University of Bucharest

Faculty of Sociology and Social Work

Doctoral School of Sociology

'Happy like a unicorn'

Discursive Emotion Literacy and Conceptual Metaphors of

Affect in Foreign Language Acquisition

A Study in the Sociology of Emotions

Ph.D. Student:

Carmen Zaharia

Doctoral Advisor:

Prof. Dr. Cosima Rughiniş

May, 2018

1. <u>Abstract</u>

This paper presents a theoretical justification and an exploratory empirical research for my proposed concept of *discursive emotion literacy*. I defined this concept as *the ability to understand, express and describe emotions as experiences, shaped through language, in interaction with other people, in a social context*. My intention is to conceptualize *discursive emotion literacy* as people's competence of mastering emotions as discourse, focusing on the constructed character of feeling and expressing emotions. I also aim to validate, through an exploratory study, the usefulness of this concept, by capturing empirical variability among students' abilities to master emotions as discourse.

The proposed concept is at the *junction between 'emotion work' and 'emotional literacy'*, and includes the following:

- The ability to master the discursive dimension of emotions (emotions as medium of expression);
- The ability to understand and orient towards the cultural and interactional shaping of emotions (emotions as social constructs);
- The ability to understand emotions from other people's perspective;
- The differences between the impact different types of media have in fostering this competence.

Taking this into consideration, I advanced *four dimensions for this concept*:

1. Discursive skills in emotion work
2. Awareness of interactional shaping of emotions
3. Awareness of socially constructed roles in emotion work
4. Empathy

The first dimension – *discursive skills in emotion work* – refers to the level of skill in formulating emotions. Emotional expression may be more or less complex, elaborated, and imaginative. The second dimension – *awareness of interactional shaping of emotions* – addresses the socially aware formulations, meaning whether emotions are perceived as interactive achievements rather that as individual states, emerging from within oneself. The third dimension – *awareness of socially constructed roles in emotion work* – will include the skills of perceiving various social roles in shaping emotions. The last dimension – *empathy* – will include skills of sensing others' feelings and perspective, and being attentive to emotional cues.

The thesis is structured in two main parts. In the first section I start from a literature review and I argue in favor of the relevance of the proposed concept. The second section presents the methods, activities and findings for an exploratory sociological study of discursive emotion literacy in the setting of an international high-school in Bucharest.

In the first section, I reviewed the evolution of the sociology of emotions, following the development of this term from psychology – where it originated – introducing the theory of James - Lang (1884), the Cannon - Bard theory of emotions (1927), the two stage processing theory of Schachter and Singer (1962), and Lazarus' theory of appraisal (1991). I then had an overview of the most important sociological approaches and theories on emotions, using as models the classifications made by Turner and Stets (2006) and Turner (2009). I therefore organized my overview as follows: evolutionary theories (Darwin, 1872, Wentworth and Ryan, 1994), symbolic interactionist theories (Shott, 1979, Sheff, 1988), dramaturgical and cultural theories (Goffman, 1959, Rosenberg, 1990, Hochschild, 1975, 1979, Thoits, 1989, 1990), ritual theories (Durkheim, 1965, [1912], Collins, 1981, 2004), structural theories (Kemper, 1978), and exchange theories (Lawler, 2001).

When studying emotions and their expression in relation with culture, I briefly introduced the two important theoretical perspectives: the one advocating that these are socially learned, depending on the culture (the studies of Mead, Goffman, Geertz, Mills), and the one considering the existence of universal basic emotions and associated facial expressions (Darwin, Ekman & Friesen) – although Ekman and Friesen (1972) admit the existence of cultural differences in facial expressions associated to emotions, this applying only to the public manifestation of emotions. The term used by the two authors – *display rules* – refers to the rules of expression management. These are socially learnt, they vary from one culture to another, they regulate when, by whom and in whose presence, particular emotions may be expressed.

Kemper's analysis on primary and secondary emotions links the two opposite directions – the positivist one and the social constructionist one – existent in the sociology of emotions. Kemper (1987) argues that none of the two perspectives can offer a complete explanation, and only by 'wedding' them we get a deeper and more accurate understanding of emotions from the sociological point of view.

