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Towards an analysis of the concept of sadness in Polish : a cognitive view

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TOWARDS AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF SADNESS IN POLISH: A COGNITIVE VIEW

1. Introduction

This paper has a twofold purpose. First, it aims to discuss the concept of the emotion of SADNESS through the analysis of the language used to talk about this particular emotion by Polish native speakers. Secondly, it will make an attempt at proving that cognitive semantics as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Lakoff (1983), as well as by Kövecses (1986, 1989, 1990) is capable of discovering the structure of such concepts as emotions.

The assumptions of cognitive semantics seem particularly well-suited for the analysis of such elusive concepts, which have extremely rich semantic representations, as human emotions. Although emotions have long been thought undefinable („Uczucie to jest coś, co się czuje, a nie coś, co się przeżywa w słowach", Wierzbicka 1971:30)), their nature is neither obvious, nor comprehensible, nor clear, and they are capable of exerting such force on people as to make them lose their heads, people still talk about them, try to name things which cannot be fully expressed.

It was not until the research by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) that it became possible to make a comprehensive semantic analysis of the language of emotions which would allow to differentiate between different emotions and to account for the structure of their concepts.

In our analysis we rely to a great extent on the research of Eleanor Rosch on categorisation (Rosch 1977, 1978), Charles Fillmore on frames (1982, 1985, 1986) and Charles Fillmore and Beryl Atkins (1992), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson on metaphors and metonymy (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1985), George Lakoff and Zoltan Kövecses on the language of emotions (1986, 1989, 1990)[1].

The analysis presented in this paper is based on the computerised corpus of linguistic data collected by the author herself. The corpus consists of over 550000 words, the linguistic data coming from two main sources: first, fragments of books and articles from a number of various Polish periodicals published in Poland in the years 1995–1998, representing a large variety of topics, style, register and target audience.

The following magazines have been used: Polityka, Sukces, Pani, Uroda and Przyjaciółka[2]. The material coming from books ranges from typical low-quality romances, action and adventure novels, to literature from the field of organisational psychology, marketing and management.

Although the choice of the linguistic material may seem coincidental, the author tried to collect sources which would contain a large number of data useful for the purposes of her doctoral dissertation, namely, the analysis of the language of negative emotions.

The second source of linguistic data was an anonymous survey conducted among 34 Polish native speakers, the average age being 24. The informants had no linguistic background and they were not informed about the purpose of the survey. The aim was to elicit as many examples of usage of language of negative emotions from young Polish native speakers as possible. Some of the questions asked were: 'What do you feel like doing when you feel blue/sad?', 'How can you tell if somebody is sad?', 'What is happening to you when you feel sad/depressed?'

2. Psychology of emotion versus language of emotion

For a long time emotions were considered to be feelings without any conceptual content, so they did not present any interest to linguists. Cognitive scientists claim, however, that emotions have an extremely complex conceptual structure and involve different amounts of cognitive processing.

In psychology there have been numerous attempts to account for the nature, origins and development of emotions, as well as the distinction between emotion and non-emotion. Our view is based on the cognitive theory of emotion (Strongman 1996) and claims that emotions arise as a result of certain kinds of cognitions, and physiological, behavioural and expressive aspects presuppose that this cognitive step has taken place. So, in other words, emotions arise as a result of the way in which situations that initiate them are construed by the Self (Lakoff 1985); however, following Halliday (1984) and with regard to recent psychological research

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[2] I would like to express my gratefulness to the editors and staff of the above mentioned magazines and publishing houses whose assistance and kindness greatly contributed to the creation of my corpus.

(e.g. Ekman 1994, Clore 1994), as well as on the basis of the analysis of the linguistic data, the author chose to use the term Senser.

It must also be remembered that what is meant here by "emotion" is something that psychologists and linguists have come to call "basic emotion" (e.g. Ekman 1992, 1994, Izard 1991, Johnson-Laird and Oatley 1989, Langacker 1987). There is linguistic and empirical evidence that a set of about six emotion categories, among them SADNESS, may be regarded as basic, and that there are certain parallels between this basic status and concrete basic level categories (the number of basic emotions may differ slightly in different theories, but all of them agree that such a concept exists).

