

Perceiving and responding to embarrassing predicaments across languages

Cultural influences on the emotion lexicon*

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The experience of embarrassment was explored in two experiments comparing monolingual and bilingual speakers from cultures varying in the degree of elaboration of the embarrassment lexicon. In Experiment 1, narratives in English or Korean depicting three types of embarrassing predicaments were to be rated on their embarrassability and humorousness by Korean-English bilinguals, Korean monolinguals, and Euro-American monolinguals. All groups judged certain predicaments (involving social gaffes) to be the most embarrassing. However, significant group and language differences occurred in judgments of the intensity of embarrassment and amusement judgments evoked. Euro-Americans exhibited higher overall levels of amusement than the two Korean groups who, in turn, reported higher levels of embarrassment, particularly for certain predicament types and contexts (ingroup members present). Further, for the bilinguals, inept performance predicaments in English were judged more embarrassing than those in Korean, whereas all predicament types were judged more amusing when framed with English emotion labels. Bilinguals also appeared to show a heightened embarrassability relative to both monolingual groups. Experiment 2 found lexical selection differences in open-ended responses to embarrassing predicaments depicted in each language, with Euro-Americans preferring to give justifications or use humor to minimize the embarrassment and Korean-English bilinguals preferring to give apologies or say nothing. The findings are interpreted to reflect the influence of culturally-mediated schemas guiding the activation and processing of emotion vocabulary.

Recent research on emotion and the lexicon suggests that one cannot assume that the meanings, intensity and valence of affect-laden words in a given language are

necessarily the same across different languages (Altarriba, Basnight, & Canary, 2003). The possibility that certain words despite being translation equivalents may not actually be processed equivalently presents a challenge to models of the bilingual mental lexicon. One factor that may underlie why affective words do not show a straightforward equivalence across translation equivalents is that they are often used in the service of face management which, in turn, is shaped by culturally-mediated norms governing social interaction. Sociopragmatic conventions, whether described in terms of politeness maxims (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987) or interactional principles (Spencer-Oatey & Jiang, 2003) are thought to be universal; however, the ways in which they are implemented and may influence lexical processing differ across language users from culturally-distinct experiences. However, culture as a potential source of influence on how words are categorized or accessed has not been explicitly addressed in formal or experimental psycholinguistic accounts of the mental lexicon. It has, however, been shown that bilinguals' languages may activate culturally distinct scripts or frames that influence cognitive performance (Ramirez-Esparza, Gosling, Benet-Martinez, Potter, & Pennebaker, 2006) and that cultural self-identification by bilinguals may affect their choice of language in a variety of affective domains (e.g., Vaid, 2006; Vaid, Chen, Choi, & Martinez, 2004).

Studies from the intercultural pragmatics and social psychological literature have noted that culturally shaped construals of one's identity as independent or interdependent may affect one's preferred form of self-expression: individuals from so-called low-context cultures are seen to prefer a more direct style that favors explicit, verbal self-expression (see Kim & Sherman, 2007) whereas those from high-context cultures are seen to prefer a more indirect style that values silence and nonverbal forms of expression (Hara & Kim, 2004; Hasegawa & Gudykunst, 1998; Holtgraves, 1997). These studies have begun to explore how cultural differences such as individualism and collectivism and use of direct versus indirect communicative styles may affect how specific emotions are perceived and managed. It has been suggested, for example, that emotions such as anger that pose greater relational face threats may be less frequently articulated among collectivist cultures or, when articulated, may have greater impact. Similarly, in high-context, relational cultures anger-related terms may be less often used in favor of more indirect, perhaps even nonverbal, ways of communicating anger; in such cultures anger, when used, may be perceived as having even greater force.

For the most part, available studies have drawn conclusions about the impact of culture for discourse-level processing. Nevertheless, it is plausible to hypothesize that culture may operate as a schema that affects how emotion words are categorized, activated, accessed, and interpreted, and, thus, that cultural influences may also be expected to operate at the level of the mental lexicon.

With this in mind, the present study examined cultural influences on language users' perceptions of and responses to verbal narratives depicting embarrassing social predicaments. We compared members from an Asian culture (Korean) with those from a western culture (Euro-Americans), given previous research indicating that embarrassment and shame are more culturally salient in Asian cultures (as discussed further below). In the process, our study considered how words in English versus Korean could activate culturally-mediated schemas that in turn guide bilinguals' affective perceptions and responses.

In order to better understand the significance of embarrassment in our own study, we consider briefly how embarrassment has been studied in the literature. Embarrassment and the related concept, shame, have been studied from a number of perspectives. Sociologists regard embarrassment as a means of maintaining social order. In a classic essay on embarrassment, Goffman (1967) argued that the mere threat of embarrassment is a factor in enforcing social codes that govern everyday interaction. Sociologists have identified situational variables such as the formality of the setting and the presence of ingroup or outgroup members as affecting the degree of embarrassment experienced. Social psychologists, in turn, have focused on identifying causes (e.g., Sabini, Stiepmann, Stein, & Meyerowitz, 2000) and functions of embarrassment, theorizing that, as a self-conscious emotion, embarrassment may serve a self-regulatory function (Keltner & Anderson, 2000).

The perspective that is of most relevance to the present study is the cognitive anthropological one. Here the interest has been in exploring how basic emotion concepts are categorized across cultures and how the nature and degree of lexical descriptors of particular emotions may reflect cultural differences in how the emotions are conceptualized. In the case of embarrassment and shame, there is abundant ethnographic research attesting to their salience and "hypercognized" nature in cultures in southeast and south Asia and neighboring regions. Indeed, traditional cultures of Asia (most notably, Japan, Korea, and China) have been described by western anthropologists as shame cultures and contrasted with so-called guilt cultures thought to characterize the cultures of North America and Western Europe.

It is thought that the higher emphasis placed on respect for authority in Asian cultures and the more hierarchical social organization found in these cultures, together with the value placed on maintaining social harmony, may foster conditions in which any threats to social harmony or violations of the social hierarchy would generate intense experiences of shame and embarrassment in members of these cultures (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994). Furthermore, given the collectivist orientation of these cultures, embarrassment and shame are more likely to be experienced as a group-level face threat in these cultures rather than primarily as a threat to one's own face, as is presumably the case in western cultures.

Support for the claim of heightened awareness of embarrassment and shame in Asian cultures may be found in part in the kinds of phrases used to refer to these emotions and in their broader cultural status. Ha (1995, pp. 1115–1116), for example, notes that “[i]n the Korean language, there is an elaborate vocabulary of words and phrases related to shame.” He suggests that unlike in Western cultures, where shame is socially unacceptable and is seen as a mark of weakness and defeat (see Goffman, 1967), shame is more culturally accepted in Asian cultures. In this context, Ha cites the Korean phrase *yeomchi eopta* (“have no sense of shame”) as an example of a saying that is used to denigrate those individuals “who cannot sense when they should feel ashamed” (Ha, 1995, p. 1115; see also Yang & Rosenblatt, 2001). A greater codification of shame-related terms in the lexicon of Asian languages has also been documented in a recent study of Mandarin speakers that found at least 113 words pertaining to shame in the Chinese language (Li, Wang, & Fischer, 2004). Shaver, Wu, and Schwartz (1992) reported that Chinese participants in contrast to Italians and Americans categorized shame as a distinct category, separate from other emotions. Shaver et al. (1992) also cited a study which found that whereas fewer than 20% of American mothers believed that their 2–3 year old children knew the meaning of the term “ashamed,” this was the case for 95% of Chinese mothers of children in the same age group. These examples provide hints that the experience of shame and related emotions is shaped and interpreted through the filter of culture. This filter may affect how readily emotion-related words that have particular cultural weight are activated in the mental lexicon, how they are stored and how they are interpreted.

