

**The Semantics of Emotion across Language:
English- Spanish Language Transfer in Emotion Words**

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the semantic differences in emotion words between English and Spanish. Having a more concrete understanding of what emotion words mean in different languages can help language learners develop a more clear cultural understanding of the target language, improve the educational context in which emotion words are taught, and further psychologists' understanding of language differences that may arise between them and their clients. After surveying fifty-eight L2 Spanish speakers and thirty L1 Spanish speakers about different hypothetical scenarios, a few trends arose surrounding word usage and first and third person subjects. It was found that the L2 Spanish speakers had different trends than the L1 Spanish speakers in which words they wrote in and that both groups preferred first person subject responses over more indirect third person subject responses. Since the majority of L2 Spanish speakers had more than five years of experience in the language and the L1 Spanish population had fewer participants, further research would need to be done on a less experienced L2 population and with a larger L1 population in order to better understand the differences between Spanish and English emotion words.

Introduction

The expression of emotion in language is a complex topic to examine, and the question of the place of emotion and emotion-laden words in the bilingual lexicon is an important and neglected area of research into bilingualism (Wierzbicka, 2008). The study of language transfer often focuses on syntactic, morphological, and phonological features, while the semantics of bilingual language use is overlooked. However, semantic differences in language can create miscommunications, as different languages can use seemingly analogous words in distinctive ways. Understanding the conceptual differences between emotion words in languages “will underscore the existence of a personal, subjective, cultural memory that is coded linguistically in a unique way within a language” (Altarriba, 2003, p. 306).

Having a deeper understanding of differences in the meaning of emotion words has many uses. First and foremost, understanding the full semantic meaning of emotion words and phrases can offer great insights into the culture surrounding a language. These observations can be used to understand the meaning of certain situations more fully and respond to other situations more appropriately. For example, Wierzbicka (1994) explains that “in Japan, it is important to apologize very frequently and in a broad range of situations” (p. 4-5). She then goes on to give examples of certain situations where Westerners’ failure to fully comprehend the cultural significance of an apology in Japan created an awkward, rude, or dangerous situation. If the cultural significance of emotion words and phrases can be more clearly understood, then language learners may have a smoother transition culturally when interacting with the native speakers of that language.

Second, foreign language education can be greatly improved by understanding more about the nuances of emotion words and developing a better definition of them to present to

foreign language learners. While native English speakers may initially learn that *feliz* and *alegre* both mean “happy,” they are sure to get a few raised eyebrows by Spanish speakers if they throw the word *feliz* around too much. When looking at the respective definitions of *feliz* and *alegre* in the Dictionary of the Real Academia Española, *feliz* means “*que tiene felicidad*” or in English “to have a feeling of pleasant spiritual and physical satisfaction,” while *alegre* means “*poseído o lleno de alegría*” which translates to “possessing or full of a pleasing feeling.” With these definitions in mind, it seems that *feliz* has a much deeper meaning of happiness, while *alegre* is more surface level. These words differ from each other pragmatically and are used in different contexts. These nuances can and should be fleshed out more when first learning the language, in order to better prepare students' interactions with native speakers.

Finally, an understanding of the semantics of emotion can lead to the development of more culturally sensitive linguistic practices to incorporate into therapy, allowing psychologists to reach a larger population (Altarriba & Santiago-Rivera, 1994). Patients who are second language English speakers may not fully understand the English equivalent of the word they are using because they may be applying their understanding of the word from their native cultural and linguistic perspective. If therapy is conducted in English, they may misuse certain emotion words in an attempt to convey specific ideas. On the other hand, if a psychologist is conducting therapy in their second language, they might not fully understand the cultural implications of certain emotion words a native speaker might use. If psychologists were more fully aware of the meanings behind emotion words that native speakers use, it might help them more effectively grasp the situation. Furthermore, it has been shown that it can be easier to talk about embarrassing topics in one's second language, so in therapy, language switching can be used as a distancing technique in order to talk about topics that would otherwise be too upsetting (Bond &

Lai, 1986). Ultimately, understanding the semantic differences between languages can help both patients and psychologists alike in bilingual therapy settings.

Literature Review

Semantics

Semantics refers to the branch in linguistics that examines word meaning. There are different ways of interpreting what a word means, both concrete and abstract. “The denotation of a word or a phrase is the set of things in the world that the word refers to,” and “one other important element to the meaning of a word is its connotation: the mental associations we have with the word, some of which arise from the kinds of other words it tends to co-occur with” (Anderson, 2018). The denotation of a word is more concrete in nature, while the connotation of a word is more abstract.

The ability to semantically understand a word is more difficult depending on the type of word. Concrete words “refer to objects or events that are available to the senses,” and “abstract words “refer to ideas of concepts; they have no physical referents” (Friedlander, n.d.). Emotion words are intangible and unable to be perceived with the senses and are, therefore, considered abstract words. Wierzbicka (2008) even goes so far as to make the argument that “on the lexical level, emotion and emotion-laden words need to be considered as a separate class of words in the mental lexicon, because recent research shows that these words are represented and processed differently from abstract and concrete words” (p. 147). In general, concrete words are more likely than abstract words to share a number of semantic features across languages; therefore, concrete words will have similar meaning across languages. Because abstract words overlap less, they are more likely to have language-specific meanings (Altarriba & Heredia, 2001). This

indicates that emotion words, more abstract words, are more likely to be difficult to translate across languages.

