports of one kind or another. As psychologists Lisa Feldman Barrett et al. (2007: 377) put it, self-reports are "essential – for revealing the ontological structure of consciousness". This applies equally to spontaneous expressions and responses to direct inquiries, e.g. questions from a doctor to patient, sociological surveys about one's state of happiness, and to other "assessment devices" that may be devised by psychologists, such as those which tap into memory or "experience sampling" (Diener, Lucas & Oshii 2002: 65). In the end, these methods all rely on self-report and they are all dependent on words. Hence, the importance of the fact that the emotion words of different languages do not match up perfectly in meaning and the danger of English as a default language in global studies (e.g. Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014a; Wierzbicka 2014).

A second reason that language matters in emotion research is that, arguably, " the way people interpret their own emotions depends, to some extent at least, on the lexical grid provided by their native language" (Wierzbicka 1999: 26; cf. Besmeres 2002; Pavlenko 2005, 2006). As we better understand the meanings of emotion terms in other languages, we can better understand native speaker's perspectives on what they are thinking and feeling. This does not necessarily mean, of course, that when a language does not have a particular emotion term its speakers lack corresponding experiences, but it can be argued that those aspects of experience that are given linguistic labels are those which are regarded by a people of a given culture as particularly relevant, salient and important. As such, folk labels in effect reveal

what the leading Russian lexicographer Jurij Apresjan calls "a naïve picture of the human being" (Apresjan 2000: 102-4), or, what anthropologists and cognitive linguists call a cultural model or folk theory of a person (Holland & Quinn 1987; D'Andrade 1995; Shore 1996; Sharifian 2011).

Furthermore, in the view of NSM researchers, the clear-cut demarcation that is often drawn between folk theories and scientific theory appears less than tenable. For one thing, it is difficult for scientific theories to be fully free from the 'naïve picture' inherent in the native language of the researchers. Equally, however, a scientific theory about human emotion without folk knowledge as its theoretical basis ultimately lacks a 'human face'; that is, an emotion theory that is entirely dissociated from ordinary language use may run the risk of being divorced from the social reality and cultural context where people's emotional life actually takes place and which gives rise to the incredible richness of human emotional life (Kövecses 2000; Wierzbicka 1999, 2014).

When interpreting the self-reports of people whose native language is not English, if we simply convert their words into their assumed English counterparts, we are in effect "re-coding" and altering their meanings. What is needed, instead, is a way of unravelling the meanings of "happiness-like" and "pain-like" expressions in many languages, and this calls for a way of rendering these meanings into a common code that can be transposed across languages. Hence the need for a vocabulary of culturally "safe" words for speaking about human feelings and thoughts, as explained in the next section. This volume demonstrates the usefulness of such "safe" words, known as the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), and shows how they can be used to compose explanatory texts for word meanings, known as explications.

3. The metalanguage of semantic primes

The 65 semantic primes – simple words with equivalents in all or most languages – are listed in Table 1, using English exponents. Comparable tables have been drawn up for about 30 languages from a diversity of language families, geographical locations and cultural types. Though there are only 65 items in the inventory, it represents a fairly rich set of semantic "basics" which span many different semantic areas, as suggested by the division of the table into 12 rough groupings. There is an extensive linguistic literature about how these primes were discovered over the past three decades, about how they manifest themselves in the vocabularies of different languages (sometimes disguised by language-specific polysemy),

and about their grammar of combination, which also appears to be substantially the same across all or most languages (e.g. Goddard and Wierzbicka eds. 2002; Peeters ed. 2006; Goddard ed. 2008). [Note 2] We will not attempt to summarize this literature here, but rather concentrate on giving a thumbnail sketch of those aspects that are most pertinent to the emotional domain.