Two studies that compared members of Asian cultures with members of western cultures in their experience of embarrassment are of particular relevance to the present research. Following an earlier finding by Edelmann (1990), Imahori and Cupach (1994) reported that, when asked to recall awkward social situations, Japanese speakers were more likely to recall gaffes that occurred in the presence of ingroup members, and most often reported feelings of shame as the predominant emotion in those situations. Euro-Americans, by contrast, reported feeling embarrassment as their predominant emotion triggered by awkward situations, which were typically situations involving a temporary loss of composure occurring in public settings (Imahori & Cupach, 1994). Cupach and Metts (1994) studied how individuals respond when presented with depictions of social predicaments, defined as situations “in which social performances are botched, expectations are disconfirmed, identities are threatened, and persons are held accountable” (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 159). Using this approach, Sueda and Wiseman (1992) compared Japanese participants, who were presented with embarrassing social predicaments in Japanese, and Euro-Americans, who were given the same predicaments in English. They found that Japanese speakers were far more likely to

resort to silence whereas Americans were far more likely to give verbal comments and use humor as remedial strategies.

The present research sought to extend the scope of these previous studies by examining a broader range of embarrassing predicaments in a new sample (Koreans) and considering the influence of culture and language on affective arousal and lexical response to embarrassing social predicaments. Our research manipulated the language in which social predicaments were presented and framed as a way of examining the influence of word choice on a bilingual's affective responses and the potentially distinct affective arousal from translation equivalents. That is, we sought to examine whether the language of presentation of emotion-laden narratives may serve to trigger distinct cultural scripts that affect the intensity of the emotion experienced and how the emotion is managed.

Whereas participants in previous studies were often bilingual, the impact of this variable was not assessed. In contrast, the bilinguality of our participants was of particular theoretical interest, as it permitted us to examine how the language of testing per se may affect performance and whether knowing two languages/cultural frameworks (in contrast to a single language) may modulate lexical access and lexical selection.

Two experiments were conducted. Our first experiment examined how culture affects affective arousal across the two languages of bilinguals and in bilinguals as compared to monolinguals. Our second experiment examined how culture affects lexical selection. In this experiment we examined group differences in lexical selection by native speakers of Korean versus English in response to embarrassing predicaments, in particular, the relative use of mitigation responses, humor and silence (see Imahori & Cupach, 1994; Tarr, Kim, & Sharkey, 2005). In both experiments participants were presented with a set of verbal narratives that depicted predicaments designed to evoke feelings of embarrassment and/or amusement.

Our study was premised on the view that the greater value placed in Asian cultures on respect for authority and maintaining a sense of propriety in public, together with a preference for an indirect conversational style (see Holtgraves, 1997) should result in a heightened awareness of the embarrassment potential of social predicaments (especially those occurring in the presence of ingroup members) when these are presented in the Korean language as compared to when they are presented in English. Furthermore, to the extent that embarrassment in Asian cultures is associated with threats to group-face rather than own-face, we expected group differences in the management of embarrassment (Experiment 2) with Koreans more likely to opt for silence or apologies, both of which may be seen as preserving others' face, and Euro-Americans more likely to opt for excuses, justification, and humor, which may be seen as ways to preserve their own face.

Experiment 1. Language and cultural effects in perceptions of emotion intensity: Euro-Americans versus Koreans versus Korean-English bilinguals

This experiment examined similarities and differences between two monolingual, culturally distinct groups — Koreans and Euro-Americans — and between Korean-English bilinguals tested in Korean versus in English on their perceptions of the intensity of amusement and embarrassment elicited by written narratives depicting embarrassing social predicaments. The predicaments were classified into three types: accidents, inept performance (clumsiness or failing to display expected skill or ability), and social mistakes (unintentional or benign faux pas) and were each presented under four conditions involving two levels of social distance (ingroup/outgroup members present) crossed with two levels of perspective (experiencer/observer) in a between-subjects design.

Two sets of hypotheses were examined. Hypothesis Set 1, which compared the Korean monolinguals with the Euro-Americans and thus allowed for a test of language/culture effects more generally, hypothesized that the greater cultural importance placed on shame concepts in Asian cultures would lead to an enhanced experience of embarrassment among Koreans, especially when the embarrassing predicaments occurred in the presence of ingroup members. Across both groups, we expected predicaments involving faux pas or mistakes to be perceived as especially embarrassing as compared to predicaments involving accidents or inept performance. Finally, we expected Euro-Americans to judge the predicaments to be more amusing relative to the amusement ratings by Koreans for the same predicaments.

Hypothesis Set 2, which compared bilinguals on each language and bilinguals with each of the monolingual groups per language, addressed the following questions: (1) Is bilinguals' coding of emotion intensity of words describing embarrassing predicaments affected by the language in which the words are presented, and in turn by the particular cultural script presumably triggered by the language (see Matsumoto & Assar, 1992; Ramirez-Esparza et al., 2006)? (2) Are there carryover effects in the experience of embarrassment from bilinguals' culture of origin to their later acquired language/culture (e.g., Al-Issa, 2003)? (3) Does bilinguality/biculturalism itself affect the perceived intensity of emotion word coding?

With respect to the first question, to the extent that the language of an event activates particular cultural scripts associated with the use of that language bilinguals were expected to report feeling heightened embarrassment when predicaments were presented in Korean than when they were presented in English. With respect to the second question, we predicted that Korean-English bilinguals would show greater embarrassment for predicaments presented in English (their second

language) relative to that experienced by Euro-Americans in English, but would not differ from Korean monolinguals in Korean. With respect to the third question, we hypothesized that exposure to two different languages/cultural experiences may have a general repercussion in the form of a heightened affective arousal relative to exposure to a single language (in line with a previous finding from self-report data that the impact of bilingualism enhanced the tendency to find humor in different situations, see Vaid, 2006).

Method

Participants

For tests of Hypothesis Set 1, a total of 60 college students were tested. These included 24 Koreans (12 males, 12 females) and 36 Euro-Americans (18M, 18F). The Koreans were recruited from a large university in Seoul and were tested by one of the authors; the Euro-Americans were recruited from a large university in Texas.