Defining Emotion

It can be easy to examine the language of emotions with an ethnocentric perspective. As Anna Wierzbicka (1995) writes:

Words of our native language have a powerful hold on us, and in a sense, it is quite natural to project our own conceptualization of reality onto other human groups, and to imagine that for them, too, ‘anger’ or ‘sadness’ are realities, and when one hears that, for example, the Ifaluks don’t have words corresponding to ‘anger’ and ‘sadness,’ it is quite natural to be at first surprised and even incredulous. (p.28)

Moreover, in order to study the semantics of emotion, it is important to recognize that the term “‘emotion’ is an English word, and that it embodies a concept which is culture specific” (Wierzbicka, 1995, p. 17). Therefore, it is important to understand that everything discussed in the realm of “emotion” in English will inherently come from an Anglocentric perspective.

Defining what exactly is an emotion or an emotion word/phrase is the first obstacle in studying the difference in communicating emotions through language. Wierzbicka (1999) proposes that “the very meaning of the English word *emotion* includes both a reference to feelings and a reference to thoughts... and culture often shapes both ways of thinking and ways of feeling” (p. 5). For this reason, Wierzbicka’s idea of the meaning of the word “emotion” is not clearly defined but instead, explained using references that fall under the umbrella of the concept (specifically references to feelings and thoughts). She then goes on to explain that “emotion” is a

difficult concept to pin down and her references to it are mainly of convenience, so when she uses the term, it is meant to refer to, “roughly speaking, feelings based on thoughts” (p. 12). This definition of emotion is also closely aligned with the cognitive perspective on emotion. Cornelius (2000) describes the cognitive perspective as being centered around the idea “that thought and emotion are inseparable. More specifically, all emotions are seen within this perspective as being dependent on what Arnold (1960) called appraisal, the process by which events in the environment are judged as good or bad for us” (para 18). Wierzbicka’s broad definition of emotion as “feelings based on thoughts” will therefore be used for the purposes of this study.

Defining an emotion is difficult enough when examining its meaning and use in a single language (such as English). However, when attempting to translate emotions and emotion words from one language into another, inconsistencies can arise, since “even languages culturally (as well as genetically) closely related to English provide evidence of different ways of conceptualizing and categorizing human experience” (Wierzbicka, 1999, p. 3). Specifically, Wierzbicka (1999) cites the examples of German and Russian, which along with English belong to the Indo-European family of language, but which do not have a direct translation for the English word “emotion.” Furthermore, there are many other factors to consider when examining the role of an emotion in a culture. “More or less consideration may be given to how the emotion event fits into the flow of action; how the participants are situated in relation to each other, in terms of class, kinship, and biography and how emotion connects with other areas of value, such as morality, law, and economy. Studies of emotion rarely take into account all these factors...” (Beatty, 2005, pp. 18-19). All of this to say, that not only is the word “emotion” not always translatable, its role in a culture and the cultural norms and context surrounding its expression are also something that should be taken into account. This idea falls in line with the social

constructionist perspective of emotions which states “that emotions are cultural products that owe their meaning and coherence to learned social rules” (Cornelius, 2000, para 24).

Supporting the idea that cultural norms can influence the interpretation of emotion, there is evidence that speakers of the same language can have different viewpoints surrounding the expression of emotions. For example the Black or African American communities in the United States may differ from white Americans in their communicative attitudes surrounding emotion, “which white speakers tend to view negatively, as incompatible with clear thinking and rational argumentation, and which black speakers view positively, as a ‘natural’ and positive force, as a sign of sincerity and commitment” (Wierzbicka, 1994). In other words, white Americans tend to view emotion as mutually exclusive with clear and logical discourse and, therefore, distasteful, while many Black Americans see emotion-laden discourse as a positive. If two communities that speak the same language can have such vastly different views about the role of emotion in communication, then it is hardly necessary to state that communities that speak different languages are also likely to have different perspectives.

Differences between English and Spanish

When looking at previous research into the semantics of emotion across languages, there are a few words and phrases that have already been identified as difficult to translate between English and other languages due to semantic differences, the examples of *feliz* and *alegre* having previously been mentioned. Wierzbicka (1995) offers the Italian word *rabbia* as an example of a word that could be a “universal human emotion” in one language, while not directly translating into an easily identifiable emotion in English. The word *rabbia* is glossed as “rage, anger, fury” in the Grande Dizionario Inglese-Italiano y Italiano-Inglese, and the examples “make it quite

clear that the concept of ‘*rabbia*’ is really different from that of ‘anger,’ and that it implies an intensity and a lack of control which place it closer to the English words ‘rage’ and ‘fury’ than to the English ‘anger’” (Wierzbicka, 1995, pp. 31-32). The situation is similar in Spanish, with the word *rabia*. The Real Academia Española, defines *rabia* as “ira, enojo, enfado grande,” which is translated in WordReference.com as “anger, fury, rage.” Like the Italian *rabbia*, the Spanish *rabia* ultimately does not have a single concise translation into English, and it is much more akin in meaning to its Italian counterpart than the English gloss “anger.”

