



Idioms as Gateways to Emotional Expressions of Sadness and Joy in French

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Abstract: This study explores the metaphorical and metonymical expressions of sadness and joy in French idiomatic expressions, collected from various media sources and YouTube channels. Using a qualitative research design, it applies the Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory to analyze how these emotions are conceptualized through image schemas, domains, and mental spaces. A type-based approach is used to categorize the source domains underlying these metaphors. Metaphors were identified using the Metaphor Identification Procedure, while conceptual metaphor extraction followed a structured approach. Inter-rater reliability measures ensured the objectivity of the analysis. The findings reveal that French idioms conceptualize sadness through metaphors such as having an unwelcome insect (cockroach), grinding black thoughts, and having one's spirits in one's socks, whereas joy is expressed as being elevated with spiritual undertones and infused with vibrant colours like pink. Metonymies were also found where physiological, metaphorical, and expressive responses stand for emotions, as seen in *Je ne suis pas dans mon assiette*, *Mon cœur saute*, and *Je pleure de joie*. Comparative analysis with English, Chinese, and Japanese shows both universal patterns, such as sadness as bad taste and happiness as up, and culture-specific variations in emotional conceptualization. The study contributes to cognitive linguistics and cross-cultural metaphor research, demonstrating how language, culture, and cognition interact in shaping emotional expressions and providing insights for language learning and intercultural communication.

Keywords: Metaphor, Metonymy, Idiomatic Expressions, French Language, Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Cross-Cultural Linguistics, Emotional Expression

1. Introduction

Emotion is widely recognized for its figurative nature, with various expressions falling under different conceptual metaphors and metonymies (Kövecses, 2003). In general, a conceptual metaphor consists of a source domain and a target domain, such as LOVE IS MADNESS (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Zibin et al., 2022). In most cases, the source domain is more concrete and better understood than the target domain. Unlike conceptual metaphors, conceptual metonymies involve a single domain or concept. Metonymy aims to provide mental access to a domain by using a part of that same domain (or vice versa) or by using one part of a domain to represent another part within the same domain (see Kövecses & Radden, 1998). Thus, metonymy, unlike metaphor, establishes a “stand-for” relationship within a single domain (see Author et al., 2020), e.g., A DROP IN BODY TEMPERATURE FOR FEAR (getting cold feet) (Kövecses, 2020: 43-44).

Emotions are central to human interaction and communication. The language we use to articulate these emotions provides insights into cultural norms, values, and cognitive processes (Kövecses, 2003). Sadness and happiness have been studied across various cultures, as shown by works such as Yu (1995), Kövecses (2000, 2008), Esenova (2011), Polley (2012), Moradi & Mashak (2013), and Baş & Büyükkantarcioglu (2019) However, there is a notable gap in research exploring these emotions within the context of French idiomatic expressions. French is renowned for its rich use of idioms, which often contain specific emotional references. Understanding these expressions can provide valuable insights into French cultural and linguistic practices, highlighting how emotions are linguistically mapped and expressed.

In this study, we focus on the idiomatic expressions of sadness and joy in French due to their significance in human experience and their prevalence in idiomatic language. Our preliminary analysis reveals that these emotions exhibit distinct conceptual mappings, providing a rich area for exploration into how emotions are expressed in French. This exploration enhances intercultural communication and reveals both the similarities and differences in emotional expressions across languages.

Recent studies such as Wentura (2019) and Krawczak (2018) explored how emot-

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-ions, including sadness and happiness, can be reconceptualised within a more holistic, subsymbolic framework rather than as distinct symbolic nodes. Additionally, Climent and Coll-Florit (2021) analyzed metaphors in love songs, demonstrating how metaphors evolve and highlight emotional dimensions, such as sadness in heartbreak and happiness in love's positive aspects. Their work reveals the importance of metaphorical frameworks in shaping emotional experiences.

Furthermore, Rodsap, Rodpan, and Suklek (2022) employed the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to analyze how fear and sadness were metaphorically expressed in Thai-language news during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their identification of source domains like *Dominance*, *Supernatural*, and *Human* reveals the cultural understanding and processing of emotions during crises. These studies demonstrate the diversity of emotional conceptualization and highlight the novelty of our focus on French idiomatic expressions.

While some research has examined emotions in French from various perspectives (see Devillers et al., 2006; Mathieu & Fellbaum, 2010; Cigada, 2016; Abdaoui et al., 2017; Krawczak, 2018), a notable gap remains in the literature regarding the figurative language used to express sadness and joy specifically within French idiomatic expressions. Idiomatic expressions are linguistic constructs within a given language that possess metaphorical significance distinct from the literal interpretation of their constituent words. Such idioms frequently carry cultural connotations, are specific to particular languages or regions, and may lack coherence when translated literally.

This study addresses the research gap by examining the underlying metaphors and/or metonymies of sadness and joy in French idiomatic expressions, drawing comparisons with cross-cultural analyses in English, Chinese, and Japanese. By doing so, we aim to contribute new insights into the cross-linguistic conceptualization of emotions, enhancing our understanding of emotion expression within the unique context of the French language. We explore expressions drawn from a range of contexts, including personal experiences, media (such as television series, radio programs, and YouTube channels), literary works, and songs.

The study takes inspiration from the work of Kövecses (2020), who suggests that emotion concepts can be understood as complex metaphorical structures shaped by the context around them. Kövecses's contemporary view of emotion concepts sheds light on the adaptability of metaphors, how they change with different contexts, and the influence of cultural and situational factors in creating metaphorical language.

Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the main metaphors and/or metonymies found in French idiomatic expressions that convey sadness and joy?
2. How do these metaphors and metonymies reflect the embodied and culturally situated nature of emotional experiences in French idiomatic expressions?

1.1. Background

In his previous work, Kövecses (1990, 2000) proposed that cognitive models are formed by conceptual metaphors, conceptual metonymies, and related concepts. These cognitive models are assumed to represent specific emotions such as anger, love, fear, happiness, and more. Some of the common conceptual metaphors that characterize emotions include:

- *Emotion Is A Fluid In A Container*
- *Emotion Is Heat/Fire*
- *Emotion Is A Natural Force*
- *Emotion Is A Physical Force*
- *Emotion Is A Social Superior*
- *Emotion Is An Opponent*
- *Emotion Is A Captive Animal*
- *Emotion Is A Force Displacing The Self*
- *Emotion Is A Burden*

(Kövecses, 2020: 43)

The main argument regarding these conceptual metaphors is that they exemplify a general force-dynamic pattern (see Kövecses, 2000), as outlined by Leonard Talmy (1988). Considering the force-dynamic nature of these conceptual metaphors and their significant contribution to the conceptual structure associated with emotions, it has been suggested that emotion concepts are largely constituted by force dynamics (Kövecses, 2000). Concerning emotions, there are two general types of conceptual metonymies, namely, *Cause Of Emotion For The Emotion* and *Effect Of Emotion For The Emotion*. The latter is much more common than the former (see Barcelona, 2000). Below are some specific representative cases of the general metonymy *Effect Of Emotion For The Emotion*:

- *Body Heat For Anger (Being A Hothead)*
- *Drop-In Body Temperature For Fear (Getting Cold Feet)*
- *Chest Out For Pride (Puffing One's Chest Out With Pride)*
- *Facial Expressions For Sadness (Having A Sad Face)*
- *Running Away For Fear (Fleeing The Scene)*
- *Ways Of Looking For Love (Looking At Someone Amorously)*

(Kövecses, 2020: 43-44)

Such conceptual metonymies correspond to physiological, behavioral, and expressive responses related to particular emotions. Hence, BODY HEAT FOR ANGER is a conceptual representation of a physiological response. CHEST OUT FOR PRIDE is, in fact, a behavioral response. FACIAL EXPRESSION FOR SADNESS is an expressive response (Kövecses, 2020). What is referred to as "related concepts" are, in fact, the emotions or attitudes that the subject of an emotion—i.e., the person feeling the emotion—has towards the object or cause of the emotion. For instance, friendship can be considered an emotion or emotional attitude.

Previous views of emotions considered abstract concepts to have little substance but relied heavily on figurative interpretations, meaning they were mostly understood metaphorically (Kövecses, 2020). This viewpoint suggests that emotions rely more on bodily experiences compared to other abstract concepts, particularly for prototypical emotions such as anger and joy (Lakoff & Kövecses, 1987; Borghi et al., 2017; Altarriba et al., 2004). However, non-prototypical emotions often lack this bodily connection and are solely understood through figurative means. Kövecses introduced the concept of "differential experiential focus" to address this issue, highlighting that embodiment encompasses various aspects of bodily experience that may vary across cultures or individuals.

In his discussion of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Kövecses (2020) introduces Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory (ECMT) as a response to the limitations of earlier frameworks. ECMT presents a multi-level framework that underscores the importance of context in understanding emotional concepts. This approach integrates general metaphorical structures—such as image schemas, domains, and frames—with specific mental spaces that are rich in contextual information, enabling a deeper interpretation of how metaphors function in actual discourse.

A significant advancement of ECMT over CMT is its acknowledgment of the role of long-term and working memory in metaphorical processing. Kövecses (2020: 120) emphasizes the significance of memory in his schematicity hierarchy, where long-term memory encompasses image schemas—analogue conceptual structures that influence metaphor use. Within this framework, domain- and frame-level metaphors are stored in long-term memory in a propositional format, whereas mental space-level metaphors are maintained in working memory. This distinction facilitates a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of metaphorical thought as it operates in real-time communication, providing insights into how emotions are conveyed both conceptually and contextually. Through addressing these elements, ECMT enhances our comprehension of metaphorical language and offers a more robust framework for analyzing the complexities of emotional expression across different contexts and cultures.

For example, in Shakespeare's *Sonnet 18*, the metaphor of "a summer's day" progresses through different levels of schematicity. It moves from the general metaphor of INTENSITY IS HEAT to the specific mental space that relates fluctuating love intensity to the changing heat of summer, as demonstrated below. This progression illustrates how metaphorical meaning can be detailed and context-sensitive.

Image schema

Intensity Is Heat / Cold

Domain

Emotion Is Temperature: Intensity of Emotion Is Degree of Heat / Cold

Frame

Love Is Fire: Love's Intensity Is the Degree of Heat of Fire

Mental Space

The Fluctuation In The Intensity of The Poet's Love Is The Fluctuation In The Degree of A Summer Day's Heat

(Kövecses, 2020: 47)

This framework recognizes the influence of bodily experiences, discourse context, situational context, and cognitive context in shaping emotional concepts. It allows for the expression of emotions that are both creative and dynamically contextualized. This framework is adopted in this study to analyze metaphors and metonymies of sadness and joy in French.