Table 1: Semantic primes (English exponents), grouped into 12 related categories

I~ME, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY	substantives
KIND, PART	relational substantives
THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE	determiners
ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH~MANY, LITTLE~FEW	quantifiers
GOOD, BAD BIG, SMALL	evaluators and descriptors
KNOW, THINK, WANT, DON'T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR	mental predicates
SAY, WORDS, TRUE	speech
DO, HAPPEN, MOVE,	actions, events, movement, contact
BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE'S), BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)	location, existence, possession, specification
LIVE, DIE	life and death
WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT	time
WHERE~PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE, TOUCH	space
NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF, VERY, MORE, LIKE~AS	logical concepts

Notes: • Primes exist as the meanings of lexical units (not at the level of lexemes) • Exponents of primes may be words, bound morphemes, or phrasemes • They can be formally complex • They can have combinatorial variants or "allolexes" (indicated with ~) • Each prime has well-specified syntactic (combinatorial) properties.

The semantic primes from which emotion and sensation concepts are typically built include: (i) the personal and social primes – SOMEONE, I~ME, PEOPLE; (ii) primes from the "mental" group –FEEL, THINK, WANT, DON'T WANT, and KNOW, reflecting the intersubjectivity of emotion concepts; (iii) GOOD, BAD and VERY, to express the quality of the feeling ; (iv) sometimes, in particular for "sensation" concepts, including "pain" – BODY and PARTS (of the body); (v) temporal elements, such as FOR SOME TIME, IN ONE MOMENT, to help distinguish between prolonged and momentary feelings; (vi) primes depicting events and actions are usually present in the cognitive scenarios – HAPPEN, DO; (vii) and logical primes– BECAUSE, CAN, NOT, LIKE – to "glue" the explication together. Rather surprisingly, it turns out that between a third and a half of the full prime inventory is needed to build the emotion concepts of human languages. Among these, it is obvious, presumably, that FEEL and THINK play a pivotal role, but it's perhaps worth noting here that the similarity prime LIKE also plays a

special role, both supporting cognitive scenarios ('this someone thinks like this: ... ') and in typicality components ('like people feel at many times when ...'). [Note 3]

Every semantic prime has specified grammatical frames which allow primes to combine into meaningful combinations. In other words, as well as a universal mini-lexicon, the Natural Semantic Metalanguage has a universal mini-grammar (Goddard & Wierzbicka eds. 2002; Goddard ed. 2008). This grammar has been explored in a fairly systematic way for over 20 years and, though a couple of murky areas remain, it is now well documented and can be regarded as substantially well understood. As well as simple combinatorial possibilities (e.g. 'this something~thing', 'someone else', 'one place', 'two parts', 'many kinds', etc.), the grammar of semantic primes includes extended valencies and complement options for the mental primes THINK, KNOW, WANT and DON'T WANT.

Although groups of primes share particular properties and can be regarded as falling into natural classes, virtually every prime has some idiosyncratic combinatorial properties. For this reason, it is not possible here to give a sketch of the full NSM grammar. For illustrative purposes, however, Table 2 displays the valency and complement frames for two semantic primes which all explications in this volume use, THINK and FEEL, using English exponents.

Table 2: Valency frame arrays for semantic primes THINK and FEEL

someone THINKS about someone/something	[topic of cognition frame]
someone THINKS something (good/bad) about someone/something	[topic + complement frame]
someone THINKS like this: " .... "	[quasi-quotational frame]
someone FEELS something (good/bad)	[minimal frame]
someone FEELS something (good/bad) towards someone else	[directed feeling]
someone FEELS something (good/bad) in part of the body	[locus of bodily feeling]

In short, the metalanguage of semantic primes, used by all contributors to this volume, provides a common measure or framework (*tertium comparationis*) that, firstly, makes the analytical contributions across all eight languages and cultures strictly comparable with one another, and, secondly, puts them into a universal frame of reference applicable to other languages and cultures around the world.

In this connection, it is useful to call on the perspective of cultural psychology, as articulated by the distinguished American scholar Richard Shweder. He sees cultural psychology as a special project of cultural anthropology based on the conviction that "culture and psyche are interdependent and make each other up" and dedicated to what he calls

"psychological pluralism" (2003: 40). In Shweder's view, a very special effort is needed in order to truly understand and appreciate the mental life of others, largely because of the difficulty of detaching from one's own native categories and ways of thinking about psychological functioning. What is needed, he writes, is a suitable language for "the comparative study of mental states" (cf. Shweder 2004), and he sees NSM research as offering the most developed and promising proposals for this purpose, in the form of the mental primes THINK, FEEL, WANT, DON'T WANT, and KNOW [Note 4] and others, including GOOD and BAD, BECAUSE, and PART. He writes:

> "[A]ny theory of psychological pluralism would lack credibility if it denied the existence of any and all universals. Indeed, cultural psychology presupposes many psychological universals, including feelings; wants; goals, and ideas of good and bad, of cause and effect, of part-whole relationships". (Shweder 2003: 40)

The convergence with NSM thinking is remarkable.