The language used in the context of apologizing provides another example of semantic differences between English and Spanish with cultural implications. In English, the words “apology” and “apologize,” which are elements of the English set of speech act terms, include in their meaning the following cultural script as specified by Wierzbicka (1994, p. 16):

“If something bad happens to someone

Because I did something

I have to say something like this to this person:

‘I feel something bad’”

The cultural script that Wierzbicka (1994) proposes is meant to serve as a guide to explain the best semantic denotation of an apology. Note that in her guide, the language she uses includes the word “I” and directly claims responsibility for what happened. In English, common apologies include the phrases, “I apologize,” and “I am sorry,” which both have the subject “I.” The subject of a sentence is defined as “the doer of the action or what the sentence is about” (Beason & Lester, 2015, p. 331), so therefore, the English apology phrases are centered around the subject “I.” These “I” statements very strongly indicate the responsibility of the situation to be on the speaker “I,” much like the cultural script that Wierzbicka puts forth.

However, in Spanish, the cultural scripts and language used in the context of an apology are different in a few ways. In Word Reference, the translations of “I’m sorry” include “*perdón*,” “*disculpa*,” “*lo siento, lo lamento*,” and “*perdone, disculpe*.” There are a few interesting trends to note with these words. The word *perdón* translates to the English interjection “pardon,” while the noun *disculpa* translates to “excuse.” If we apply the definition of an apology that Wierzbicka (1994) has put forth for English, neither of these words fall into the category of an apology, since they don’t serve the same purpose grammatically. *Lo siento* is translated to “(I) feel it,” and serves as more of an empathy statement than an act of claiming responsibility, and *lo lamento* is translated to “(I) lament it.” The “I” is in parentheses because, in Spanish, the verb ending clearly indicates the subject of the sentence and, therefore, eliminates the need to mark the subject explicitly with a subject pronoun. That is not to say that Spanish does not make use of explicit subject pronouns, but in Spanish, they are generally only expressed when the subject is unclear or when emphasizing a point. However, with the aforementioned apology phrases in particular, it is not common to hear native Spanish speakers using the subject pronoun “yo,” therefore implying that the subject of the sentence does not need to be highlighted or emphasized. Of these two phrases, “(I) lament it” is more close to a statement of taking responsibility, while as I mentioned previously, *lo siento* is more commonly offered in compassion rather than in responsibility. The final phrases *perdone* and *disculpe* are the most interesting cases. *Perdone* is the formal command of the verb *perdonar*, which means “to forgive or to pardon.” *Disculpe* is the formal command of the verb *disculpar*, which means “to excuse.” Because *perdone* and *disculpe* are formal commands, the subject becomes the implied “you.” In each of these cases, the implied cultural script centers not on a sense of “I feel bad” but rather (... something about asking the person’s pardon/forgiveness)

To summarize, the words and phrases that translate from the English “I’m sorry” to Spanish do not follow the same cultural script that apologies do in English, either because they serve mainly to offer empathy in place of taking responsibility, or focus on the person receiving the apology by making the second-person “you” the subject of the phrase rather than the first-person. All of this to say that the implication is strong that the definition and meaning of an apology in Spanish doesn’t quite fit the words that are typically put forth as a translation of the English “I’m sorry.” Just as certain emotion words can be hard to translate accurately from one language to another, this implies that cultural scripts around speech acts like apologies are also not an easily translated concept.

Bilingual Emotion Interpretation

When examining the difference in meaning in concepts across languages, it is important to keep in mind that bilinguals are in a unique position, but may not be conscious of semantic differences across the languages they speak. Wierzbicka illustrates this again using the example of English “anger” and Italian “rabbia”:

to understand the relationship between two words like ‘anger’ and ‘rabbia,’ it is not enough... just to ask informants (native speakers of Italian who can also speak English, or native speakers of English who can also speak Italian) what they think about it. It is quite likely that untrained informants will say, for example, that ‘rabbia’ and ‘anger’ mean the same thing. It is a basic principle of semantic analysis that meaning can only be established by systematic study of the way words are used. (...) To think that untrained native speakers can tell us what a word (e.g. rabbia) means, or how it differs in meaning

from another word (e.g. anger), would be as naive as to think that an untrained patient can make the best diagnosis of his or her own illness. (Wierzbicka, 1995, p.32)

Therefore, bilinguals are not always aware of any difference in semantic meaning between a word that exists in their multiple lexicons.

Since bilingual individuals have two lexicons to consider when examining emotion words, and two sets of cultural scripts to refer to, they can also have different ways of processing and expressing these emotions. Bilinguals with a clear L1 and L2 (not bilinguals who acquired both languages from childhood) typically exhibit more familiarity with the emotion words of their first language, while they have a more broad understanding of the emotion words in their second language. As a result, bilinguals will often demonstrate more emotion in their first language than in their second (Altarriba & Santiago-Rivera, 1994). Expressing emotions in one's native language is "more spontaneous and less inhibited, and more defensive styles of behavior are generated in the nondominant language" (Altarriba & Santiago-Rivera, 1994, p. 391).

The aim of this study is to compare and analyze the expression and understanding of specific emotion words among Spanish native speakers, including *feliz*, *alegre*, *frustrado*, *enfadado*, *triste*, and *devastado*. The meanings of *feliz* and *alegre* have been explained above. *Frustrado* translates to "frustration," *enfadado* translates to "angry," *triste* translates to "sad," and *devastado* translates to "devastated." In the context of this study, L1 Spanish speakers will refer to native Spanish speakers, and L2 Spanish speakers will refer to English native speakers who learned or are learning Spanish as a second language. I hypothesize that L2 Spanish speakers will have an incomplete understanding of the meaning and use of Spanish emotion words and will use them differently than the L1 Spanish speakers.