The key terms of my study are emotion work, feeling rules, emotional intelligence, emotional literacy, vocabulary of motives and conceptual metaphors of emotions. Therefore, for all these concepts I presented the main theories, explanations and interpretations.

Goleman (1996), Mayer and Salovey (1997), Mayer, Salovey & Caruso (2004) and Coleman (2008) have a great contribution in defining and operationalizing the concept of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is a concept used in psychology and defined as 'the ability to monitor one's own and other people's emotions, to discriminate between different emotions and label them appropriately and to use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior' (Coleman, 2008). Mayer, Salovey & Caruso propose an instrument to measure emotional intelligence, instrument they call *The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test*, or MSCEIT (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004). Goleman's 1995 best seller book, *Emotional Intelligence – Why it can matter more than IQ*, attracts public attention, bringing popularity to the term.

Emotion work as an action performed by the individual, but regulated by feeling rules (Hochschild, 1975) and by display rules (Hochschild, 1979, Ekman and Friesen, 1971) is an important concept for my study. Emotion work (Hochschild 1979) is a distinctive part of learning a second language, through which children learn how to recognize and label emotions, how to impute them to self and others, and how to use them in accounts (Orbuch 1997, Scott & Lyman 1968) and stories of motives (Mills 1940). I used the concept of account for excuses and justifications formulated by people in order to explain unanticipated behaviors; they depend on the actors' statuses and on the cultures, being standardized within specific cultures, subcultures and groups (Scott&Lyman, 1968). Accounts are socially approved vocabularies that neutralize an act or its consequences by justifying it or by offering excuses. The term *vocabulary of motives,* first developed in sociology by C. Wright Mills, refers to the language used by people to describe their motives and justify their behavior. Social actors justify both their own actions as well as others' by offering *motives* (Mills, 1940). From this perspective emotions are cultural productions in a particular cultural context.

When discussing the vocabulary of emotions, I introduced Kemper's (1987) catalogue of emotions, with his differentiation between primary and secondary emotions, the second group emerging as socialized responses to primary emotions: *guilt* to *fear*, *shame* to *anger*, and *pride* to *satisfaction* (Kemper, 1978, 1987).

Conceptual metaphors are particularly important for this thesis, since one of the outcomes was a vocabulary of metaphors of emotions and affects, resulted from my interviews with the students participating to the study. Therefore, the theory of the conceptual metaphors, formulated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, is a central piece of this paper. According to the two authors, our conceptual system is predominately metaphorical, and what we think and do in our ordinary lives is related to the conceptual metaphors we've got (Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M., 1980). Metaphors are not just linguistic expressions, but also a reflection of our concepts themselves, so metaphors are no longer exclusively linguistic, but conceptual as well (Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M., 1980). Emotions are associated with spatial orientation (up and down), temperature, colours, brightness, size, action, chemical reactions, objects, physical forces, and physical containers. The work of Cristina Soriano (2015) on the metaphors used by English speakers when referring to love and to anger, proved useful for my study as well.

Reali and Arciniegas's (2015) study on metaphorical framing of *locura – madness* in Spanish – underlines the way conceptual metaphors may influence the way people think about emotions. The results of their study showed that *bounded space* metaphors elicited a more pessimistic view of the situation compared to the metaphors of *fluid filling a container*, and the respondents tended to rate the symptoms as more likely to be caused by social and environmental factors, in the case of madness framed as a fluid filling a container (Reali and Arciniegas, 2015).

