The Asian EFL Journal

August 2018

Volume 20, Issue 8

Senior Editor:

Paul Robertson

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"Happiness" in Bahasa Indonesia and its Implication to Health and Community well-being

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Abstract

This paper examines the meaning of three Indonesian emotion words, *bahagia*, *senang*, and *gembira* that come from happiness discourse. "Happiness" has become **an important aspect in nation's well-being** as well as the people's health and longevity. The problem arises when these three 'happiness' words are used interchangeably without any clear cut in meaning. The Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach was applied in this study due to its universality and capacity to solve the definition circularity. The data were taken from the Leipzig University Indonesian corpora. Additionally, some definitions from Indonesian monolingual as well as English-Indonesian and Indonesian-English bilingual dictionaries were taken into consideration to illustrate the problems. As the result, this paper defines *bahagia*, *senang*, and *gembira* as personal emotions from the discourse of "happiness" that occurs in different duration of time. The difference occurs also in the 'otherness' characteristics of each emotion. The native Indonesian experience on these emotions was described in the NSM explication. Finally, the paper suggests studies on emotions and happiness to promote community well-being and health as an immerging research domain for applied linguists.

Keywords: *Happiness, bahagia, senang, gembira, emotion, Natural Semantic Metalanguage, well-being, health*

Introduction

Emotions become an important element in semantic and cross-cultural communication studies since the way they are expressed differs cross-culturally. One of the earliest statement in regards to the study of emotions is offered by William James in 1890. James (1890) states that the analysis of words referring to emotions will likely result in no single coherent outcome. The following is the direct extraction from William James:

> "If one should seek to name each particular one of [the emotions] of which the human heart is the seat, it is plain that the limit to their number would lie in the introspective vocabulary of the seeker, each race of men having found names for some shade of feeling which other races have left undiscriminated. If we should seek to break the emotions, thus enumerated, into groups, according to their affinities, it is again plain that all sorts of groupings would be possible, according as we chose this character or that as a basis, and that all groupings would be equally real and true" (James, 1890, p. 485).

From the quotation above, it is obvious that meaning of emotions is so much depending on the cultural value of the community from which the emotions derived**. According to Hochschild (2003), the members of a community share the same emotional expressions and experiences. However, interpreter from other language and culture will sometimes have no direct equivalencies for the emotions being interpreted in his own language and culture. Wierzbicka (1999) argues that people conceptualise emotions into each of their languages differently. Thus, people from different culture or speech community have to be very careful in interpreting emotion words which are not traditionally belonged to their language and culture. The relation between emotions and culture is also pointed out by Johnson-laird and Oatley. Johnson-Laird and Oatley (1989) argue that emotions are culturally variable.

Another conception of emotions that worth to pay attention to is proposed by Nico H. Frijda. Frijda (1970) states that emotion is a set of sequences. It includes a stimulating condition, a cognitive evaluation, psychological activation, a transformation of action readiness, and finalised with a physical action. This paper focuses on emotion terms of "happiness" in Bahasa Indonesia. The word "happiness" is written in a double-inverted comma to accommodate the culturally varied meaning of "happiness" across culture.

Literature review

The importance of "happiness"

According to Ye (2014), happiness study has become a 'new science' because of its importance to the nation's growth. Further, she explains that "happiness" has become an interdisciplinary study. It does not exclusively belong to the discipline of philosophy, theology, and psychology. The discipline of linguistics has immerged in the study of "happiness", especially in relation to its translation cross-culturally. The other importance of "happiness" that needs to be pointed out is its effect on people's health and community well-being. According to Veenhoven (2008), happiness does not have a direct correlation with the cure to illness. However, he asserts the importance of happiness to prevent people from illness. In other words, happiness will not give a direct impact for ill people, but it does give an impact for healthy people to prevent them from getting ill. Moreover, Veenhoven stresses the significance of being happy with the well-being. The other study conducted by Diener and Chan (2011) suggests that the presence of positive emotions and the absence of its negative counterpart will lead to health and longevity. The importance of being happy even comparable to the choice to quit smoking (Veenhoven, 2008). Communities are made up of humans and they have highly

developed emotions. Hence, understanding one community's concept of "happiness" is likely to contribute to the success of community development and health promotion programme. This paper is devoted to reveal Indonesian's concept of "happiness".