Methods

Materials

Two parallel surveys were prepared and distributed for the purposes of this study, one for native speakers of Spanish and the other for native speakers of English who have studied Spanish as a second language. These surveys were largely the same, with a few key differences. The native English speaker survey was written with instructions in English, while the native Spanish speaker survey was entirely in Spanish. Both surveys consisted of the same five multiple choice questions written in Spanish. Following the multiple choice questions, participants were asked to answer a few demographic questions. The native English speakers were asked (in English) about what other languages they spoke, how long they had been learning Spanish, the gender identity, and their age. The native Spanish speakers were asked (in Spanish) about what other languages they spoke, which variety of Spanish they identified with, their gender identity, and their age.

Multiple Choice Questions

Following the cognitive perspective of emotion, participants were asked to appraise their reactions to certain hypothetical situations (Cornelius, 2000). Participants were given four multiple choice responses to each hypothetical scenario, with a fifth option to write in a different response if they chose to. The first two responses always had the implied subject of *yo* (I). As I mentioned earlier, Spanish speakers don't normally add in the subject pronoun *yo* unless making a strong point in reference to the self, so the subject pronoun *yo* was not included in the responses. The second two responses did not have a subject of *yo*. Instead, indirect constructions were used, that included a direct object pronoun of *me* (me). The subject of the sentence ended up being the idea that was mentioned in the hypothetical. For example:

Hypothetical: <i>Su amigo le da un helado gratis</i> (Your friend gives you a free ice cream)

“I” subject response: *Estoy feliz* ([I] am happy*)

“Me” direct object response: *Me hace feliz el helado* (The ice cream makes me happy*)

*Note that the translation for *feliz* in this instance is happy, although, as previously mentioned, this translation is not exact.

In this example, the “I” subject response has a more direct relationship between the recipient of the ice cream and their corresponding emotional reaction. In the “me” direct object response, the subject of the sentence is the ice cream, *el helado*, while the recipient of the ice cream is me, *me*. This second type of response places the recipient in a more indirect relation to the verb and the emotion, *feliz*.

It is also worth noting that ending punctuation in the responses was not used to prevent influencing the responses participants chose. My thought was that including a period or an exclamation mark at the end of the responses may influence which responses participants were drawn to. However, the sentences describing each hypothetical situation did contain a period as their ending punctuation.

The five questions asked in the survey and the four multiple choice responses provided are listed below. Images of both surveys are included in the Appendix.

1. Su amigo le da un helado gratis.
 - a. Estoy feliz
 - b. Estoy alegre
 - c. Me hace feliz el helado
 - d. Me alegra el helado

2. Usted ve a su abuela por la primera vez en un año.
 - a. Estoy feliz
 - b. Estoy alegre

- c. Me hace feliz verla
 - d. Me alegra verla
3. Usted gana un millón de dólares con la lotería.
- a. Estoy feliz
 - b. Estoy alegre
 - c. Me hace feliz ganarla
 - d. Me alegra ganarla
4. Usted tiene un montón de tarea para mañana y todavía necesita ir a su trabajo por tres horas.
- a. Estoy frustrado/frustrada
 - b. Estoy enfadado/enfadada
 - c. Me frustra la tarea
 - d. Me enfada la tarea
5. Su mascota querida muere después de doce años.
- a. Estoy triste
 - b. Estoy devastado/devastada
 - c. Me hace triste
 - d. Me hace devastado/devastada

Variety of Spanish Question

When the participants were asked about their variety of Spanish, several options were presented to them as well as a blank option to write in. Participants were given the eight options of “Caribeño (Caribbean), Mexicano (Mexican), Centroamericano (Central American), Castellano peninsular (Peninsular Spanish, or Castilian), Andalucía/ Islas Canarias (Andalucian/

The Canary Islands), Rioplatense (River Plate), Chileno (Chilean),” and "Andino (Andean).”

This list is similar to the list of Spanish regions identified by Delgado et al. (2020), which identified “the eight main areas [as]: Spain (32%), Mexico-Central America (19%), River Plate (14%), Continental Caribbean (12%), Andean (8%), Antilles (7%), Chilean (6%), USA (1%).” While Spain (Castilian), River Plate, Andean, and Chilean were all included, Antilles and the USA were eliminated. Antilles was grouped in with the Caribbean variety due to their geographical proximity, so Continental Caribbean was expanded to just be “Caribbean.” The USA was eliminated altogether, the thought being that Spanish native speakers born in the USA would likely identify with the variety (or one of the varieties) of their caregivers. I separated Mexico and Central America in order to reduce the number of non-Mexican Central American participants who wanted to distance themselves from the Mexican variety and would potentially write in a different response to do so. Finally, Andalusian and the Canary Island variety of Spanish was added due to the presence of several key defining features that differ from the Castilian variety of Spanish.