2. Previous Studies on Metaphors of Sadness and Joy

By selecting specific emotion terms as examples, Stefanowitsch (2004) demonstrated that language-specific variations exist in the manner and extent to which translation equivalents in English and German engage in metaphorical mappings found within both languages. These variations may pertain to the conceptualization of the nature of an emotion (such as its intensity) or the cultural significance of an emotion (in relation to other concepts) within a particular culture (such as beliefs about its attainability or unattainability). Differences between the two languages indicate disparities in the cultural ideologies underlying them. It can be argued that American English speakers are more inclined to perceive the achievement of happiness in terms of a commercial transaction than Germans are in the case of *Glück*. This can be attributed to the fact that commercial transactions play a more significant role in contemporary American culture compared to German culture, where beliefs in the influence of money and happiness differ.

For example, Esenova (2011) conducted a study on how bodily and cultural factors influence the conceptualization of sadness through metaphors in English. The findings revealed that different metaphors used to express sadness are also used for other emotions like anger and fear. For instance, metaphors derived from plants were found to map onto emotions such as sadness, anger, and fear. Similarly, the metaphor of sadness as an unpleasant taste or smell was shown to apply to fear and anger as well. Additionally, the idea of sadness as a pure or mixed substance extended to these emotions, suggesting that they often coexist. This study challenges earlier research, which primarily linked the metaphor of supernatural beings to fear, by demonstrating that this metaphor also applies to sadness. However, sadness has a specific sub-metaphor: “sadness is a black dog.” These diverse metaphors for different emotions are rooted in human experiences with animals, as well as in cultural beliefs about supernatural beings and agriculture.

Liu and Zhao (2013) analyzed how happiness and sadness are conceptualized in Chinese and English within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Their analysis, based on natural data extracted from magazines, novels, folk songs, and everyday conversations, revealed that both Chinese and English employ orientational conceptual metaphors in understanding these emotions:

- *Happiness Is Up, Sadness Is Down*
- *Sadness Is Darkness*
- *Happiness Is A Fluid In A Container*

Although both languages share these conceptual metaphors, some subtle distinctions were found. In English, for example, the entire body can serve as the container for happiness, whereas in Chinese, specific body parts (such as the heart, chest, and bosom) are more commonly referenced as containers of the happiness fluid.

Regarding culture-specific conceptual metaphors, English exhibits an additional metaphor related to upward orientation:

- *Happiness Is Being Off The Ground*

This metaphor, however, does not exist in Chinese due to specific cultural beliefs that associate “being off the ground” with arrogance and madness. Instead, Chinese conceptualizes happiness through the metaphor FLOWERS IN THE HEART, reflecting the introverted nature of Chinese people, who do not typically express happiness overtly by “being off the ground”—a common feature in extroverted Western English-speaking societies. Furthermore, the metaphor SADNESS IS BLUE exists in English but not in Chinese, where sadness is conceptualized through SADNESS IS PAIN IN THE HEART, alongside the use of other body parts, such as the intestines, as containers of sadness. This can be attributed to the Chinese tendency to conceal emotions, resulting in internal pain.

Yanti and Aziz (2021) examined the similarities and differences between Japanese and English in the conceptualization of sadness using conceptual metaphors. Their analysis of metaphors in Japanese song lyrics, compared with those identified by Kövecses (2000) and Esenova (2011), revealed that Japanese and English share several conceptual metaphors based on universal embodied experiences. These include:

- *Sadness Is A Fluid In A Container*
- *Sadness Is Illness*
- *Sadness Is Down*
- *Sadness Is A Substance In A Container*
- *Sadness Is Dark*
- *Sadness Is Bad Taste*

However, differences influenced by cultural factors were also observed. For instance, the conceptual metaphor *Sadness Is Natural* is common in Japanese, whereas *Sadness Is A Natural Force* appears in English. This difference is evident in the Japanese metaphorical expression “That sky will be painful, won't it?”, compared to the English

expression “Waves of depression came over him.” In Japanese, the sky is the target domain, whereas in English, it serves as the source domain for sadness.

While earlier studies have explored metaphors of sadness and joy in various languages, our research specifically focuses on French idiomatic expressions. This examination reveals how these emotions are conceptualized in French and enhances our cultural understanding of these expressions. Stefanowitsch (2004) investigated language-specific variations in English and German, whereas our study highlights that although overarching similarities in metaphor usage exist, French idiomatic expressions contain unique cultural references. For example, the French idiom *Avoir le cœur lourd* (“to have a heavy heart”) encapsulates cultural contexts that are absent in American English, emphasizing the need for a culturally informed approach to metaphor analysis.

Esenova (2011) found that metaphorical mappings often overlap across emotions, suggesting a shared conceptual space. However, our study posits that French expressions of sadness and joy may exhibit particularities that do not display this fluidity. For instance, the meaning of *La tristesse* (“sadness”) in French may be expressed through idioms evoking imagery or cultural references unique to French society, which may not directly align with English conceptual mappings.

Liu and Zhao (2013) provided insights into orientational metaphors in happiness and sadness (e.g., *Happiness Is Up, Sadness Is Down*) across English and Chinese. Our study examines whether similar orientational metaphors exist in French, or whether French conceptualizations of these emotions operate within distinct conceptual paradigms.

Yanti and Aziz (2021) emphasized universal and culturally distinct aspects of sadness metaphors in Japanese and English. Similarly, our research explores both universal and culture-specific emotional metaphors in French idioms. By analyzing how sadness and joy are expressed metaphorically in French idioms, we aim to uncover cultural archetypes that inform how these emotions are linguistically represented and understood.