Indonesian happiness discourses; bahagia, senang, and gembira

Bahagia, *senang*, and *gembira* are three semantically related words from the domain of emotion in Bahasa Indonesia. They are typically used in the 'happiness' discourses. Their interrelated meaning sometimes becomes problematic since they are often used interchangeably without any clear cut in terms of meaning. Even for the native speaker of Bahasa Indonesia, defining the difference among those three words can be challenging. This problem will get worsen when people from different cultural background other than Indonesian try to seek the meaning of *bahagia*, *senang*, and *gembira* because they don't share the same emotional experience as the Indonesian native speaker. The dictionary that is expected to illuminate the meaning seems to be unable to offer the solution. The meaning that is defined by the dictionary often traps the learner into circularity. The word *bahagia* is often defined with the word *senang*. The word *senang* is defined with the word *gembira*. Whilst, *gembira* is defined with the words *bahagia* and *senang*. As an illustration, the following is the definition of the above emotion words according to the online version of *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, which is the official monolingual Indonesian dictionary.

Table 1. Definition of *bahagia*, *senang*, and *gembira* from the online version of *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (the dictionary of Bahasa Indonesia) (KBBI, 2016).

	Dictionary Definition
Bahagia	*(1) keadaan atau perasaan **senang** dan tenteram (bebas dari segala yang menyusahkan)*
Senang	*(1) puas dan lega, tanpa rasa susah dan kecewa, dan sebagainya. (2) betah. (3) **berbahagia** (tidak ada sesuatu yang menyusahkan, tidak kurang suatu apa dalam hidupnya). (4) suka; **gembira**.*
Gembira	*(1) suka; **bahagia**; bangga; **senang.***

Beside the definition from the Indonesian monolingual dictionary, the definition from the bilingual dictionary is worth to examine.

Table 2. Definition of *bahagia*, *senang*, and *gembira* from an online version of bilingual

Indonesian-English dictionary (Indonesia, 2016).

	English Translation
Bahagia	(1) **happy**. (2) lucky. (3) glad**.**
Senang	(1) appreciative. (2) **happy**. (3) nice. (4) glad.
Gembira	(1) glad. (2) **happy**. (3) delighted.

Table 3. Definition of happy from English-Indonesian bilingual dictionary

	Indonesian Translation	
Happy	(1) *bahagia*, (2) *senang*, (3) *gembira*	(Echols & Shadily, 1992)
Happy	(1) *bahagia*, (2) *senang*, (3) *gembira*	(Hornby, Siswojo, & Parnwell, 1984)

From the given examples above, circularity obviously occurs in the definition of monolingual dictionary. While, in the bilingual Indonesian-English dictionary, 'happy' consistently occurs in the definition of *bahagia*, *senang,* and *gembira*. Additionally, in the English-Indonesian dictionary, *bahagia*, senang, and *gembira* are used interchangeably to define the English word 'happy'. The interchangeably use of the three Indonesian words *bahagia*, *senang* and *gembira* to describe the meaning of English word 'happy' will lead the **cultural outsiders** into confusion. Even though they are from the same discourse "happiness", *bahagia*, *senang*, and *gembira* have slightly different meaning that could be differentiated by experiencing the emotions.

Focusing on the circularity problem, according to Arnault in Wierzbicka (1996), "In defining, we employ a definition to express the idea which we want to join to the defined word; if we then wanted to define 'the definition', still other words would be needed—and so on to infinity." Therefore, it is important to stop at some primitive words which are not defined. These primitive words are referred to as Semantic Primes by Anna Wierzbicka under her theory of Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM). Wierzbicka develops NSM as the ideal tool to overcome the definition circularity by providing a better understanding of the culture of the defined language. This cultural-related understanding could be achieved since semantics primes are primitive concepts that accepted universally (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2013). In other words, semantic primes are not restricted by the cultural boundaries. The universality of semantic primes enables the learners to closely experience the emotions from different culture

through the NSM explication. This phenomenon is referred to as "experience-near concept" (Ye, 2014). Hence, this study adopted the NSM theory to describe the meanings of the three Indonesian emotion words named above.

