The interdisciplinary field of emotion studies ignores the historical perspective on translation problems. In today’s scientific publications, which are predominantly written in English, the term “emotion” is used as if it were synonymous in all languages, times, and contexts. Although the semantic fields of emotion terms are not identical in English, French, and German, these three languages informed the study of emotion in 19th-century psychology, at the time when the scientific concept of emotion was formed. Furthermore, the French émotion and the English emotion have become homonyms, sentiment and sentiment are not used in the same way, and Affekt also poses a problem. Translation problems have masked the epistemological problems that German and French psychologists at the time were reading each other in these languages all the while writing about the same topics in their respective language. Historical perspectives are important to clarify the ambiguities of emotion terms and include non-Anglophone frameworks into current transdisciplinary debates.

The interdisciplinary field of emotion studies disregards historical perspectives on translation and left out a substantial body of scientific research on feelings and emotions that was not published in English. Yet these texts were foundational in forging the scientific concept of emotion in experimental psychology in the 19th century. The current approach to emotion science overlooks that translation issues occurred between three languages, German, French, and English, as physiological psychologists at the time were reading each other in these languages all the while writing about the same topics in their respective language. Historical perspectives are important to clarify the ambiguities of emotion terms and include non-Anglophone frameworks into current transdisciplinary debates.

That translation or cross-linguistic differences represent a problem or a challenge for emotion studies has been addressed by linguists, such as Wierzbicka (Imprisoned in English, 2014), by Mandler (Mind and Emotion, 1975), for psychology, and by Cassin (Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: dictionnaire des intraduisibles, 2004), for philosophy. The German terms Gefühl and Empfindung are part of the collection of terms which philosophers in earlier times transcribed in the original language without translating them. In this article, I adopt the same strategy in order to call attention to the non-Anglophone connotations that informed the scientific concept of “emotion” at its inception. The problem is particularly relevant at a moment when all scientific work has to be published in English in order to count. Montgomery (2013) points out that “Most Anglophone researchers are monolingual and cite only papers in English” (p. 105). While for him English is beneficial to science because now scientists are finally able to “communicate directly with each other,” linguists stress what is lost through the Anglocentrism that dominates humanist scholarship. Wierzbicka (2014) holds that “every language equips its speakers with a particular set of cognitive tools for seeing and interpreting the world” (p. 3). The Anglocentrism frame creates a conceptual cage...
that “can blind us to the world as it presents itself to other people” (p. 4). Indeed, not only are non-English frames absent from current accounts on emotions in psychology, but 19th-century psychology is invisible to scholars today, who are studying questions concerning emotion and cognition that psychologists already once raised (Farrell, 2014). Contemporary textbooks of emotion (Fox, 2008), scientific accounts (Damasio, 1999), and histories of emotion (Dixon, 2003), to give some representative examples, cite Darwin and James as the relevant historical authorities for emotion.

What I want to point out here is that the German origins of psychophysiology are key for the understanding of “emotion” in scientific texts. Part of the definitional issues on the nature of emotion that arose in the late 19th century and are hotly debated again a century later, are related to issues of translation from German to French to English, and English to French by the 19th-century psychologists. Beginning with the work of Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), who wrote in German (1863, 1874); Théodule Ribot (1839–1916), who read him and wrote in French (1873, 1881, 1896); and finally, William James (1842–1910), who read both authors and wrote in English (1884, 1890), to put it briefly. The relevant source for the “concept of emotion” in psychology, and also in Anglophone psychology, was German and French scientific psychology (Clarke & Jacyna, 1987). In the 19th century, students from all over the world flocked to Germany in order to train in the new discipline of experimental psychology (Boring, 1950; Bringmann & Tweney, 1980). At the ground of what is discussed in today’s research on emotion lies the question of the German Gefühl, its nature and role in cognition. Wundt in particular detailed on many accounts how Gefühl might be created in the brain, how it might influence processes of cognition, and how it might come to conscious awareness (for instance, Wundt, 1902–1903, Vol. 2, p. 357, Vol. 3, pp. 121–122). His argument went far beyond John Stuart Mill’s associationism (Fahrenheit, 2011). For reading the German scientific texts, the French meaning of émotion rather than the contemporary English meaning of “emotion” must be taken as the basis. Émotion and emotion were once used as synonyms, as can be seen in the writings of Hume and in language dictionaries from then 1880s, however, they no longer are so.