Thus, even though previous studies provide a comparative framework for understanding metaphorical expressions of sadness and joy across languages, our research addresses an important gap by focusing specifically on French idiomatic expressions. We examine not only the metaphors themselves but also their cultural and cognitive implications, contributing to broader discussions in metaphor studies and intercultural communication.

3. Methods

3.1. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from a variety of sources, considering that the focus was not on the number of figurative expressions of sadness and joy but on their type, following a type-based approach as envisaged by Kövecses et al. (2019). That is, our focus was on the types of source domains used to conceptualize the two emotions in French and how such conceptualization aligns with the new view of emotions suggested by Kövecses (2020). The variety of sources aimed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the metaphors used to express these emotions in French idiomatic expressions.

The first source is the first author’s own observations. Over eight years of living and studying in France, the author was exposed to a variety of figurative expressions used to convey feelings of sadness and joy in French. Through daily interactions with native French speakers, the author learned and actively used some of these expressions in everyday conversations. This firsthand experience ensures authenticity in capturing expressions that might not appear in formal sources but are significant in everyday communication.

The second source includes French television series, reality shows, and radio programs. These media outlets were chosen because they reflect the contemporary use of French, capturing the cultural references and emotional expressiveness found in society. Specific programs like *Scènes de ménages*, *En famille*, and *Nos chers voisins* were selected because they are popular series that frequently incorporate idiomatic expressions to portray relationships and emotions, making them valuable resources for identifying figurative language related to sadness and joy. The following programs were analyzed:

- *Scènes de ménages* (TV series)
- *En famille* (TV series)
- *L’amour est dans le pré* (Reality TV)
- *Nos chers voisins* (TV series)
- *Un gars, une fille* (TV series)

The third source comprises YouTube channels and selected songs, both of which play a significant role in shaping and reflecting public sentiment, offering insights into linguistic trends related to emotions in French culture. Channels like “Français Authentique” focus on authentic language use, highlighting idiomatic expressions in real-life contexts. Additionally, songs by renowned artists like Edith Piaf, particularly *La vie en rose*, capture the cultural heritage and emotional depth of French idiomatic language associated with joy. Meanwhile, historical

references such as Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil* introduce idioms like *Avoir le cafard*, illustrating the literary origins of expressions related to sadness:

Tristesse (Sadness)

- **Avoir le cafard** (*origin: literary*)
 - “To have the blues” has become *A Symbol Of Sadness*. The Poet Charles Baudelaire is said to have introduced this phrase in his collection of poems *The Flowers of Evil*, particularly in the poem *The Destruction*.
- **YouTube Channel:**
 - *Français Authentique* – [Link](#)

Joie (Joy)

- **YouTube Channel:**
 - *Amy - Epicurieux* – [Link](#)
- **Songs:**
 - **Edith Piaf** – *La vie en rose*
 - **Nicole Dumont** – *La vie me sourit*

The total number of idiomatic expressions identified in the sources above that contain metaphor and/or metonymy is fifteen (excluding repetitions). The entire specialized corpus collected for this study (see Zibin & Altakhaineh, 2023; Ammari & Al-Ahmad, 2023) contains 35 idiomatic expressions, including repeated occurrences of some expressions.

3.2. Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP)

Metaphors were identified using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). The process involves several key steps, which we applied to French idiomatic expressions related to sadness and joy as follows:

- Example: *Je suis amer(ère)*
- *Idiomatic meaning: I feel bitterly sad.*

Each idiomatic expression was examined in its linguistic context to determine whether it contained a potential metaphor. The expression *Je suis amer(ère)* was identified as metaphorical since it deviates from its literal meaning—it translates to “I am bitter,” which metaphorically signifies an emotional state of bitterness or sadness.

Once identified, each metaphor was categorized based on its source and target domains. In *Je suis amer(ère)*, the target domain is EMOTIONAL STATE (SADNESS), while the source domain is BITTER TASTE. This expression was classified within a metaphorical framework that equates emotional experiences with sensory perceptions, specifically taste.

Following categorization, a thorough linguistic analysis of each metaphorical expression was conducted. The verb *suis* (‘am’) and the adjective *amer(ère)* (‘bitter’) were examined to uncover semantic layers within the expression. The choice of *amer(ère)* conveys not only bitterness in taste but also deeper emotional experiences, such as disappointment or sorrow.

To understand the intended meaning and implications of the metaphor, we considered its social and cultural context. Among French speakers, the association of emotions with taste reflects a broader cognitive tendency in which emotions are not merely abstract concepts but are in many cases physically experienced. This analysis highlights the significance of the metaphor in everyday communication.

After linguistic analysis, the conceptual mappings embedded in the metaphor were identified. The expression *Je suis amer(ère)* conceptualizes emotional distress in terms of taste, suggesting that sadness can be reminiscent of experiencing an unpleasant flavor. This mapping illustrates how language intertwines emotional experiences with sensory perceptions.

In the final stage of analysis, we explored the metaphor *Je suis amer(ère)* within the broader framework of French emotional expression. Our findings suggest that such metaphors indicate that French culture conceptualizes emotions not merely as internal states but as tangible, sensory experiences. The bitterness metaphor, in particular, implies that sadness can feel as concrete as an actual taste in one’s mouth.

