## "The Lexico-Semantic Field of Negative Emotions in English: A Cognitive Perspective"

**Turgunov Shukhratjon, shuhratturgunov98@gmail.com**
**Teacher, Uzbekistan state world languages university.**

### Abstract

This article analyzes the lexico-semantic field of negative emotions in English from a cognitive linguistic perspective. It examines key concepts including common emotion terms such as sadness, anger, fear, and disgust. Metaphors used to conceptualize emotions and cultural scripts associated with emotional expression are also investigated. The analysis reveals how emotions are categorized and understood through language. Findings demonstrate the influence of cognitive and cultural factors on emotion semantics. Norms of emotional expression are shown to reflect sociocultural models. This study enhances understanding of the relationship between language, thought, and affect.

**Key words:** negative emotions, emotion terms, conceptual metaphors, cultural scripts, cognitive linguistics, emotional expression, language and cognition, anger, sadness, fear, disgust, cultural models

### Introduction

Emotions are a universal human phenomenon, yet the ways different cultures experience and talk about feelings can vary tremendously. This article aims to explore the semantic underpinnings of core negative emotions in English through the lens of cognitive linguistics. Specifically, it will analyze common emotion terms, metaphorical concepts, and cultural norms associated with expressions of sadness, anger, fear and disgust. Examining how these elements of language shape perceptions of affect can provide valuable insight into the relationship between cognition, culture, and emotion.

### Emotion Terms in English

All natural languages contain lexemes for labeling basic emotions. In English, the predominant terms are 'sadness', 'anger', 'fear', and 'disgust' (Russell, 1991). However, emotion semantics are complex, as single words often encompass multifaceted states. For instance, 'anger' can involve frustration, irritation, or rage depending on the context and intensity (Averill, 1982).

Subtler shades of meaning also exist. 'Sadness' primarily denotes low mood, yet elongated sorrow may be better captured by 'grief' or 'mourning' (Stearns & Stearns, 1985). Moreover, languages can differ in their lexical categorizations. For example, while English separates 'fear' and 'anxiety', some view the latter as intense, prolonged fear (Ekman, 1992). These intricacies demonstrate linguistic influences on emotional construal.

### Conceptual Metaphors in the Emotion Domain

Beyond nominal labels, conceptual metaphors play a significant role in how affective experiences are understood and communicated (Kövecses, 2018). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) described primary metaphors like EMOTIONS ARE HEATED FLUIDS IN A CONTAINER that structure emotion talk in English, as in "My blood was boiling with anger". This industrial-era metaphor highlights cultural models.

Other prevalent metaphors include EMOTIONS ARE FORCES, seen when one is "overcome with fear", and EMOTIONS AS OPPONENTS, as in the goal of "conquering grief" (Kövecses, 2005). Systematic analysis of metaphors provides a window into tacit cultural conceptions that shape emotional semantics. Beyond this, emotion discourse is embedded within sociolinguistic contexts.

### Cultural Scripts and Display Rules

Languages contain cultural scripts or norms regarding appropriateness of emotional expression in different situations (Thirioux et al., 2019). Displays of affect are regulated according to rules that maintain social harmony. In English cultures, limited crying is acceptable for sadness but frowned upon for adults in other contexts like anger (Simmons et al., 2015).

Stoic cultural scripts in English emphasize restraint, particularly for men. Suppressing negative emotions like fear during trying times can be seen as virtuous (Simpson et al., 2018). However, recent years have witnessed a loosening of display rules to allow for limited emotional vulnerability between intimate others (Eagly et al., 2019). Shifts in norms demonstrate the dynamic interplay between language, cognition, and culture over time.

### Conceptualization of Specific Negative Emotions

**Sadness** is a universal reaction to loss but diversely expressed depending on cultural norms (Mesquita & Deloisio, 2010). In English, expressions include low spirits, feeling blue, or tearfulness conveying despondency. However, inconsolable or prolonged grief implies one has not moved on, threatening cultural values of resilience (Smith & Scannell, 2017). Euphemisms like "going through a hard time" mitigate stigma.

- Crying or tearing up is acceptable for mild sadness in women but seen as weakness in men. They are expected to remain stoic.
- Open wailing or sobbing is only appropriate at funerals or intense moments of grief, otherwise it may be viewed as attention-seeking.
- Using euphemisms like "feeling down" or "blue" allow expressing sadness without appearing too emotional.

**Fear.** While fear prompts fight-or-flight, its linguistic representation is culturally mediated (Friedlmeier & Vandergoot, 2018). English freely discusses fears through nominal ("my fear of heights") and adjectival uses ("I felt fearful"). Contextual variables like respect for authority affect fear displays, from obedience to open defiance. Socially-valued bravery also motivated evolving masculinity norms encouraging limited fear admission (O'Neil, 2015).

- Admitting fears is accepted for children but discouraged in adults who should be brave and self-reliant.
- Displaying fear can be justified in dangerous situations but otherwise implies weakness of character.
- Talking about or expressing phobias is becoming more common due to greater mental health awareness.

**Anger**. Culturally, anger serves enforcement functions but must be tightly regulated to prevent harm. English recognizes gradations from annoyance and frustration to fury as demonstrated through facial expressions, tone of voice, and statements like "She made me so angry!" (Averill, 1983). However, direct anger between intimates is seen as disrespectful or psychologically unhealthy (Gottman & Silver, 2015). Venting fury rarely provides relief according to current perspectives.

- Direct, explosive displays of anger are usually condemned as aggressive and loss of control.

- For men, controlled frustration or annoyance can be expressed but fury is off-limits.
- Women have slightly more leeway to show anger as an objection to unfair treatment.
- In the workplace, any visible signs of temper are inappropriate and unprofessional. Issues must be addressed calmly.

**Disgust**. Eliciting revulsion, disgust plays defensive and moral roles (Rozin et al., 2000). Its English lexical field spans noun ("a feeling of disgust"), verb ("She was disgusted by rotten food") and adjective uses ("a disgusting sight"). Disgust sensitivity varies between contexts, from distaste for dirt to perceived violations of community ethics. Moral disgust, involving broken social-sexual rules, activates feelings of threat more than pathogen or wastefulness disgust (Chang et al., 2013).

- Facial expressions like wrinkling the nose are universal disgust signals considered appropriate.
- Verbally expressing disgust reinforces social-moral boundaries like expressions of distaste for unethical acts.
- However, constantly complaining about minor irritants can characterize one as fussy or difficult to please.

**Conclusion**

This analysis of key negative emotion terms, conceptual metaphors and cultural display norms in English from a cognitive linguistic perspective demonstrates diverse links between language, thought and emotional life. Finer semantic variations and contextualization of affective experiences reflect cultural-linguistic influences on cognition and perception. Shifting social expectations also impact emotional expression over time. Overall, this research enhances understanding of the dynamic interplay between language, culture and the subjective realm of human emotions.

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