Following the analysis of the emotion of ANGER by Lakoff (1985), we assume that there is a coherent conceptual organisation underlying all expressions connected with a given emotion, that much of this organisation is metaphorical and metonymical in nature, that the conceptual metaphors and metonymies are based on a folk theory of the physiology of those emotions, and that our concept of every emotion is embodied via the autonomous nervous system (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1985).

The language of emotions as we see it falls into four categories:

– naming one's emotions by the Senser, e.g.

(1) *Smutno mi ./*I feel sad.

or the Agent whose actions may lead to the emotion, e.g.

(2) *Zasmuciłam go swymi słowami ./My words made him sad.*

– talking about the symptoms of emotions, e.g.

(3) *Chodzi przygarbiony, ze wzrokiem wbitym w podłogę./He walks stooped, looking down at the floor.*

– talking about behaviours and actions connected with a given emotion, which enables us to characterise the emotion, e.g.

(4) *Miałam ochotę schować się w mysią dziurę./I felt like sinking undeground.*

(5) Chodzę z kąta w kąt i nic mi się nie chce./I potter about and Ieel like doing nothing.

– describing what the Senser is experiencing or feeling, e.g.:

(6) *Coś mnie od środka gniecie./Something oppresses me.*

(7) *Poczułam smutek w sercu./I felt sadness in my heart.*

The author would like to concentrate on the emotion of SADNESS as it has an extremely rich lexical representation and it has not been discussed so heavily by other authors as, for example, the category of ANGER or LOVE (Lakoff 1985, Kövecses 1986).

3. The structure of the category of SADNESS

The analysis of the linguistic data leads to the following conclusion: there exist a number of physiological metonymies and conceptual metaphors underlying all the linguistic expressions used by Polish native speakers to talk about SADNESS. However, some of them are shared by all major emotions or by some of them. Thus, granted there are basic emotion categories, it becomes natural to assume that there is a more general category EMOTION as their superordinate category, which highlights salient attributes shared by the basic level categories. Some of these attributes are the following:

PHYSICAL EFFECTS STAND FOR THE EMOTION

(8)   *Rozpłakał się z żalu ./He burst out crying with pity*

(SADNESS).

(9)   *Rozpłakał się z radości./He burst out crying for joy*

(JOY).

THE EMOTION COMES SUDDENLY FROM THE OUTSIDE

(10)   *Ogarnął ją lęk, przerażenie, gniew, żal, etc./She was overcome by fear, terror, pity, etc.*

THE EMOTION IS A LIVING ORGANISM

(11)   *Opuścił ją lęk, żal, radość, nadzieja, etc./Fear, pity, joy, hope, etc. left her.*

(12)   *Odezwał się w niej gniew, smutek, etc./*He felt anger, sadness, etc.

(13)   *Lęk, depresja, smutek, etc. się zmniejszał./Fear, depression, sadness, etc. decreased.*

THE EMOTION IS AN OPPONENT

(14)   *Uległa apatii, przerażeniu, etc./*She was overcome by fear, etc.

(15)   *Uraza, gniew, lęk, depresja, etc., atakuje ./Resentment, anger, fear, depression, etc. strikes.*

(16)   *Prześladuje go lęk, strach, etc./He is haunted by fear, etc.*

PRESENCE IS THE EXISTENCE OF THE EMOTION

(17)   Depresja, lęk, strach, etc., przychodzi, znika i powraca./Depression, fear, etc., comes, goes away and comes back.

(18)   Minęła jej złość, lęk, apatia, etc./*Her anger, fear, apathy, etc. died.*

THE BODY/THE EYES/THE HEART/OTHER ORGANS ARE
CONTAINERS FOR THE EMOTIONS

(19)   *Dała upust swym uczuciom./She gave vent to her feelings.*

(20)   *Przepełnia go nienawiść, lęk, radość, etc./He is full of hatred, fear, joy, etc.*

(21) *Moje serce jest pełne radości, smutku, etc./Her heart is full of joy, sadness, etc.*

(22) *Oczy wypełniał jej ból, strach, przerażenie, etc./Her eyes were filled with pain, fear, horror, etc.*

EMOTIONS ARE BOUNDED SPACES

(23) *Była w depresji, w apatii, w lęku, etc./She was in apathy, etc.*

(24) *Wpadłam w gniew, w szał, etc./I fell into fury, anger, etc.*

Leaving behind the metaphors common to a number of emotions, the analysis of the structure of the concept of SADNESS should be started with the analysis of its physiological effects and metonymies to which they lead.