3.3. Additional Example

Another idiomatic expression is *avoir le cœur lourd*, which translates literally to “having a heavy heart.” We applied the same Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP):

- Identify: Recognized as a metaphor signifying deep sadness or sorrow.
- Categorize: Established the target domain (*Emotional State (Sadness)*) and the source domain (*Heaviness*).
- Analyze: Investigated the linguistic construction, noting that *heavy* conveys a sense of physical weight symbolizing an emotional burden.
- Contextualize: Considered how heaviness attributed to the heart represents a culturally acknowledged state of sorrow.
- Map: Explained how metaphors establish parallels between physical sensations and emotional states.
- Interpret: Proposed that this metaphor illustrates how French speakers experience and express feelings of sadness.

3.4. The Extraction Of The Conceptual Metaphors And Application Of Application Of ECMT

Following the application of MIP, the conceptual metaphor extraction from the expression *Je suis amer(ère)*, meaning “I am bitter,” with the intended meaning: “I feel bitterly sad,” follows a structured approach (Steen, 2007).

First, the expression is identified as metaphorical, as *bitter* does not refer to its literal taste but instead conveys an emotional state. Next, cross-domain mappings are established between two domains:

- Target domain: *Emotional State (Sadness)*
- Source domain: *Bitter Taste*

This leads to the transformation of the linguistic expression into specific conceptual structures represented by propositions, where *feel* denotes the emotional experience, and *bitter* modifies it. An open comparison is then created, forming the analogy:

$SIM \{ \exists E \exists A [E (SADNESS)]_T [BITTERNESS (A)]_S \}$, indicating that there is a conceptual similarity between the emotional state of sadness and the experience of bitterness. This results in a closed comparison, thereby extracting the conceptual metaphor that links sadness to bitterness:

Sadness Is Bitterness

The similarities between sadness and bitterness can be articulated through several key observations:

1. Both experiences are commonly associated with discomfort and negativity—bitterness is frequently perceived as an unpleasant flavor, while sadness is regarded as an undesirable emotional state.
2. Just as bitter flavors tend to linger and can be difficult to disperse, feelings of sadness may persist and exert a significant emotional burden on an individual.
3. Both concepts signify a sense of loss or the absence of sweetness—bitterness represents the lack of sweetness in taste, whereas sadness is often connected to the absence of joy or happiness in emotional experiences.

An analysis of this metaphor based on Kövecses’s (2020) new view of emotions was conducted as follows:

Image schema

- *Bitter Is Bad*

Domain

- *Emotion Is Taste*
- *A Negative Emotion Is A Bad Taste*

Frame

- *Sadness Is Bitterness*
- *The Degree Of Sadness Is The Intensity Of Bitterness*

Mental space

- *The Intensity Of Sadness Felt By The Speaker Is The Intensity Of Bitterness Felt In The Mouth*

3.5. Context and Relationship to the Study

In conducting this research, we are driven by a curiosity about how language, culture, and emotional expression are intertwined. With our backgrounds in linguistics and cultural studies, we have a solid foundation for exploring metaphors within the context of French idiomatic expressions using a new framework (Kövecses, 2020). Given the limited research on how emotions are metaphorically represented in the French language, we aim to make a

meaningful contribution by examining how sadness and joy are conveyed through idioms that are unique to French culture. This context shapes our analysis and highlights our dedication to providing insights that can enrich understanding in both academic and everyday settings.

3.6. Methodological Rigor

To ensure methodological rigor, we followed procedures throughout our research process. We used the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) to identify and analyze metaphorical expressions in a structured way. Additionally, we implemented inter-rater reliability measures to enhance the objectivity of our analysis. The three researchers involved in this study independently examined the identified metaphors. We calculated Cohen's Kappa to compare our analyses and assess the level of agreement among us (see McHugh, 2012). The results yielded a Kappa value of 0.81, indicating an excellent level of agreement and reinforcing the reliability of our findings. This approach helped reduce subjective bias and ensured that our interpretations were consistently aligned across the research team. The following section reports the results of the analysis.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis of the idiomatic expressions of sadness and joy collected in this study demonstrates that, first, sadness is perceived as A BAD TASTE, PHYSICAL FALLING, PHYSICAL DAMAGE, GRINDING DARK SUBSTANCE, DARKNESS, and HAVING UNWANTED INSECTS. The second emotion, joy, is perceived as BEING IN A HIGH PHYSICAL POSITION, BEING IN A HEAVENLY PLANE, BEING FILLED UP, SWIMMING IN JOY, and SEEING LIFE IN A PINK COLOUR. This section provides an analysis of all fifteen expressions based on ECMT.

4.1. Metaphors of Sadness

The idiomatic expression in (2) is used to express sadness, where feeling depressed or downcast is associated with being physically knocked down:

- *Je me sens abattu(e)*
- *Literal translation: I feel downcast/knocked down.*
- *Idiomatic meaning: "I feel down/sad."*

The metaphor of being physically struck down represents a state of emotional despair. This progression involves different levels of meaning, moving from the general idea that connects negative emotions with physical decline to the specific link between feeling emotionally down and experiencing a physical blow, as shown below. This process highlights how metaphors can change depending on the context.

Image Schema

- *Down Is Bad / Up Is Good*

Domain

- *Emotions Are Spatial*
- *Feeling A Negative Emotion Is Being Down*

Frame

- *Feeling Sad Is Feeling Down*
- *The Degree Of Sadness Is The Extent To Which One Is Cast/Struck Down*

Mental Space

- *The Intensity Of Sadness Felt By The Speaker Is The Intensity Of Physical Falling Or Being Struck Down*

This analysis also applies to expressions such as:

- *J'ai le moral dans les chaussettes*
- *Literal translation: I have my spirits in my socks.*
- *Idiomatic meaning: "I feel down/sad."*

The metaphorical mapping used here connects a chaotic physical location to the emotional state of feeling down. ECMT shows how incorporating cultural humor and everyday language, such as saying someone has their spirits in their socks, makes the metaphor more meaningful. This adds depth to the metaphor, leading to varied reactions based on the situation, age groups, or social contexts involved.

