



The NSM Approach to the Polish Concept of *Żal*

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The paper discusses the conceptual meaning of the word *żal*, one of the central emotional concepts in the Polish culture. *Żal* has been rooted in the language for a long time and earned a special place in the semantic map of Polish emotions. Strongly connected with the practice of *narzekanie* as well as the famous pessimism, it is one of the Polish culturally salient words.

Although emotion words seem crucial for defining a culture, they are semantically intricate and difficult to explain. The Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) explications proposed by Anna Wierzbicka (1972/1997) come as a most useful tool for the analysis of such words. Noticing the need for a kind of metalanguage that would help overcome linguistic barriers, Wierzbicka (1997) proposes a list of semantic primitives that can be used as a mini-language with which everything can be defined. The NSM approach, which is used in the proposed analysis, is based on reductive paraphrase using such universal metalanguage, and it consists in putting complex meanings in simple terms.

The NSM framework makes it possible to propose a culturally meaningful definition of *żal*. The paper focuses on a detailed examination of derivatives and collocations of *żal* as well as various examples of its usage in order to arrive at the NSM explication of the analysed word. Such a procedure enables an insight into the concept of *żal* and the meaning it has in the Polish culture.

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