A study of language-specific emotion patterns in English and German

Emotion concepts in context such as ANGER or HAPPINESS have more recently been viewed from a contrastive perspective (Cislaru 2014; Constantinou 2014; Wierzbicka 2009). The present paper shows that the cognitive (corpus) linguistics framework (Kövecses 2000; Lakoff 1987; Lewandowska-Tomascyk/ Dziwirek 2009) of Emotion Events (Langacker 1987, 1991; Lewandowska-Tomascyk/ Wilson 2010), which are defined as the immediate contextual use of emotion lexemes and their sub-unit parameters such as intensifiers (Fronhofer, accepted) or cognitive verbs (Fetzer 2014), provides a tertium comparationis particularly suitable for revealing cross-linguistic contrasts in the actual use of emotion concepts in discourse. Considering the patterns of emotion lexemes with language-specific sets of sub-unit-parameters, which themselves may function as contextualization cues (Gumperz 1982, 1992ab), language-specific emergent and salient discourse patterns (Ariel 2008) may be disclosed.

Qualitative and quantitative analyses of data taken from a comparable, gender-balanced and topic-balanced corpus of elicited personal narratives (n= 248) written by British and German university students corroborate the postulations made above. More specifically, (1) intensifiers co-occurring with emotion lexemes may function as foregrounding/ backgrounding devices, (2) language-specific patterns have been identified, e.g. upgrader + ANGER/ AERGER (97.5%/ 67.7%) vs. downgrader + ANGER/ AERGER (12.5%/ 67.7%):

(1) a.  e_f_024_2 I'm just so happy […]

b.  g_f_012_1 Ich werde dann fast ein bisschen wütend […]

[‘nearly a bit angry’]

(2) a.  e_f_033_1 I'm so annoyed right now […]

b.  g_f_033_2 […] bin aber ein wenig irritiert […] [‘a bit irritated’]

c.  e_f_033_2 […] some of them were upset, and I think probably a bit jealous.

g_m_014_2 Dabei bin ich mir sicher, dass sie […] jetzt einfach ein wenig neidisch sind. [‘I am sure … a bit jealous’]

In follow-up studies, further emotion concepts (e.g. SURPRISE) as well as discourse patterns will be under scrutiny.
References
