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Return to sender? The conceptualization of emotions in written correspondence from the NSM perspective

Abstract:
In her introduction to Family, lovers and their letters, Cancian (2010: 10) remarks that [emigrants’ correspondence] “mirror the individual writers’ interior psychological and emotional spaces and their views of the outside world”. Although scholars have been especially skilled in analysing the historical and linguistic dynamics operating in the migrant letter, only recently has the linguistic study of emotion talk come into focus. This paper investigates the subjective experience of migration as described and construed in the epistolary discourse of the Irish emigrants that travelled to the United States and Australia/New Zealand during the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth centuries and their loved ones back in Ireland. More specifically, the study proposes a detailed contextualised analysis of positive emotional concepts (Gladkova & Romero-Trillo 2014; Romero-Trillo & Avila-Ledesma 2016) such as happy and glad using the methods of corpus pragmatics (Romero-Trillo 2008, 2017) and Natural Semantic Metalanguage (Wierzbicka 1999; Goddard and Ye 2016). The historical letters on which this study is based come from CORIECOR, the Corpus of Irish English Correspondence (McCafferty and Amador-Moreno in preparation) which consists on private letters dating between 1700 and 1930 and sent from and to Irish emigrants to Argentina, Australia/New Zealand, Canada, Great Britain and the United States. The ultimate objective of this paper is to provide an in-depth examination of happiness-like terms, based on real personal correspondence sent from two different migration settings, in order to ascertain the extent to which specific migration experiences influenced the ideologies and emotions expressed in the epistolary discourse of Irish emigrants. Based on historical corpus evidence, the paper adds to the growing literature on happiness, subjective well-being and emigration.

References:


