

“I am much pleased with this part of the world...”:
Exploring the Ethnopragmatic Conceptualization of
‘Happiness’ and ‘Sadness’ in Irish Emigrants’
Personal Correspondence.

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The aims of the study

- ✓ The present paper, based on a corpus of Irish emigrants' personal correspondence, aims to diachronically account for the ethnopragmatic conceptualization of happiness and sadness in the speech of the Irish citizens that migrated to North America between 1700 and 1920.
- ✓ The study proposes a Natural Semantic Metalanguage examination of two positive adjectives, *happy* and *glad*, and their negative counterparts, *unhappy* and *sad* in order to identify Irish emigrants' emotional responses to transatlantic migration and life abroad.

Introductory remarks

- ❑ Irish immigrants traditionally described as homesick, helpless and alienated expatriates (cf. e.g. Gibson 1951:26; Brown 1956:329; Miller 1985:4, 2008:10).
- ❑ American immigration historians and the image of “the self-pitying, Anglophobic Irish exile” (Miller 1985:4).
- ❑ The use of letters, ballads, speeches, sermons and poems to provide anecdotal accounts of emigrants’ experiences abroad.
- ❑ Academic studies on Irish migrations: historical studies (cf. Miller et al. 2003) and linguistic studies (cf. Amador-Moreno and McCafferty 2012, 2012b).

A Methodology for Emotion Semantics:

The Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM)

- ❑ Wierzbicka 1996; Goddard and Wierzbicka 2002b; Goddard 2008, 2010, 2014a, 2014b.
- ❑ NSM studies on emotions (cf. e.g. Wierzbicka 1999, 2014; Harkins & Wierzbicka eds. 2001; Enfield & Wierzbicka eds. 2002; Gladkova 2010a).

Data

□ 1,153 letters compiled from the Irish Emigration Database.

Period	Amount of letters	Amount of words
1700-1776	41	32,466
1783-1845	385	297,202
1846-1920	727	512,499
Total	1,153	842,167

Irish emigrants' conceptualization of positive experiences

- ❑ Terms referring to positive mental and emotional states (*happy, glad, pleased, contented, delighted, excited, etc.*)
- ❑ Emotion terms used to describe positive events such as family news, fortunate trips, meetings with relatives and friends in America, first impressions about America, etc.
- ❑ *Happy* and *glad* as the most representative and defining concepts in the sphere of emigrants' positive emotional attitudes towards departure.
- ❑ NSM explication of *happy* (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014a)

Happy

- ❖ A cerebral emotion term used to describe either a positive event or general state.

E.g. *Everything is so new and nice and they are so **happy**.*

*I am very glad to have to tell you that I have had a very **happy** life since I came to America.*

*I was just thinking it feels so truly **happy** the way we live now.*

- ❖ *Personal character*

E.g. *Well Christmas is over and it was a very **happy** day to me, happy in the present.*

Happy

- ❖ The expectation component

E.g. *I am very **happy** this morning to have the privilege of answering your kind letter for which I have been anxiously waiting.*

*We are all very **happy** that this terrible war is over.*

Semantic explication of *happy*

(Wierzbicka 1999; Goddard & Wierzbicka 2014a)

Happy (X was happy)

- a. he (= this someone) thought like this for some time at this time:
 - b. “many good things are happening to me now as I want I can do many things now as I want this is good”
- c. because of this, this someone felt something good at this time
- d. like people feel at many times when they think like this for some time.

Glad

- ❖ A short-term experience of pleasure caused by an immediate reason or an incident

E.g. *I was very **glad** to receive your letter a short time ago, and to have such a full feast of neighborhood [neighborhood?] news as it contained.*

- ❖ General character (the absence of ‘to me’)
- ❖ More connected with an unexpected, pleasant event

E.g. *I was so **glad** that in the week of Walter's birthday he had letters from ever so many brothers, from Duncan, John, Sholto, Percie, & from Ethel too.*

Semantic explication of *glad*

Glad (X was glad)