For tests of Hypothesis Set 2, participants included the same set of 60 college students who formed the basis for the analyses in Hypothesis 1 (i.e., 24 Koreans tested in Korea and 36 Euro-Americans) and 60 Korean-English bilinguals, recruited from the same university in the U.S. as that from which the Euro-Americans were recruited. The bilinguals were subdivided according to the language in which the experiment was administered to them: thirty-six of the bilingual respondents (18M, 18F) were tested in English and 24 (12M, 12F) were tested in Korean.

Bilingual participants completed a language and cultural background questionnaire adapted from Vaid (2006) and administered in Korean and English. The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 36 years (mean = 29.6 years) and had been living in the U.S. for an average of 4.4 years. The majority were late second language learners who had acquired English between the ages of 9–12 years or later. Their mean self-ratings on English language proficiency were 18 (out of a maximum score of 28 representing the sum of ratings on a 7 point scale on speaking, reading, listening, and general comprehension). Nearly half of the sample reported having studied Japanese as well, and a few had studied German. However, almost all considered Korean to be their most effective language for communication. The majority regarded themselves to be more Korean than Euro-American in their cultural identity and reported keeping their Korean and Euro-American aspects of their cultural identity separate and compartmentalized.

Stimuli and procedure

Stimuli were a set of 12 brief, narratives depicting predicaments that were designed to elicit feelings of embarrassment. They were developed by the authors after consulting studies of retrospective accounts by individuals from western and eastern cultures of awkward social situations (e.g., Imahori & Cupach, 1994; Sabini et al., 2000). The predicaments were subdivided into three types, following a typology identified by Imahori and Cupach (1994), as follows: gaffes or social mistakes, such as being seen with toilet paper stuck to one's clothes, or having condoms fall out of one's bag (there were four of this type), inept performance, such as breaking something or singing out of tune (there were three of this type), and accidents involving a temporary loss of composure, such as falling down or belching (there were two of this type). The remaining three narratives were treated as fillers.

The narratives were constructed with a view to representing a range of potentially embarrassing situations that could plausibly occur in either Korean or Euro-American cultural settings although care was taken to avoid including any overt indication of the cultural setting in which the predicament occurred. However, social setting was deliberately varied, with some narratives situated in formal, public settings and others in informal, private settings. Moreover, in order to examine the influence of social distance given previous findings showing that embarrassment is experienced more intensely by Asians when in the presence of family and friends, two variants of each narrative were created; in one variant the embarrassment-inducing events were described as occurring in the presence of friends or siblings of the participants (ingroup condition), whereas in the other variant the events occurred in the presence of strangers (outgroup condition). The immediacy of the event was also manipulated. This was done by framing the participant as an experiencer of the embarrassing event in one version and as an observer of the event in another version. Thus, there were four versions of each narrative, representing two levels of social distance crossed with two levels of immediacy. The immediacy variable was treated mainly as a control variable and was not included in the analysis of the data.

One final manipulation involved the language of presentation of the narratives. The narratives were presented in English and in Korean translation. Since we wanted to ensure that the narratives across language conditions did not differ in any appreciable way other than in the language in which they were written, care was taken in the construction of the translations, and the Korean narratives were back-translated to check for the accuracy of the translation. Korean monolinguals ($n = 24$) were administered the narratives in Korean and Euro-American participants ($n = 36$) were tested in English. Korean-English bilinguals were randomly assigned to either the Korean ($n = 24$) or the English language version ($n = 36$). Thus,

there were a total of eight versions of the narratives, four per language. Although any given participant received only one variant, all four variants were represented across participants per group, and the order of presentation of the narratives per variant was fixed.

Participants were given the set of 12 narratives in booklet form. They were instructed upon reading each narrative to indicate, using a 7 point scale, where 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *very*, the degree to which they felt amused and the degree to which they felt embarrassed by the predicament described in the narrative. Judgments of “amused” always preceded judgments of “embarrassed”.

The embarrassment lexicon in Korean

For “amused” the translation equivalent in Korean used was *jami-itta*. For “embarrassed” a decision had to be made between two possible terms: *changpee-hada* (which has online dictionary meanings of “embarrassed, ashamed, shameful, ignoble”) and *dahngwhahngsrupda* (defined as “embarrassed, perplexed, puzzled, bewildered, discomfited, disconcerted, lose one’s composure, lose one’s presence of mind”). The two terms, according to our Korean informant, one of the authors of this study, are used somewhat differently. Whereas *changpee-hada* refers to the feeling of being embarrassed (or ashamed), *dahngwhahngsrupda* refers more to one’s action because of the feeling. *Dahngwhahngsrupda* may be used when one wants to run away from an embarrassing situation but cannot for some reason. The latter term is closely related to an expression that roughly translates as “don’t know what to do or bewildered because of a shameful situation.” There does not appear to be an English equivalent for this term. One way of illustrating the difference between the two terms is as follows: *changpee-hada* is used when a child has wet his/her pants. *Dahngwhahngsrupda* is used when the child is worried that someone may have seen him/her do it. The former term captures the feeling, the latter has to do more with one’s action because of the feeling. In our study we used the term *changpee-hada* for “embarrassed”.

Design and analyses for tests of Hypothesis Set 1

Although all participants rated the narratives on the amount of amusement and embarrassment elicited, we examined specific combinations of the participants in order to test the various hypotheses we were interested in testing. Thus, for tests of Hypothesis Set 1, the participants included in the analyses were Koreans (based in Korea and tested in Korean) and Euro-Americans. The amusement and embarrassment ratings for these groups were analyzed in separate analyses of variance, as they represented separate dependent measures. For each type of rating, the de-

sign was a 2 (Cultural group — Korean vs. Euro-American) \times 3 (Predicament Type — accident, inept performance, mistake) \times 2 (Social Distance — ingroup vs. outgroup members) mixed factorial with Predicament Type as the only within subjects variable.

Design and analyses for tests of Hypothesis Set 2

For tests of our second set of hypotheses, we undertook three separate $2 \times 2 \times 3$ mixed factorial analyses on each of the emotion judgments (amusement and embarrassment), considered separately.

For the test of Hypothesis 2a (bilinguals on each language), the variables were Group (Korean-English bilinguals tested in Korean vs. those tested in English), and Social Distance (ingroup vs. outgroup) and the within subject variable was Predicament Type (accident, inept performance, mistake).

For the test of Hypothesis 2b (bilinguals vs. Korean monolinguals), the Group variable was Korean-English bilinguals tested in Korean versus Korean monolinguals tested in Korean, and for the test of Hypothesis 2c (bilinguals vs. English monolinguals), the Group variable was Korean-English bilinguals tested in English versus Euro-Americans tested in English. The other variables in the analyses for 2b and 2c were the same as those in the analysis for 2a, i.e., Social Distance and Predicament Type.

Results and Discussion

Figure 1 illustrates the mean amusement intensity ratings per predicament type at each level of Group, Test Language, and Social Distance. Figure 2 illustrates the mean ratings on embarrassment intensity per predicament type as a function of each of these variables.