Drooping posture

(25) *Przybiła go* ta wiadomość./The news dispirited him.

(26) Chodził *ze zwieszoną głową.*/He walked hanging down his head.

Droopy face

(27) Twarz jej *się wydłużyła.*/She made a long face.

(28) *Chodziła z nosem spuszczonym na kwintę.*/She walked with a face as long as a fiddle.

Crying/sobbing

(29) *Rozpłakała się* jak małe dziecko./She burts out crying like a small child.

(30) *Łzy napłynęły jej* do oczu./Tears welled in her eyes.

Grimaced face

(31) Twarz *wykrzywił mu ból.*/Her face grimaced in pain.

Difficulty with speaking

(32) Z jego głosu *bił wielki smutek.*/He spoke with a sad voice.

(33) Mówił do niej *trzęsącym się z bólu głosem.*/He spoke to her in a voice trembling in pain.

(34) Powiedział to *urywanym głosem, ze ściśniętym rozpaczą gardłem./* /He said that in a shaky voice, with a lump in his throat.

Interference with accurate perception

(35) *Widziałam świat w czarnych kolorach./* The world seemed black to me.

(36) *Mrok spowija* całe moje życie./All my life is gloomy.

These metonymies provide the basis for a number of metaphors. Droopy face and drooping posture provide motivation for the SAD IS DOWN metaphor.

SAD IS DOWN

(37) *Byłam w dołku./*I was down.

(38) Z nastroju chandry ciężko się *wygrzebać.*/It's difficult to overcome the blues.

(39) Byłam na dnie *rozpaczy.*/I was in the depths of despair.

(40) Zamiast *grzęznąć w depresji,* zrób coś dla siebie./Instead of sinking into depression, do something for yourself.

(41) Jej słowa mnie *zdołowały.*/Her words got me down.

This state of looking and feeling droopy may be a partial motivation for the SADNESS IS A BURDEN metaphor.

SADNESS IS A BURDEN

(42) Coś mnie od środka *gniecie.*/Something oppresses my heart.

(43) Czułam się tak, jak bym miała *cały świat na swoich barkach.*/I feel as if I carried the whole world on my shoulders.

Sadness is viewed as a state devoid of energy and vitality, characterised by the need to withdraw and be lonely for some time. This is shown by behavioural reactions which are typically assumed to accompany sadness:

WITHDRAWAL/ISOLATION

(44) *Nie chciało mi się z nikim rozmawiać.*/I didn't feel like talking to anyone.

(45) *Unikała mojego wzroku.*/She avoided my eyes.

(46) *Zamknęła się w sobie.*/She shrank into herself.

(47) *Unikała towarzystwa i rozmowy.*/She avoided company and conversation.

(48) *Był nieobecny duchem.*/His thorghts were far away.

Characteristic of sadness is also a low level of physiological arousal, as in the examples:

APATHY/LACK OF ENERGY

(49) Był taki *apatyczny i bierny.*/He was apathetic and passive.

(50) *Nic mi się nie chce.*/I don't feel like doing anything.

(51) *Nie mam na nic siły.*/I don't have enough energy to do anything.

(52) *Straciłam apetyt.*/I lost my appetite.

The state of apathy, withdrawal and isolation is the theme of a metaphor as well:

SADNESS IS LACK OF VITALITY

(53) *Straciłam chęć do życia.*/I lost an appetite for life.

(54) Po śmierci ojca zupełnie *przygasł.*/After his father's death, he was downcast.

(55) Był kompletnie *wypompowany.*/He was completely exhausted.

(56) *Życie straciło dla mnie urok.*/Life lost its charm.

The lack of vitality and the feeling of carrying a burden on your shoulders may be a motivation for the metaphors: SADNESS IS PAIN/DISEASE/DEATH.

SADNESS IS PAIN/DISEASE/DEATH

(57) Serce wypełnił jej *ból.*/Her heart was filled with pain.

(58) *Cierpi cała moja dusza.*/My soul is in pain.

(59) Tylko miłość mogła *ukoić ból jej serca.*/Only love could alleviate the pain in her heart.