Participants

Participants belonging to two groups were recruited for this study. One group consisted of individuals who identified themselves as native English speakers who are learning, or have learned, Spanish as a second language. The other group consisted of individuals who identified themselves as native Spanish speakers. Most participants were recruited through the Hispanic and Lusophone Linguist Facebook group. I also posted the surveys on my own Facebook page, as well as distributed them to several of my peers and professors in Appalachian State University’s Languages, Literatures, and Cultures Department, with the intention that my peers

and the professors would help distribute the surveys. All of the participants were over the age of eighteen, and there was no age limit. The responses were anonymous.

L2 Spanish Speakers

58 participants responded to the survey as L1 English speakers and L2 Spanish learners; this group will be referred to as “L2 Spanish speakers.” Of the L2 Spanish speakers, 79.3% of respondents were female, 19% were male, and 1.7% preferred not to give their gender identity. 24.1% of the participants ranged from ages 18-25, 13.8% ranged from 26-30, 34.5% ranged from 31-40, 6.9% ranged from 41-50, 15.5% ranged from 51-60, and 5.2% were above the age of 60.

In terms of years spent studying Spanish, the majority (72.4%) identified as having learned the language for 9+ years. 10.3% had studied between 5-8 years, 6.9% had studied for 4 years, 6.9% studied for 2 years, 1.7% had studied for 1 year, and 1.7% had studied for less than a year. The sample was clearly skewed toward highly experienced L2 Spanish speakers, as 82.7% of the participants had studied Spanish for over five years. Ideally the sample would have contained more L2 Spanish language speakers who had less than five years of experience, so this particular aspect of the participant demographics will be taken into account when considering results and conclusions.

Of the 58 participants, 17 (29.3%) identified as speaking more languages than English and Spanish. 29.4% of these multilinguals also spoke Portuguese, and 23.5% spoke French. 1 speaker (5.8%) spoke both French and Portuguese. The L2 Spanish group also included one speaker (5.8%) of each of the following languages: Malay, Arabic, Hebrew, and Vietnamese. 2 speakers (11.8%) identified as speaking French, German, and Portuguese in addition to English and Spanish, and another speaker (5.8%) said they spoke Portuguese, Italian, French, and German.

While some respondents did specify that they were not fluent in the languages they had listed, I decided to include all answers, regardless of what ability level the participant specified (if they specified at all). As such, I will assume that each participant had at least a basic level of understanding in each language.

L1 Spanish Speakers

30 participants responded identifying as L1 Spanish speakers. 53.3% of participants identified as female, 43.3% identified as male, and 1 participant (3.3%) identified as genderqueer. 3.3% of participants were between the ages of 18-25, 13.3% were 26-30, 36.7% were 31-40, 23.3% were 41-50, and 13.3% were 51-60, and 10% were over the age of 60.

The variety of Spanish that the largest percentage of participants identified with was Peninsular Spanish (26.7%). Following that, River Plate was the next biggest group, with 23.3%. 4 participants each (13.3%) identified with Caribbean and Mexican Spanish, respectively, and 9.9% of participants wrote in Colombian as a response. The Central American, Chilean, and Andean varieties were each represented by just one respondent (3.3%) and a single participant (3.3%) wrote in as identifying with Spanish of the United States. Another participant (3.3%) wrote in Peruvian Spanish, although Peruvian Spanish is generally grouped with other Andean Spanish varieties. Finally, a single participant (3.3%) wrote in “Colombian/ Peninsular”; the participant may have wanted to indicate that they identified as bidialectal, but the intention is not entirely clear.

Bilingualism and multilingualism was common among L1 Spanish respondents. All but 2 (6.6%) of the L1 Spanish participants spoke a language other than Spanish. English was the second language of 36.6% of respondents, and, one individual (3.3%) spoke Dutch as well as Spanish. Several respondents reported speaking three languages; the most common

second-language combinations being English and Portuguese (10%), English and French (6.6%), and Portuguese and French (6.6%). There were several respondents who had unique multilingual backgrounds; the following language profiles correspond to single respondents (3.3% of the sample in each case): English, French, and Italian; English and Italian; English, French, Italian, and Portuguese; English, Catalan, Esperanto, and French; 3 English, Guarani, and French; English and German; English and Japanese; English, French, Chinese, and Italian; and English, Catalan, and French. Some respondents did choose to specify that they were not fluent, so it will be assumed that for each language, the respondents had at least basic knowledge of the language.

Procedure

The surveys were posted on Facebook. Each survey was posted with a description of the participants needed. After the survey had been open for three weeks, the survey was closed to further responses. The results are described in the next section. It's worth noting that full statistical analysis was not done but may be beneficial in future research.

Results

L2 Spanish

In question one, the majority, 56.9% of the participants, responded with “estoy feliz.” The results of each of the questions asked in the L2 Spanish speaker survey are displayed in the figures below. 48.3% of participants in question two selected “me alegra verla” as their response. Question three had the greatest amount of variation in their responses, with 39.7% of participants choosing “estoy feliz.” Questions four and five had the most write ins, with five each. Question four also had the greatest consensus in responses, with 69% of participants responding with

“estoy frustrado/ frustrada.” In question five, 46.6% of participants selected “estoy devastado/ devastada” as their response.