I also discussed Crawford (2009) questions and criticism to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory on conceptual metaphors, one of those being related to the fact that the two authors completely rely on linguistic expression to support their arguments, so conceptual metaphors are inferred from linguistic metaphors, and linguistic metaphors are given as evidence for conceptual metaphors (Crawford, 2009). Crawford also argues that there may be alternative accounts for the representation of the concepts, other than metaphors, and, she suggests that the spatial expression used both to describe space and emotions may be a case of polysemy.
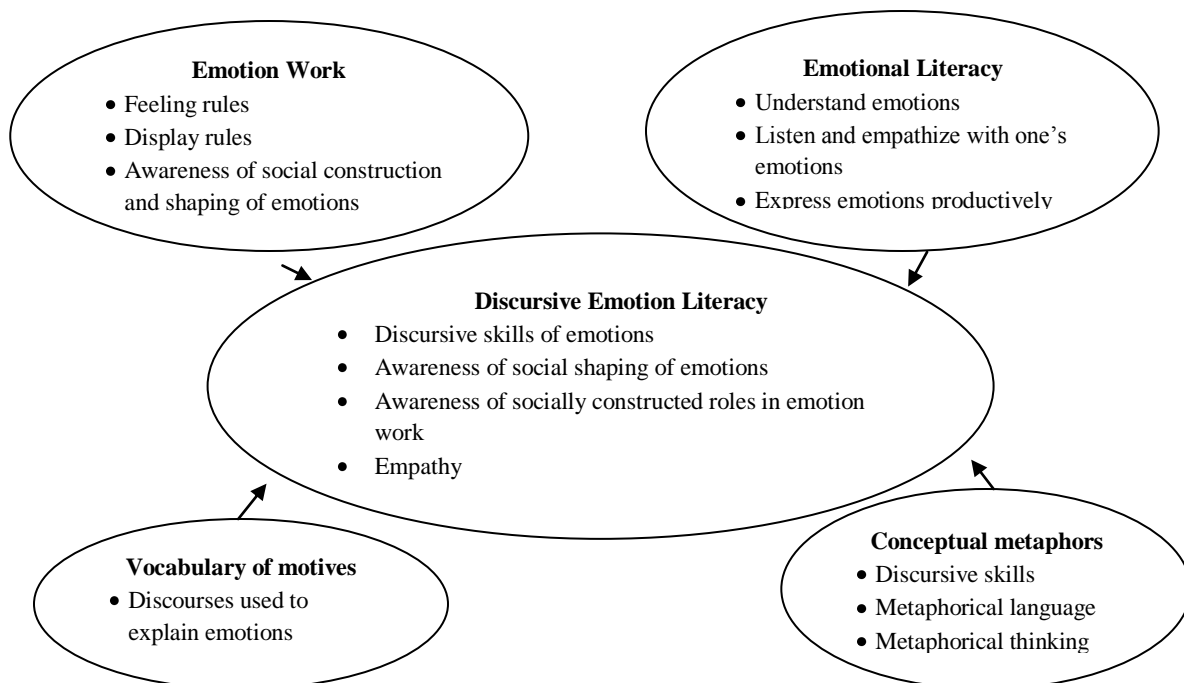
Metaphorical thinking plays a crucial role in developing individual's ability to solve problems, to manage their own emotions and to understand the others'. The metaphors of emotions are produced and used in a social context and metaphorical thinking shapes our understanding of emotions.

Emotional literacy is a term introduced in counseling with definitions very closely related to emotional intelligence. The term was developed by Claude Steiner and was later theorized as

the ability to understand one's own emotions, the ability to listen to others and empathize with their emotions, and the ability to express emotions productively (Steiner and Perry, 1997).

Matthews (2006) affirms that emotions are produced in cultural context and in interaction with other people. His research on emotional literacy focused particularly on the field of education. The importance of Matthews' contribution to the evolution of the concept of emotion literacy is that he sees it as a social process, and senses the importance of the social context in which emotion literacy is set (Matthews, 2006).

Starting from these theories, I constructed my concept of *discursive emotion literacy*, becoming an adept of Matthews' perspective on emotional literacy, as I felt that most approaches do not focus enough on the dimension of the interactional and cultural construction – inclusively the discursive one – of emotion. Emotions are rather view as individual psychological phenomena and not as social constructs, and I am interested in spotting my students' ability to understand and orient towards the cultural and interactional shaping of emotions, my focus being not necessary the students' ability to identify and express emotions, but rather their ability to understand and express how our emotions depend on the social norms, roles and interaction with other people. All these resulted in an empirical exploration and illustration of the *discursive emotion literacy*, a junction between *emotion work, emotional literacy* and *vocabulary of motives*. The concept will also produce a *vocabulary of metaphors for emotions*, therefore bringing the *conceptual metaphors of emotions* into the picture as well.