Pernau (2012) highlights that languages are no “naturally given entities” but are created by the historical exchanges of the actors that use them, adding new meanings and incorporating nonnative elements. Today, the conventional use of the English “emotion” in colloquial contexts immediately prompts the association of love and hate and, in scientific contexts, of the six “basic emotions,” happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, and surprise, which are often treated like a fixed entity. Much scholarly ink is spilled over the existence of basic emotions, definitions, classification, expression, and cultural specificity. (See the discussion in the special section on Defining Emotion in Emotion Review, 2012.) The medical literature uses the term emotion often in a generic sense, connote feeling, basic arousal, unconscious processing, or emotional processing in the nervous system (Hillman, 1960). This is closer to the use that German psychophysicists made of Gefühl and which was translated as emotion.

Historians who alerted to the role of language in a “science of emotion” left out the perspectives of the German psychophysicists (Evans, 2001; Majid, 2012). As Majid put it, Dixon “very nicely illustrates” that,

[The definitional criteria of the term emotion in English has changed in historical time and was, in part, originally defined by the concerns of scientists. However, contemporary usage of emotion by English speakers doesn’t always correspond to the myriad scientific terminologies. (2012, p. 380)]

Historians of emotions began analyzing the shifting emotional vocabulary from 1800 to 2000 based on German and British encyclopedia entries (Scheer et al., 2014) but did not include scientific texts, nor did they consider the issue of translation between German, French, and English in the 19th century. Linguists seek nonethnocentric ways for analyzing language in order to get out of the conceptual cage that the English language represents, because it is taken as the “standard in relation to which all other languages and cultures can be analyzed and interpreted” (Wierzbicka, 2014, p. 3). Wierzbicka (2009) argues that a natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) can free us from conventions of speaking and framing things in the historically shaped conceptual vocabulary of English. Fabrega (2012, p. 318) assumes that such a theory of arguably “self-evident, self-explanatory concepts which all natural languages build on” represents the key for understanding, for instance, how humans were able to develop communication about their pain. Goddard (2014) suggests that the NSM also allows including the study of vocal interjections in the analysis of emotions, as they convey emotional meaning. The aim of the scientific work in experimental psychology in the 19th century was to go beyond the alleged self-evidence of Gefühl, Empfindung, feeling, thinking, and perceiving.

In the following lines, I turn to the conceptual distinctions made by 19th-century psychologists. First, I show how German psychology in the 19th century reflected on the use of emotion terms such as Gefühl, Empfindung, and Affekt. Then I turn to the uses of émotion and emotion, and sentiment and sentiment in historical French dictionaries and in translations to illustrate the semantic field and problem set that experimental psychologists addressed. Concluding I hope to show that the historical diagnosis of contemporary psychology’s ills is incomplete and even misleading, when it leaves out the non-Anglophone scientific texts that provided the basis for the contemporary concept of emotion in experimental psychology.

While in the British case, as Dixon (2003) argued, a new term was introduced, emotion replaced passion, in the German case the terms Gefühl, Empfindung, Affect, and Leidenschaft remained, but the ways in which they were used in psychology shifted from the 18th to the 19th century. Wundt (1891, 1900) reviewed the shifting meanings of emotion terms in philosophy, literature, and psychology in two articles in 1891 and 1900. In his chronology of the psychology of emotions he noted that German philosophy from Christian Wolff to Kant was the
precursor of the psychology of his day (Wundt, 1913, p. 167). Since the 17th century, several Gefühle had been described in considerable detail, but ethical considerations, questions of logic, and practical considerations were always admixed in the psychological reflection. According to his analysis of Gefühlspsychologie, the psychology of emotion began with Aristotle’s Nichomachean Ethics, which remained a canonical text that was still highly influential in the 18th century. At the turn of the 19th century, Kant’s Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht (1880) and Maas’s Versuch über die Leidenschaften (1805–1807) took the lead in the psychology of emotions. At that time, the terms Gemüth (mind), Seele (soul), Geist (spirit), and Bewusstsein (consciousness) were used indiscriminately. Kant used the notion of “Vorstellungen, die im Gemüth wohnen” ideas that live in the mind. The distinction between Gemüth and Geist (mind vs. spirit) was introduced by Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1808). The romantic literature established the term Gefühl, differentiating more passive and more active or lasting aspects of emotions. Gefühl was linked to specific ideas; it “excited” but did not yet “move” the Gemüth into action. Gefühl was an excitation that remained on the surface. Gefühl was part of—but not equivalent to—motivation, desire, and action. “Eine Gemütherregung, welche nicht das ganz Gemüth ergriff, sondern an einzelne Vorstellungen gebunden, gewissermassen an der Oberfläche desselben bleibt, eine Erregung, aber noch keine Bewegung des Gemüths ist” (Wundt, 1891, p. 337). In contrast to Gefühl stood Leidenschaft, which signified a lasting orientation of Gemüth in a particular direction—an inclination towards one specific form of pleasure or one particular pain, a single specific activity that the mind could not direct its attention away from. Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841) was the first to analyze the psychic processes of Gefühl in their own right and strictly from a psychological point of view.

