The expressive function of language: Towards a cognitive semantic approach

Ad Foolen
Catholic University of Nijmegen, Netherlands

1. Introduction

Cognitive semantics studies the way people conceptualize the world. It thus focuses on the 'Darstellungsfunktion' of language to use Bühler's (1934) term. In this respect, cognitive semantics is not different from logical semantics or generative grammar, which also concentrate on the propositional, referential, or ideational function of language. But cognitive semantics differs from the other approaches in that it stresses the active role that the human mind plays in representing the world. This is why I prefer to use the term 'conceptualizing function' here, instead of propositional, referential, or ideational function.

What about Bühler's two other functions of language, 'Ausdruck' and 'Appell', or 'expression' and 'direction'? The directive function of language has received a lot of attention in the last two decades from pragmatics, in particular in the framework of speech act theory. But the 'pragmatic turn' has not freed the expressive function from its rather marginal position in linguistics.

The present paper is meant as a first exploration of the question whether cognitive semantics could be used as a framework to look at the expressive function of language. This might sound counter-intuitive at first sight, because cognitive semantics calls itself 'cognitive', that is, it focuses on the cognitive-conceptual(izing) function of language. Nevertheless, I hope to show that the analytical tools of cognitive semantics, like metaphor, metonymy, polysemy, grammaticalization, etc., can be of use in the study of the expressive function, and, the other way round, that the study of the expressive function of language might contribute to cognitive semantic theorizing.

The expressive function has to do with emotions. It is the emotional feeling of the speaker that is expressed and communicated in the expressive function. Although the topic of emotions and their relation to language and
language use has not been central in linguistic studies of the past, it has not stayed out of the picture altogether either. A first short overview shows that the language-emotion relation has been studied from such rather diverse perspectives as the following:

- There is lexicographic research on words that refer to emotions, cf. Omondi (this volume, in particular section 2.2., on the emotional lexicon of Dholuo). Neppl & Boll (1991) is a more methodologically oriented paper, and van Ginneken (1912-1913) can be mentioned as an early example of this kind of research. An important issue for lexicographic work is, of course, the universality or culture-relativity of human emotions (cf. Solomon 1995, Wierzbicka 1995).
- From a syntactic point of view, attention has been paid to the behavior of emotion verbs like to fear, etc., cf. Nissenbaum (1985) and a special issue of Langue Française (Nr. 105, 1995).
- Emotion can be conveyed by certain types of language use, like hyperbole, repetition, the use of strong metaphors (like I am exploding, to express anger, cf. Braun 1992). I consider the study of this type of language use as belonging to the field of stylistics.
- Emotion is expected to be expressed in certain phases of social and conversational interaction. The rules that regulate the occurrence of expressive emotional behavior in interaction has been studied in the field of conversational analysis (cf. Fiehler 1990, Drescher this volume).
- Languages are full of conventionalized metaphors that are related to emotions. You can be in love, love can be burning, etc. The study of such ways of talking about emotions can be very helpful in the study of how languages conceptualize emotions. In the framework of cognitive semantics, extensive and excellent work has been done by Kövecses (1990, 1995), Wierzbicka (1995), and others. Note that we are dealing here with the conceptualizing function of language, not with the expressive function. The question of how emotions are conceptualized in languages is in principle not different from the question of how reasoning, color, time, etc. are conceptualized (cf. Volek 1977, who stresses the importance of distinguishing emotion as a notional domain from emotion as it appears in expressive language).

Interesting as each of these perspectives on the language and emotion question may be, I will ignore them here, and concentrate on the expressive function in its strict sense, i.e. the direct expression of emotion through language.

What this paper should lead to in the end is a perspective from which the expressive value of linguistic forms like interjections, intonation, sentence types, etc., can be analyzed. But before we come to such linguistic matters in section 5 and 6, we will first make three preliminary excursions. Section 2 leads us into the history of linguistics, section 3 into psychology, and section 4 into the general problem of how emotions and ideas are communicated.

2. Expressive semantics: A historical excursion

Expressive semantics - as I will call the work of semanticists who have pleaded for or practised the study of the expressive function of language - has always been a minor line of study, see Rosier (1992) for the 13th century and Bologna (1995) for the interest that the 19th century historical linguist Pott had in the expressive function.

At the beginning of the 20th century, linguists like Erdmann (1900), Bally (1905, 1910), Sperber (1914) and, last but not least, the Dutch linguist van Ginneken (1907) criticized the strong ideational orientation of semantics in their time, and they pleaded for doing expressive semantics, in addition to 'rational semantics'. Van Ginneken even considered emotional meaning as primary. In his view, conceptual meaning and function words (conjunctions, prepositions) were derived from forms with a primarily emotional meaning.