Moreover, even though *bahagia*, *senang*, and *gembira* are interrelated in meaning, they can still be differed by examining the incompatibility that occurs when one word is substituted for the others within the same sentence. The following instance describes this incompatibility phenomenon. Whenever translation occurs, the emotion words will not be translated to retain their distinctive meaning and thus avoid confusion.

*(1) setelah menikah, pasangan itu hidup **bahagia** untuk selama-lamanya.*

*(2) ??setelah menikah, pasangan itu hidup **senang** untuk selama-lamanya.*

*(3) ??setelah menikah, pasangan itu hidup **gembira** untuk selama-lamanya.*

The above examples show the incompatibility when *senang* and *gembira* used to substitute *bahagia*. The literal meaning of sentence (1) in English is 'After marriage, the couple live *bahagia* ever after.' When *bahagia* is replaced with *senang,* and *gembira*, as shown in the sentence (2) and (3), it results to peculiar expressions in Bahasa Indonesia.

Despite the emerging emotion studies, the Indonesian "happiness" studies are still largely lacking. The previous study in regards to emotions in Bahasa Indonesia was conducted by Widhiarso and Prawitasari (2010). However, their study was not aimed to define the meaning differences of the emotion words and thus unable to explain the meaning differences of emotions in Bahasa Indonesia. Another study was done by Murtisari (2013), *Some Traditional Javanese Values in NSM: From God to Social Interaction* that mainly talking about the Javanese emotions. Her study was not related to happiness, but rather on the Javanese notions related to the devotion to God.

Methodology

Having seen the problems and the importance of emotions and happiness above, this study adopted NSM to define the difference of meanings for the three Indonesian emotion words *bahagia*, *senang,* and *gembira*. The 'near-experience concept' is applied to provide the learner with the nearest experience to the emotions of 'happiness' in Indonesian culture. As stated previously, the universality of semantic primes is an idyllic solution in providing the outsider with the experience of the defined emotions. The data were taken from the Leipzig University Indonesian corpora. The examples were carefully chosen to ensure their representativeness to the native Indonesian perspectives. As Ye (2014) points out, the most

fundamental aspect in the studies of emotions and value concepts is the understanding of the local perspective.

Findings and discussion

The statistical data from the Indonesian corpora of Leipzig University

Leipzig University (LU) Indonesian corpus is compiled since 2013 and available online. In 2016 the tokens have reached 1,206,281,985. The findings are presented in the following table, which includes the Indonesian emotion words from 'happiness' discourse *bahagia*, *senang*, and *gembira*.

Table 3. Frequency data based on Indonesian corpora by Leipzig University (Corpora, 2013a)

	Frequency	**Rank**	**Frequency Class**
Bahagia	73,735	2,175	9
Senang	6,486	14,524	12
Gembira	44,783	3,302	10

The above frequency data shows that *bahagia* is the word that most frequently used in Indonesian discourses. The second most frequent word is *gembira*, and *senang* is the less frequent.

Bahagia in Bahasa Indonesia

To illuminate the use of emotion word *bahagia* in Bahasa indonesia, several examples were drawn for the corpora mentioned above. Each of the examples was provided with a free English translation.

1. *Pak Hari merasa **bahagia** melihat putranya diwisuda.*
   Mr. Hari feels ***bahagia*** to see his son graduates.
2. *Ini hari bermakna bagi saya, dan saya pribadi merasa **bahagia**, begitu pula dengan keluarga.*
   This is a meaningful day, I personally feel ***bahagia***, and my family **too.**
3. *Para ahli sepakat bahwa pernikahan yang **bahagia** bisa saling meringankan beban.*
   The experts agree that ***bahagia*** marriage can alleviate each other's burden.

Source: LU Indonesian corpora collection (Corpora, 2013b)

In the examples above, it is obvious that *bahagia* is an emotion that arises as the result of the occurrence of good events/things in the experiencer's life. *Bahagia* is a prolonged

personal emotion. *Bahagia* is also an emotion that involves caring for others. The others here are the people who have a close relationship with the experiencer, such as son, daughter, wife, husband, parents or other family members. Hence, bahagia can be explicated as follows.