The evolution of the usage of emotion terms was prefigured by the Latin term “affectus,” which signified a mighty but passing excitation, “heftige Gemütherregung oder ein Begehren von qualitativ unbestimmter Natur;” a strong movement of the mind or a desire of qualitative indistinct nature, whereas passio implied the suffering condition of body or soul, which was something lasting (Wundt 1891, p. 340). As Wundt saw it, the term Leidenschaft was introduced into German in the late 17th century in translation of Descartes’ Passion de l’âme. Indeed, the evolution of the meaning of the terms Affect and Leidenschaft was entirely due to Descartes, who called attention “to the active part in suffering” (Wundt, 1891, p. 339). For Descartes, every suffering could be considered an “action” because it required an acting person. De Spinoza (1981, Part III, Def. 3) used Affect as a general term and distinguished between active and passive suffering, Afecte oder Leidenschaften. This distinction disappeared in German philosophy until Kant reintroduced it when he theorized on the development and duration of the affection (Wundt, 1891, p. 340). In Kant’s (1838) definition, Leidenschaft became a “lasting inclination,” a tendency to (re)act that was hard to overcome through rational deliberation, “eine durch die Vernunft des Subjets schwer oder gar nicht bezwingliche Neigung” (1838, p. 170). In contrast, Affect was a spontaneous impulse, an emotion or feeling of a pleasure or a pain “in the present,” which did not prompt the individual to reflect on whether it was right or wrong to give in to it in the heat of the moment, “das Gefühl einer Lust oder Unlust im gegenwärtigen Zustand, welches im Subject die Ueberlegung...nicht aufkommen lässt” (Kant, 1838, p. 170). Thus, Kant spoke of Leidenschaften as “diseases of the soul/mind” (Kant, 1838, p. 170) Krankheiten des Gemüths. The notion is retained particularly in Affektkriminalität, crime of passion. Reflection on long-term outcomes is not invited when in the grip of strong emotions. Kant’s point is consistent with the French dictionaries’ idea that sentiment is stronger than mere thought. The dictionaries expressed what still holds true today: people are strongly convinced that what they “feel” is true, much more strongly than what they merely guess or voice an opinion about.

Nineteenth-century psychology retained solely the temporal distinction in Kant’s definition; namely, Affect was a “passing excitement,” “vorübergehende Gemüthsbewegung” (Wundt, 1891, p. 340) whereas Leidenschaft was a “lasting orientation” of the psyche, dauernde Gemüthsausrichtung (Wundt, 1891, p. 341). Psychology abandoned the pathological connotation of Leidenschaft; it no longer spoke of Leidenschaften as diseases of the mind. In this use of the term, “scientific psychology” returned to the way Leidenschaft had been used in the romantic literature in the 18th century, where it stood for both positive and negative passions (Wundt, 1891, p. 341). Leidenschaft was not, however, included in the psychophysiological analysis of Gefühl, because it was considered a special case and not part of the fundamental principles of cognition.