Sapir, in his book Language (1921: 38-39), strongly opposed the expressive semanticists, and in particular van Ginneken. In fact, van Ginneken's is the only name of a colleague linguist which Sapir mentions in his whole book (he calls him "the brilliant Dutch writer Jac. van Ginneken"). In Sapir's view, "ideation reigns supreme in language, (...) volition and emotion come in as distinctly secondary factors" (Sapir 1921: 38-39).

This is not the place to deal extensively with the interesting linguistic historiography of the cognition-expression controversy. Hübner (1987: 357) points at the interest that members of the Prague Linguistic Circle had in the expressive dimension of human communication (he mentions Mathesius, Jakobson, and Havránek; cf. also Daneš 1994). In 1955, Jakobson and Sperber took part in an interdisciplinary conference on expressive aspects of language activity (cf. Werner (ed.) 1955).

In recent years, there seems to be a revival of interest in the expressive function of language. An indication of this interest is given by the special issues that journals devoted to the topic (Text 9: 1, 1989, on 'The pragmatics of affect', and Journal of Pragmatics 22: 3/4, 1994, on 'Involvement in language').
Finally, I would like to point out the valuable work by Fries, who, in a series of papers, has investigated the expressive function of language and who has proposed a model for the description of expressive meanings in which two dimensions are distinguished: intensity on the one hand and positive-negative affect on the other hand (cf. Fries 1995: 155).

In summary, expressive semantics has existed as a side stream in a linguistic landscape in which representational semantics formed the main stream.

3. Cognition and emotion: The psychological distinction

In a recent paper, Brown states that "Somewhere between Leibniz and Kant the mind was divided into three parts: Cognition, affection, and conation" (1994: 169). We recognize here, of course, Bühler's three functions of language. This classical trichotomy of the mind was discussed in Ullmann (1952: 146) in a way that fits the argument of this paper quite well. He argues that a reduction of the tripartition into a bipartition, namely cognition and emotion, is defendable, because volition ('conation') and emotion have a strong affinity and thus can be taken together. Cognition vs. emotion thus seems to be the main psychological distinction, and I will concentrate here on that opposition.

Psychology has a long tradition of emotion studies, cf. Frijda (1986) for one of the recent contributions to this long tradition. The question of how far distinctions should be made within the area of emotion has been extensively discussed. How many emotions should be distinguished? And should one distinguish between emotion, feeling, and affect? Damasio (1994: 150), for example, takes feeling as the general term, which covers at least three subtypes: (a) feelings of basic universal emotion, which are innate (for example happiness, anger, sadness, fear, disgust); (b) feelings of subtle universal but not innate emotions, which are variations of the basic feelings: euphoria and ecstasy as variations of happiness; melancholy and wistfulness as variations of sadness, etc.; (c) background feelings, related to mood. Although such distinctions are perhaps relevant in relation to the study of the expressive function of language, in this paper, with its global approach, I will use terms like feeling and emotion interchangeably as catch-all terms.

The psychological distinction between cognition and emotion is supported by neurological research (cf. LeDoux 1989: 284): "Affect and cognition are separate information processing functions mediated by different brain systems". Emotions are located in the limbic system, an older part of the brain, that is fully present in animals, cf. Masson & McCarthy (1995: 16): "The part of the brain called the limbic system, which is thought to mediate emotion, is one of the most phylogenetically ancient parts of the human brain, so much so that it is sometimes called 'the reptile brain'. The limbic system originated in evolution 200 million years ago, whereas the rational neocortex in its present human form originated only 50,000 to 100,000 years ago. Other authors stress the role of the right hemisphere, cf. Code (1987: 106): "... mechanisms exist in the right hemisphere which mediate between emotion and the expression and appreciation of emotion through non-verbal and verbal means".

This dichotomous picture is not meant to deny that in the actual functioning of the human mind, reason and emotion interact in a complex way. Damasio (1994: xiii) is one long argument to show "that certain aspects of emotion and feeling are indispensable for rationality". I hope I do not simplify things too much if I assume, for the rest of this paper, that the analytical distinction between cognition and emotion can nevertheless be upheld, and that their 'presence' in language can be studied on the basis of the psychological distinction.