Another idiomatic expression used to express sadness in our corpus is:

- *Je broie du noir*
- *Literal translation: I am grinding black.*
- *Idiomatic meaning: "I am feeling down."*

Feeling sad or having dark thoughts is associated with grinding something inherently gloomy or dark, as follows:

Image Schema

- *Dark Is Bad / Light Is Good*

Domain

- *Emotions/Thoughts Are Hard Objects*
- *Feeling Sad Is Grinding A Dark Object*

Frame

- *Feeling Sad Is Experiencing Dark Thoughts*

Mental Space

- *Experiencing Sad/Dark Thoughts Is Grinding Something Black*
- *The More One Grinds, The Darker The Thoughts Become*

A similar idiomatic expression, where seeing life in black or through a black lens is used in French to express sadness or pessimism:

- *Je vois la vie en noir*
- *Literal translation: I see life in black.*
- *Idiomatic meaning: "I feel down/sad."*

The metaphor SADNESS IS DARKNESS can be identified here. One can see how ECMT highlights the dynamic adaptability of this metaphor in many circumstances, such as how continuous exposure to bad experiences can intensify this metaphor or how immediate surroundings can influence the extent to which someone perceives life negatively.

Another way to express sadness in French:

- *J'ai le cafard*
- *Literal translation: I have the cockroach.*
- *Idiomatic meaning: "I feel very sad."*

In example (5), the cockroach is used to symbolize negative emotions since it is an unpleasant and unwanted insect. Below is an analysis of this metaphor:

Image Schema

- *Dirt/Infestation Is Bad*

Domain

- *Negative Emotions Are Bad Insects*

Frame

- *Feeling Sad Is Having A Bad/Unwanted Insect*

Mental Space

- *Having A Cockroach Represents The Presence Of Something Undesirable Or Depressing Within One's Emotional Or Mental State. The Cockroach, As Something Unpleasant, Equates To The Negative Feelings Occupying The Mind.*

It is clear that ECMT highlights how cultural and situational settings impact metaphors, showcasing various degrees and forms of sadness. It also shows how emotional expressions can be shaped by personal experiences with insects or cleanliness, reflecting cultural diversity.

- *Je ne suis pas dans mon assiette.*
- *Literal translation: I am not in my plate.*
- *Idiomatic meaning: "I am not myself today."*

Example (7) is used in French to express a feeling of unease, discomfort, or sadness. The literal translation may not make sense to speakers of other languages, yet this idiomatic, conventionalized expression proposes a metonymic connection: the physical state stands for the emotion, or the physiological effects of emotion stand for it (Lakoff & Kövecses, 1987: 4).

These physiological effects can be explained as follows:

Feeling unease: Feeling sad is usually accompanied by malaise, lethargy, or weariness, so experiencing physical discomfort can directly reflect mental states.

Loss of appetite: The metaphorical plate may symbolize the ease of regular eating patterns, whereas the expression *not being in one's plate* may indicate a disturbance in such patterns caused by emotional distress or sadness.

This example may illustrate embodied cognition, where humans' understanding of abstract concepts, such as emotions, is associated with physical experiences. Hence, bodily symptoms caused by emotions can serve as effective representations or symbols of emotions themselves (see Lakoff, 2012; Alazazmeh & Zibin, 2023).

4.2. Metaphors of Joy

Having analysed the idiomatic expressions used to express sadness in French, we now move on to analyze idiomatic expressions used to express joy. The latter emotion can be expressed through the following idiomatic expressions:

- *La vie me sourit*
- *Literal translation: Life smiles at me.*
- *Idiomatic meaning: "I am happy."*

What is taking place in (8) is personification, where life is depicted as a person who can favor you. The use of personification may reflect a cultural tendency to perceive life as an active participant in one's emotional state. Thus, the experience itself is perceived as life itself being benevolent.

- *Je suis au septième ciel*
- *Literal translation: I am in the seventh sky.*
- *Idiomatic meaning: "I am extremely happy."*

In (9), using the image schema HAPPINESS IS UP, French speakers use the source domain of being in a high place to perceive extreme happiness. The expression here may integrate spiritual or religious overtones, i.e., heaven-related, which may indicate cultural influences on the conceptualization of joy in French. An analysis based on ECMT is provided below:

Image Schema

- *Happiness Is Up / Sadness Is Down*

Domain

- *Emotions Are Spatial, Feeling A Positive Emotion Is Being High Up*

Frame

- *Feeling Happy Is Feeling High Up, The Degree Of Happiness Is The Elevation Within The Highest Sky Or The Spiritual Realm*

Mental space

- *The Intensity Of Happiness Is Being Elevated To The Seventh Heavenly Plane.*

Another expression that reflects heavenly-related subtleties is:

- *Je suis aux anges*
- *Literal translation: I am with the angels.*
- *Idiomatic meaning: "My happiness is sublime."*

The expression in (10) incorporates religious and cultural imagery, in which happiness is related to divine or otherworldly beings. This may reflect a cultural fascination with the sublime.