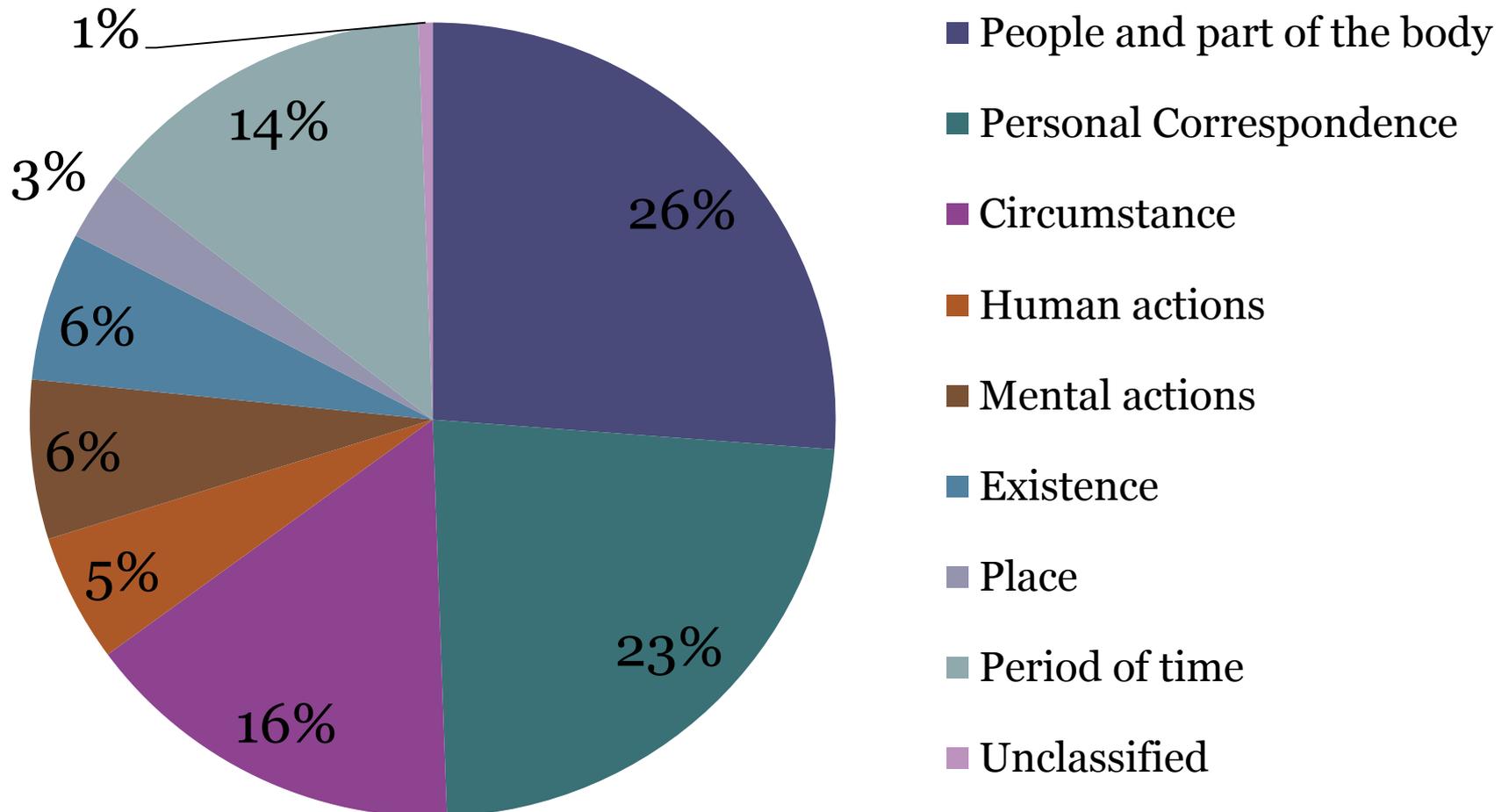
- a. he (= this someone) thought like this for some time at this time:
 - b. “ something good is happening now because of something
I want things like this to happen
this is good”
- c. Because of this something, this someone feels something good at this time
- d. Like people feel at many times when they think like this for some time

Following Romero-Trillo's (2008) principles for the examination of pragmatic meanings ...

