FEELINGS IN SIDAAMA

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This study shows that Sidaama, a Cushitic language of Ethiopia, does not have any lexical exponent for feel—one of the concepts that Wierzbicka’s Natural Semantic Meta-language (NSM) research program proposes as universal semantic primitives (cf. Wierzbicka 1972, 1996; Goddard & Wierzbicka 1994, 2002a)—by describing how this language expresses feelings.

1. Review of the NSM Research Program. According to the NSM program, there is a set of indefinable and irreducible universal primitive concepts, which each have lexical exponents in every language; some of these primitive concepts are combined to analyze non-primitive concepts expressed by a vast majority of words in languages. There are about sixty primitives proposed by the latest version of the NSM program (Goddard 2002:14, Wierzbicka 2006:122). For each of the primitives, there are canonical sentences, which are constructed together with other primitives and can be translated into any language with no difference in meaning (Goddard & Wierzbicka 1994, Wierzbicka 1996). However, even though the claims made by the NSM are alleged to be based on crosslinguistic data, of the approximately thirty languages that it has examined, there are only two African languages: Amharic (Ethio-Semitic) and Ewe (Niger-Congo); it has not looked at any Cushitic languages.

One of the proposed primitives is feel, which does not differentiate between mental feelings and physical feelings. Its universality has been the underpinning of the NSM theory of language and feeling, which claims that feel is a universal concept (Wierzbicka 1999a, 1999b; Harkins & Wierzbicka 2001), though the concept of emotion and individual emotions (e.g. ‘anger’, ‘fear’, etc.) are both culture-bound and neither of them are universal concepts. According to NSM theory, the Darwinian notion of ‘basic emotions’ (cf. Ekman & Friesen 1986: happiness, sadness, fear, disgust, anger, surprise, and contempt) is ethno-centric because, by the use of these words, their English meanings are imposed on the ‘basic emotions’, despite the fact that human emotions vary greatly across languages and cultures. NSM researchers note that words in different languages which refer to similar emotive concepts are actually different in meaning and also that words for individual emotions in one language are often untranslatable to another language. NSM therefore argues that if there is any basic emotion or conceptual element pertaining to emotion, it should not be defined by a word in any particular language, but should be described through culture-independent, universal terms, such as the primitives that the NSM proposes.

NSM theory clearly states that ‘[a]ll languages have a word for feel’ (Wierzbicka 1999a:36, 1999b:15). From this, it hypothesizes that by using the word for feel, any language can
construct universally translatable canonical sentences for this primitive such as the following: (i) I feel good/bad, (ii) I feel like this (Goddard & Wierzbicka 1994:52).

There are counterexamples to the lexical universality of FEEL that have been put forward from several languages (e.g. Lutz 1988, Michelson 2002), but NSM has reformulated the principle of the lexical universalism of FEEL to defend itself from them. According to the current version of the NSM program, any language that appears not to have a word for FEEL can compensate in one of several ways. In some languages, a perception verb (e.g. a verb for ‘see’, a verb for ‘hear’) may be used to express FEEL (Goddard & Wierzbicka 1994:65–67, 2002b:63–64). Another way that some languages may express FEEL is through body part terms (often, terms for internal organs like ‘liver’, ‘stomach’, and ‘insides’) (Goddard & Wierzbicka 1994:63–65, 2002b:64). In this case, expressions with body part terms such as ‘My liver/stomach is good/bad’ and ‘My insides are good/bad’ mean ‘I feel good/bad.’ However, as shown below, Sidaama even defies these NSM solutions to the counterexamples.

2. FEELING EXPRESSIONS IN SIDAAMA. Sidaama is a Highland East Cushitic language spoken in South Central Ethiopia (Kawachi 2007, in press a, in press b, in press c). The word order is predominantly SOV, and the case-marking is accusative. This section describes how Sidaama expresses feelings without a word for FEEL.

2.1. ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS. First of all, even if Sidaama had a verb like the English verb feel, it has no adjectives or adverbs that could be used with that verb to express how one feels.

