

Linguistic asymmetries in cross-cultural emotion recognition

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The aim of this study is to explore cross-linguistic/cross-cultural recognition of emotion in a relatively understudied language (Korean). Previous studies on cross-linguistic emotion recognition found that intercultural emotion recognition is the combination of universal, cultural and, to a lesser extent, linguistic factors (Mesquita & Fridja, 1992; Scherer, 1997a, 1997b). However, these studies have mostly adopted unbalanced experimental designs that either used a “one-to-many” approach (presenting the same stimuli to different listener groups), or a “many-to-one” approach (presenting different stimuli to the same listeners). Moreover, these studies are often limited to basic emotions (Ekman, 1992). Consequently, current work on cross-linguistic emotion recognition may fail to take linguistic asymmetries into account. Thus, in the present study, we developed a full cross-language design (“two-to-two”), with speakers and listeners from two typologically different languages and different cultures, Dutch and Korean. Participants heard carrier phrases that are linguistically appropriate in both languages ([nuto hɔm sepikaŋ]) expressed with eight different emotions (balanced in terms of valence and arousal), and were then asked to choose one of the eight emotions that they thought the speaker was expressing.

Consistent with previous studies, our data revealed that both groups can successfully decode the emotions above chance level, supporting the universal hypothesis (Scherer et al., 2001). Also consistent with previous work (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002), our data highlighted an in-group advantage for recognizing vocal emotions produced in listeners' native language. The similarities and differences in confusion patterns across languages will be discussed in terms of the influence of linguistic asymmetries.

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