Gefühl and Empfindung

The terms Gefühl and Empfindung, emotion and sensation, were used as follows: Empfindung was seen as the more internal, the innermost self, das mehr Innerliche und Subjective, whereas Gefühl was seen as the more objective and external, das Aeusserliche und Objecte. The sense of touch, Tastsinn, was called Gefühlssinn, feeling sense. The excitation of the senses of hearing and seeing were called sensations, Empfindungen. However, as Wundt pointed out, psychological language in the 19th century inverted the meaning of Gefühl and Empfindung: what was called fühlten and empfinden at the beginning of the century was called empfinden at the end of the century, and vice versa. The way psychology at the end of the 19th century used fühlten and empfinden would be this, “We perceive it as green, we feel it as pleasurable,” Wir empfinden es grün, und wir fühlen es angenehm. In his monograph about the bodily expressions of psychic states, Über die körperlichen Äusserungen psychischer Zustände, the German neurologist Berger (1904) noted the inverted use of the terms Empfindung und Gefühl that the physiological and the psychological literature of his time was making.

Empfindung designated each and every qualitative excitation of consciousness (conscious awareness), Erregung des Bewusstseins, which could become part of objective ideas. For instance, when taken in isolation color, warmth, and a simple
sound were sensations, *Empfindungen*. The subjective reaction to color, warmth, or sound, however, was *Gefühl*. One should add that “objective” and “subjective” were used in a value-free manner. Objective simply meant having an object to which a change of state that the brain perceived was causally attributable. For instance, when the grass turns black as the sun goes down, the cause lies outside of us. When we feel a tooth ache, the cause lies in us.

*Gefühl* was subjective because the cause of the perceived change laid inside of us. In Wundt’s view *Gefühl* was a judgment with relation to us. It was a mode of thought, a quality of conscious awareness which was tied to central nervous processing, *an bestimmte centrale Gehirnvorgänge gebundene Bewussteinseigenschaften* (Wundt, 1902–1903, Vol. 2, p. 357). *Gefühl* expressed our inner attitude to external excitation, thoughts, or memories. Wundt pointed out that the emotion terms were used differently in different realms, scientific and esthetic. In particular, in the field of aesthetics the terms *Empfindung* and *Gefühl* were still used indiscriminately, and in the same way as they had been used in psychology at the beginning of the 19th century (Wundt, 1891, p. 338). In the artistic domain, *Empfindung* designated the most ethereal sentiment, whereas in the medical literature, the same term designated the most primitive visceral sensation.

The problem is still with us today. Different connotations of *Empfindung* are evoked in the medical disciplines and humanities. This causes misunderstandings in transdisciplinary debates. Contemporary biomedical literature (Hüther, 2010) conceptualizes the “emotional-cognitive” development as linked and classified brain processes in hierarchical order from bottom up, from simple to most complex: *Körperzustand, Emotion, Gefühl, Empfindung*, body state, emotion, feeling, sentiment. *Empfindung* is placed at the very top (2010, p. 15). Whereas in the 19th-century psychophysiological literature, *Empfindung* was situated at the bottom, on the same plane as *sinnliche Gefühle*, sense feelings, followed by *Affekte* (Wundt, 1863, 1874, 1902–1903). Placed at the top of the hierarchy were “higher order emotions” and concepts, *höhere Gefühle* and *Begriffe*, characterized by increasing complexity and intellectual content.

**Gefühl and Affekt**

Different disciplines also use the term *Affekt* in different ways. The sociological literature (Scheler, 1923; Simmel, 1896) privileges *Affekt(e)* over *Gefühl* in contrast to the psycho-medical literature. Contemporary German historians of emotion also privilege the term *Affekt*, as do some Anglophone psychologists (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009; Fox, 2008), who suggest using of “affect” instead of emotion. However, the term *Affect* too was used in contradictory ways in the psychological literature of the 19th century. (After 1900 the German spelling was *Affect*). For instance, in *Das menschliche Gefühlslieben*, Nahlowsky (1862, p. 214) argued that *Gefühle* originated in *Affect*, whereas Wundt in his monograph *Über Gemüthsbewegungen*, used *Affect* for simple emotion, such as a startle, and at other times also for (what Wundt called) complex higher order emotions, such as anger and happiness. In Lange’s account, startle, anger, and happiness, Schreck, Wuth, Freude were “einfache Affekte” simple emotions. He argued that these einfache Affekte should be analytically separated from the more complex emotional conditions “complex Gemüthszustände,” such as envy, love, and admiration, Neid, Liebe, Bewunderung. The former should be called *Affect* or *Gemüthsbewegungen*, the latter *Gefühl*. Here, *Gefühle* would correspond to sentiment. However, this classification was not followed in psychology. When Wundt (1887) commented on the different usages of the term *Affect* in the psychological literature in his discussion of the James–Lange theory of emotion he held: “What is usually taken to be the relation between *Gefühl* and *Affect* is turned upside down [in Lange’s work]. *The Affect* is defined as the simple process, *Gefühl* as the complex process composed out of several *Affecten*” (1887, p. 350).