Emotion Work
- Feeling rules
- Display rules
- Awareness of social construction and shaping of emotions

Emotional Literacy
- Understand emotions
- Listen and empathize with one's emotions
- Express emotions productively

Discursive Emotion Literacy
- Discursive skills of emotions
- Awareness of social shaping of emotions
- Awareness of socially constructed roles in emotion work
- Empathy

Vocabulary of motives
- Discourses used to explain emotions

Conceptual metaphors
- Discursive skills
- Metaphorical language
- Metaphorical thinking

As empirical research question I proposed: *How can we operationalize and observe in empirical settings students' discursive emotion literacy - that is, their competence of mastering emotions as discourse*?

In the second section, I report the design and findings of an exploratory study that serves to validate the relevance of the proposed concept for sociological studies of emotion work.

I used stimuli from different media to observe how young people express discursive emotion literacy and to estimate which type of media would be more appropriate in stimulating and developing discursive emotion literacy.

I had a qualitative approach of the topic, using participant observation of the activities and document analysis – interviews, documents written by students and narrative journals.

In the first research activity, I wanted to observe how students talk about the emotions they identify in a movie, what metaphors they use when referring to emotions and what discourses they adopt to explain them, in order to examine their level of awareness regarding the socially constructed character of emotions, including the impact of the situation, interaction, social roles. For this purpose, I used the Pixar creation *Inside out*. Students aged 12 to 17 were interviewed after watching the movie analyzing how they perceive different emotions, if emotions are seen as positive and/or negative, if they are all considered to have a role, what metaphors are used to describe different emotions, what vocabularies of emotions are created and what discourses are formulated by the participants. I also focused a part of my research on noticing if students perceive emotions as interactive versus individual states and if they are aware of the different social roles in the social construction of emotions. Because the metaphors used by the respondents proved to be very interesting, I decided to add to my study another stimulus, another movie about feelings and emotions, and to see what metaphors of affects this one will evoke in my students. The movie was *Jack and the Cuckoo-Clock Heart*, an animated film based on the illustrated novel *La mécanique du cœur*, created by Mathias Malzieu, the leader of the French rock band Dionysos.

I was also interested in *how can we study the specificity of various learning resources as regards their potential to elicit discursive emotion literacy*, and this inquiry remains open for further research. In this respect, I used three case studies applied to two groups of students aged fourteen to sixteen. Each case study is centered on a learning resource for teaching/learning the vocabulary of emotions in the foreign language: short stories and newspaper articles, comics and

a BBC interactive video drama and Spanish course. These case studies are meant to spot and analyze how secondary school children interact with each others, the teacher and the digital system, and what discourses they display when talking about emotions, what abilities they show in understanding and expressing how our emotions depend on the social norms, roles and interaction with other people.

The findings were presented in tables illustrating the four dimensions. A special interest was given to the vocabulary of conceptual metaphors of emotions and affects. The metaphors used by the respondents fall in the following categories: nature and natural phenomenon/force of nature (*sunny day, asteroid, the world going to an end, flowers, sun, rain, stormy day, puddle of water, storm, desert, rainbow, sunflower, field, meadow, lightening, thunder, volcano, winter, mud, earthquake, dead rose garden*), physical container (*empty bus, emptiness*), temperature and fire (*burn, fire, warm, burning feeling, coldness, hot, hot as a volcano*), colours and brightness (*colours, grey, black, blue, red, bright, darkness, shining [sun], sunshine*), supernatural (*unicorn, eats you up, demon, dementor, magic, supernatural, Harry Potter, doomsday, ghost*), weapon (*explode like a bomb*), physical force/action/ reaction (*chest collapsing on your heart, squeezing the life out of it; tears; blood rushing; [you feel] attracted to another individual; [your feelings] are jumping; pain*), weight (*bones and flesh turning into air, you feel so light, feather in the wind),* sound *(laughter, silence, scream, song*), taste/food (*sweet, sweet apple, pepper, sour, lemon, broccoli, ice-cream),* animals *(puppy, pet, spider*), states of mind/using other emotions (*annoyed, numb, lost, board, lazy, peace, loosing [the closest thing you love], comfortable feeling*).