(60) Prawie *umarła z rozpaczy.*/She nearly died of despair.

(61) *Zapadłam na depresję po śmierci męża.*/I fell with depression after my husband's death.

(62) Często *popadam w dołki i stan przygnębienia.*/I often feel down and in a bad mood.

(63) *Chandra* to stan *nawiedzający* samotnych./The blues is a condition that comes upon the lonely.

The analysis of the language of SADNESS reveals that it can be understood as an episode that develops over time, has its source, the grip it has on us and its termination. Lakoff (1985) suggested that emotion categories can be understood as scenarios.

Lakoff's scenario of ANGER (1985) consisted of the following stages:

1. There is an offending event which produces anger in Self.
2. As the intensity of anger increases, Self experiences physiological effects.
3. Self attempts to control his anger.
4. Self can no longer control his anger.
5. Self performs the act of retribution and the intensity of anger drops to zero.

Lakoff (1985) points out that this scenario is not the only course that anger can take and that there exist a wide range of instances of anger which deviate from the prototype, thus arriving at the conclusion that there is no single unified cognitive model of anger, that there is a category of cognitive models with a prototypical model in the centre, kinds of anger being variants on the prototype, bearing family resemblances to one another.

The category of SADNESS can also be understood as a scenario as SADNESS has a temporary aspect. The scenario consists of five stages, which will now be discussed. However, some elements of the scenario are different from those for the ANGER scenario.

In the ANGER scenario a very important element is the "act of retribution" (Lakoff 1985). However, in sadness there is no need to act against anybody, provided it is a pure emotion, not combined with others. In fact, sadness may lead to withdrawal, giving up any action, but it may also lead to engaging oneself actively in something of interest, but not directly involved with the cause of sadness. This leads further to the way it is terminated. Thus, the stages of the two scenarios cannot be identical.

However, we decided to call the last stage "action", as it involves certain behavioural responses and display reactions.

We would like to propose the following scenario of the prototypical emotion of SADNESS.

STAGE 1. Cause.

There is an event that makes Senser (S) sad, unhappy and miserable. According to psychologists (Izard 1991) there are some natural causes for sadness (by natural they consider a cause that is common to all people regardless of culture, education or socioeconomic background), such as: separation, whether physical or psychological, death of a close person, disappointment or failure.

(64) *Śmierć syna* wpędziła ją w depresję./Her son's death plunged her into despair.

(65) Po *jego odejściu* była zraniona, ale nie zdruzgotana./After he left, she was hurt, but not broken down.

(66) *Gdy to powiedział,* gdzieś w środku poczułam ukłucie smutku./ When he said that, I felt a twinge of pain.

(67) *Z byle jakiego powodu* ulega rozczarowaniu i szybko wybucha płaczem./She is overcome with disappointment and bursts out crying for any reason.

(68) *Błąd przywódcy* może sprowadzić cierpienia na innych./Th leader's mistake can result in others suffering.

However, there are also non-prototypical cases of sadness, such as the following:

a) there may be no obvious cause for the feeling of sadness:

(69) *Chandra przychodzi bez żadnego powodu.* Ot, rano wstaję i jest mi źle./Bad mood comes for no reason. I get up in the morning and I feel blue.

(70) Nie zawsze *łapie się chandrę bez powodu./* Not always do you get the blues for no reason.

b) the cause need not be something existing at the moment, but the prospect of such a thing or a memory of such a thing:

(71) *Osiągnięcia innych* zawsze wpędzają mnie w depresję./Other people's achievements always plunge me into despair.

(72) Gdybym musiała opuścić kraj, *pogrążyłabym się w rozpaczy./*If I had to leave the country, I would sink into despair.

(73) Wciąż *dręczą mnie te wspomnienia: bolesne, gorzkie i pełne urazy./* /I am still tormented by the memories: painful, bitter and resentful.

c) the cause may not be real, but artificial, for example when S is watching a movie or is reading a book, which can evoke sadness or melancholy in S, and even make him cry.

STAGE 2. Sadness.

As the intensity of sadness increases, S experiences physiological effects of sadness. (In the ANGER scenario S feels the need to act, as it is in the FEAR scenario proposed by Kövecses (1990) where S feels the need to escape.)