Though it has adjectives for ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (danča and buša, respectively), Sidaama cannot express one of the proposed NSM canonical sentence patterns for FEEL: ‘I feel good/bad.’ The Sidaama literal translations of ‘I am good/bad’ (ani danča=te/buša=te. [SG.NOM good=PRED.F/bad=PRED.F]) and ‘I became good/bad’ (ani danča/buša ikk-umann. [SG.NOM good/bad become-PERF.1SG.M]) actually mean ‘I (F) am a good/bad person’ and ‘I (M) became/am a good/bad person’, respectively. Therefore, they are used for someone’s personality, not their feelings.

Sidaama has adjectives for mental states, but all of them are derived from state-change verbs discussed in Section 2.2 and concern inherent mental states or personality traits: e.g. dadill-aančo ‘always worrying’ (dadill- ‘become worried’), bagiid-aančo ‘always happy’ (bagiid- ‘become happy’), waįį-j-aančo ‘becoming afraid easily’ (waįį- ‘become fearful’), hank’-aaleessa (M)/hank’-aaleette (F) ‘getting angry easily’ (hank’- ‘get angry’). It has a few adjectives for physical predispositions that are also derived from state-change verbs: e.g. mug-aančo ‘always sleepy’ (mug- ‘become sleepy’). However, Sidaama lacks adjectives for non-inherent mental states including emotions and for non-inherent physical states.

Sidaama has no lexical adverbs that express the ways one feels. Manner adverbials can be formed from adjectives and the suffix -gede ‘like’: danča-gede [good-like] ‘well’, buša-gede [bad-like] ‘badly’, lowo-gede [large-like] ‘greatly’. They are used only to describe skill in performing an action or the manner of an action, not for feelings, however. Moreover, the demonstrative adverbs, togo ‘like this’ and batto ‘like that’, cannot be combined with any verb to express ‘I feel like this/that.’

2.2. VERBS. Sidaama does not have a verb that refers to feel. There is no verb that is analogous to the English verb feel, nor is there a verb like perceive or sense. Furthermore, none of the Sidaama perception verbs (la- ‘see’, maččišš- ‘hear’, su’nis- ‘smell’, kis- ‘touch’, k’āmmas- ‘taste’) can serve as a general perception verb for feel.

All the verb roots for both mental and physical feelings in Sidaama express change of state. Examples are shown in (1):


These verbs take an experiencer as subject. When the state-change verbs are in the perfect aspect, as in (2) and (3), they express a state-change event that has already happened; the new state, which the referent of the subject NP has entered as a result of the state change, is interpreted as continuing at the time of utterance, as suggested in the glosses for (2) and (3). (Sidaama has two perfect aspect suffixes, which are interchangeable in many cases, but only one of them is used throughout this paper).

(2) hank’-itu.  
become.angry-PERF.3SG.F  
‘She has gotten angry (and is angry now)’.

(3) mug-gu.  
become.sleepy-PERF.3SG.F  
‘She has become sleepy (and is sleepy now)’.

Thus, because the experiencer’s current mental and physical states, for which many languages use adjectives, can be depicted as temporary conditions resulting from state changes by the perfect forms of the state-change verbs, Sidaama can do without adjectives for non-inherent mental and physical feelings.

The causative forms of many intransitive state-change verbs take the experiencer as direct object, and can use an impersonal third-person singular masculine subject, which is indicated by a verb suffix (represented as fused with an aspect suffix into a portmanteau suffix in the present paper). In (4) and (5), the subject is impersonal, as in (a), unless the stimulus or cause is interpreted as a third-person singular masculine referent, as in (b).
(4)  
\[ \text{bank’-is-i-se.} \]
\[ \text{become.angry-CAUS-PERF.3SG.M-3SG.F} \]
\[ \text{a. ‘She has gotten angry (and is angry now).’ (lit. ‘IMPERS.3SG.M has caused her to get angry.’)} \]
b. ‘He has made her angry (and she is angry now).’

(5)  
\[ \text{mug-is-i-se.} \]
\[ \text{become.sleepy-CAUS-PERF.3SG.M-3SG.F} \]
a. ‘She has become sleepy (and is sleepy now).’ (lit. ‘IMPERS.3SG.M has caused her to become sleepy.’)
b. ‘He has made her feel sleepy (and she is sleepy now).’

There are also a few transitive verbs that take the impersonal third-person singular masculine subject.

(6)  
\[ \text{dìw-i-se.} \]
\[ \text{cause.sickness-PERF.3SG.M-3SG.F} \]
‘She has gotten sick (and is sick now).’ (lit. ‘IMPERS.3SG.M has caused her sickness.’)