4. Explications and cultural scripts

The primary products of NSM semantic analysis are formal representations of meaning known as semantic explications. The concept of an explication is central to NSM work. An explication tries to show what a word or other expression means to a speaker or for a speaker. Consequently it can be viewed equally as a linguistic analysis and also as a conceptual analysis. The studies in the present collection present about 50 explications for words and expressions related to "happiness" and "pain" in eight languages.

To get a sense of what explications look like and how they work in relation to expressions for "emotions" and "sensations", let us briefly consider two examples. It cannot be emphasized too much that these explications are proposed specifically for English words. As the papers in the volume demonstrate beyond doubt, similar or analogous concepts in other languages can differ markedly.

Explication [A] below is for the English word *happy*, in contexts such as *He/she is happy*. Note that the grammatical context (often called a grammatical frame) is important because the English word *happy* is polysemous. The frame being used here, i.e. human subject with a bare predicative adjective, helps select the intended sense; excluding, for example, the somewhat different meaning of *happy* found in an expression like *I'm happy with my job*.

Space does not allow a full discussion and justification of the details of the explication (see Wierzbicka 1999: 60-3; Goddard 2011; Goddard & Wierzbicka 2014a: Ch 5), but a few supporting remarks may be helpful. Explication [A] suggests a relatively mild and generic response to a feeling that 'many good things happening to me now as I want' and that one can do as one wants. As argued in Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014a: Ch5), before the eighteenth century, the word *happy* referred to a more intense, exceptional and short-lived feeling, linked with something like good luck or good fortune (as the comparable term still does in many European languages; cf. German *glücklich*, French *heureux*).

[A] Semantic explication of English *happy* (as in *He was happy*).

a. he (= this someone) thought like this for some time at this time:

b. "many good things are happening to me now as I want
I can do many things now as I want
this is good"

c. because of this, this someone felt something good at this time

d. like people feel at many times when they think like this for some time

Explication [A] follows a semantic template shared with many English emotion words (Wierzbicka 1999; Goddard 2011, 2012b). This template has four main parts: (a) attribution of some prototypical thought content to the experiencer; (b) the spelling out of this content, sometimes called a prototypical cognitive scenario, (c) the triggering of a feeling (good or bad, as the case may be), (d) which is understood to be typical of the kind of feeling evoked by such thoughts. The main idea behind this structure, i.e. that emotion concepts are understood via prototypical thoughts, was first proposed in Wierzbicka (1972) and was further developed in NSM theory into the notion of a 'prototypical cognitive scenario' in the 1990s (cf. especially Wierzbicka 1999). The key role of the cognitive scenario aligns with research findings from psychology that emotions involve script-like mental processes (Fehr & Russell 1984), and with the role of appraisal in emotion (Moors et al. 2014; cf. Ye 2013).

As for English *pain*, it is explicated in [B] (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2014a: Ch 6). The overall structure is rather different, even though the explication is constructed, for the most part, from the same semantic elements as [A]. In terms of its "ingredients", the chief difference is that the *pain* explication includes (twice) the expression 'part of this someone's body'. In terms of structure, the *pain* explication is different, first, because it starts with a (bad) feeling (rather than with a thought); and second, because this bad feeling is

characterized in terms of a real scenario involving something bad happening to part of someone's body (rather than a cognitive scenario). *Pain* is a bad feeling LIKE one can feel in such a situation. Crucially, this situation involves not only something like "damage" happening to part of one's body, but also a resulting bad feeling 'in this part of the body', and a strongly negative mental reaction to this feeling, a reaction that the prototypical experiencer cannot prevent ('this someone can't not think like this: "I don't want this"').

