

WAYS TO EXPRESS INDIFFERENCE FROM UNEMOTIONAL VERSUS EMOTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

*Serghei VASILACHI,
drd., Academia de Studii Economice din Moldova*

Această publicație are ca și scop identificarea mijloacelor lingvistice sau paralingvistice de exprimare a indiferenței din perspectiva comparării stării non-afective cu cea emoțională/afectivă. Uneori e dificil să determini prin care mijloace paralingvistice și extralingvistice se exprimă acea starea de indiferență fără emoții dacă nu o contrastăm cu starea emoțională de grijă, atenție față de cineva.

Emotions in general and particular, according to Aaron Ben-Ze'ev in his work “The Subtlety of Emotions”, constitute prototype rather than binary categories. There are no necessary and sufficient conditions in virtue of which a state is an emotion as opposed to a non-emotion, and there are no necessary and sufficient conditions in virtue of which an emotion is anger instead of, for instance, resentment. We may, nonetheless, describe the characteristics typical of emotional states, and a state may be classified as an emotion to the extent that that it partakes of these characteristics. Similarly, we may describe the characteristics typical of a given emotion, such as anger, and an emotion may qualify as anger to the extent that it resembles the typical case. Such prototype analysis is sufficiently rich, Ben-Ze'ev maintains, “to generate psychologically and philosophically interesting insights into the nature of emotions in general and into the features of particular kinds of emotions. “ [1, p.29]

So what, in general, sets emotions apart from other states that aren't emotions, like perceptions, or beliefs, or tickles on the soles of one's feet? According to Ben-Ze'ev, emotions are typically directed at people (or agents, such as animals, which resemble people in relevant respects) and are typically generated by the perception of a change that strikes us as significant in virtue of bearing upon our personal concerns. When in the grip of an emotion, we compare our new situation (or a possible situation which is known by us to be imaginary), with our previous or desired state of affairs and, given such a comparison, we evaluate our actual or counterfactual situation.

This typical causal history leads emotions to enjoy a particular constellation of characteristics. In virtue of being triggered by the perception of an important change, emotions are typically intense. In virtue of the fact that the change is perceived as important due to its relevance to our personal concerns, emotions typically take a narrow and relatively egocentric focus. In virtue of the fact that no change can be perceived as a change forever (eventually, the new situation becomes the status quo), emotions are typically unstable and brief.

While it does hold sway, however, an emotion enjoys a feeling and a tripartite intentional component, the latter of which is composed of cognitive, evaluative and motivational elements [1, p.31]. Anger, for instance, may involve a particular sensation in the stomach, an interpretation of what someone has done, an evaluation of this behavior as blameworthy, and a desire to punish the wrong-doer. These feeling and intentional components serve to distinguish emotions from other affective states, such as sentiments, moods, affective traits and affective disorders. In particular, emotions are typically about something fairly specific and, in virtue of having a pronounced feel, are the subject of immediate experience. Sentiments, although taking a specific content, may lack the feeling component entirely and so need not be present to awareness at any given time. Moods, much like tickles, are the subject of awareness in virtue of enjoying a distinctive feeling but they need not be about anything in particular. Affective traits lack both a feel and a definite content and, as such, are more on the order of dispositions to feel and behave in certain ways. Affective disorders, on the other hand, may take the extreme form of any affective state (emotion, sentiment, mood or trait). [1. p.34]

Emotions, themselves, may be distinguished from each other on the basis of their evaluative components, and, in particular, on the basis of the positive or negative nature of this evaluation and its object [2, p.12]. Envy and jealousy, for instance, involve negative evaluations of others' good fortune. Pity and compassion involve negative evaluations of others' misfortune. Happy-for and pleasure-in-other's misfortune involve positive evaluations of others' good fortune and bad fortune, respectively. Anger involves a negative evaluation of the praiseworthiness of an agent's actions; disgust involves a negative evaluation of the appealingness of the agent; while hate and contempt both involve a negative evaluation of the appealingness and the praiseworthiness of an agent [2, p.13]. Gratitude, on the other hand, involves a positive evaluation of the praiseworthiness of another's actions. Sexual desire involves a positive evaluation of the appealingness of an agent. Love involves the positive evaluation of the appealingness and the praiseworthiness of an agent. Happiness and sadness, respectively, involve positive and negative evaluations of our current situation. Hope and fear, respectively, involve positive and negative evaluations of our possible future. Pride involves a positive evaluation of our actions, whereas regret, guilt and embarrassment involve negative evaluations of our deeds. Pridefulness and shame, on the other hand, involve positive and negative evaluations of ourselves, respectively. Although no emotions are basic in any reductionistic sense, certain emotions may be considered basic insofar as their intentional components are relatively unsophisticated and don't require the ability to refer to oneself, imagine counterfactual situations, contemplate the fortune of others, or engage in social comparison. Happiness, anger and repulsion would be basic in this sense, whereas envy, regret and shame would not be basic [2, p.14].

The opposite of being emotional is being indifferent, namely, being apathetic. Contrary to emotional people, indifferent people are unresponsive to and detached from changes in their situation; they remain stable in the face of such changes. The life of people low in emotional intensity is characterized by endurance, evenness, and lack of fluctuation. The life of people high in emotional intensity is characterized by abruptness, changeableness, and volatility.

One of the typical characteristics of emotions is their relative great intensity. Emotions are intense reactions. In emotions the mental system has not yet adapted to the given change, and owing to its significance the change requires the mobilization of many resources. No wonder that emotions are associated with urgency and heat. One basic evolutionary function of emotions is indeed that of immediate mobilization. This function enables us to regulate the timing and locus of investment in the sense of allocating resources away from situations where they would be wasted, and toward those where investment will yield a significant payoff.

Low intensity of the feeling dimension, as well as of other mental components, usually expresses neutral or indifferent states of the mental system. Emotions are the opposite of such states. Accordingly, it is preferable to consider low-intensity states as non-emotional or non-typical. Although it is impossible to delineate the precise borderlines of emotional intensity, we can say that typical emotions have such an intensity that influences our normal functioning but not in a way that disables us completely - as is the case in affective disorders.

References

1. Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, *THE SUBTLETY OF EMOTIONS* MIT Press, 2000, 629 pp.
2. John Searle, *EXPRESSION AND MEANING*. Cambridge: C.U.P., 1979. 187 pp.