(7)  
\[ \text{anga t’iss-i-se.} \]
\[ \text{arm(OBL) cause.pain-PERF.3SG.M-3SG.F} \]
‘She has come to feel a pain in her arm (and feels the pain now).’ (lit. ‘IMPERS.3SG.M has caused her pain with respect to the arm.’)

As shown above, Sidaama has verbs for various types of both mental and physical feelings. The semantic component of a specific way one feels is always ‘conflated’ (Talmy 1985) with that of coming to feel x in any of the verb roots for state changes involving feelings. The same is true for causing to feel in the case of the transitive verbs in (6) and (7). Thus, this language does not need a verb for feel.

2.3. Body part terms. Sidaama has no noun that would correspond to feeling in English, but it has two internal body part terms that are used in various idiomatic expressions involving mental states: wodana ‘heart’ and godowa ‘stomach.’ However, neither of these can be claimed to be exponents of feel for the following reasons.

First, unlike body part terms in other languages, neither wodana nor godowa can be used to express any of the canonical sentences for feel. The Sidaama sentences for ‘My heart/stomach is good/bad’ (wodan-i-’ya/godow-i-’ya danča=bo/buša=bo. [heart-NOM-1SG.Poss/stomach-NOM-1SG.Poss good=pred.M/bad=pred.M]) can mean ‘I am a nice/cruel person,’ but they never express any feeling. The sentences for ‘My heart/stomach got better’ (wodan-i-’ya/godow-i-’ya woyyaw-i [heart-NOM-1SG.Poss/stomach-NOM-1SG.Poss get.better-PERF.3SG.M]) cannot be used generally for feelings either, though they may be used literally to mean ‘My heart/stomach physically has recovered from illness.’
Second, when idiomatic expressions with wodana and godowa are used for feelings, they are restricted to mental feelings, and cannot be used for physical feelings. If either of these were proposed as an exponent of FEEL, it would be contradictory to the NSM claim that FEEL does not differentiate between mental and physical feelings.

Moreover, idiomatic expressions with wodana and godowa are generally not restricted to (mental) feelings, but can also be used for personality traits and thought, which are not feelings. There are three patterns of expressions corresponding to the three major types of syntactic environments where these words can be used idiomatically. Whereas one of them involves feelings, the other two do not. Each pattern is described below. (Note that, as indicated in the examples below, there are expressions where either wodana or godowa can be used, normally interchangeably and without any difference in meaning, and expressions where only one of them can be used.)

In one pattern, wodana and godowa are subjects of intransitive verbs, usually state-change verbs, or direct objects of transitive verbs.

(8) hakko od-i-nni wodan-i-’ya/godow-i-’ya
that.M.GEN news-GEN-with heart-NOM-1SG.POSS/stomach-NOM-1SG.POSS
mas-i. get.shocked-PERF.3SG.M

‘I have become concerned/am concerned (lit. My heart/stomach has gotten shocked) with the news’. (This expression is usually used by a female speaker.)

(9) wodana-si/godowa-si giir-tu.
heart(ACC)-3SG.M.POSS/stomach(ACC)-3SG.M.POSS burn-PERF.3SG.F

‘She irritated him’. (lit. ‘She burned his heart/stomach’.)

When they are used this way, these idioms usually express emotions. Examples of such expressions (abridged to a combination of ‘heart’ or ‘stomach’ and a verb) are shown in (10):

(10) a. subjects of intransitive verbs:
    heart: muddi- ‘become disappointed/sad’ (lit. ‘bleed’), be’i ass- ‘become worried’ (lit. ‘produce the onomatopoeic sound be’i’), foolišši- ‘settle, relax’ (lit. ‘take a rest’), uurr- ‘get excited’ (lit. ‘stand’)
    stomach: šaššaf- ‘shock’ (lit. ‘agitate’)

b. direct objects of transitive verbs:
    heart: hiikk- ‘disappoint’ (lit. ‘break’), kis- ‘move, hurt’ (lit. ‘touch’), ad- ‘attract’ (lit. ‘take’), moor- ‘fascinate’ (lit. ‘steal’), tūm- ‘frighten’ (lit. ‘pound’);
    stomach: šaššaf- ‘shock’ (lit. ‘agitate’)

