

Emotional words

Description

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Early last year Facebook introduced the option of tagging your status updates with an indication of how you feel. You select from a menu to indicate if you are happy, bored, irritated â?? that kind of thing â?? and thereâ??s a smiley that goes with each feeling. It was introduced as a trial, but is still there. I only see occasional messages tagged with smileys. So perhaps itâ??s not that popular, at least among the British.

Itâ??s pretty â??un-Britishâ?• really to indulge in such crude indicators of emotion. Iâ??ve caught up with Kate Foxâ??s book on the hidden rules of English (sic.) behaviour. (I think sheâ??s referring to WASPs.) She tells the story of how after the tragic 7/7 London bombings in 2005 Americans set up an online forum called â??London Hurtsâ?• with the tagline, â??Today Iâ??m a Londoner and today I hurt.â?•

Amidst the messages of sympathy from around the world, actual Londoners posted messages such as, â??If youâ??re all Londoners today thatâ??s eight quid each for the congestion charge,â?• and â??Southwark cathedral was a bit shaken, and went down the pub with the Imperial War Museum last night.â?• Her point of course is that Brits donâ??t take emotions that seriously, or pretend not to, or perhaps they are circumspect about how and where they give vent to their emotions.

Preeminently cultural

On a more serious note, Iâ??ve been reading academic articles by anthropologist Catherine Lutz on cultural differences, not just in the way emotions get expressed, but identified, talked about and *used* . Many people think that emotions are basic, somehow natural, and understood by everyone. So we all know what it is to feel grief, happiness, anger etc. These basic emotions unite us all. The categories get a bit ropey however when we start using terms like *thankful, drained, confident*, or *gutted*.

As an anthropologist Lutz examined the way certain groups in the South Pacific exhibited and reported emotional experience. She makes the strong claim that emotional experience is not â??precultural, but pre*eminently* cultural.â?•

In her book *Unnatural Emotions*, she says, â??the concepts of emotion can more profitably be viewed as serving complex communicative, moral, and cultural purposes rather than simply as labels for internal states whose nature or essence is presumed to be universal. The pragmatic and associative networks of meaning in which each emotion word is embedded are extremely rich ones. The complex meaning of each emotion word is the result of the important role those words play in articulating the full range of a peopleâ??s cultural values, social relations, and economic circumstances. Talk about emotions is simultaneously talk about society â?? about power and politics, about kinship and marriage, about normality and deviance â?¦â?• (pp. 5-6)

So I guess smileys donâ??t really capture that!



Notes

- The default list of Facebook feelings is: happy, excited, blessed, tired, relaxed, sad, amused, emotional, loved, proud, annoyed, fed up, fantastic, content, sick, determined, pained, bored, cold, exhausted, confused, thankful, nervous, frustrated, stressed, meh, cosy, drained, depressed, accomplished, angry, wonderful, hungry, ill, positive, upset, scared, lonely, stuffed, sleepy, down, hungover, hopeful, shattered, irritated, lucky, in love, grateful, sore, awesome, undecided, nostalgic, crazy, optimistic, lost, fat, heartbroken, blah, relieved, amazing, full, great, ecstatic, gutted, satisfied, hot, crappy, refreshed, rough, ready, productive, disappointed, anxious, grumpy, shocked, mischievous, worried, motivated, special, impatient, lazy, good, stupid, curious, broken, super, furious, alone, disgusted, embarrassed, devastated, giddy, unwell, aggravated, better, overwhelmed, awake, restless, wet, energised, bad, blissful, sorry, pretty, cool, free, safe, guilty, lovely, hurt, thoughtful, funny, alive, confident, beautiful, surprised, sexy, fresh, add your own.

- Iâ??m uncomfortable with national stereotypes of the kind amplified by Kate Fox, especially considering the diversity of what goes on in these islands, and its ethnic diversity, assuming it stays that way.
- The picture is a building detail in Riga, Latvia.

Bibliography

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Category

1. Culture

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Tags

1. emotion
2. Facebook
3. mood
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