Happiness involved the following metaphors: *sunny day, flowers, sun, colours, bright, warm [day], [happy like] a unicorn, bones and flesh turning into air, you feel so light, feather in the wind, peace*. Anger was *fire, demon, red, annoyed, [makes you] explode like a bomb*. Sadness implied metaphors like *rain, rain [starting when you don't have an umbrella], desert, grey, black, blue, demon, [you feel] your chest collapsing, squeeze the life, tears, burning feeling, numb, lost, bored, lazy*. Anxiety is an *earthquake, darkness, doomsday, ghost, silence, scream, and spider*. Anxiety also *eats you up*. Disgust is *mud or mud in the water, sleeping into a puddle of water, or broccoli*.

The importance of the metaphorical thinking is reflected on the idea that kids capable to work with symbolic and metaphoric ideas are better in solving problems. At the opposite side are

children unskilled in working and thinking metaphorically; these have also difficulties in solving problems (Burns, 2005). Metaphorical thinking and expression, being strongly linked to the emotional understanding, capacitates individuals to deal with their own emotions, to manage them. The link between metaphorical thinking and emotion literacy becomes evident from this perspective.

Another observable result is that, when involved in these kind of activities, students develop abilities for understanding their own feelings and other people's feelings as well, managing feelings, developing empathy, expressing emotions appropriately to a given context, thus becoming emotionally literate in a foreign language, and consolidating their emotional literacy as a broader ability. They also become aware of the fact that not only the way we express emotions, but our emotions themselves are determined by the language, norms and values of the society we live in, by the roles of the actors and by the interaction with the others.

Related to the specificity of various learning resources as regards their potential to elicit discursive emotion literacy, controversy and personal relevance seem to be the features that challenge young people in finding creative, complex and empathic formulations for their and others' emotions, thus enabling the development of discursive emotional literacy.

In the end, I suggested some action plans to develop the discursive emotional literacy as a desirable skill in our students, as this would make them aware not only of their own emotions and of the others' emotions, but also on the impact made by the society in constructing and shaping these emotions and their display. This would have as a result a better understanding and acceptance of cultural differences and, by promoting this, we form a generation oriented towards communication, dialogue, agreement and understanding, a generation capable to cope with these differences and see them as enhancing their existence, instead of threatening it.

For further research, I propose *the development of an instrument to measure discursive emotional literacy*, which could be used to evaluate, not only the skill itself, but rather its evolution, with the purpose of observing if the programmes and the policies developed for this are efficient.

By understanding the socially constructed component of emotions, individuals may cope better with their own feelings, as well as with the others'. Discursive emotion literacy as a competence becomes an important asset and, just as it was suggested that emotional intelligence may play a more important role in individual's success than does the rational intelligence – the

IQ – emotional literacy may prove to do the same, and to have an important contribution in achieving future goals. I therefore see a need for developing this competence in our students from very early stages of education. I am not advocating the development of special programmes dedicated to teaching discursive emotion literacy itself, but rather to integrate this skill in all the other educational programmes, starting with subject curriculums and continuing with extracurricular activities. Students should be encouraged to continuously research and compare any particular situation they come along with during their studies, after school activities, life events, with situations from different communities, to seek for similarities and differences, to understand and explain them. This activity, continuously practiced all along the course, will develop students' understanding of different systems of values; and emotions are an integrated part of these systems.

> „*Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization.*"
> Mahatma *Gandhi*

Key words: emotional literacy, emotion work, feeling rules, emotional intelligence, vocabulary of motives, conceptual metaphors of emotions.