Table 1. Most frequent nouns modified by *happy* organized into categories.

People and part of the body	Personal Correspondence	Circumstance	Period of time
Person 113 People 55 Children 4 Man/men 4 Wife/Mother 3 Couple 3 Americans 1 Baby 1 Family 1 Look 1 Women 1	News 144 Receipt of letter 10 Opportunity of writing 8 Word 2 Remarks 1	Situation 94 Event 9 State 7	New Year 49 Christmas 15 Day 15 Year 8 Easter 3 Time 3 Birthday 2 Hour 2 Season 2
187	165	110	99

Figure 1. Most frequent nouns modified by *happy* organized into categories.

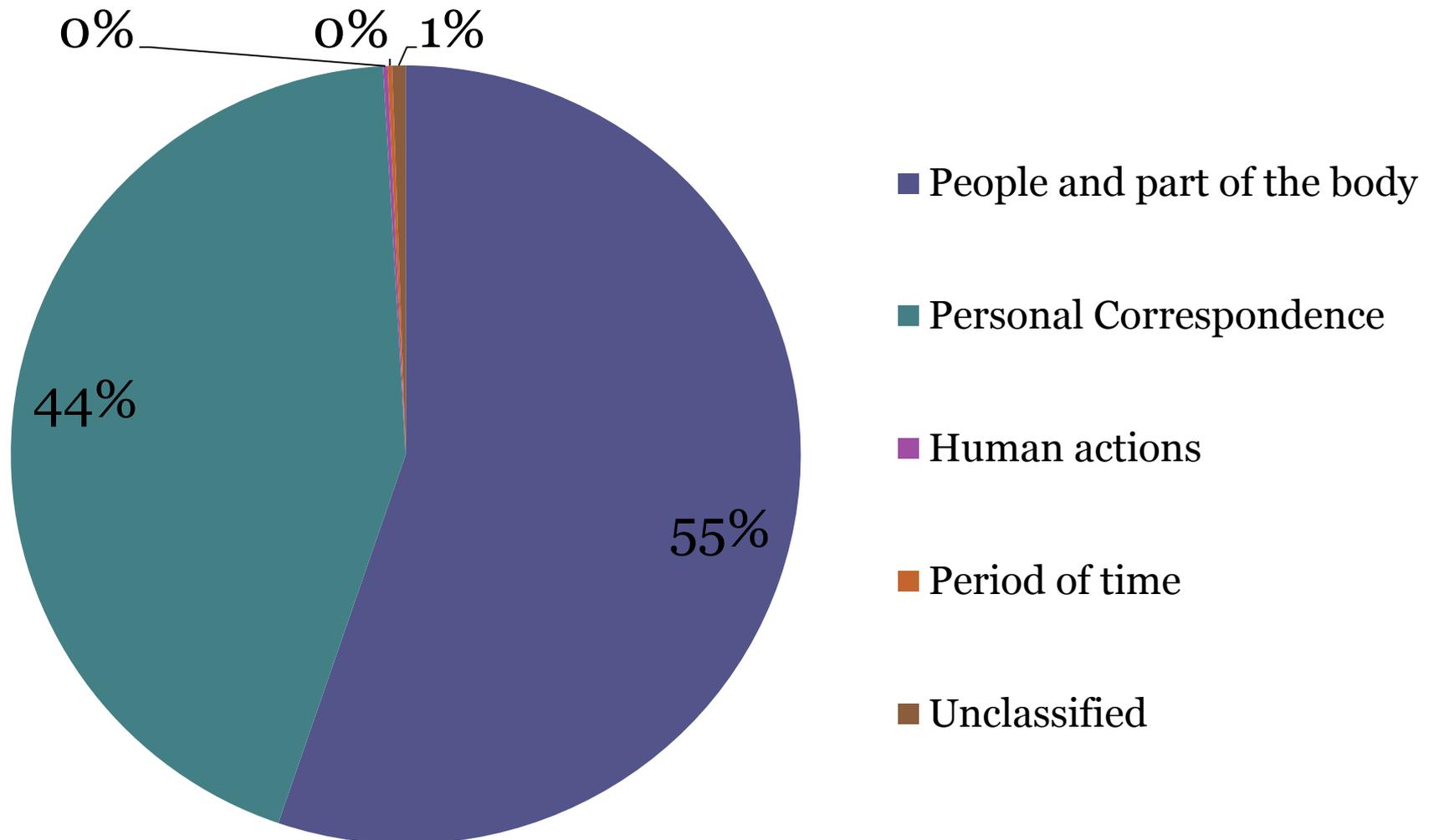


Following Romero-Trillo's (2008) principles for the examination of pragmatic meanings ...