[B] *She felt pain.*

a. she felt something bad at that time
    like someone can feel when it is like this:
b. something bad is happening to a part of this someone's body
c. this someone feels something bad in this part of the body because of this
d. this someone can't not think like this at this time: "I don't want this"

There are many discussion-worthy aspects of this explication which cannot be pursued here. We will draw attention only to two of them. First, the explication focuses on a rather localized site ('a part of this someone's body'), rather than on the body in a global sense. Second, although the explication accords physical pain a privileged status as a reference point, it treats *pain* as a unitary concept, applicable to both physical and emotional pain. Both these points are amply discussed in several studies in the collection (Wierzbicka, Bulat Silva, Ye, Priestley).

In addition to semantic explications, used by all contributors to this volume, a couple of the papers (by Levisen on Danish, Priestley on Koromu) also use or refer to the concept of cultural scripts. This term refers to the main vehicle used by NSM linguists in pragmatics, or, as NSM prefer to say, ethnopragmatics (Goddard ed. 2006; Goddard in press a, in press b). Although they are written largely in the metalanguage of semantic primes, [Note 5] cultural scripts are not paraphrases of word meanings. They are "representations of cultural norms which are widely held in a given society and are reflected in the language" (Wierzbicka 2007: 56). Most cultural scripts are introduced by the framing component: 'many people think like this: .... '. This shows that they are intended as representations of widely shared social attitudes. Cultural scripts exist at different levels of generality and may relate to different ways of speaking, thinking, acting, and even (as Levisen and Priestley show in their respective studies) to different ways of feeling and responding to feelings.

5. Writing and reading NSM explications

The critical thing about a semantic explication is that it is intended to be a paraphrase, more specifically – a reductive paraphrase, i.e. an attempt to say in other, simpler words what a speaker is saying when he or she utters the expression being explicated. NSM is the only system of semantic analysis to employ reductive paraphrase in a strict sense. Many systems seek to describe meaning in decompositional terms, but there is an enormous difference between paraphrasing and describing. Paraphrase attempts to capture what anthropologists term an "insider perspective", with its sometimes naïve first-person quality, rather than the sophisticated outsider perspective of an expert linguist, logician, social psychologist, etc.

Devising an explication is no easy matter. Although there are some heuristics to support the process (Goddard 2011), there is no mechanical procedure or "discovery method" that can be followed. A good explication will, however, satisfy at least three conditions. The first is substitutability in a broad sense: explications have to make intuitive sense to native speakers when substituted into their contexts of use, and to generate the appropriate entailments and implications. The second condition is well-formedness: they have to be framed entirely in semantic primes or molecules, and conform to the syntax of the natural semantic metalanguage. The third, more difficult to evaluate, concerns coherence, "flow", and logical structure; minimally, an explication has to make sense as a whole, with appropriate chains of anaphora, co-reference, causal links, etc. Often the textual structure of explications turns out to include parallelism and counterpoint. Generally speaking, considerable effort is required to come up with any explication that satisfies or appears to satisfy these conditions. All the explications in the present volume have been through numerous iterations as the analysts explored the pros and cons of different components and different arrangements of components.

Keith Allan (p.c.) once rightly observed that NSM explications are "easy to read, hard to write" (cf. Allan 2001: 276-281), but while the point is well taken (because writing explications implies a demanding process of analysis), it is also true that even reading explications is not necessarily all that easy. Despite being composed in ordinary words, they are not ordinary discourse. For one thing, they are much longer than the kind of pithy (but opaque) formulations constructed from complex English-specific words typically found in dictionaries, for example. Some scholars apparently find the simple wordings "childish" and difficult to take seriously (apparently unmoved by the argument that simple wording improves semantic resolution and helps ward off Anglocentrism). It would be easy, and in some cases probably justified, to dismiss this kind of response as reflecting an unscientific

attitude, but there is an obvious intertextual dissonance between the simple wording of NSM and high prestige academic English. For many readers, explications are a new genre and the NSM metalanguage is a new register, and as when one encounters any new genre or register, a period of familiarization and stylistic habituation may be necessary before one feels fully comfortable.