In the fifth edition of Grundzüge der Physiologischen Psychologie (1902), Wundt and Wirth grouped the various conceptions of *Gefühle/emotion* that were discussed at his time into four main hypotheses: (a) the *intellectualist* hypothesis, according to which *Gefühl* was a particular activity of cognizance, eine besondere Beteiligung der Erkenntnis; (b) the *interactionist* hypothesis, which causally attributed *Gefühl* to an interaction of ideas, Wechselwirkung der Vorstellungen; (c) the cognitive hypothesis, which suggested that *Gefühl* was subjective Ergänzung, the subjective supplement (or complement) to objective sensations and ideas; and (d) the *sensualist* hypothesis, according to which *Gefühle*, emotions, were the physical side effect of sensation or sensory excitation, physische Nebenwirkung der Empfindungsreize. Wundt proposed a systematic distinction, which defined *Gefühl* clearly from a conceptual point of view based on the neuroanatomical knowledge of his time. In his classification the distinction between *Gefühl*, *Empfindung*, and *Affekt*, which were conceptualized as processes rather than states, concerned the intellectual content, the time pattern of the process (Gefühlswerlauf), the motivational component, the object of reference, and the tendency to act that might or might not be implied.

The distinction between *Empfindung* and *Gefühl* was central to the German argument. The translation of the German terms into English abolishes the distinction. In 1900, the German–English dictionary *Encyklopädisches Wörterbuch* translated the term *Empfindung* to English as “sentiment” and “sensibility,” both of which carry an intellectual and abstract connotation. However, Wundt used *Empfindung* to mean sensation, not sentiment. Sentiment was signified by *Gefühl*. Wundt reserved *Empfindung* for those changes in our momentary state (feeling, perception) for which a causal agent could be clearly situated outside the body, or changes in our state like hunger, when we
talk about it in an abstract way, in contrast to feeling it. The French literature used *sensation* as a translation for *Empfindung*, *sentiment* for *Gefühl*, and *émotion* for *Gemeňtsbewegung*; it also used “vul affective” in the sense of *Gemüth* (Wundt, 1891, p. 357). The English literature used the terms sensation, feeling, and emotion, and also “affection process” and “affectionate state” (in the meaning of *Stimmung, mood*) in partly synonymous ways; it also used the term “idea.” The French terms *sentiment*, *émotion*, and *idée* and the English sentiment, emotion, and idea are homonyms, which gave rise to many misunderstandings because of their variable usage.

**French Emotion Terms**

The French terms are important for understanding the meaning of the German scientific texts. The connotation of *émotion* and emotion, as first used in French by Montaigne (1533–1592), was close to the concerns of 19th-century German psychophysicists—which is not surprising, because Wundt read Hume and Descartes. In *Les Passions de l’âme*, 1649, Descartes used the term *émotion* to describe the connection between mind (soul) and body. He thought that emotion was triggered through the *movement* of corporeal “animal spirits” in the nerves, which he thought were hollow, informing the soul situated in the pineal gland about the state of the body. French psychologists in the 19th century recommended Descartes’ work to psychologists studying emotion and attributed the term *émotion* to Descartes. Dumas (1948) wrote that at first Descartes called all emotional phenomena “passions,” both “what is called today passions, such as love, hate, ambition, desire, and also the emotions like surprise, happiness, fear” (pp. 27–28). Later Descartes held that it was better to call all of them not *passions de l’âme* but *émotions de l’âme*, “emotions of the soul,” because of all of the thoughts the soul could have, these moved the soul most strongly. The *International English and French Dictionary* (Smith & Hamilton, 1880, p. 187) read, “Emotion: (Latin emovere) *émotion.*”

Hume spoke of “impressions or emotions” and he used the term “affections.” In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume (1817) wrote that the “second property” which he observed in the human mind

[I]s a like association of impressions or emotions. All resembling impressions are connected together, and no sooner one arises, than the rest naturally follow. Grief and disappointment give rise to anger, anger to envy, envy to malice, and malice to grief again. In a like manner, our temper, when elevated with joy, naturally throns itself into love, generosity, courage, pride, and other resembling affections. (Vol. 2, p. 177)

In the French translation of Hume’s (1748) work, *émotion* is used, in English emotion (p. 16). At that time *émotion* and *emotion* were used synonymously. Hume like Montaigne used the term *émotion* to signify diffuse feelings that we do not have a proper name for and that we cannot precisely localize.