Table 2. Most frequent nouns modified by *glad* organized into categories.

People and part of the body	Personal Correspondence	Human actions	Period of time	Unclassified
Person 260	News 228	Meeting 1	New Year 1	Glory 1
People 39	Receipt of letter 10			Sight 1
Men 1	Opportunity of			Sound 1
Mother 1	writing 1			
301	239	1	1	3

Figure 2. Most frequent nouns modified by *glad* organized into categories.



Conceptualizing negative experiences

- ❑ Terms referring to negative mental and emotional states (*sad, unhappy, homesick, grieved, depressed, sorrowful, etc.*)
- ❑ Emotion terms triggered by negative events such as bad news coming from the island; misfortunes in America/ Ireland; situation of the home country, etc.
- ❑ *Unhappy* and *sad* as the primary and most representative concepts in the sphere of emigrants' negative emotional attitudes towards departure.
- ❑ NSM explications of *unhappy* and *sad* (Wierzbicka 1999:60)

Unhappy

- ❖ Experience of unhappiness triggered by a negative event (cause-effect nature)

E.g. *Aunt Nancy says she is very **unhappy** her husband is drinking very hard.*

*It makes me very **unhappy** that I can't, with any safety, send my dear little nieces any token of my regard for them.*

*I am very **unhappy** about him not writing to me.*

- ❖ Stronger negative connotation (the use of 'very')

Unhappy

❖ Personal character

E.g. *I will remain **unhappy** until I get your answer.*

*The **unhappy** man drives about the country in broad daylight in the most unclerical style imaginable*

*It cut me to the heart to see them **unhappy** when it was out of my power to make their situation more congenial to their wishes.*

❖ Unwillingness to accept the fact

Semantic explication of *unhappy*

(Wierzbicka 1999:62)

Unhappy (X was unhappy)

- a. X felt something because X thought something
sometimes a person thinks for some time:
 - b. “some very bad things happened to me
I wanted things like this not to happen to me
I can’t not think about it”
- c. when this person thinks this this person feels something
bad for some time
- d. X felt something like this because X thought something
like this

Sad

- ❖ Used to describe either a negative event or general state

E.g. *The **sad** news and my own loneliness make things look dreary out here.*

*We do feel **sad** when we think of the calamity that has befallen our old neighbors and friends [...]*

*This country is brought to a **sad** state, nothing but beggars, liars, thieves and murderers, in it.*

- ❖ General character
- ❖ Resigned state of mind

Semantic explication of *sad*

Sad (X was sad)

a. X felt something

sometimes a person thinks:

b. “ I know: something bad happened

I do not want things like this to happen

I can't think: I will do something because of it now

I know I can't do anything”

c. When this person thinks this this person feels something bad

d. X felt something like this

Following Romero-Trillo's (2008) principles for the examination of pragmatic meanings ...

Table 3. Most frequent nouns modified by *unhappy* organized into categories.

People and part of the body	Personal Correspondence	Human actions	Place	Period of time
Person 11 People 3 Man 1	News 2	Marriage 2 Voyage 1	Country 2	Hour 1 Time 1
15	2	3	2	2

Figure 3. Noun categories modifying *unhappy* in the letters.