4. The communication of ideas and emotions

As we argued in the foregoing section, ideas and emotions have a neurologically different status. It seems that, corresponding to this different 'internal' status, the ways ideas and emotions are externalized are different, too. Ideas are communicated through the digital channel of human language, be it spoken or signed, whereas emotions are typically expressed in an analogical way, be it by the face, the voice, the hands, or other body parts. Accordingly, the study of the expression of emotion has, from Darwin (1872) onwards, typically been embedded in the study of non-verbal communication (see Key 1975 for a useful bibliography). The voice and the hands thus both participate in two different communication systems. The voice produces cries and the hands produce gestures when used in the analogical mode, whereas they form words and signs respectively when used for conveying digital language.

The strong inner psychological and outer communicative distinction between cognition and emotion can be supported with findings from other areas of research such as language pathology and language acquisition. Cognitive disability does not imply emotional disturbance, as Down syndrome children show us; aphasics does not imply problems with the non-verbal expression of emotion. Bloom (1993a, 1993b) did research on the question of how language is acquired in the second year of life in relation to the system of affect expression that is already in place at that time. She
found (1993b: 104) that

... words did not replace affect expression in the period of word learning, and speech was not something these children did instead of expressing emotion. Rather, they were beginning to learn language as a new system of expression for the contents of their beliefs and desires while they continued to express their feelings about these contents through displays of affect.

The thesis that emotion and cognition each have their own channel of externalization should not lead to the misunderstanding that emotions are not accessible for verbalizations. Children, and certainly adults, can talk about their feelings and tell what they feel. They can say *This soup is disgusting*, instead of or in addition to the expression of their feeling in a gestural or facial way. But the verbal saying and the non-verbal showing are qualitatively different ways of communicating. In the non-verbal way, the feeling is expressed directly, whereas in a verbal utterance the conceptualization of the feeling is communicated, cf. the following simple sketch:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Input</th>
<th>Inner process</th>
<th>Communicative output</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>senses</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ideas</td>
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<td>action</td>
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<td>(indirect)</td>
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<td>senses</td>
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<td>ideas</td>
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<td>action</td>
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<tr>
<td>(direct)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. *The communication of cognitive and emotional content*

In the digital mode, everything in the world can be the object of conceptualization, leading to an utterance about that object. This is indicated in the figure by the arrows directed at *Cognition*, which represent the input from different sources, including emotions. In the same way, emotions can be 'aroused' by stimuli from different input systems, including ideas. This is indicated by the double arrows.

According to Figure 1, emotion can be externalized in two ways. There is the direct way, through non-verbal and paralinguistic means, and there is the indirect way, when the emotion is conceptualized and then verbalized. The question now is whether there is a third way, i.e., can we expand the figure with an output arrow, leading directly from emotion to verbal utterance? In Figure 1, this is indicated by the dotted arrow with the question mark. A positive answer to the question would mean that we have a direct linguistic expression of emotions, without the intermediary step of conceptualization.

### 5. Linguistic forms with expressive function

The overview in the foregoing sections seems to lead to a contradiction. On the one hand, the view was accepted that language is the medium for externalizing cognitive content only and that "grammar is a notoriously poor medium for conveying subtle patterns of emotion" (Pinker & Bloom 1990: 715). On the other hand, the paper started with the assumption of Bühler and others that language *does* have an expressive function.

If we take this latter assumption seriously, we should correct our simple sketch in Figure 1 by changing the dotted and questioned arrow into an uninterrupted and unquestioned arrow. Such an arrow would indicate that language can indeed express feelings directly, although the status and importance of this line, for example in comparison to the non-verbal direct ways of emotional expression, is open for further discussion.

The proposal that we should indeed erase the question mark in Figure 1, finds strong support in descriptive linguistic research. It is a descriptive fact that expressive forms have been found on all levels of language description:

2. **Morphological**, for example uses of the diminutive in many languages (cf. Dressler & Merlino Barbaresi 1994).
3. **Lexical**, for example swear words, terms of endearment and abuse (cf. the studies on cursing by Carpenier (1988), Jay (1992), and Savić (1995)).

6. Pragmatic, if that is a level of description: expressive speech acts like warning, threatening, congratulation, condolence, etc.

It would be a useful enterprise to put together all this descriptive work in a cross-linguistic inventory of the expressive forms that are available in the different languages. But this is not the place to reproduce this descriptive evidence.