A look at historical French dictionary entries for *émotion* and *sentiment* provides an approximation of the problems that the German psychophysicists and the French, who followed suit, tried to understand in the 19th century. I have assessed the French dictionaries through the ARTLF project of the University of Chicago (http://portail.atlf.fr) which can be considered representative for my purpose. The dictionaries that I consulted are mostly those by the * Académie Française*, who claims normative status in terms of defining the French language. I have consulted all existing editions from 1762 to 1932. I use these entries for illustrative purposes in a qualitative manner. The description of *émotion* and *sentiment* in French did not change significantly in these dictionaries, even when some of the concurrent political events of the times left an imprint. The entries on *émotion* were short, those on *sentiment* considerably longer. Judging from the length of the entries, the term *sentiment* was more frequently used than *émotion*. This shows also in a qualitative way in the Google Books Ngram Viewer (available online). In what follows, I give a representative example taken from the fourth edition of the *Dictionnaire de L’Académie française* (1762). The entry showed that *émotion* was thought to act on three levels, the humors, the spirits, and the soul.

ÉMOTION. s.f. Altération, mouvement excité dans les humeurs, dans les esprits, dans l’âme. J’ai peur d’avoir la fièvre, j’ai senti quelque émotion. Il n’a plus la fièvre, mais je lui trouve encore quelque émotion, de l’émotion. Il a trop marché, cela lui a donné, lui a causé de l’émotion. Ce discours le fâche, on vit de l’émotion sur son visage. Il n’en eut pas la moindre émotion. Il attendit le coup sans émotion. Il a de l’émotion dans le pouls.

On dit, il y a de l’émotion dans le peuple, pour dire, qu’il y a de la disposition dans le peuple à se soulever. (Académie française, 1762, p. 608)

The entry described *émotion* as both corporeal and mental reaction to a physical or psychological event, which could be felt and shown, or felt but not shown. In particular, it mentioned “The speech angered him, one saw the emotion on his face.” And, “He didn’t show the least emotion. He waited for the shot without emotion.” Emotion could show on the face and in the pulse. It was associated with a state of fever and with having walked too much. The addendum stated that the term was also used to designate a tendency in the people to rise up. Among the various meanings given for *émotion* in French dictionaries, historians have been most interested in the notion of *émute*, mob action (Frevert, 2011, p. 18). However, the other meanings of *émotion* and *sentiment* were much more pertinent to the scientific agenda of 19th-century psychologists, who attempted to understand the fundamental principles of brain function and physiology.

The entry shifted slightly over time. It retained that *émotion* could show on the face in reaction to alarming or annoying news until 1932, when the face was no longer specifically mentioned. The French Revolution left a temporary trace with “the feelings of the heart,” specifically mentioning hatred and anger, and the note that an orator raised high emotions in the spirits of his audience (Académie française, 1798, p. 479). In 1832, qualitative differentiations were introduced instead; *émotion* could be lively, strong, and light. Sweet and tender *émotions* were mentioned. Hundred years later, in 1932, the entry was considerably
shorter. It retained the qualitative distinctions of *émotion*, the idea that *émotion* was expressed in speech, in the tone of voice, and mentioned the unflinching reaction to bad news, “He didn’t feel [ressentir] the least emotion at hearing this news” (Author translation from Académie française, 1932, p. 1:451).

