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Emotions in Language and Interactions: A Memo

This presentation focuses on definitional and methodological issues, in the field of analysis of emotions in language, discourse and interaction, from a linguistic, semiotic and interactional viewpoint.

1. Basic lexicon
The vocabulary of emotion is structured by a broad opposition between *emotion* and *affect* as high tension foreground episodes (phasic states) developing on a background of less intense routine background, the "normal state of composure", conditioned by individual *mood*, *temper* (*character*, *disposition*).
Emotions are *complex* phenomenon (syndromes), including *more or less intense pleasant or unpleasant* states of mind, linked with a specific representation of the *surrounding circumstances*, involving *meaningful bodily manifestations*, and initiating specific forms of *behavior and action*.
Feeling is more general than *emotion* or *affect*. It can refer to a physical sensation: *a feeling of cold*. In ordinary language, *feeling* refers basically to a physical sensation experienced through the sense organ of touch, and to the "generalized bodily consciousness or sensation" (Merriam-Webster, art. *Feeling*). Following on this lexical definition, Damasio defines feelings as "*the mental representations of the physiologic changes that occur during an emotion*" (2004, p. 52, italics in original).
Affect refers to an emerging, unspecified state of pleasant/unpleasant arousal.
Emotions are temporary physiological and psychological phenomenon. **Mood, temper, temperament, humor, character, disposition** refer to more permanent states or characteristics of the individual.
Like emotions, **moods** are positive or negative: one can be in a *good*, *happy*, *expansive* or *bad*, *irritable*, *depressed*, *hostile* mood. Moods differ from emotions by their source, their duration, and their state of consciousness.
The word **ethos** can be taken as an equivalent of character. Strictly speaking it refers to an intentional, strategic display of the character of the individual as represented in his or her speech.

2. Emotion episode and emotions as a flux
In medicine, a phasic phenomenon develops "rapidly and strongly to a stimulus but quickly [adapts and has] a short period of excitation" (M.-W Medical Dictionary, *Phasic*). Emotions characteristically develop as **phasic** phenomenon, consisting in a sudden surge of arousal followed by its resumption. **As phasic** phenomenon, emotions are opposed to **linear** continuous, more or less permanent basic dispositions of an individual, such as mood or character.
Emotion episodes can be rudimentary represented as a strong fluctuation on a more or less flat line corresponding to the standard degree of excitation of such and such individual in given circumstances.
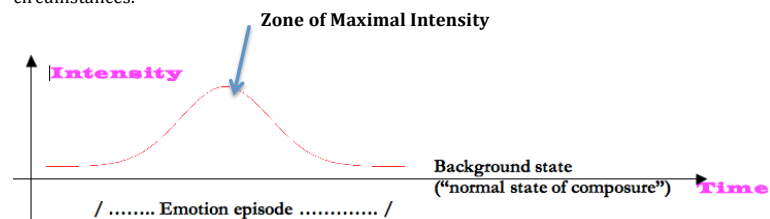

This representation can be criticized because it may introduce a misleading symmetry between the first emotional phase (emergence of emotion) and the second one (control of emotion); or

because it presupposes that the initial state is recovered as it was after the emotion peak, which is not true for life changing emotion experiences.
Nonetheless, it the concept of **emotion episode** is well adapted to the case of micro-emotions in interaction, as manifested for example by interjections (primary or secondary), as can be shown on the case of the French secondary interjection "*ah merde!*" (shit).
The vision of psychic life as based upon a phasic / linear opposition can be challenged for implying that the "normal state of composure" is *an-emotional*, and that emotion is *abnormal*.
Emotional life might be more adequately represented as not just one emotional peak but a series of successive, continuous and coordinated emotional impulsions. The resulting wavy line going from small emotions to greater ones represents an "emotional trip" (parcours émotionnel)
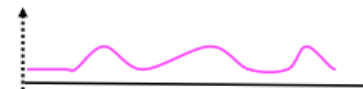
The concentration of interactional events such as *overlappings*, *voice intensity*, *low/fast speech rate* can be taken as criteria characterizing the emotional moments of the interaction. This paves the way for an automatic detection of emotion episodes in an interaction (Quignard & al. 2016; Nassau, 2016)