Hypothesis Set 1: Judgments of emotion intensity as a function of cultural group

Amusement

A main effect of Group, $F(1, 56) = 26.73, p < .0001$, showed that Euro-Americans gave higher overall amusement ratings than did Koreans (4.38 vs. 2.82). A Predicament Type \times Social Distance interaction, $F(2, 112) = 6.64, p < .002$, indicated higher amusement for mistakes relative to accidents ($p < .01$) and for inept performance relative to accidents ($p < .05$) for predicaments occurring in the presence of outgroup members; the three predicament types were judged equally amusing in the presence of ingroup members.

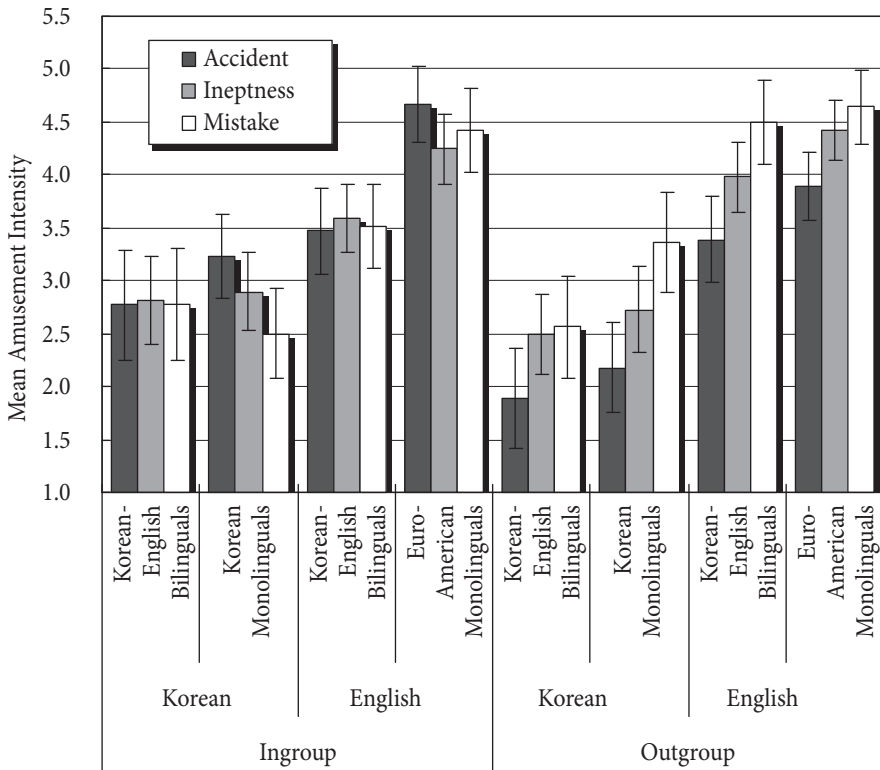


Figure 1. Mean amusement intensity ratings (and standard errors) in Experiment 1 by predicament type, social distance, test language, and group (1 = not at all amusing, 7 = very amusing)

Embarrassment

The embarrassment judgments varied by Predicament Type, $F(2, 112) = 16.29$, $p < .0001$. For both groups, mistake predicaments elicited the greatest embarrassment. A trend for a Group by Predicament Type interaction, $F(2, 112) = 2.40$, $p < .09$, suggested that accidents were rated as more embarrassing by Koreans than by Euro-Americans ($p = .08$); further, whereas Euro-Americans judged accidents less embarrassing than inept performance ($p < .05$), Koreans judged these to be equally embarrassing. There were no other effects.

In summary, the test of Hypothesis Set 1 found, as predicted, an effect of culture on the coding of emotion words in Korean versus English, with a heightened perception of amusement on the part of Euro-Americans and a heightened sense of embarrassment on the part of Koreans. Also as predicted, mistake predicaments were judged to be the most embarrassing of the three predicament types. Finally, the variable of ingroup versus outgroup did not emerge as significant in the em-

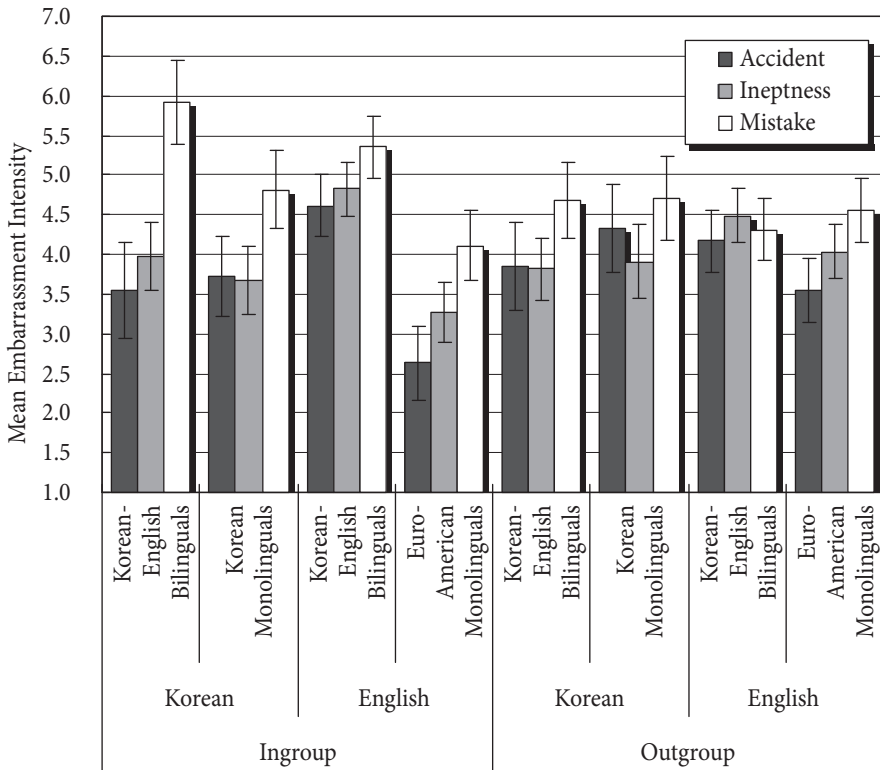


Figure 2. Mean embarrassment intensity ratings (and standard errors) in Experiment 1 by predicament type, social distance, test language, and group (1 = not at all embarrassing, 7 = very embarrassing)

barrassability judgments, although it did affect amusement judgments but did so similarly across groups.

Hypothesis Set 2: Judgments of emotion intensity as a function of input language, cultural group, and bilinguality/biculturalism

A. Bilinguals Tested in English versus Bilinguals Tested in Korean

Amusement. An analysis of variance conducted on the mean amusement ratings indicated a main effect of Language, $F(1, 56) = 9.87, p < .003$, a main effect of Predicament Type, $F(2, 112) = 3.59, p < .03$, and a Predicament by Social Distance interaction, $F(2, 112) = 3.06, p < .05$. The Language effect revealed that predicaments were judged more amusing when they were read in English than when they were read in Korean (3.74 vs. 2.55). The Predicament Type effect showed that mistakes and inept performance elicited more amusement than did accidents. The interac-

tion of Predicament Type and Distance showed that the above effect was restricted to predicaments occurring in the presence of outgroup members.