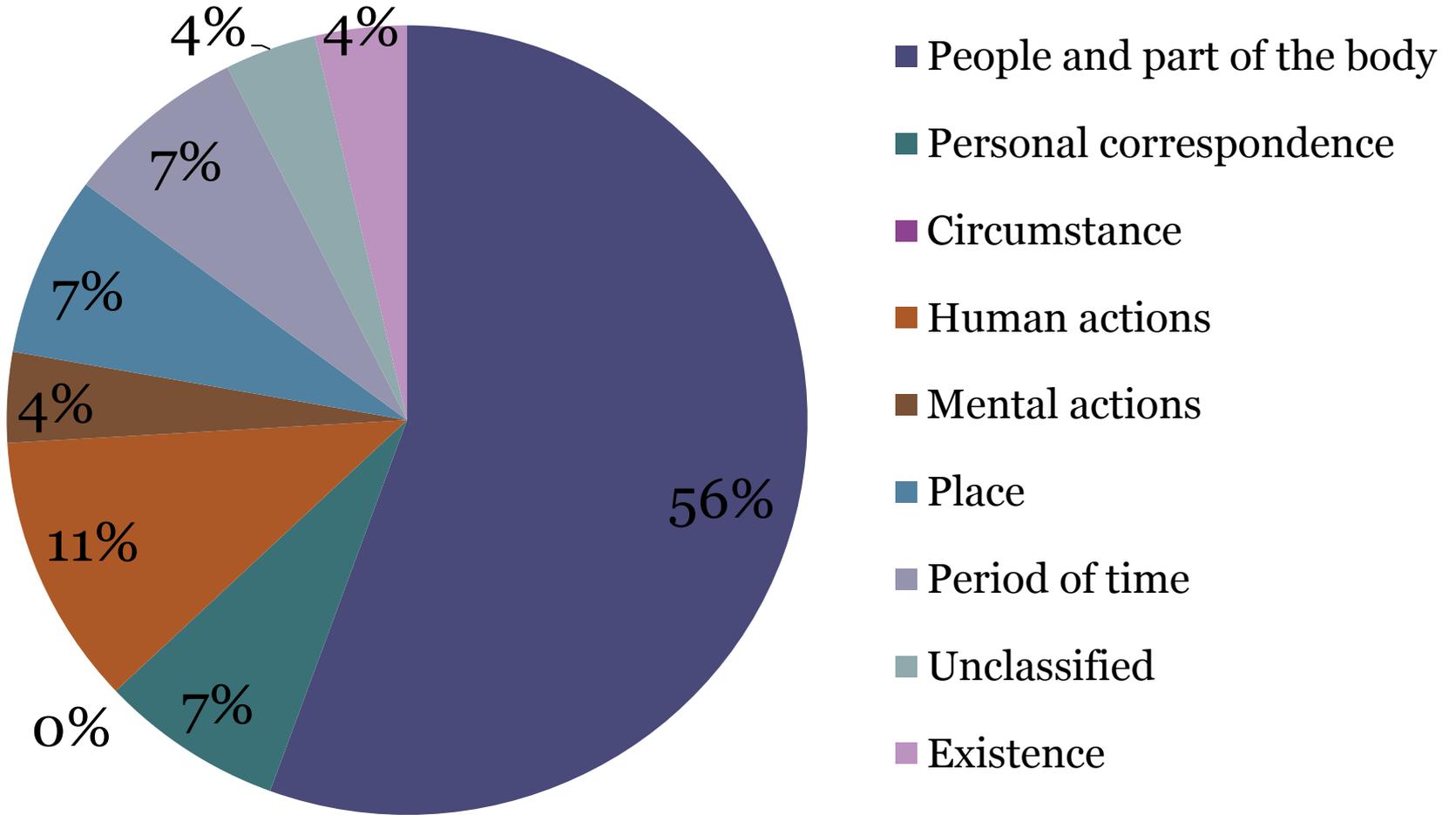