NSM explication of *bahagia*

a. Someone X feels *bahagia* for some time
This someone (X) feels something good for some time

Because this someone (X) thinks like this at this time:

b. "many good things are happening to me now
I can do many things now as I want

this is something good

at the same time, I know that I want someone to feel this something

c. this someone is like this:
I know this someone
I know that I can be with this someone at many times
I feel something good when I think about this someone
this someone thinks something good towards me
I want to do good things for this someone

d. Because of this, this someone (X) feels something good for some time
like people can feel at many times when they think like this

The component (a) and (d) in the above explication are the NSM standard frame for emotion concepts named the prototypical cognitive scenario. Component (a) depicts that *bahagia* is a prolonged emotion that is shown in the phrase 'for some time'. Further, component (a) attempts to seize that the notion of *bahagia* is related to personal feeling. However, *bahagia* is not a selfish notion. It encompasses also the caring for others. The experiencer will feel *bahagia* (happy) when something good happens to someone else's life. The caring for others is explicated in component (b) and (c). Additionally, component (c) describes the relation between the experiencer and someone that he/she cares. For instance, this someone is one who has a close relation to the experiencer (i.e. son, daughter, wife, husband, etc.) and shares a prolonged life experience together such as marriage. Finally, component (e) shows the result

for the experiencer: Something very good is happening to someone, I want this good things to happen to this someone and I feel something very good because of this.

Senang in Bahasa Indonesia

The following examples are provided to elucidate the use of emotion word *senang* in Bahasa Indonesia.

1. *Saya **senang** melihat anakmu medapatkan pekerjaan.*

   I am ***senang*** to see your son/daughter gets a job.

2. *Bu Risma **senang** melihat warga Surabaya menikmati taman kota.*

   Madam Risma is ***senang*** to see the Surabaya people enjoy the city park.

3. *Setelah dua minggu, saya **senang** melaporkan bahwa kedua keluarga itu telah dipersatukan kembali.*

   After two weeks, I am ***senang*** to report the family was reunited.

Source: LU Indonesian corpora collection (Corpora, 2013c).

The examples on the use of *senang* from the LU Indonesian corpora above illustrates that *senang* is an explicit emotion in which the experiencer wants other people to notice his feeling. However, unlike *bahagia* that has a certain criterion for the people to whom the experiencer wants to share the feeling with, *senang* can be shared with anyone. The experiencer thinks that it will be good for people to know his/her feeling. Additionally, *senang* is also a prolonged emotion, although the duration is not as long as *bahagia*. Hence, *senang* can be explicated as follows.

NSM explication of *senang*

a. Someone X feels *senang* for some time at this time

   This someone (X) feels something good for some time at this time

   Because this someone (X) thinks like this at this time:

b.　　　"something good is happening to some people now

　　　I want this

　　　I want people to know this

　　　I think it's good for people to know this"

c. Because of this, this someone (X) feels something good for some time at this time

　　　like people can feel at many times when they think like this

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The above explication contains the prototypical cognitive scenario in components (a) and (c). Unlike *bahagia*, *senang* is more explicit feeling. The explicitness is marked with the intension of the experiencer to show the feeling to others. This explicit characteristic is explicated in component (b) 'I want people to know this'. Further, the phrase 'I think it's good for people to know this' is the depiction of the experiencer's thought. He/she thinks that by sharing this feeling will bring 'happiness' also to the people around him/her. The people who the experiencer wants to share the feeling with could be anyone. There is no specific relational criterion to share the feeling. Moreover, *Senang* is a feeling that occurs as a result of a present phenomenon 'something good is happening to me now'. It is a temporal feeling that happens in a certain duration of time at the present moment 'for some time at this time'. This is frequently signed by a smile on the face or a bodily gesture like coming closer to the person whom the joy is shared. Component (c) is the resulting component for the experiencer 'feels something good' and followed by typicality.

Gembira in Bahasa Indonesia

The final emotion word in Bahasa Indonesia that will be explicated is *gembira*. The below instances is devoted to describe the use of *gembira*.