If we want to go beyond an inventory of the expressive forms that occur in languages, we should try to put a little more theory in our approach to the data. Questions and hypotheses should take the lead in the investigation, rather than only adding still more observations. One could think of questions like the following:

- Why does language have an expressive function? Against the background of the claim made in section 4 - namely that emotions have their own channels of expression - this is not self-evident.
- What is the semiotic status of expressive language forms? Are they digitally or analogically encoded, or do they represent a third type of signs, a blend maybe between the two?
- Where do linguistic forms with an expressive function come from? Do they have their expressive function from the start, or are they taken from other parts of the linguistic system to fulfil the expressive function in addition to or instead of another function that they fulfilled already?

These are difficult questions indeed. I want to focus here on the last question, where the expressive forms come from, because, in my view, the beginning of an answer seems to be possible here if we follow the line of thinking that has been developed in the framework of cognitive semantics.

6. Cognitive semantics and the expressive function of language

Sweetser (1990), among others, has shown that linguistic forms that function primarily on the level of ideational content can be shifted to the epistemic level by a process of metaphor or metonymy. Modals like can, must, and should provide standard examples of such a shift. When they function on the epistemic level, these forms do not represent a content anymore. Instead, they indicate a procedural operation that the cognitive ap-

paratus of the speaker carries out on the cognitive content of the utterance. When a speaker says John must be ill, he indicates that he has arguments for the inference that John is ill.

Of course, the speaker can talk in a purely conceptual way about his cognitive operations. He can say I infer that John is ill, instead of saying John must be ill. Then the speaker not only conceptualizes a propositional content ('John is ill'), but also a cognitive operation on this content (in this case, the operation of 'inference'), whereas in John must be ill the special status of the cognitive operation is reflected in the special, grammaticalized status of the modal verb. The modal verb indicates the cognitive operation of inference, instead of describing it. That is what is meant with the 'epistemic' use of the modal verb.

In my view, this type of shift from cognitive to epistemic use can be taken as a model for looking at the distinction between cognitive and expressive meaning. To be more precise, I propose that the difference between saying This soup is disgusting and yuk!, is analogous to the difference between saying I infer that John is ill and John must be ill. Or, to give some other pairs of examples: a neutral conceptual utterance like He is very tall has expressive counterparts such as Is he tall? or How tall he is! Likewise, instead of the conceptual I wish he were here, one could use the expressive form If only he were here!

And the analogy goes further. The epistemic use of a verb like must is claimed to be derived from a 'content' or 'conceptual' use. Let us assume, then, that expressive forms are also secondary, derived uses of forms that have their primary function in the conceptual domain. Diachronically, the primary use of If only he were here! is that of an embedded conditional clause. In its expressive use, it is used in a non-embedded, secondary way, in which it has taken on its expressive value.

In this view, the cognitive content domain is thus a 'source domain' not only for epistemic meanings but also for expressive meanings. There is, however, a difference: epistemic uses of forms stay cognitive in character, in the sense that, in their epistemic use, they indicate operations of the cognitive apparatus, whereas expressive uses of forms leave the cognitive area altogether to shift to the expressive domain.

After the shift, the form involved can continue to fulfil its primary function on the cognitive content level or it can entirely give up that function. This holds for both epistemic and expressive cases. Thus, in the same way as must can be used in two domains, namely content and epistemic, bastard and bitch can be used in two domains, namely conceptual and expressive. And, as is to be expected, forms can adopt new syntactic possibilities in their new domain of use. For example, the combination you bitch seems only syntactically well formed in the expressive domain.
I do not claim that all expressive forms should come from the cognitive content domain. In particular, some interjections are probably conventionalizations of non-linguistic analogical cries. Drescher (this volume), following Burger (1980), calls these forms primary interjections. Compare also the "single consonantal puffs" and other examples that Omondi (this volume) gives for Dholuo. Omondi contrasts these forms with "more word-like forms that express emotion", which can be identified with what Drescher calls secondary interjections and which are, in her words, "derivative uses of other words or locutions which have lost their original conceptual meanings". From a comparative linguistic perspective, it would be interesting to find out what the proportion between the different sources for expressive forms in different languages might look like.

If the analogy between the content-epistemic and the content-expressive shift holds, then we are obliged to provide cognitive processes which account for how such shifts can take place. For the epistemic cases, metaphor and metonymy have proven to be the main processes. For example, must takes on its epistemic use along the metaphorical way, whereas metonymy seems to be the proper analysis for should. Probably, both processes play a role in the content-expressive shifts as well, although Dirven (1993: 25) found an "association of the metonymical pole with the representational function of language and [an association] of the metaphoric pole with the expressive function". To get more certainty on this point, we should now start to analyze a sample of concrete examples. I will not make this step here, but only indicate along which line such analyses could be made. For the metonymical mechanism we could envisage a development along the following line:

1. People have attitudes to referents, and these attitudes get associated with the concept for the referent. The conceptual meaning assumes a connotative, but the conceptual meaning is still dominant.