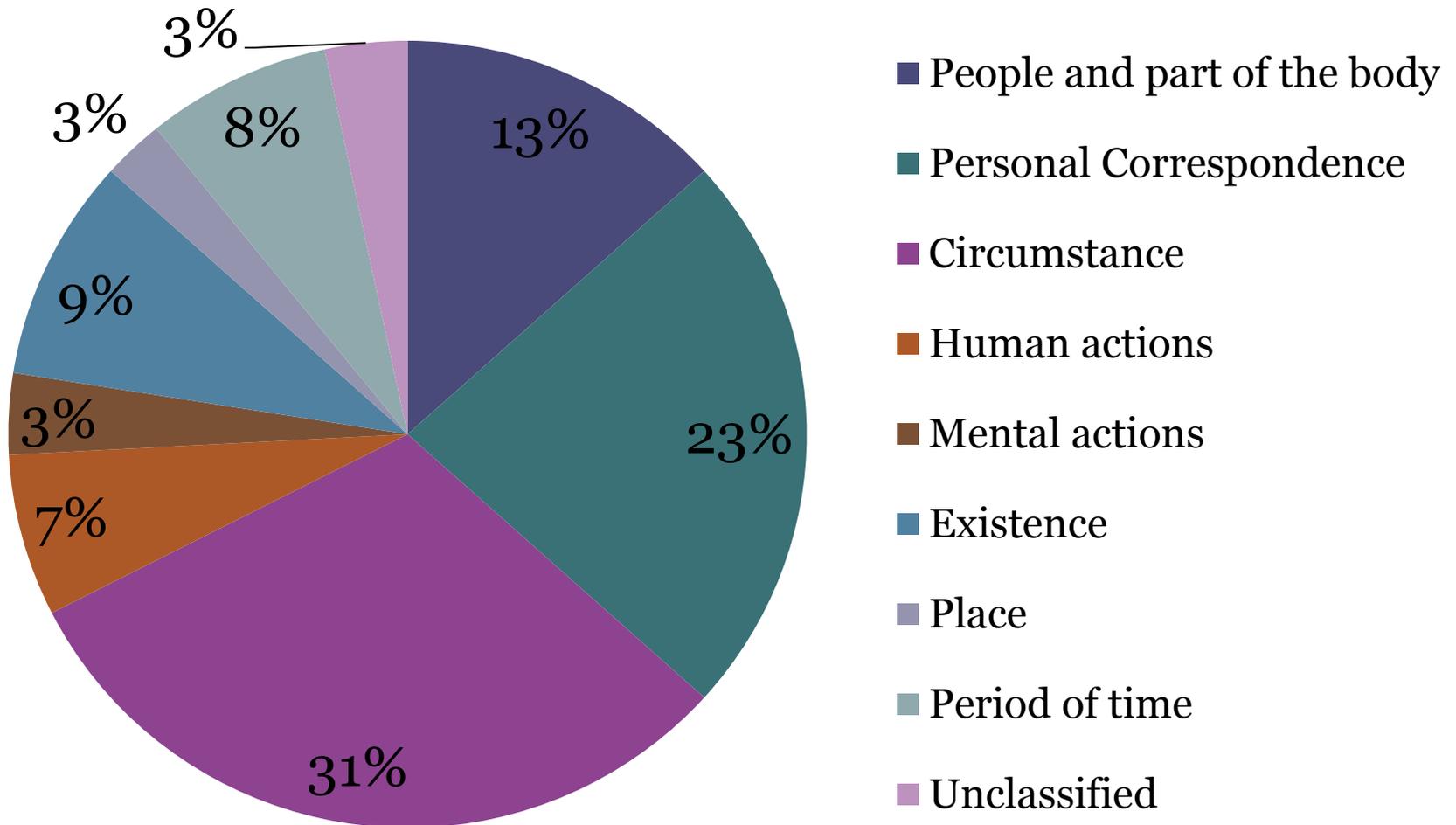