The variants include different degrees of intensity of sadness, such as: *przygnębienie, melancholia, rozpacz, chandra, żal, ból, cierpienie, osamotnienie, depresja, apatia, rozgoryczenie, etc* ./bad mood, melancholy, despair, blues, grief, pain, suffering, depression, apathy, bitterness, etc.

STAGE 3. Attempt at control.

S attempts to control his sadness as loss of control can damage S's well-being. This emotion is considered to be universal, but how we show our grieving – how sadness is displayed or held back – is moulded by culture, much in the same fashion as the choice of people who we usually mourn when they die. In Western culture it is not entirely acceptable to communicate and express freely what you feel, though it may be more acceptable to see a woman crying in public rather than a man. Thus, S attempts not to communicate what he feels and not to engage in the behavioural responses.

> (74) Zwykle potrafię nieźle *zamaskować swój smutek* – w najgorszym razie uznają mnie za niesympatycznego *mruka./I can usually mask my sadness – in the worst case I will be taken for an impolite growler.*
>
> *(75) Uśmiechnęła się smutno.*/She smiled sadly.
>
> (76) Próbowała to ukryć, ale *oczy wypełniał jej ból.*/She tried to hide it, but her eyes were filled with pain.
>
> (77) Gdy się żegnaliśmy, jej *smutne oczy ujawniały wzruszenie.*/When we parted, her sad eyes revealed affection.
>
> (78) Z trudem *powstrzymywała się od płaczu.*/She could no hel crying.

STAGE 4. Loss of control.

Each person has a certain tolerance for controlling emotions, including sadness. If the intensity increases beyond the limit point constituted by this tolerance, S may lose control.

STAGE 5. Action

S loses control and exhibits uncontrolled behaviour, such as bursting out crying or sobbing. S loses energy and enthusiasm for life's activities and withdraws from life to mourn a loss or frustrated hope, not willing to meet people.

> (79) Gdybym musiała wyjechać na tyle lat, chyba bym się *poryczała./*If I had to leave for so many years, I would burst out crying.

(80) Gdy się o tym dowiedziałam, *okropnie płakałam.*/When I learned about it, I cried horribly.

(81) Miałam ochotę *uciec przed światem, płakać, czytać nostalgiczne wiersze i słuchać takiej muzyki.*/I felt like hiding form the world, crying, reading nostalgic poems and listening to such music.

(82) *Dał upust swemu nieszczęściu i odkrył się* przed nami./He gave vent to his misery and opened his heart.

(83) Zazwyczaj *zamykam się w sobie i milczę.*/I usually shrink into myself and keep silent.

(84) Nie próbuję opanowywać swego smutku, ale raczej *przeżyć do końca, potem sam mija.*/I don't try to fight with my sadness, but live it till the end, and then it just goes away.

At this stage the variants can be the following:

a) sadness can turn into a mood, which is not so intense and may last days, weeks or months;

(85) Mój *zły nastrój trwał jeszcze przez kilka następnych dni.*/My bad mood lasted a few more days.

b) sadness can turn into depression regarded as a clinical condition;

(86) Była oraz bardziej odporna na leki, a *nawroty depresji i manii – ostrzejsze.*/She was more and more immune to medicines, and reversions of depression and mania – more and more acute.

(87) Dorota *cierpi na umiarkowaną depresję.*/Dorota suffers from mild depression.

c) sadness can turn into another emotion or combine with it;

(88) Gdy ktoś mnie zrani, mam ochotę się *rozpłakać, a zaraz potem powiedzieć mu coś takiego, żeby mu poszło w pięty.*/When somebody hurts me, I feel like crying and then telling him something that would sting him to the quick.

(89) Najpierw czuję się *zraniona, naiwna, potem wściekła.*/Firs I feel hurt, naive, and then angry.

d) S may try to cope with it using cognition, that is using attentional and thought processes to regulate or change the emotion; for example, one can use a device called cognitive reframing (Taylor 1989), which means seeing things differently, in a more positive light;

(90) Staram się *znaleźć w sobie coś pozytywnego.*/I try to find something positive in myself.

(91) Staram się *wewnętrznie uspokoić i wmówić sobie, że wszystko będzie dobrze.*/I try to calm down and convince myself that everything is going to be fine.