Embarrassment. The analysis of variance conducted on the mean embarrassment ratings showed a main effect of Predicament Type, $F(2, 112) = 23.13, p < .0001$, a Language by Predicament interaction, $F(2, 112) = 9.75, p < .0001$, and a Predicament x Social Distance interaction, $F(2, 112) = 6.47, p < .002$. The interaction of Language with Predicament showed that bilinguals were differentially sensitive to predicament type for Korean-presented scenarios only: mistakes elicited the highest degree of embarrassment, which was significantly higher than that for accidents ($p < .001$) or inept performance ($p < .001$) (5.3, 3.7, 3.9, respectively). Further, although mistake predicaments and accidents were not judged more embarrassing in one language than in the other, inept performance in English was judged more embarrassing than that in Korean ($p = .03$). The Predicament x Social Distance interaction showed that, across languages, mistake predicaments occurring among ingroup members were judged significantly more embarrassing than the same predicaments occurring among outgroup members ($p < .01$); the other two predicament types were not affected by social distance. Mistakes were also rated more embarrassing than the other two predicament types ($ps < .01$).

B. Bilinguals Tested in Korean versus Korean Monolinguals in Korean

Amusement. The only significant effect in this analysis was a Predicament Type by Social Distance effect $F(2, 88) = 5.71, p < .005$. The accident predicaments were judged more amusing when they occurred among ingroup than outgroup members ($p < .05$). There were no group differences.

Embarrassment. A significant effect of Predicament Type was qualified by a Predicament by Social Distance interaction, $F(2, 88) = 4.04, p < .02$. The interaction revealed that mistake predicaments, which were rated as the most embarrassing of the three predicament types, were especially more so when occurring among ingroup than outgroup members. A Group x Predicament Type interaction approached significance, $F(2, 88) = 2.46, p < .09$. Inspection of the means suggested that Korean mistake predicaments occurring among ingroup members elicited higher embarrassment for bilinguals as compared to monolinguals.

C. Bilinguals Tested in English versus Euro-Americans in English

Amusement. There was a main effect of Group $F(1, 68) = 4.03, p < .04$ which indicated higher amusement by Euro-Americans as compared to bilinguals. A Predicament Type by Social Distance effect $F(2, 136) = 4.37, p < .01$ indicated that mistake predicaments were judged more amusing than the other predicament types, particularly in the presence of outgroup members ($p < .05$).

Embarrassment. The analysis of embarrassment judgments revealed a main effect of Group ($p < .006$) and an interaction of Group with Social Distance, $F(1, 68) = 4.01, p < .04$. There was also a main effect of Predicament Type ($p < .0001$) and an interaction of Predicament Type with Group $F(2, 136) = 3.73, p < .03$. Although Korean bilinguals reported higher embarrassment overall than Euro-Americans, this effect was qualified by the two interactions observed. The group difference was particularly evident for the accident ($p < .01$) and inept ($p < .01$) **performance predicaments**; for the mistakes predicaments both groups showed equally high levels of embarrassment. The interaction with social distance showed that the higher embarrassment experienced by the bilinguals relative to the Euro-Americans was significant only for ingroup members ($p < .01$); (Korean bilinguals, 4.93; Euro-Americans, 3.34).

In summary, the test of Hypothesis Set 2 showed support for all three predictions. First, the language in which emotions were to be judged on intensity affected bilinguals' judgments; across translation equivalents, bilinguals experienced an overall higher level of amusement for predicaments presented in English than they did for those presented in Korean. Although they did not show higher levels of overall embarrassment in Korean than in English, their experience of the embarrassment potential varied by language across the three predicament types, being greater for mistakes than accidents or inept performance only in Korean; the three types were not differentiated when the judgments were made in response to English prompts. This may suggest either that one's coding of emotion intensity is less sensitive to predicament type in one's nonprimary language or that it is more sensitive to predicament type in one's primary language.

Moreover, there was support for the view that the primary language and associated cultural script has a carryover effect in the processing of emotional information in the nonprimary language given that mistake predicaments were judged by bilinguals to be more embarrassing in ingroup than in outgroup contexts, regardless of the language of presentation of the predicaments.

The comparison of bilinguals with the two monolingual groups allowed for a test of the influence of exposure to two cultures on the perception of emotion intensity across languages. Here, we found evidence that the bilinguals' emotion judgments in Korean were more similar to those of Korean monolinguals (particularly for amusement) than their judgments in English were to those of Euro-American monolinguals. Even so, there was some indication that bilinguals were more susceptible to social distance effects on embarrassment than were Korean monolinguals. This difference was accentuated in the comparison of bilinguals with Euro-Americans. Here there were pronounced group differences, suggesting the operation of distinct cultural schemas in the bilinguals and the monolinguals. Consistent with expectation, Euro-Americans experienced more amusement than

the bilinguals, who in turn experienced more embarrassment. Also consistent with expectation and with prior findings with Japanese versus American samples, the group difference noted for embarrassment was restricted to ingroup settings. Furthermore, there was some suggestion that bilinguals (on English) showed an enhanced degree of embarrassment for certain predicament types (accidents and inept performance), relative to Euro-Americans. This outcome suggests that a possible byproduct of having access to two distinct cultural frameworks may be to make one even more aware of social norms and thus more susceptible to feeling embarrassed.

Experiment 2. Language and cultural influences in responses to embarrassing predicaments

Whereas the previous experiment used rating scales to assess the degree of embarrassment and amusement experienced by bilinguals and monolinguals in response to embarrassing predicaments, the present experiment used open-ended responses to examine language and cultural influences on lexical selection strategies in seeking to minimize the damage caused by the embarrassing act.

Based on previous research with Japanese versus Euro-American samples (Sueda & Wiseman, 1992), it was hypothesized that Koreans would be more likely to use mitigation strategies such as silence or apologies, whereas Euro-Americans would be more likely to use assertive response strategies such as offering excuses or justifications or humorous responses.

Method

Participants

Twenty Korean-English bilinguals and 40 Euro-American monolinguals, matched in gender, participated in the experiment. All were students at a large southwestern university in the U.S. The Korean participants consisted of a subset of the bilingual participants from Experiment 1 who had been tested in Korean. The Euro-Americans had not participated in the previous experiment but were selected from the same participant pool as those in the previous experiment.

Stimuli and procedure

The stimuli consisted of the same set of 12 scenarios used in Experiment 1. Euro-Americans read the scenarios in English and the Korean-English bilinguals read the translation equivalents of the scenarios in Korean. Upon reading each scenario, participants were to write down what they would feel if they were in the predicament depicted as the experiencer of the embarrassing event. Then they were to write down what they would say in that situation. The bilinguals were asked to respond in Korean and the Euro-Americans responded in English.