Table 4. Most frequent nouns modified by *sad* organized into categories.

People and part of the body	Personal correspondence	Circumstance	Existence
Person 4	News 23	Situation 23	Bereavement 6
People 3	Letter 4	Event 7	Death 3
Heart 3	Testimony 1	Blow 3	Life 2
Look 3		Disappointment 2	
Companions 1		Calamities 1	
Face 1		State 1	
Fellow 1			
16	28	37	11

Figure 4. Noun categories modifying *sad* in the letters.



Discussion

- ❑ **Happy** describes a wide variety of nouns in the letters, ranging from ‘people and part of the body’ and ‘human actions’ to more abstract categories such as ‘mental actions’ and ‘circumstances’, etc .
- ❑ **Glad** is not only used to describe ‘people’ but also more general nouns such as news and opportunity of writing grouped within ‘personal correspondence’ category.
- ❑ ‘People and parts of the body’ category in **happy** has 11 different nouns, while **glad** 4.
- ❑ ‘Human actions’ in **happy** has 7 different nouns, while **glad** 1.

Discussion

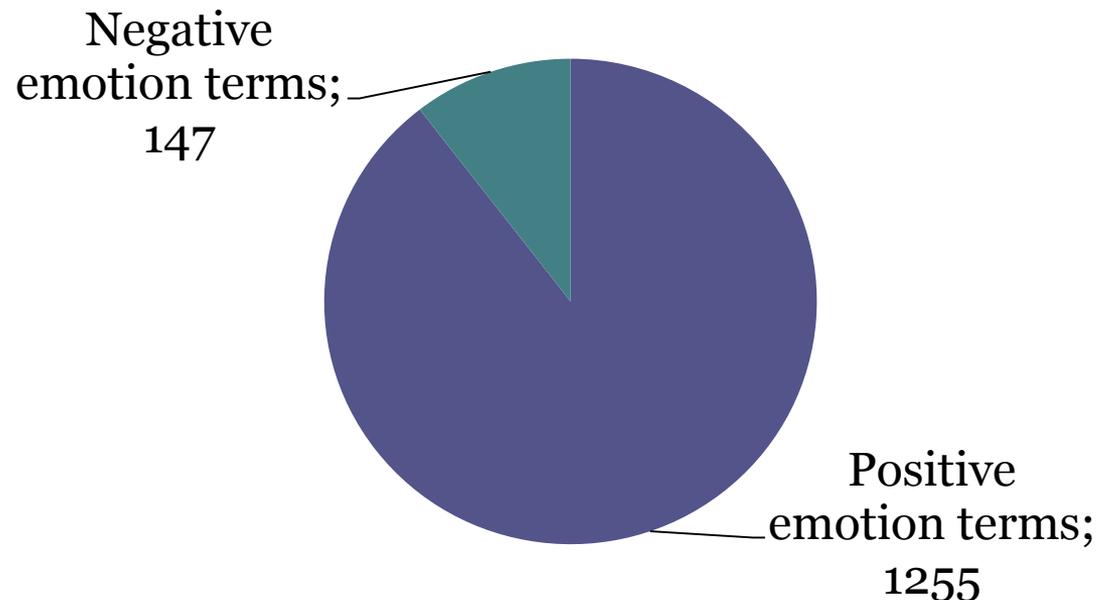
- ❑ ***Unhappy*** primarily modifies nouns referring to ‘people’ and ‘human actions’.
- ❑ ***Sad*** covers a wider variety of references that ranges from personal experiences to more general situations.
- ❑ Circumstance in ***sad*** has 6 different nouns (28 examples), while ***unhappy*** 0.
- ❑ In ‘personal correspondence’ category, ***unhappy*** only modifies the noun *news*, while ***sad*** modifies 3 different nouns (*news, letter, testimony*).

Concluding remarks

1. Based on corpus evidence, it is argued that, despite the intense homesickness that characterized these migrations, there is a strong tendency for Irish to evaluate their transatlantic experiences in positive terms, that is, emigration as an opportunity rather than an unhappy, sad exile.
2. The categorical use of *happy* and *glad* with ‘people’, ‘personal correspondence’ and ‘circumstance’ categories confirm our initial hypothesis about the existence of different emotional responses towards emigration.

Concluding remarks

- Findings have shown that although the exile motif was collectively used in ballads, sermons, speeches, etc. to describe Irish experiences abroad, on individual levels, emigration was widely regarded in positive terms: as a happy/glad state, event, opportunity or even as escape.



Concluding remarks

4. The increasing use of *happy* and *glad* in the famine years— with 531 and 395 occurrences respectively – therefore suggests a change in Irish emigrants’ mentality.
5. There is a significant use of the negative adjective *sad*, with 111 occurrences, between 1846 and 1920.
6. The presence of negative emotion terms such as *unhappy* and *sad* illustrates the paradox of Irish emotions.

References

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Thank you

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