Another idiomatic expression is:

- *Mon cœur saute*
- *Literal translation: my heart jumps.*
- *Idiomatic meaning: "I am very happy."*

The expression in (11) is based on the metonymical schema THE METAPHORICAL PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF AN EMOTION STAND FOR THE EMOTION (Zibin & Hamdan, 2019; Zibin et al., 2022) where the heart does not literally jump or move up, it does so metaphorically. Since this physiological effect is not possible (see Kövecses, 1990), it can be suggested that it is grounded in French culture and is therefore culturally motivated (cf. Maleej, 2007). Another metonymy can be observed in:

- *Je pleure de joie*
- *Literal translation: I cry from joy.*
- *Idiomatic meaning: "I am overwhelmed with happiness."*

Even though tears are usually linked to sadness, they can also represent overwhelming happiness. This idea reflects how, in French culture, tears can signify intense emotions, showing that expressions of joy can sometimes overlap with those of sorrow. This example illustrates how people express their emotions in different ways (Kövecses, 2020).

In (13) below, being happy is perceived as swimming in joy:

- *Nager dans la joie*
- *Literal translation: Swim in joy.*
- *Idiomatic meaning: "I am overwhelmed with joy."*

The metaphor being used here is INTENSE EMOTIONS ARE FLUIDS where being immersed in an emotion similar to swimming in water indicates intense happiness as follows:

Image schema

- *Movement is Experience*

Domain

- *Emotions Are Fluid; Experiencing An Emotion Is Swimming Through It*

Frame

- *Experiencing Joy Is Swimming Through Joy*

Mental space

- *The Process Of Swimming Through Joy Symbolizes Fully Immersing Oneself In Joy.*

In the expression in (14), the body is a container for emotions:

- *Être comblé(e)*
- *Literal translation: To be filled/filled up.*
- *Idiomatic meaning: "I am full of joy."*

In (14), being filled indicates complete satisfaction which shows that joy is perceived as a state of completeness as in:

Image schema

- *Container Are Full/Empty, Body As A Container That Can Be Filled With Emotions*

Domain

- *Emotions Are Fluids In A Container; Emotions Can Fill Up Containers*

Frame

- *Feeling Happy Is The Emotional Container Being Completely Filled Up*

Mental space

- *The State Of Being "Comblé(E)" Reflects The Notion Of Emotional Fulfilment Where Emotions Fill The Body To Capacity.*

Finally, French speakers can express joy using color references as in:

- *Je vois la vie en rose*
- *Literal translation: I see life in pink.*
- *Idiomatic meaning: "I am happy."*

In (15), happiness is perceived as a colour that one can see life through, explaining how positive emotions tine one's perception of the world. The colour itself is culturally related to positivity and warmth giving an optimistic outlook.

5. Results' Relation to ECMT

In general, one can observe that in expressions of sadness, such as *Je me sens abattu(e)* ("I feel downcast/knocked down") and *J'ai le moral dans les chaussettes* ("I have my spirits in my socks"), ECMT emphasizes how emotional states are often depicted through spatial orientations and physical conditions. This illustrates deeply rooted cultural attitudes towards vulnerability and resilience. For instance, the *Down Is Bad / Up Is Good* schema shows how societal views of weakness are linked to physical decline or disorder, which conveys a cultural narrative in which emotional struggles require strength and recovery.

Expressions like *Je broie du noir* (“I am grinding black”) and *Je vois la vie en noir* (“I see life in black”) further highlight the *Sadness Is Darkness* metaphor, which emphasizes ECMT’s focus on dynamic adaptability. These metaphors suggest that repeated exposure to negative experiences reinforces the view of sadness as overwhelming darkness, thus emphasizing a cultural preference for expressing emotional depth through vivid, experiential imagery. Expressions such as *J’ai le cafard* (“I have the cockroach”) draw on cultural interpretations of insects as symbols of undesirability, which reveals the intersection of personal experience with wider societal beliefs about cleanliness and aversion.

On the other hand, expressions of joy, such as *La vie me sourit* (“Life smiles at me”) and *Je suis au septième ciel* (“I am in the seventh sky”), utilize personification and verticality metaphors. This reveals how joy is connected to ideas of divine favour or elevated states—concepts that are deeply woven into French cultural narratives celebrating life’s kindness and spiritual fulfilment. The expressiveness in *Je suis aux anges* (“I am with the angels”) emphasizes a cultural fascination with sublimity, which demonstrates how joy is depicted through heavenly or ethereal imagery.

Metonymical expressions linking emotions to physical sensations, such as *Mon cœur saute* (“My heart jumps”) and *Je pleure de joie* (“I cry from joy”), reflect a cultural acceptance of using physical reactions as stand-ins for emotions, especially in a society that values expressive authenticity. ECMT’s framework illustrates how these idioms are rooted in cultural experiences and interpretations, suggesting that in French culture, emotional expressions are richly connected to bodily sensations.

Finally, metaphors like *Je vois la vie en rose* (“I see life in pink”) highlight the cultural tendency to associate colors with emotions, particularly a positive outlook, adding a layer of optimism and warmth that resonates within French artistic and cultural traditions.

This analysis suggests that ECMT offers a framework for understanding how French idiomatic expressions related to sadness and joy are deeply embedded in cultural and contextual narratives. This not only illustrates the unique ways emotions are conceptualized in French but also highlights the broader role of language and culture in shaping emotional perception and expression.