Coding schemes

Two different coding schemes were used. One, applied to the entire response set, classified the responses into humorous responses, nonhumorous responses and “say nothing” responses. The second coding scheme was applied to a subset of the “say” data, the four mistake predicaments. These were classified using response categories adapted from Imahori and Cupach (1994) as follows: account (excuses or justifications), silence, humor (an actual humorous remark or a statement indicating that humor would be attempted), and behavioral remedy (e.g., zipping up one’s fly discreetly). To these, two other categories were added — acknowledgment (the use of interjections like “sorry” or “excuse me” or “damn,” or some other implicit acknowledgment of being in an awkward situation but short of offering an excuse or explanation), and escape (leaving the situation). Each response was assigned only one coding. Two coders were used and differences were resolved by consensus. In the analyses reported below some of the above categories were collapsed (e.g., silence with escape).

The “feel” responses were used primarily to guide the interpretation of the “say” responses and are not analyzed further. The “say” responses of the bilinguals were translated into English by one of the authors, a native Korean speaker with advanced proficiency in English, and together with the responses from the Euro-Americans were coded and entered for analysis.

Design and analysis

Two sets of analyses were performed on the “say” responses. The first set classified participants’ responses into three overall types: silence, humor, and nonhumor and analyzed each in a three-way analysis of variance as a function of Group (Euro-American vs. Korean), Social Distance (ingroup vs. outgroup), and Setting (private vs. public).

The second set of analyses focused on the mistake predicaments. Here for each group, the frequency of each of the five response types in coding scheme 2 was noted.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of overall “say” responses

“Say nothing” responses

A main effect of Group was found, $F(1, 56) = 10.99, p < .01$, indicating more responses of this type overall by Koreans than by Euro-Americans. A three-way interaction of Group x Setting x Interlocutor was also obtained, $F(1, 56) = 7.00, p < .05$ (see Figure 3). The interaction revealed that whereas Koreans uniformly used silence across the four conditions, Euro-Americans used silence selectively, being least likely to use it with friends in private settings ($ps < .01$).

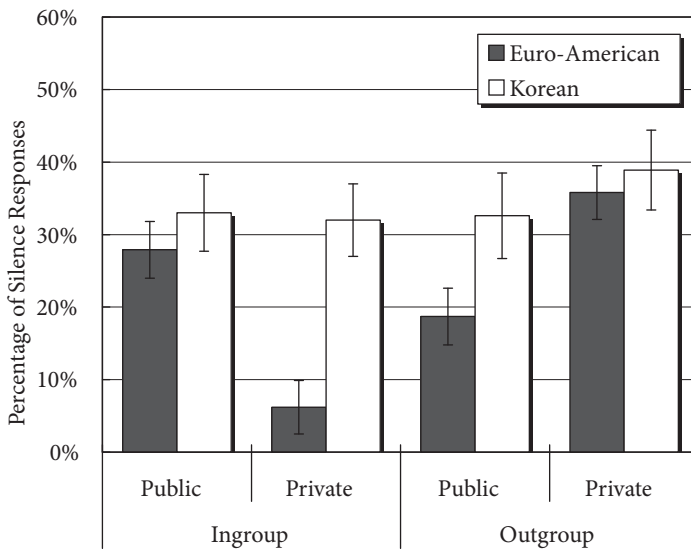


Figure 3. Mean percent distribution of silence responses to embarrassment in Experiment 2 by group, social distance and setting

Humorous responses

A three-way interaction of Group x Setting x Social Distance was obtained, $F(1, 56) = 10.69, p < .001$. Further analysis suggested that Euro-Americans gave more humorous responses than Koreans, particularly with strangers in public settings and with friends in private settings ($p = .06$). See Figure 4.

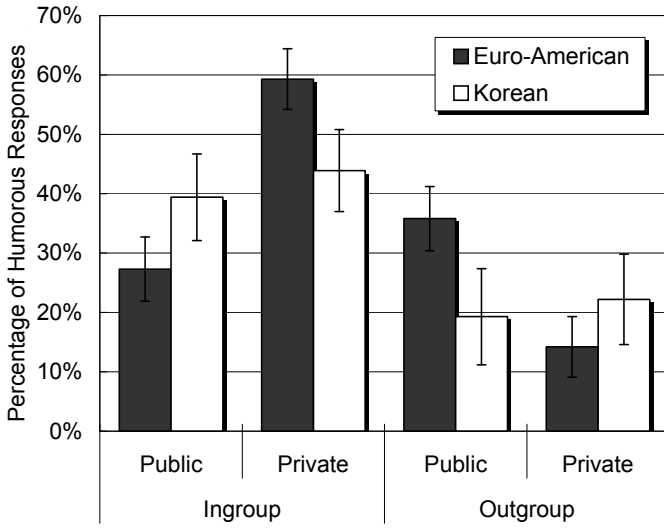


Figure 4. Mean percent distribution of humorous responses to embarrassment in Experiment 2 by group, social distance and setting

Nonhumorous responses

A three-way interaction of Group x Setting x Social Distance was obtained, $F(1, 56) = 12.64, p < .001$. Breakdown of this interaction (see Figure 5) revealed that Koreans gave more nonhumorous responses than Euro-Americans with out-group members in public settings ($p = .01$).

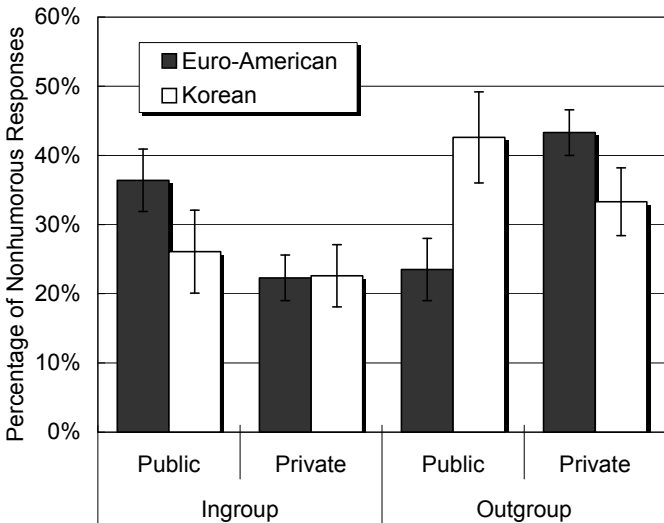


Figure 5. Mean percentage of nonhumorous responses to embarrassment in Experiment 2 by group, social distance and setting

Analysis of “say” responses to mistake predicaments

Sample responses provided by participants for mistake predicaments are summarized in Appendix B. A breakdown of the relative use of different response strategies by social distance revealed the following: for Euro-Americans, the preferred response strategy with ingroup members was Acknowledgment (25%, as compared to only 9% by Korean bilinguals). For the bilinguals, Silence was the most preferred response strategy (42.25%, as compared to 22.5% for Euro-Americans). The other response strategies, in descending order were, for Euro-Americans in ingroup settings: Account (23.8%), Silence/Escape (22.5%), Humor (18.8%), and Remedy (7.5%), and for Korean bilinguals, Humor (24.75%), Account (11.2%), and Remedy (11.2%). The use of Silence/Escape in both groups was higher for outgroup than for ingroup members: 47.5% for Euro-Americans and 55.75% for Korean bilinguals, all other categories of response were lower in frequency for outgroup than for ingroup members.