2. Bleaching of the conceptual meaning: the connotative meaning takes its place and becomes the central expressive meaning of the form, at least in one of its uses.

It is to be expected that the metonymical mechanism will work in those domains where connotation easily occurs, like the religious and sexual domain. Think of such expressive words like Jesus (Christ), fak, or Dutch hemeltje ('heavenly diminutive', a word for expressing astonishment). Omondi (this volume) gives yava, a Dholuo word that "functions commonly as an expression of emotion", and that, at the same time, means 'our people'. I suppose that the metonymical mechanism has been at work here, but more information is needed for a full understanding of the example.

For a nice example of an expressive form with a metaphorical origin, we can have a look at Lyons' (1995: 310-11) discussion of the English demonstrative pronouns:

[T]here is a particular use of 'that' versus 'this' which is recognizably expressive, and whose expressivity can be identified as that of emotional or attitudinal dissociation (or distancing). For example, if speakers are holding something in the hand they will normally use 'this', rather than 'that', to refer to it (by virtue of its spatial-temporal proximity). If they say What's that? in such circumstances, their use of 'that' will be indicative of their dislike or aversion: they will be distancing themselves emotionally or attitudinally from whatever they are referring to.

In this example, the physical domain functions as a source domain for the emotional goal domain: physical proximity and remoteness is taken as a metaphor for emotional closeness and distance.

If this approach makes sense, we can, on this basis, start to propose hypotheses like the following, which could be tested in empirical research:

In diachrony, we should mainly find developments in one direction, namely from content to expressive. But degrammaticalization has been found in languages (cf. Ramat 1992), so we should not absolutely exclude the possibility that the development goes the other way round every now and then. A case in point might be the possibility in English to make a verb out of an expressive interjection, for example to hurray. Here, an expressive form becomes conceptual in character.

We should now and then find an example where the form in its expressive use starts to differ from the same form in its content use. We can then get a development from polysemy to what Lichtenberg (1991) has called 'heterosemy', two related forms with related meanings. Dutch has the curse words gos and gosamme, which are formally related to God and God zal me ('God shall me ...').

Forms that express a negative feeling tend to lose their original cognitive meaning more quickly than forms that express positive feelings. The association of a cognitive meaning with a negative or pejorative sense is avoided (for pejorative sense development see Schreuder 1970). Of course, a slight formal differentiation from the original form may also be of help (the Dutch God-gos case).

Expressive meanings have a relatively short life. Their 'life cycle' is shorter than those of cognitive or epistemic meanings. This has to do with the special character of expressivity.
What is the relation between shifts from the cognitive domain to the epistemic and to the expressive domain? Are these types of shifts strictly separated, or can we observe shifts that involve both target domains? Pos (1935: 140), for example, suggested that 'logical particles' (which are grammaticalizations from the cognitive content domain) acquire 'affective uses' as a further step in their development. He distinguishes "le mais surpris, le donc impatient, le pourquoi mécontent ou revêche, le non étonné ou incrédule, les particules temporelles enfin et toujours en usage affectif".

7. Conclusion

John Haviland, in his contribution to the special issue of Text (1989) on affect, refers to "Elinor Ochs's insistent urgings that we shed our referential biases" (1989: 29). I am indeed willing to follow Ochs's urgings, but I would not go as far as, for example, Ullmann (1952: 146) does, who makes a statement that seems characteristic of the expressive semanticists: "Les fonctions affectives du langage sont aussi fondamentales que ses fonctions intellectuelles". Here, the voice of Bally and other expressive semanticists sounds through too clearly. In this respect, I feel more in line with Sapir's phrasing of the relation between ideation and emotion quoted before: "Ideation reigns supreme, emotion (...) comes in as a secondary factor".

This first, and I admit very global and programmatic, exploration of the expressive function of language from a cognitive semantic perspective makes me feel confident that the analytical tools that cognitive semantics has developed will turn out to be helpful in the concrete analysis of expressive forms. And conversely, cognitive semantics should indeed shed a little bit of its cognitive conceptual bias. Emotions are an important part of our self-experience, and they cannot be left out of an enterprise that aims to be experiential. To conclude with Pos (1935: 140):

En poursuivant ce point de vue on envisagera une étude de l'affectivité, examinée dans ses rapports avec l'intelligence et où les données linguistiques pourront être utilisées dans une très large mesure par le psychologue et par l'explorateur de l'esprit humain.

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