(92) *Optymistycznie patrzę na świat.*/ I look at the world with optimism.

(93) Gdy wpadam w smutek, potrzebuję czasu na dojście *do wniosku, że nie znalazłam się jeszcze w najgorszej sytuacji.*/ When I feel sad, I need some time to come to the conclusion that I am not in the worst possible situation yet.

e) S may resort to physical action – counteracting the physical expression of sadness through voluntary expressions and actions, e.g. he can get his body and mind active and engaged in something of interest;

> (94) Żeby zdecydowanie poprawić sobie nastrój, staram się zrobić coś przyjemnego, pójść na zakupy, obejrzeć film, który dawno chciałam obejrzeć./To feel better, I try to do something pleasant, go shopping, see a movie that I have wanted to see for a long time.

> (95) Czasem pomaga *nowe uczesanie, kupienie czegoś nowego.*/Sometimes it helps me to have a new hair-do, to buy something new.

> (96) Gdy jest mi ciężko, *piszę o tym.*/ When I feel bad, I write about it.

> (97) Gdy chcę opanować smutek, *kładę się do łóżka, czytam książkę lub słucham muzyki.*/ When I want to overcome sadness, I go to bed, read a book or listen to music.

f) S may resort to someone close for help or may try to find relief from their sadness in turning to a transcendent power;

> (98) Chcę *przytulić się do mamy i opowiedzieć jej, jak się czuję.*/I feel like hugging my mum and telling her how unhappy I am.

> (99) Tylko *inny człowiek potrafi mi pomóc łatwiej spojrzeć na świat.*/ Only another human being can help me look at the world in a different way.

> (100) Gdy jest mi źle, *odwołuję się do Boga lub próbuję do kogoś zadzwonić i pogadać.*/ When I feel miserable, I seek God's help, or I try to phone someone and talk.

g) S seemingly manages to overcome sadness, but it still exists and is bound to come back later;

> (101) Trudno jej było przezwyciężyć *dawne lęki.*/ She found it difficult to overcome past fears.

h) any of the above combined with one or two others, (for example, combining positive thinking with some interesting activities).

Each of the cases mentioned above, each of the cited examples, is a case involving sadness of some kind. It seems to us that there are no necessary and sufficient conditions which will fit all the cases. However, they are variants of the prototypical scenario. Thus, it can be said that the category SADNESS forms a cluster model with the prototypical model in the centre, and that it is a radial category with a centre and extensions which are non–prototypical models, more or less marginal, depending on how many family resemblances they bear with one another.

In the above analysis the author has concentrated on "pure" sadness, that is sadness not combined with nor influenced by any other emotions. However, it must be mentioned at this point that the analysis of the linguistic data shows clearly that not always do we encounter "pure" emotions, but very often we have to cope with mixtures or combinations of emotions, as in the examples:

(102) Gdy ktoś mi zrobi coś przykrego, *jest mi przykro, a jednocześnie czuję wściekłość i chciałabym zrobić na złość tej osobie./* If somebody hurts me, I feel sorry, but at the same time I am furious and I would like to do something just to spite that person.

(103) Wycofałam się jeszcze głębiej w siebie, gdzie tylko *ból, strach i obezwładniający smutek./*I shrank into myself even more, where there was only pain, fear and overwhelming grief.

(104) Ogarnęła ją *rozpacz przemieszana z lękiem i całkowitą apatią./*She was overcome with despair mixed with fear and apathy.

(105) Więcej było w tym *złości niż cierpienia./*There was more anger in it than suffering.

(106) *Miłość graniczy z bólem, lękiem* przed samotnością i odrzuceniem./ /Love verges on pain, fear of loneliness and abandonement.

4. Conclusions

We have endeavoured to show that the methodology developed by cognitive linguistics is able to account for the structure of the category of emotions. We are deeply convinced that it is possible, and the analysis presented above is a sample of work in progress devoted to the language of emotions in Polish and English. It is our intention to compare the conceptualisations of negative emotions in Polish and English revealed by the conventionalised ways to talk about them, and attempt to answer the question whether it is possible to claim, on the basis of the linguistic analysis, that there are basic, universal emotions, shared by the speakers of Polish and English and, if they do exist, to account for their structure. We think that this kind of analysis might be of interest for lexicographers and language learners.

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