



Why are emotions expressed? Conjectures and recent evidence

Klaus R. Scherer

University of Geneva

I argue that recent evidence from many different disciplines bolsters my earlier claim that brief non-verbal displays of emotion (affect bursts) may have been an important element in the evolution of speech and gesture, and, probably in parallel, of singing and music. I suggest that this evolutionary milestone was achieved because of the lawful but flexible signaling of appraisal and intention states of relevant organisms, thus playing an eminent role in fostering social communication. After giving brief account of the evolutionary development of emotion and the nature and architecture of the human emotion system, with particular emphasis on motor expression, I will present a dynamic model of emotion communication. I suggest that expression functions 1) as symptom (of speaker state), 2) as symbol (of a message), and 3) appeal (to the listener), highlighting differential types of coding (biological push vs. sociocultural pull) of the expressive signs. I then describe the results of a research program, using theoretically designed synthetic facial stimuli to experimentally investigate the claim that non-verbal expression signals appraisals and action tendencies.