In the second and third patterns, idiomatic expressions with wodana and godowa do not refer to any feeling at all. In the second pattern, wodana or godowa is usually the subject of an adjectival or nominal predicate, occasionally a state-change verb, or is sometimes attributively modified by an adjective or noun.
Idioms of this pattern do not express feelings; the possessor of the heart or stomach does not feel anything at all. These expressions concern personality traits (with only a few exceptions: e.g. heart/stomach: *siwiila* ‘physically strong, sophisticated’ [lit. ‘iron’]). Other examples of this pattern are listed in an abridged way in (12):

**(12)**

a. heart/stomach: *t’alala* ‘straightforward, open-hearted’ (lit. ‘clear’), *šakk’ado* ‘kind’ (lit. ‘soft’), *kinčo* ‘sophisticated’ (lit. ‘a stone’), *barriččo* ‘timid’ (lit. ‘a donkey’), *hamaššo* ‘malicious’ (lit. ‘a snake’)

b. heart: *lowo* ‘too ambitious’ (lit. ‘big’), *šiima* ‘childish’ (lit. ‘small’), *wo’ma* ‘not caring’ (lit. ‘full’), *airrado* ‘too sophisticated’ (lit. ‘heavy’), *bubbe* ‘undependable’ (lit. ‘wind’), *wošiččo* ‘unsophisticated, easily forgetting things’ (lit. ‘a dog’), *koliššo* ‘pessimistic, bleak, twisted’ (lit. ‘black’), *du’ma* ‘carefree’ (lit. ‘fat’)

c. stomach: *hala’lado* ‘patient’ (lit. ‘wide’)

In a third pattern, *wodana* and *godowa* are usually used as part of an adverbial:

**(13)**

*wodan-u-nni/godow-u-nni agur-i-e.*

heart-GEN-from/stomach-GEN-from forgive-IMP.2SG-1SG

‘Forgive me from the bottom of your heart’. (lit. ‘from the heart/stomach’)

**(14)**

*wodan-i-si/godow-i-si giddo no*

heart-GEN-3SG.M.PRESS/stomach-GEN-3SG.M.PRESS inside come.to.exist.3

re af-uummo.

things(ACC) get.to.know-PERF.1SG

‘I (M) know/have come to know what he is really thinking’. (lit. ‘the things that have come to exist in his heart/stomach’)

In the preceding examples of this pattern, *wodana* and *godowa* are treated as the location of their possessors’ seriousness, sincerity, honesty, or consideration; often, these are only accessible to their possessors. English translations of other examples are given in (15):

**(15)**

a. heart/stomach: ‘love someone’ (lit. ‘someone has come to exist in one’s heart/stomach’), ‘be none of one’s business anymore’ (lit. ‘exit from one’s heart/stomach’), ‘work/dance, etc. seriously’ (lit. ‘work/dance, etc. from one’s/the heart/stomach’)

Therefore, idiomatic expressions that use \textit{wodana} and \textit{godowa} are not devoted to feelings, and can convey other types of mental states, depending on which construction is used. Even when they are used for feelings, they are limited to mental feelings and cannot be used for physical sensations.

3. Lack of an exponent for \textit{feel} and the use of a body part term for feelings. This section shows that the lack of an exponent for \textit{feel} in a language does not necessarily motivate the use of a body part term for feelings in that language by comparing Sidaama with Amharic (Ethio-Semitic), a language geographically close to, yet only distantly related to, Sidaama.

Amberber (2001:37–42) describes feeling expressions in Amharic in the NSM framework. As he states, this language has a verb for \textit{feel}, \textit{samma}, which is neutral to the distinction between mental and physical feelings; it can also mean 'hear' in some morphosyntactic environments, where it does not mean \textit{feel}.

On the other hand, Amharic can use words for 'heart' (\textit{libb}) and 'stomach' (\textit{hod}) in various idiomatic expressions like those in Sidaama, and they follow basically the same patterns as Sidaama expressions using \textit{wodana} and \textit{godowa}. Their uses overlap considerably, though they do not necessarily match with each other.