3. Emotion as an individual *and* a social interactional condition
3.1 Rules governing the social control of emotion
The biological theory of emotion necessitates the concept of display **rules** to account for the various social manifestations of emotion considered as universal. Display rules are "procedures learned early in life for the management of affect displays and include de-intensifying, intensifying, neutralizing, or masking an affect display. These rules prescribe what to do about the display of each affect in different social settings; they vary with the social role and demographic characteristics, and should vary across cultures" (Ekman, Sorenson, and Friesen 1969, p. 87).
In the empirical sociological approach of emotions **emotion work** is defined as "the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling" (p. 561); emotion work adapts "what I do feel" to "what I should feel" (Hochschild, 1983/2003, pp. 56–57).
Feeling Rules are norms or scripts that "guide emotion work by establishing the sense of entitlement or obligations that govern emotional exchange" (Hochschild, 1983/2003, pp. 56–57). Feeling rules are social conventions, establishing what one should feel under given circumstances. Two levels of feeling rules can be distinguished, *cultural* rules, valid in the community at large, such as rules determining what one should feel at a funeral or at a wedding; and *occupational* rules aimed at adapting the *deep feelings* of the individual to the various workplace necessities, not just his her *external emotional actions* (Hochschild 1983/2003).
3.2 Emotion as a social interactional condition
• From an historical point of view, the word emotion referred first to a non-psychological, **collective movement**.
• In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle presents the first list of basic emotions as inherently **social and political**.
• Some of Ekman's basic emotions are **inherently relational** (*anger, guilt, shame, contempt, embarrassment, pride in achievement*). The complementary set includes *disgust, happiness, sadness, surprise amusement, contentment, excitement, fear, relief, sadness/distress, satisfaction, sensory pleasure*; each of these emotion implies a social-interactional relation as often as not.
• The basically other-related nature of emotion has its roots in the mechanisms of *affective resonance*, *empathy*, and *sympathy*. **Affective resonance** is the capacity to share the emotion of the other. **Empathy** and **sympathy** goes beyond affective resonance insofar as they include cognitive filters; for instance, co-oriented *anger*, induced by a partner's anger towards an object, is a case of empathy; *pity* felt as a reaction to a partner's distress is a case of sympathy.

Sympathy is not identification, but understanding and positioning towards the other; the emotion displayed by the second-level experiencer is not identical with, but complementary to the emotion of the other. These concepts connect easily with the notions of **involvement**, **alignment**, or **affiliation** familiar in interaction analysis.

4. The communicative function of emotion

Emotional language is defined as an unpredictable, uncontrollable, unintentional, causally provoked outbreak of emotion breaking up the discourse. **In emotive language**, emotion is strategically, intentionally displayed in order to influence or manipulate the partner (Caffi & Janney 1994, p. 348). This distinction between *emotional* expression and *emotive* communication is intuitively clear (true /manipulative emotion), but difficult to apply insofar as any true manifestation of emotion can be **mimicked** to be strategically used. So, by default, emotion in interaction should be considered as a kind of **linguistic-semiotic communicative activity**.

6. In practice: Re-constructing emotions:

Emotion can be *asserted* or *inferred*

1. Explicitly asserted, when the passage contains an emotion term: I'm sad (self-allocated emotion, the speaker is the experiencer)

2. Inferred from terms having an *emotional orientation*

    2a: Terms describing the situation. An *insecure footbridge* makes the experiencer/speaker feel *insecure* "uncertain or anxious about oneself; not confident" (Merriam-Webster, *Insecure*)

    2b.   Terms describing a tone of voice, a mimic, a posture, a gesture of the experiencer " The men are throwing their hands up in the air and saying, you know, what am I supposed to do?" (Linguee, lever les bras au ciel)

3. Specific emotions can be deduced from non-semiotic activities: S/he carefully from which one can infer an emotion or a broad state of mind "*Every few minutes he paused in his work to scrutinize the landscape, for he had a feeling that danger was not far off*" (Google, *scrutinize the landscape*).

5. Emotion and argumentation

• Emotional states can be construed as **conclusions**. Emotions can be based on good reasons: *motivated fear, justified anger, good reasons for pride*. They can be used as **arguments**, to do or to think something: *motivated fear* is itself a sound reason to take precautions (without fear, the concept of precaution does not make sense); feeling indignation is a good reason to act / a good justification for political action, etc.

• **Emotions are not the response to a stimulus, as shown by:**

— The existence of emotion **prescriptions**

    Time for outrage! (Stéphane Hessel).

— The **same** material situation can motivate **two** antagonistic responses:

    A: — *Let's rejoice, the tyrant is dead!*

    B: — *Let's cry the death of the Father of our Country!*

— Emotions are disputable; they can be the focus of an explicit dissensus:

    A: — *I'm not afraid!*

    B : — *You should be!*.

• **In everyday language, reason and emotion are indiscernible**

The same basic cognitive axes frame emotion and cognition Plantin 2011), that is: Categorization – Distance – Causality – Agentivity – Control – Analogy.

Ex: Causes and *agents*. The same road accident can be framed as a consequence of fatality, or as a consequence of a systematic public policy. The first description builds *sadness* and *resignation*; the second description builds *political indignation*.

Consequences. Events are moving when their consequences affect the (potential) experiencer interests, norms and values. Emotions can be induced simply by showing that such and such a state of affairs will have a positive or a negative consequence.

— The dimension of *control* is essential. A dangerous perspective induces *fear*; if it can be controlled through action, the experiencer become *ashamed* to be *afraid*, and decide to act. The same negative event, without possibility of control, creates *panic*.

• NB: The status of emotion differs according the genre of discourse and activity considered.

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