

Everyone of us use the term “emotion”. There is a common subjective belief that, when using this word, we know exactly what we mean. But do we know for sure? Let us think for a while what emotion is. This belief that each one of us knows what emotion is exists also among scientists. But it is only until we ask for its definition. It is obvious that we are able to indicate some examples of emotions, like joy, sadness, or fear, but is that it? The attempts to define “emotion” with solid meaning frames were undertaken even by ancient philosophers. Unfortunately, the issue of the definition of emotions has still not been clearly resolved. This is why collection and analysis of the widest possible choice of published emotion definitions will be the first aim at my own examination of emotion so as to juxtapose it. The compiled list of definitions will be used to establish the definitional criteria for emotion.

The lack of agreement does not only apply to the definitions of emotions, but there is also a difficulty in their categorisation. I assume that most of us have heard about the set of “basic emotions”. Possibly, some part of readers is able to mention a few emotions that are parts of the set. Nevertheless, most frequently, basic emotions are listed following one researcher or, at most, a very few of them. Particular emphasis is placed on cross-cultural research of facial expressions’ recognition made by Paul Ekman and his associates. However, when looking at a broader view of basic emotions, a common lack of agreement is also seen. Depending on a publication, the set has typically got from five to fifteen emotions. The more detailed the attempt of mastering the matter by scientists is, the more potential and practical discrepancies between classifications there come. The problem of disagreement between categorisations is not necessarily new to psychology as a study. A similar issue was encountered by personality psychology researchers who did not reach a relative consensus on classification of traits until 1980s. Yet, that problem was solved as a result of psycholexical studies. What is psycholexical study? It is a research based on the assumption that all important individual differences are encoded in the language we use. Emotion can also be seen as kind of individual difference. Why? Let us take a parachute jump as an example. There are people who make savings to experience the jump and the emotions connected to it. On the other hand, there are people who would never do it for any money. Here we have one situation but two different individuals and two highly different emotional reactions. By transferring lexical assumption into the ground of psychology of emotions, we can assume that the analysis of language used by an individual to describe their own or somebody else’s emotions may give the answer to the question about the categorisation of emotions.

In what way is the scientist able to categorise an emotion basing on language? First of all, by knowing the exact scope of the definition of emotion. For that reason, the part of research that was covered in the first paragraph is a necessary starting point. Further, on the basis of the selected criteria, a group of psychology specialists excerpts from a dictionary of a given language all the words that, according to them, meet the criteria. Nonetheless, even the specialists should not have their word taken for granted. Their work is followed by an analysis of interjudge reliability. A list selected like that usually is relatively long (for example, while preliminary studies of Polish language it was more than 1200 words) so it requires a careful reduction. On the final list, there are the words that has been left after morphemic reduction, which means that, for example, instead of words joy (*radość*) and joyfully (*radośnie*), there will be only one of them on the list. Also, the words that are not known to the majority of respondents are crossed out. Thus prepared list gives background to conduct quantitative research focus on emotion categorisation. Every respondent will be asked to add a note about how often they feel the emotion in their life next to the name of it. After collecting the answers and analysing the coexistence of the given words from the list there will be done a lexical classification of the emotions. It is worth to mention that lexical studies do not measure a popular perception of emotion. The respondent does not need to have knowledge about what emotion is and how to categorise it, because this task rests with the researcher. The respondent only mention the frequency of experiencing a given emotion. They do not need to have knowledge about what emotion is and how to categorise it. This is the role of a person conducting the research. A new, alternative to the established classifications of emotion will be the effect of thus conducted research. Hopefully, as it was in the case of personality psychology, it will add up to relative classification consensus.

Psycholexical studies may also be used to the development of cross-cultural studies of classification of emotions. It is all by the use of precisely described and relatively easy-to-replicate methodology that bases on language, so easily replicable research within the same culture for the same starting point/basis. Conducting the same research in many languages/cultures will give possibility of a direct comparison of the results. To this taking place, the first step described in this project must be done.