1. Su amigo le da un helado gratis.

Estoy feliz	56.9%
Me hace feliz el helado	29.3%
Estoy alegre	5.2%
Me alegra el helado	3.4%

Write ins: “Me pone feliz el helado,” “Me encanta el helado, gracias amigo,” “Me encantan los helados – son riquísimos”

2. Usted ve a su abuela por la primera vez en un año

Me alegra verla	48.3%
Me hace feliz verla	27.6%
Estoy feliz	13.8%
Estoy alegre	3.4%

Write ins: “Estoy muy feliz,” “No puedo más de la emoción.,” “¡Estoy muy contenta!,” “Me emocioné al verla.”

3. Usted gana un millón de dólares con la lotería.

Estoy feliz	39.7%
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Me hace feliz ganarla	25.9%
Me alegra ganarla	15.5%
Estoy alegre	8.6%

Write ins: “Estoy emocionada,” “No puedo más de la emoción,” “Me alegra mucho,” “Ya chingué, no inventes, muero de emoción”

4. Usted tiene un montón de tarea para mañana y todavía necesita ir a su trabajo por tres horas.

Estoy frustrado/ frustrada	69%
Me frustra la tarea	15.5%
Estoy enfadado/ enfadada	5.2%
Me enfada la tarea	1.7%

Write ins: “Estoy molesta,” “Estoy harta,” “Me harta esta tarea,” “Estoy ansiosa,” “Estoy cansada”

5. Su mascota querida muere después de doce años.

Estoy devastado/ devastada	46.6%
Estoy triste	29.3%
Me hace triste	8.6%
Me hace devastado/ devastada	6.9%

Write ins: “Estoy deprimida,” “Me pone triste/ deprimida,” “Me pone triste,” “Estoy deshecha,” “Me puse bien deprimido”

L1 Spanish

Among the L1 Spanish speakers, the most common response for question one was “estoy feliz.” Question two had the most variety in the response distribution with 33.3% responding with “me hace feliz verla.” Questions four and five had the most write-ins with five each. Question five was the only question to have an even split in responses, where 46.7% of participants responded with “estoy devastado/ devastada” and 46.7% of participants responded with “estoy triste.” The results of the L1 Spanish speaker survey are displayed in the table below.

6. Su amigo le da un helado gratis.

Estoy feliz	46.7%
Me alegra el helado	13.3%
Estoy alegre	10%
Me hace feliz el helado	6.7%

Write ins: “El helado me pone contenta,” “El helado me pone contenta,” “Mi amigo me hace feliz con el helado,” “Agradezco el helado,” “Qué rico. Gracias. Me encanta el helado,” “Me sorprende,” “Estoy contento”

7. Usted ve a su abuela por la primera vez en un año

Me hace feliz verla	33.3%
Estoy feliz	26.7%
Me alegra verla	23.3%
Estoy alegre	3.3%

Write ins: “Ve a su abuela,” “Estoy feliz de verla,” “Estoy contento,” “Estoy mas que contenta”

8. Usted gana un millón de dólares con la lotería.

Estoy feliz	56.7%
Me hace feliz ganarla	16.7%
Estoy alegre	6.7%
Me alegra ganarla	3.3%

Write ins: “Me alegra haberla ganado, o mejor,estoy contento de haberla ganado,” “No lo puedo creer,” “Qué emoción. No quepo de alegría,” “No lo puedo creer!” “Estoy encantado de la vida”

9. Usted tiene un montón de tarea para mañana y todavía necesita ir a su trabajo por tres horas.

Estoy frustrado/ frustrada	43.3%
Me frustra la tarea	23.3%
Estoy enfadado/ enfadada	6.7%
Me enfada la tarea	3.3%

Write ins: “Estoy agobiada,” “Me pudre,” “Tener tanta tarea me molesta,” “Qué fastidio,” “Me estresa,” “Me siento abrumado,” “Estoy exhausta/recansada, no doy mas”

10. Su mascota querida muere después de doce años.

Estoy devastado/ devastada	46.7%
Estoy triste	46.7%
Me hace triste	0%
Me hace devastado/ devastada	0%

Write ins: “Me entristece,” “Estoy remal”

Discussion

Overall Comparison

For question one, “estoy feliz” was the top answer for both groups of participants, with 56.9% of L2 Spanish speakers and 46.7% of L1 Spanish speakers choosing it as a response. While 29.3% of the L2 Spanish speakers chose “me hace feliz el helado,” making it the second most common response, only 10% of L1 Spanish speakers selected that option as a response. The second most common response by the L1 Spanish speakers was “me alegra el helado” with 13.3%, but it was the least popular response for the L2 Spanish speakers, with only 3.4%.

For question two, 48.3% of L2 Spanish speakers chose “me alegra verla” as their response, but only 23.3% of L1 Spanish speakers chose that as their response, making it the third most popular response of the four. The most popular response by L1 Spanish speakers was “me hace feliz verla” at 33.3%, which was the second most common response for L2 Spanish speakers at 27.6%. The second most common response for L1 Spanish speakers was “estoy feliz” (26.7%), which was the third most common response chosen by L2 Spanish speakers (13.8%). “Estoy alegre” was the least common response by both groups.

For question three, both groups of participants chose “estoy feliz” as the most popular response, with 39.7% of L2 Spanish speakers and 56.7% of L1 Spanish speakers choosing it as a response. “Me hace feliz ganarla” was the second most common response for both groups, with 25.9% of L2 Spanish speakers and 16.7% of L1 Spanish speakers selecting it. While “me alegra ganarla” was the third most common response by L2 Spanish speakers (15.5%), it was the least common response chosen by L1 Spanish speakers (3.3.%). The reverse was true for “estoy alegre,” which 6.7% of L1 Spanish speakers chose as their response, while it was the least common response for L2 Spanish speakers (8.6%).

