

The Syntax of Desire and Other Emotions: A Look across Languages

ENGL 39600 / LING 39800

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Prof. Elena Benedicto (ebenedi@purdue.edu)

The expression of desire and similar emotions across the languages across the world is extremely varied. We usually can identify three elements: the 'emotion' itself, the 'source of the emotion' and the 'experiencer' of the emotion. While English tends to use a 'subject' for the experiencer and a 'verb' for the emotion (Kim and loves, in Kim loves Pat), in Scottish Gaelic, for instance, we find the experiencer being expressed with a preposition and the emotion with a noun (is toil leam Màiri, lit: is delight with-me Mary, 'I like Mary', or tha gràin agam oirre, lit: hate is at-me on-her, 'I hate her'). A similar pattern is used in Spanish, with a dative for the experiencer: me dan miedo las arañas, lit: to-me give fear the spiders, 'I fear spiders'). In Mayangna, an indigenous language from Nicaragua, the emotion is a combination of noun+verb (isingna âwi – our-liver he-puts, 'he likes us'); many emotions are expressed through the liver! Similar syntactic patterns are also observed in physical emotions (pain, dizziness, etc...).

In this class, we will work on establishing and systematizing the syntactic patterns and properties that we can observe crosslinguistically and on exploring ways to represent them structurally (syntactic trees). We will look at languages that we usually don't work on, from all five different continents and from all different kinds of linguistic families. So this is also an opportunity to learn about languages you wouldn't have a chance to learn about!