6. Discussion

The analysis reveals several key implications, particularly in terms of metaphorical subtlety. Sadness in French idioms is often represented through metaphors of darkness, low physical positioning, bad tastes, heaviness, and intrusion, as seen in expressions like *abattu(e)* and *avoir le cafard*. Conversely, joy is conceptualized through high physical positioning, heavenly imagery, fullness, swimming, and vibrant colors, as reflected in *nager dans la joie* and *être au septième ciel*. Metonymies are also prevalent, where the physiological, metaphorical, or expressive effects of emotions stand for the emotions themselves, as illustrated in *Je ne suis pas dans mon assiette*, *Mon cœur saute*, and *Je pleure de joie* (see Maalej, 2007; Zibin & Hamdan, 2019; Kövecses, 2020).

From a cultural perspective, French idioms for sadness suggest a somber and resigned outlook, as in *Je broie du noir* and *J’ai le moral dans les chaussettes*. These metaphors reflect a cultural approach that acknowledges and verbalizes emotional lows rather than suppressing them. In contrast, expressions of joy in French often associate happiness with lightness, spirituality, and physical wellness, as seen in *Je suis aux anges* and *Mon cœur saute*. This distinction highlights a cultural preference for expressing positive emotions in an elevated and almost transcendent manner.

Emotional accessibility is another important aspect. Expressions like *Je ne suis pas dans mon assiette* emphasize physical manifestations of emotions, reflecting a cultural inclination toward discussing emotional well-being through bodily states. French idiomatic expressions blend experiences, sensations, spirituality, and visuals, offering a unique emotional language. Additionally, the symbolic use of color, such as *noir* for sadness and *rose* for joy, reinforces the importance of visual representations in French emotional metaphors. This analysis reveals a culture that values the aesthetic and expressive nature of internal states, allowing emotions to be articulated vividly.

The findings also underscore the role of ECMT in understanding emotion metaphors as dynamic and context-sensitive constructs (Kövecses, 2020). The interpretation of these metaphors is deeply influenced by cultural context, reinforcing ECMT’s claim that metaphors are not static but evolve based on social and cognitive factors. The idioms examined in this study, such as *J’ai le cafard*, have distinct cultural origins, making them less transparent to non-native speakers. This supports the notion that while some metaphorical patterns are universal, their linguistic manifestations are shaped by cultural experiences.

Furthermore, the interaction between memory, perception, and emotional regulation in metaphor use suggests that French idioms not only reflect emotions but actively shape how they are experienced and communicated. The expression *Je broie du noir*, for example, may be interpreted differently depending on personal experiences and societal norms (cf. Stefanowitsch, 2004). The adaptability of these metaphors underscores the idea that emotional expressions are both linguistically and cognitively fluid, responding to changes in cultural and communicative needs.

Ultimately, this study highlights how French emotional metaphors are embedded in cultural narratives and how language serves as a bridge between emotional experience and expression. By applying ECMT, the study demonstrates that metaphors are fundamental to the linguistic encoding of emotions, offering valuable insights into the intersection of language, cognition, and culture.

7. Implications

Finally, the findings of this study have important implications for intercultural communication and language teaching. By highlighting the metaphorical representations of sadness and joy in French idiomatic expressions, educators can help learners better understand the cultural context that shapes these emotions.

For example, knowing that French speakers often visualize sadness through metaphors of darkness and low positioning can improve students' emotional intelligence and empathy when interacting with French speakers. Additionally, including these idioms in language courses not only helps with vocabulary acquisition but also fosters an appreciation for the subtlety and richness of emotional expression in French culture.

The analysis also shows that metaphors for joy are linked to elevated and spiritual imagery, such as being in a heavenly place or swimming in joy. This can encourage learners to explore how positivity is expressed differently across cultures. Engaging with these cultural aspects can lead to more meaningful interactions and enhance intercultural competence, allowing learners to understand emotional expressions with greater sensitivity and awareness.

The findings of this study also have important implications across different languages, contributing to the broader field of cognitive linguistics by showing how cultural and contextual factors influence the metaphorical and metonymical representation of emotions. By comparing French idiomatic expressions with similar metaphors found in English, Chinese, and Japanese, this study highlights universal patterns in how emotions are conceptualized while also pointing out specific subtleties in each language.

The insights from this study could enrich discussions about the relationship between language, thought, and emotion, suggesting that while certain emotional experiences are universally recognized, the ways we express and frame these emotions can vary widely (see Alazazmeh & Zibin, 2023). This emphasizes the importance of ongoing cross-linguistic research to explore how different cultures shape emotional language and deepen our understanding of human emotional experiences.

8. Conclusions

This study adopted the Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Kövecses, 2020) to explore idiomatic expressions of sadness and joy in French, providing insights into how emotions are perceived and communicated within French culture. The analysis revealed that metaphors used in French contain physical sensations, colour imagery, and spiritual elements, while the metonymies reflect both the physical and experiential foundations of emotions, all contextualized within the culture. The analysis highlights the cultural significance attributed to both positive and negative emotions, enhancing our understanding of how these feelings are expressed in everyday life.

However, the study has limitations that should be acknowledged. The relatively small sample size of idioms may not fully represent the complete range of French idiomatic expressions, and the process of metaphor identification could introduce biases in interpretation.

Future research could broaden the scope by exploring a wider and more diverse range of idiomatic expressions related to other emotions and by comparing them across different Francophone cultures. Additionally, further investigations could incorporate quantitative methods to complement the qualitative findings, providing a richer analysis of the prevalence and use of specific metaphors and metonymies in contemporary French media.

Finally, this study serves as a step toward understanding the richness of emotional expression in French and highlights the potential for further exploration in this fascinating area of research.

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