For question four, both groups had the same ranking of responses with slightly different percentages. Both groups selected “estoy frustrado/ frustrada” as the top response, with 69% of the L2 Spanish speakers and 43.3% of the L1 Spanish speakers choosing it. The second most common response for both groups was “me frustra la tarea,” with 15.5% of L2 Spanish speakers and 23.3% of L1 Spanish speakers selecting it. “Estoy enfadado/ enfadada” was the third response, chosen by 5.2% of L2 Spanish speakers and 6.7% of L1 Spanish speakers. “Me enfada la tarea” was the least common response, with only 1.7% of L2 Spanish speakers and 3.3% of L1 Spanish speakers selecting it.

Question five had the most unique distribution in responses. The L1 Spanish speakers were evenly split between “estoy devastado/ devastada” and “estoy triste” as responses, with 46.7% of participants selecting each response. None of the L1 Spanish speaker participants selected “me hace triste” or “me hace devastado/ devastada” as a response. The L2 Spanish speakers chose “estoy devastado/ devastada” as their top response, with 46.6% of participants choosing it. “Estoy triste” was the second response at 29.3%. 8.6% of participants chose “me hace triste” as a response, and 6.9% chose “me hace devastado/ devastada.”

First Person vs Third Person Subject

For question one, 62.1% of the L2 Spanish responses (including write-ins) had a first person subject. 63.3% of the L1 Spanish responses also had a first person subject. For question two, only 22.3% of the L2 Spanish participants responded with a first person subject response. The L1 Spanish speakers favored the first person subject responses slightly more at 39.9%. In question three, 53.4% of the L2 Spanish speakers chose a response with a first person subject. The L1 Spanish speakers chose more responses with a first person subject at 76.6%. In question

four, 81% of the L2 Spanish speakers responded with a first person subject, while only 59.9% of the L1 Spanish speakers responded with a first person subject. Finally, in question five, 79.3% of the L2 Spanish speakers responded with a first person subject. All but one of the L1 Spanish speaking participants, 96.7%, chose a response with a first person subject.

For each question, with the exception of question two, the majority of the responses in both surveys had a first person subject. Question two was the only question where the majority of the responses had a third person subject. The Spanish speakers had a higher percentage of first person subject responses for each question but question four.

Word Choice

In each question, participants were given two different adjectives to choose between when giving their responses (ex. *alegre* and *feliz*). In the write-ins, there were a few noteworthy trends in adjectives and phrases used.

Me Encanta

In the first question, two L2 Spanish participants wrote in responses with the phrase “*me encanta*” including “*Me encanta el helado, gracias amigo,*” and “*Me encantan los helados – son riquísimos.*” One of the L1 Spanish speakers also wrote in the response “*Qué rico. Gracias. Me encanta el helado.*” This question was the only one where participants wrote in the phrase *me encanta* as a response.

Contento/ Contenta

In the first question, an L1 Spanish participant wrote in “*Estoy contento,*” although none of the L2 Spanish speakers wrote in a phrase with the word *contento/contenta*. In the second question, one L1 Spanish speaker wrote in the phrase “*Estoy más que contenta*” and another

wrote in “Estoy contento.” An L2 Spanish participant wrote in the response “¡Estoy muy contenta!” Because multiple L1 Spanish speakers wrote in phrases with the word *contento/contenta* while only one L2 Spanish speaker did, there is an indication that the word *contento/contenta* might be underused by L2 Spanish speakers.

Estoy harta/ Me harta

For question four, one L2 Spanish participant wrote in the phrase “estoy harta,” while another wrote in the phrase “me harta esta tarea.” None of the L1 Spanish participants wrote in a response with the word/phrase *harta/ me harta*.

Deprimido/ Deprimida

In the final question, three of the L2 Spanish participants wrote in responses using the word *deprimido/ deprimida*. The phrases included “estoy deprimida,” “me pone triste/deprimida,” and “me puse bien deprimido.” However, none of the L1 Spanish participants included the word *deprimido/ deprimida* in their write-in responses.

Participants

One factor that likely impacted the results of the experiment was the amount of experience that the L2 Spanish speakers had. 72.4% of the L2 Spanish participants said they had nine or more years of Spanish experience and 10.3% said they had five to eight years of experience. Only 17.2% of participants had less than five years of experience, indicating that the majority of the participants had a large amount of experience with Spanish and were, therefore, less likely to make mistakes more common with beginners.

Many participants were recruited via Facebook groups, including a “Hispanic and Lusophone Linguistics” group, meaning that the participants likely included at least some L2

Spanish speakers who have training in linguistics and a long-ranging academic experience with the language. This is reflected in the large percentage of participants from the L2 group who reported having studied Spanish for 9 years or more, and likely decreased the overall percentage of beginner and non-native-like responses that more inexperienced participants would have made. In the future, limiting the L2 Spanish speaker pool to participants with less than five years of experience in the language would likely offer a more clear picture of semantic differences between L2 and L1 Spanish speakers.