Overall, participants' response strategies followed in the hypothesized direction with Euro-Americans offering accounts or acknowledgments (nearly half of their responses to the mistake predicaments were of this type whereas only 20% of the Korean bilinguals' responses were of this type) and Koreans preferring to say nothing in response to embarrassment. Humor tended to be used more by Euro-Americans than by Koreans. Korean bilinguals, by contrast, used non-humorous responses (apologies) more.

General discussion

We will discuss the findings in terms of their bearing on three issues of central importance in the study of emotion and the bilingual mental lexicon: 1) the issue of language and cultural influences on coding, or how a particular situation is perceived and verbally coded, 2) the issue of language and cultural influences on lexical selection, or how individuals verbally respond in a particular situation, and 3) the issue of the influence of language choice on a bilingual's affective responses and the potentially distinct affective arousal from translation equivalents.

Language and cultural influences on coding

Experiment 1 examined the effect of language and culture on the coding of affective narratives. Narratives were to be coded in terms of the intensity of two types of emotions elicited. It was hypothesized that, given the greater cultural significance of shame and embarrassment in the Korean culture relative to the Euro-American

culture, narratives describing embarrassment-inducing situations in Korean would be coded as higher in their affective intensity (i.e., more embarrassing) than the same narratives presented in English. Similarly, given that humor is a common accompaniment of embarrassment, particularly in western cultures, we expected that predicaments would be perceived as more amusing when presented in English than when presented in Korean.

The predicted language effect in embarrassment was obtained for one of the predicaments in that Korean monolinguals coded accident predicaments as eliciting greater embarrassment than Euro-Americans' embarrassment ratings for those predicaments. The predicted language effect for amusement was also obtained, as greater amusement was observed for predicaments presented in English (to Euro-Americans and bilinguals tested in English) relative to that for predicaments presented in Korean (to Koreans and bilinguals tested in Korean). The observed elevated amusement experience on the part of the Euro-Americans and on the part of Korean bilinguals when coding the predicaments in English, points to an enhanced cultural salience for humor in the Euro-American culture. This interpretation is supported by our finding, in Experiment 2, that Euro-Americans were significantly more likely than Koreans to attempt to be humorous as a way of coping with embarrassment. Our results thus clearly show that language and cultural variables affect the way in which situations are perceived and verbally coded.

Language and cultural influences on lexical selection

Our data from Experiment 2 addressed the issue of how language and culture influence how individuals verbally respond in a situation. In this experiment, open-ended responses to the situations were solicited from Euro-Americans (in English) and from Korean-English bilinguals (in Korean). Participants were to indicate verbally how they would feel and what they would say if they were in the experiencer role in each of the predicaments described. Analysis of the "say" responses indicated significant group differences, presumably reflecting the activation of different cultural scripts for how to respond to embarrassment. The most striking difference was that Koreans preferred to say nothing, as though by not drawing attention to the event, one could agree to act as though it never happened. By contrast, Euro-Americans' preferred response was to be humorous, rather than be non-humorous or silent. A more fine-grained analysis of lexical selection biases showed that Euro-Americans felt compelled to verbally acknowledge the event (e.g., by saying, "Damn" or "Oops") and to offer some justification for it (e.g., in response to having condoms slip out of a bag, common responses by Euro-Americans were "I'm a busy man," or "this is a gag gift for someone's birthday"). Humor (at another's expense) was another favored response mode by

Euro-Americans; e.g., for the condom episode described above: “Yeah, well your mom was the one who gave them to me.” In contrast, Koreans’ favored response to this predicament was keeping silent, saying something to distance oneself from the source of the embarrassment (“These are not mine”) or simply fixing the problem (“say nothing — just pick them up”). Thus there was strong support for the influence of culture in the selection of verbal responses in response to situations presented in Korean versus English.

Bilinguals’ distinct affective arousal to translation equivalents

The third issue of relevance to the mental lexicon that the present research illuminates concerns the distinct affective response of bilinguals to affect-inducing narratives that are translation equivalents. A strong test of this issue was not possible given the between-subject design of the language manipulation in the present research. Nevertheless, our findings show that bilinguals who were tested in Korean showed a different pattern of affective arousal to the narratives than bilinguals who were tested in English, pointing once again to the influence of a cultural schema that guided bilinguals’ responses, making them perceive the narratives as more embarrassing in the Korean version but more amusing in the English version. Given the different cultural weighting of embarrassment and perhaps of humor across Korean and Euro-American cultures, it is not surprising that manipulating the language of presentation of embarrassing predicaments appears to have triggered culture-appropriate schemas that serve to work through the mental lexicon to enhance the degree of arousal in one case and lower it in another. That is, the same narratives when framed in Korean, appear to have primed culturally-salient notions of shame and accentuated the experience of shame and embarrassment as compared to the case when the narratives are framed in English, where there is not a salient cultural schema for shame. As a result, perceptions of affect to English-framed narratives emphasized the amusing aspect of the predicaments rather than their embarrassment potential.

Based on their self-reports on a questionnaire probing cultural self-identification, the Korean-English bilingual sample in our study was fairly homogeneous in that the majority reported feeling more anchored in a Korean cultural identity. As such, their heightened sense of embarrassment in response to predicaments presented in Korean than in English was consistent with their cultural identification as predominantly Korean. Had we included a more varied bilingual sample in terms of their cultural identification we may have uncovered other patterns of response.

A noteworthy aspect of our findings was the heightened embarrassment experienced by the bilinguals relative to that experienced by either monolingual group. Given the greater identification of the bilingual sample with their Korean

cultural identity it is not surprising that they would show a more “Korean” pattern in English relative to that of the Euro-American participants. What was somewhat surprising, though, was that they also showed signs of a stronger Korean pattern in Korean relative to that of the Korean monolinguals. One interpretation of this somewhat unexpected finding is that having to navigate between two different sets of cultural norms may make bilinguals more sensitive to social codes in general and thus, perhaps, even more affected by potential disruptions of social norms. If this finding turns out to be replicable it would add to the array of findings in the bilingualism literature on cognitive and social repercussions of knowing two languages.

A final point we wish to underscore from our results is that, as predicted, the heightened experience of embarrassment in the Korean groups (as well as the greater tendency to resort to silence in managing their embarrassment) was largely restricted to contexts in which the embarrassing predicaments occurred in the presence of ingroup members. Had we not included this variable we may not have uncovered group/language differences in affective arousal or lexical selection.