Like the first pattern in Sidaama, the Amharic words for 'heart' and 'stomach' can be used as the subject of an intransitive verb or the direct object of a transitive verb to express emotions. Like Sidaama expressions of the second pattern, Amharic expressions where adjectives or nouns predicate or attributively modify \textit{libb} or \textit{hod} also express personality traits but not feelings. When \textit{libb} and \textit{hod} are used as parts of adverbials, they are also usually treated as the locus of serious thought or private thought.

Amharic has some expressions that Sidaama lacks (e.g. ‘ambitious’ (lit. ‘mountain heart’), ‘hurt someone’s heart’, ‘close one’s heart’), and some Sidaama expressions may not be commonly used in Amharic (\textit{mudid} ‘become disappointed/sad’ (lit. ‘bleed’)). There are also a few expressions with ‘heart’ and ‘stomach’ in Sidaama and Amharic that are translated word for word into English the same ways but actually have different meanings. For example, ‘open someone’s heart’ means ‘come to have a good manner, listen to someone’s advice’ in Sidaama, but means ‘reveal one’s real intention’ in Amharic. Nevertheless, Amharic can use many of the Sidaama expressions in (8)–(15) in the same way:

(16) a. heart/stomach: 'become concerned' (lit. ‘get shocked’), 'sophisticated' (lit. ‘a stone’), 'timid' (lit. ‘a donkey’)

(16) b. **heart**: ‘settle, relax’ (lit. ‘take a rest’), ‘get excited’ (lit. ‘stand’), ‘fascinate’ (lit. ‘steal’), ‘too sophisticated’ (lit. ‘heavy’), ‘not caring’ (lit. ‘full’)

           c. **stomach**: ‘patient’ (lit. ‘wide’)

Therefore, the use of the body part terms for (mental) feelings and related concepts in Sidaama is not motivated by or even related to the lack of a lexical exponent for **feel** in this language.

4. **CONCLUSION.** To summarize, Sidaama does not have any lexical exponent for **feel**. This challenges the fundamental hypothesis of the NSM program that **feel** is a lexical universal. Idiomatic expressions with the words for ‘heart’ and ‘stomach’ in Sidaama are restricted to mental feelings and cannot be used for physical feelings. Neither of these terms can be exponents for **feel**, which does not differentiate between mental and physical feelings. In fact, the use of body part terms for feelings is irrelevant to the lack of an exponent of **feel** in Sidaama.

Because of this, the correlation between them proposed by the NSM is groundless.

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2 The verbs in (1)–(3) are all state-change verbs—their progressive forms characteristically express the process of entering a state, as in (i) and (ii):

(i) **hank’-itannino.**
become.angry-PROG.3SG.F
’she is (in the process of) getting angry’.

(ii) **mug-gannino**
become.sleepy-PROG.3SG.F
’she is (in the process of) becoming sleepy’.

3 The difference between adjectives and verbs that refer to feelings lies not so much in duration as in inherency—adjectives are used for inherent mental and physical states, whereas verbs are used for non-inherent ones. Although their perfect forms express short-term mental and physical states, state-change verbs are not restricted to short-term ones. As in (iii) and (iv), recurrent or frequent state changes expressed by the imperfect forms of some state-change verbs (e.g. **bat’** ‘come to like’, **gib** ‘come to hate’, **hasid’** ‘come to want’) express long-lasting states including current states as recurrent or regular state changes.

(iii) **bat’-anno-se.**
come.to.like-IMPERF.3SG.M-3SG.F
’he (always) likes her’ (lit. ‘He comes to like her (regularly/habitually)’).

(iv) **waasa it-a hasi’r-anno.**
waasa(ACC) eat-INF come.to.want-IMPERF.3
’He wants to eat waasa (all the time)’ (lit. ‘He comes to want to eat waasa (regularly/habitually)’).

Like other state-change verbs, the perfective forms of these verbs express temporary states as resultative states, as in (iii)’ and (iv)’:

(iii)’ \( bat’-i-se. \)
\( \text{come.to.like-PERF.3SG.M-3SG.F} \)
‘He likes her (now)’. (lit. ‘He came to like her’)

(iv)’ \( waasa \ it-a \ bas’r-i. \)
\( \text{waasa(ACC) eat-INF come.to.want-PERF.3SG.M} \)
‘He wants to eat waasa (now)’. (lit. ‘He has come to want to eat waasa’)

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