Conclusion

Understanding the differences in semantic meaning of emotion words between languages has many uses. Having a more clear picture of the semantic differences can help improve foreign language education and allow learners to improve their understanding of the target language. It can also be useful for psychologists, so they have a better understanding of possible language differences between them and their clients.

After surveying fifty-eight L2 Spanish speakers and thirty L1 Spanish speakers about different hypothetical scenarios, there was not a clear difference in the responses given by the two groups. This was likely due to the L2 Spanish population having a large amount of Spanish experience. Both groups used a first person subject more often than a third person subject in all but one of the questions. The L2 Spanish speakers did write in more responses containing the words/phrases *contento/contenta*, *me encanta*, *harta/ me harta*, and *deprimido/ deprimida*. The L1 Spanish speakers did not have any clear trends in their responses, but this may be due to the smaller amount of participants. Further research would need to be done with a less experienced

L2 population and a larger L1 population in order to better understand the differences between Spanish and English emotion words.

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Appendix

Expressing emotions in Spanish (for L2 Spanish speakers/learners)

This is a survey for an Honors College Thesis project at Appalachian State University. Your response is completely voluntary, and your answers will be kept anonymous. This survey is designed for English speakers who learned or are learning Spanish as a second language; if you consider yourself to be a native speaker of Spanish, please complete the version of the survey found at <https://forms.gle/K7MAkWdci157tzyx5> instead.

If you have any questions about the survey or this project, please contact Dr. Catherine Fountain (fountainca@appstate.edu) or Jenna Elliott (elliottjr1@appstate.edu).

* Required

Instructions

You will be given five hypothetical situations. For each of the situations, think about how you would describe your reaction to someone else, and pick the answer that you think words your reaction the best.

Su amigo le da un helado gratis. *

- Estoy feliz
- Estoy alegre
- Me hace feliz el helado
- Me alegra el helado
- Other: _____

Usted ve a su abuela por la primera vez en un año. *

- Estoy feliz
 - Estoy alegre
 - Me hace feliz verla
 - Me alegra verla
 - Other...
-

Usted gana un millón de dólares con la lotería. *

- Estoy feliz
- Estoy alegre
- Me hace feliz ganarla
- Me alegra ganarla
- Other...

Usted tiene un montón de tarea para mañana y todavía necesita ir a su trabajo por tres horas. *

- Estoy frustrado/frustrada
 - Estoy enfadado/enfadada
 - Me frustra la tarea
 - Me enfada la tarea
 - Other...
-

Su mascota querida muere después de doce años. *

- Estoy triste
- Estoy devastado/devastada
- Me hace triste
- Me hace devastado/devastada
- Other...

What languages do you speak other than English and Spanish? If none, please write "none". *

Short answer text
.....

How long have you been learning Spanish *

1. Less than 1 year
2. 1 year
3. 2 years
4. 3 years
5. 4 years
6. 5- 8 years
7. 9 or more years

What is your gender identity? *

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say
- Other...

How old are you? *

1. 18-25
2. 26-30
3. 31-40
4. 41-50
5. 51-60
6. 60+

La expresión de emociones (para hablantes nativos del español)

Esta encuesta es para un proyecto de tesis del programa de honores en Appalachian State University. Su participación es completamente voluntaria, y sus respuestas serán anónimas. Esta encuesta es para individuos que se consideran hablantes nativos del español; si usted habla español como segunda lengua, debe completar otra encuesta, que se encuentra en la siguiente dirección: <https://forms.gle/PfAbbXsi8JBWiwk77>.

Si tiene preguntas sobre la encuesta y/o el proyecto, por favor póngase en contacto con la Dra. Catherine Fountain (fountainca@appstate.edu) o Jenna Elliott (elliottjr1@appstate.edu).

Instrucciones

Abajo se presentan cinco situaciones hipotéticas. Para cada situación, piense en cómo describiría su reacción a otra persona, y elija la respuesta que mejor exprese su reacción.

Su amigo le da un helado gratis. *

- Estoy feliz
- Estoy alegre
- Me hace feliz el helado
- Me alegra el helado
- Other...

Usted ve a su abuela por la primera vez en un año. *

- Estoy feliz
 - Estoy alegre
 - Me hace feliz verla
 - Me alegra verla
 - Other...
-

Usted gana un millón de dólares con la lotería. *

- Estoy feliz
 - Estoy alegre
 - Me hace feliz ganarla
 - Me alegra ganarla
 - Other...
-

Usted tiene un montón de tarea para mañana y todavía necesita ir a su trabajo por tres horas. *

- Estoy frustrado/frustrada
 - Estoy enfadado/enfadada
 - Me frustra la tarea
 - Me enfada la tarea
 - Other...
-

Su mascota querida muere después de doce años. *

- Estoy triste
- Estoy devastado/devastada
- Me hace triste
- Me hace devastado/devastada
- Other...

Qué idiomas habla usted aparte de español? *

Short answer text
.....

Cuál es su identidad de género? *

- Mujer
- Hombre
- Prefiero no responder
- Other...

Con qué variedad(es) de español se identifica usted? *

- Caribeño
- Mexicano
- Centroamericano
- Castellano peninsular
- Andalucía/ Islas Canarias
- Rioplatense
- Chileno
- Andino
- Other...

Cuántos años tiene usted? *

1. 18-25
2. 26-30
3. 31-40
4. 41-50
5. 51-60
6. 60+