Implications and prospects for further research

A limitation of our first experiment was that the bilinguals were assessed in a between-subjects comparison. In future research, the use of a within-subjects design would allow investigation of transfer effects from socio-cultural beliefs associated with the first language on second language affective coding and response (see Al-Issa, 2003). Another limitation of our first experiment was that we provided our participants with specific emotion labels (i.e., “amusing” and “embarrassing”) rather than allowing them to generate their own labels (see, for example, Greasley, Sherrard, & Waterman, 2000). Finally, we did not directly compare participants’ embarrassment ratings with their amusement ratings. Doing so may have allowed us greater insight into the relationship between humor and embarrassment. A limitation of our second experiment was that predicaments were presented to the bilinguals in one language (Korean) only, and their language of response was also restricted to a single language. Given two previous studies with Asian samples (Bond & Lai, 1986; Ha, 1995) that found that bilinguals tend to code-switch into their second, affectively more neutral, language when talking about embarrassing topics, it would be interesting in future research to allow bilinguals to choose their language(s) of response. Finally, a limitation of both studies was our use of self-report, offline measures. In future research it would be interesting to develop online measures to allow for more fine-grained monitoring of the effects of interest; examples of possible tasks that could be adapted here may be priming, and evaluative decision measures (e.g., Avero & Calvo, 2006).

Despite these limitations, we feel that the results of our study have contributed to the literature on emotion and the bilingual mental lexicon in drawing attention to the significance of culture as a moderator of affective arousal and lexical selection. Specifically, our study provided empirical support for the claim that the experience and management of embarrassment may differ in Asian and Western cultures reflecting the greater cultural recognition given to embarrassment and shame in Asian cultures which in turn is thought to arise from the greater emphasis in these cultures on respect and approval (Ha, 2000).

In closing we would like to suggest how research on cultural influences is important for studies of the mental lexicon. Whereas experimental research on the mental lexicon over the past several decades has amassed a considerable body of findings showing the influence of a host of variables affecting word recognition, the focus of this literature has been on the processing of individual words presented under conditions that are far removed from their actual contexts of use. Even studies of the emotion lexicon have tended to disregard natural contexts when rating the valence of stimuli, which may compromise the studies' validity (see Greasley et al., 2000, for demonstration of this point). Limiting the study of the mental lexicon to the study of decontextualized words is to ignore the richness and complexity of lexical processing as it characterizes actual language use, which is embedded in culturally-specific social contexts. In studying emotion and the bilingual mental lexicon, cultural variables become even harder to ignore, given the presumed influence of cultural factors on emotion categorization (see Altarriba et al., 2003).

Instead of being treated as "noise," culture should be seen as an important, if understudied, source of variation that, if systematically examined, may enrich and advance theorizing into the bilingual emotion lexicon. Culture, here, may be conceptualized as a kind of higher order contextual variable that may facilitate the access of certain emotion-laden words, prolong their length of activation, make them more memorable, and affect the kinds of connections the words have to other words in the lexicon. As already demonstrated by studies such as those of Li et al. (2004), cultural variables are central in shaping how emotion terms are classified, described, and elaborated, and even how early certain terms are acquired (see Shaver et al., 1992).

Culture has been the focus of two theoretical models of relevance to the mental lexicon. One model, using a natural semantics metalanguage approach, identifies a core set of universal semantic primitives across languages with concepts being built out of the primitives and organized into structured domains such as emotions, which are not always equivalent across languages (Wierzbicka, 2006). The other model, termed the linguistic category model (Semin, Gorts, Nandram, & Semin-Goossens, 2002), considers how individuals in different cultures talk about emotional events and hypothesizes that emotion terms should be more promi-

ment or accessible as relation markers in cultures where group goals assume more prominence over individual goals; conversely, emotions are said to be more prominent as self markers in individual-centered cultures. These approaches, although differing from psycholinguistic models of the architecture of the mental lexicon, offer promising ways of conceptualizing the influence of culture at the lexical level. When sufficiently grounded so as to allow specific hypotheses to be formulated and tested, culturally-based accounts should prove particularly fruitful in advancing our understanding not only of how but also of why words in the mental lexicon are accessed, classified, represented and used in the ways they are.

Note

* This research was supported by a Faculty Stipendiary Fellowship to the first author by the Melburn G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research. We thank Jung Min Lee and Hyunsuk Jeong for assistance in Korean data collection and coding, and McKenzie Henry and Rosie Rodriguez for assistance in data entry. We are particularly grateful to Jeanette Altarriba, Norman Segalowitz, and Aneta Pavlenko for suggestions on the framing of the manuscript.

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Appendix A. List of predicaments (using outgroup/experiencer variant)

Accident

1. You are a furniture deliveryman. When delivering a table to someone's house, you trip over a rock in the lawn and fall to the ground. As you get up you see that the homeowner has seen the entire thing happen. You are not hurt but look very embarrassed.
2. Your sister and her friends, whom you've never met before, are chatting in the living room. When you walk by, you suddenly feel an uncontrollable need to burp, and so you do. It is very loud and smells very bad.

Ineptness

3. You are boasting about your strength in front of a group of strangers in a party. In order to demonstrate your physical strength, you lift up a nearby heavy object, but you are unable to hold onto it, and it falls to the floor and breaks into many pieces.
4. You are invited to a party at which you don't know most of the guests. The host serves some light snacks as well as some alcoholic drinks. You get drunk and proceed to climb out onto the balcony and sing loudly and off-key for about ten minutes until one of the neighbors asks you to stop.
5. You are eating at home with your sister and her friends, who you are meeting for the first time. As you pass the salt, you accidentally knock one of the glasses on the table over, spilling a drink on your sister's friend. She says to you: "That's all right, you must have thought that I looked too warm and needed to be cooled off."

Mistake

6. You are waiting for an elevator in a large building. When the elevator comes, you walk in. There is already one person in the elevator. You happen to glance at the floor and you notice that

you have some toilet paper hanging out of the bottom of your pants. The person in the elevator with you seems to have already noticed it.

7. You are in a waiting room waiting to see a doctor. There is only one other person in the waiting room with you. You are holding a bag in your lap but as you reach to get a magazine the bag falls to the floor and several condoms spill out.

8. You are in a business meeting as a representative for your company and you are about to give a presentation. As you start your presentation, you realize that your fly is open.

9. You are attending a classical music concert in a crowded theatre. You are talking to your friend there. As the piece of music is building to a climax, it gets progressively louder and so does your voice. Suddenly, the music comes to an abrupt end. In the silence that follows, everyone in the auditorium can hear the end of your sentence: "...and that's how I got herpes!"

Appendix B. Sample responses given by participants in Experiment 2 to predicaments

Predicament	Korean-English Bilinguals	Euro-Americans
Toilet paper sticking out from clothes in elevator.	<i>Say nothing.</i> <i>This toilet paper must like me.</i> <i>Sometimes weird things happen.</i>	<i>This is the new style.</i> <i>Ya know, in case I need a pit stop.</i> <i>Oh well, it's obvious where I've been.</i>
Emitting a loud burp.	<i>It was delicious.</i> <i>Oops, excuse me.</i> <i>Excuse me, I must have eaten too much.</i>	<i>That's just the beginning, boys.</i> <i>Don't be jealous.</i> <i>It happens, get over it.</i>
Being overheard disclosing how one got herpes	<i>Say nothing and run away.</i> <i>Damn!</i>	<i>Nothing. Just leave. [escape]</i> <i>And your mom still has not apologized.</i>

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