1. *Para wisudawan begitu **gembira**. Mereka meleparkan topinya ke udara sebagai tanda kelulusan.*
   The graduates are so ***gembira***. They throw their hats as a sign of graduation.

2. *Para fans Real Madrid bernyanyi **gembira** merayakan gol Ronaldo.*
   Real Madrid fans sing ***gembira*** celebrating Ronaldo's goal.

3. *Sabari yang begitu **gembira** berlari secepat kilat ke pelabuhan menjemput Zoro anaknya.*
   Sabari that is so ***gembira*** run as fast as lightning to the harbour to pick up his son, Zoro.

From the examples above, it can be seen that *gembira* is an intense emotion. The intension of *gembira* is greater than the two emotions discussed earlier. The intension is indicated by the involvement physical movements as a resulting action. This is in accordance with Frijda theory in emotion above. Moreover, unlike *bahagia* and *senang* that are prolonged emotions, *gembira* happens in a short term in a certain time at the present moment. *Gembira* is also an explicit feeling in which the experiencer has the objective to show his/her feeling to others. Hence, *gembira* can be explicated as follows.

NSM explication of gembira

a. Someone X feels *gembira* at this time

   This someone (X) feels something very good at this time

Because this someone (X) thinks like this at this time:

b.   "something very good is happening to me now

I want to do something because of this

I want people to know this

I want this"

c. Because of this, this someone (X) feels something very good at this time

like people can feel at many times when they think like this

Component (a) and (e) are the prototypical cognitive scenario for NSM emotions concept. *Gembira* is the most intense emotion compared to *bahagia* and *senang* that is revealed in component (b) 'something very good'. This intense emotion is further described in the desire to do a physical action 'I want to do something'. Moreover, like senang, gembira involves also the willingness to let others know the experiencer's feeling that is explicated in the phrase 'I want people to know this'. However, *gembira* does not include the phrase 'I think it is good for people to know this' as found in the explication of *senang*. Additionally, *gembira* is a short term emotion that is indicated by the time indicator phrase 'at that time'. In component (c) the typicality 'like people can feel at many times when they think like this' is preceded by the resulting phrase 'because of this, this someone (X) felt something good at that time'.

Conclusions

The study of "happiness", as part of emotion studies, has become an interesting field that attracts the attention of many scholars. Emotions related to happiness has a significant impact on the well-being of a state. Happiness also has a direct correlation to longevity in which happy people tend to live longer. Happiness in Bahasa Indonesia often expressed with three words, *bahagia*, *senang*, and *gembira*. To be able to differentiate the difference of those three words is challenging. The outsider must know the local perspectives towards those three emotions. NSM is an ideal solution to provide the outsider the closest experience on those emotions. *Bahagia* is a prolonged emotion that involves caring for others. The others here are those who have a close relationship to the experiencer (i.e. children, spouse, or parents). *Senang* is a prolonged emotion, but not as elongated as *bahagia*. It happens in a certain duration at the present moment. *Senang* is an explicit emotion in which the experiencer hopes other people to know his/her feeling. There is no specific relational criterion for the people to whom the experiencer wants to share the feeling with. The experiencer believes that it will be good for

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the others to know his/her feeling. *Gembira* is the most intense emotion compared to the two others. It requires physical action as the result of the feeling. The experiencer also wants people to know this feeling. Besides, *gembira* has the shortest duration compared to *bahagia*, and *senang*.

Happiness as discussed previously plays an important role in maintaining people's health and make them live longer. This phenomenon is revealed through scientific studies. One of the studies that proposes the role of happiness in health and longevity was done by Veenhoven (2008). The other study conducted by Diener and Chan (2011). Both studied come to the same conclusion on the relation of happiness and healthier community. In the future, it is expected that happiness could be used by community developers, be it health extension workers, social workers, and educators, as means to promote health and well-being. However, the effort in promoting health and well-being through "happiness" requires more interdisciplinary research that includes the research on the meaning of "happiness" cross-culturally. This is, of course, the chance for the linguistics and applied linguistics researchers to contribute more in the field other than language teaching.

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