It is also important to acknowledge that although their individual components are simply phrased, when read as a whole NSM explications are often quite complex and difficult to take in. Actually, there should be nothing surprising about this. Although phrased in simple and intelligible terms, an explication does not in any sense reduce the semantic complexity of the original expression; rather, what it does is to articulate that complexity. It is only natural therefore that a certain amount of time and effort is required to fully absorb an explication, especially if it represents an unfamiliar concept, not found in one's own language and culture. [Note 6]

Somewhat offsetting these challenges of interpretation, many NSM explications have textual and compositional features that make them easy to remember and make them easier to understand. Allan (2001: 279) compares them to "prose poems", presumably alluding to the lexical sparseness, grammatical parallelism and counterpoint (repetition of similar structures, with differing key words), and perhaps also to the satisfying aesthetic effect that can come from a finely-honed choice of words.

None of this is to say that any given NSM explication is perfect. We are certain that no contributor to this volume advances their explications as the "ultimate truth". Indeed, over the past three decades many published explications have been subsequently revised, by their authors or others, in the light of broader considerations, additional evidence, improvements in the metalanguage, and so on. Nonetheless, we are prepared to say that NSM explications are always offered as approximations to the truth or as hypotheses about the truth. Even if an explication is faulty, it is better to have a clearly expressed, and hence testable (and revisable) hypothesis, than no hypothesis at all. It is this spirit of truth-seeking that has underpinned and energised the NSM research community over the past decades, and resulted in the publication of literally hundreds of explications from many languages.

6. This volume

The studies in this volume present another 50 explications – for words corresponding to "happiness", "pain" and related concepts. They cover eight languages: four European – English, Danish, French, and Spanish (Latin American Spanish), three Asian – Chinese,

Japanese, Tibetan, and one small indigenous language – Koromu, from Papua New Guinea. In order of presentation, the chapters are as follows:

– "Pain" and "suffering" in cross-linguistic perspective, by Anna Wierzbicka.
– The story of "Danish happiness": Global discourse and local semantics, by Carsten Levisen.
– The meaning of "happiness" (*xìngfú*) and "emotional pain" (*tòngkǔ)* in Chinese, by Zhengdao Ye.
– Japanese interpretations of "pain" and the use of psychomimes, by Yuko Asano-Cavanagh.
– Some remarks on *dolor* "pain" in Latin American Spanish, by Zuzanna Bulat Silva.
– The semantics and morphosyntax of *tare* 'hurt/pain' in Koromu (PNG): Verbal and nominal constructions, by Carol Priestley.

Most of the studies confine themselves to contemporary times, though Wierzbicka's cross-linguistic review of "pain and suffering" delves into the cultural history of the concept of "suffering" and its possible links with Christian tradition. Likewise, most of the authors concentrate on words and word meanings, though Asano-Cavanagh and Priestley, respectively, examine typologically distinctive and interesting lexicogrammatical phenomena; namely, Japanese psychomimes, and experiencer constructions and special NP syntax in Koromu.

The studies vary in the extent to which they draw out links with other aspects of the cultures. Ye draws links between the Chinese "happiness" concept (*xìngfú*) and the relationship orientation of Chinese culture as a whole. Using cultural scripts, Levisen links the Danish concepts of *lykke* with what may be called the Danish philosophy of life. Priestley links the lifestyle and culture of the Koromu people of the New Guinea highlands with different attitudes to "pain". Bulat Silva touches on the tango in her discussion of Latin American Spanish *dolor*, and its differences both to French *douleur* and English *pain*. And as mentioned, Wierzbicka traces aspects of modern European notions of "suffering" back to roots in the teachings of the New Testament. Even in those papers that do not engage explicitly in this kind of argumentation or commentary, however, there is an implicit and constant relevance to culture, if only because in documenting language-specific semantic/conceptual differences one is ipso facto documenting cultural differences.

In terms of lexical focus, there is – rather surprisingly – a certain bias across the collection in favour of "pain"-related concepts, but this is more than offset by the compelling critiques of "global happiness studies" offered in the papers by Levisen and by Ye.

7. Parting remark

In his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, first published in 1785, the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid commented on the difficulties faced by those who would inquire systematically into the human mind. Recognising the need for what we would now call conceptual semantics, he draws an analogy between this undertaking and mathematics.

> So, in order to discover the truth in what related to the operations of the mind, it is not enough that a man be able to give attention to them; he must have the ability to distinguish accurately the minute differences, to resolve and analyse complex operations into their simple ingredients; to unfold the ambiguity of words, which in this science is greater than in any other, and to give them the same accuracy and precision that mathematical terms have. (Reid 1785: 63)

Pursuing the analogy with mathematics, Reid comments that "For indeed, the same precision in the use of words; the same cool attention to the minute differences of things; the same talent for abstracting and analysing which fits a man for the study of mathematics, is not less necessary in this" (Reid 1785: 63-64).

Reid's insistence on the importance of "minute differences" is certainly borne out by the studies in the present volume. As Wierzbicka (this volume) shows in relation to English *pain* vs. French *douleur*, for example, even a small difference in semantic content can be responsible for a discernably different range of use in the language – not just different collocational patterns and polysemic extensions, but significantly different "discourses". And as Asano-Cavanagh shows, the Japanese psychomimes are an exquisitely fine-tuned system for indicating subtle differences in the phenomenology of "pain". From a methodological point of view, we see it as impressive that the Natural Semantic Metalanguage can provide analytical purchase across such diverse areas and at such a fine level of resolution. Indeed, we would go so far as to say that just as numbers and measurement provide quantitative science with the tools needed to discern and specify fine differences in the physical world, so the metalanguage of semantic primes provides the tool or instruments needed to discern and specify fine differences in the realm of concepts, symbols and ideas.

In line with the aims of this new journal, we hope that this collection provides a "proof of concept" demonstration that NSM techniques open up new ways of exploring the intricate

relationships between language and culture, and new ways of making connections between different disciplines and communities of scholarship at the language and culture interface.

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Endnotes

[1] A noticeable exception is the volume on the multidisciplinary perspectives on "pain" and "joy" edited by Lascaratou et al. (2008).

[2] More resources are available online at the NSM Homepage hosted by Griffith University. Short URL: bit.ly/Lz6QbN.

[3] It may be useful to provide some summary notes on differences in how the main mental primes relevant to emotions are expressed cross-linguistically (Goddard 2012). In many languages, exponents of FEEL have polysemic extensions such as 'taste', 'smell', and 'hold an opinion'. Sometimes the exponents of FEEL and HEAR are related or even identical in form. Distinctive grammatical constructions ("experiencer constructions") are common with exponents of FEEL, such as impersonal constructions, dative subject constructions, and the like. It is not uncommon for exponents of THINK to have polysemic extensions such as 'intend', 'worry', 'long for', and even 'count'. On a grammatical note, English permits using *think* in a general "opinion" sense with a *that*-complement (e.g. 'I think that she's at home'), but this is a peculiarity not shared by many other languages and it is not part of the universal grammar of THINK. Exponents of WANT often have polysemic extensions such as 'like' and 'love', or 'seek'. Many languages employ different grammar for the two types of clausal complement that are possible with WANT. From a formal point of view, exponents of semantic primes are not always morphologically simple. When they are morphologically complex, it is not uncommon for two or more mental primes to share some morphological material between them, such as a common root or formative. A useful resource for identifying exponents of semantic primes is the schedule of 150 canonical sentences given in Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014b).

[4] Since Shweder (2003, 2004), semantic prime DON'T WANT has been added to the prime inventory, or, more accurately, it has been re-installed after 15 years off the list. DON'T WANT, or 'diswant', was one of the 13 primes originally proposed in Wierzbicka (1972).

[5] Some cultural scripts include complex but universal (or near-universal) words, such as social category words like 'men', 'women' or 'children'. They may also include culture-specific words designating culturally important concepts or categories (cf. e.g. Ye 2004; Yoon 2004).

[6] There is no contradiction in recognizing this and claiming at the same time that complex semantic content is fluently at play in normal cognition and communication, because, firstly, the content is packaged into words, which appear to be cognitively processed as units, and, second, because normal cognition and communication is supported by tremendous routinization and "over-learning".