**French Dictionary Entries for “Sentiment”**

The term *émotion* appealed to French psychophysiologists as a scientific term, because *émotion* was easier to disambiguate than sentiment (Dumas, 1895). A parallel reading of the entries for *émotion* and *sentiment* elucidates the epistemological stakes in the psychophysiological debate. The *International English and French Dictionary* (Smith & Hamilton, 1880) translated the English sentiment to opinion, thought, and also sensibility, “sentiment, opinion, avis.” The entry sentiment in *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1762) was comprehensive but I cannot paraphrase it here for lack of space. The description of *sentiment* in the *Dictionnaire critique de la langue française* (Féraud, 1787–1788), clearly stated the distinction between perceiving, feeling, and understanding that was still at stake in 19th-century debates on the nature of Gefühl, emotion. **Sentiment:**

1°. Sensation, Perception (Synon.) Ces mots désignent l’impression, que les objets font sur l’âme, mais le sentiment va au coeur, la sensation s’arrête aux sens, et la perception s’adresse à l’esprit. (Féraud, 1994, p. C551a)

*Sentiment*, like sensation and perception, designated “impressions that objects make on the soul,” but *sentiment* “goes to the heart, sensation stops at the senses, and perception addresses the mind.” The entry gave sensation and perception as synonyms for “sentiment.” The *Dictionnaire critique de la langue française* specified that (fr) *sentiment* was “more certain” than (fr) *opinion*, whereas thought (pensée) belonged to (fr) *conjecture*, assumption, and was less fixed and less ascertained. Riskin (2002) argued that in the 18th century, French scientists fused sensation and sentiment. In the 19th century, medical physiological and psychological research worked to establish the neuroanatomical and conceptual distinctions between emotion, sensation, and perception, Gefühl, Empfindung, and Wahrnehmung. The German psychophysiological literature discussed judgment as an essential feature of Gefühl.

Translations of German Gefühl to emotion in James’s work, as well as the English to French and French to English translations of the terms *émotion* and emotion, and of *sentiment* affected how emotion was conceived in the psychological literature at the turn of the 20th century. This can be seen particularly well in the works of the French psychophysicists Dumas (1895, 1900, 1923; James & Dumas, 1903); Binet (1894), and Ribot (1883, 1885, 1896a, 1896b, 1897, 1903), who all studied Wundt’s work. When Dumas (1895) translated Lange’s work and James’s article “What Is an Emotion” to French he used the term *émotion*, “Introduction à Lange, Les émotions. Étude psychophysiological,” and *La théorie de l’émotion* (James & Dumas, 1903). When Ribot (1896b) published *La Psychologie des sentiments*, it was translated as *The Psychology of the Emotions* (1897). However, Ribot deliberately used *sentiment* instead of *émotion*, which had been widely used during the 1890s in the debate about the nature of emotion that revolved around the James–Lange theory of emotion, in order to make a distinction between the more basic notion of *émotion*, and the more complex and intellectual sense of *sentiment*. In Germany, Ribot’s (1903) work was published as *Psychologie der Gefühle*.

**Conclusion**

The contemporary discussion on the concept of emotion lets psychologists engage in a debate de lana caprina rixari when proposing to replace “emotion” by “affect” or rather use “feeling.” The problem cannot be solved by “simply using terms like emotion, sentiment, or feeling, in their general senses” as Dixon suggested (T. Dixon, personal communication, June 6, 2013); nor by substituting “feeling” for emotion, as Damasio (2001) recommended, or “affect” for emotion as Feldman Barrett and Bliss-Moreau (2009) proposed. I am not arguing that the English use of emotion terms is poor. Rather, I try to point out that the word emotion has a very definite connotation in English, which is used in a self-evident manner by Anglophone scholars in psychology and other fields, and which does not correspond to the signification or meanings of the German term Gefühl, but which was nonetheless used to translate the term Gefühl and to discuss about the German scientific texts in English at the turn of the 20th century, most notably by William James and his American disciples.

Evidence for the convergence of languages in the scientific concept of emotion is also given by the fact that Wundt’s works were not translated to English but were nonetheless read by the French psychophysicologists and by the British scientists, who worked out fundamental principles of brain function such as Sherrington (1899–1900), and that informed scientific research agendas on emotion until the mid-20th century (Dumas, 1948). The authors who worked on the scientific conception of emotion, for instance, Mosso (1896, English translation [La Paura, 1884]), Wundt, Lange, Guiseppe Sergi, A. Wright, Lehmann, Binet, Dumas, Ribot, Charles Féré, François-Franck to name a few, were influenced by Kant’s philosophy and the neuroanatomical and physiological research that revised Bichat’s conception of the nervous system over the course of the 19th century. They referred to many authors, but not to the Scottish moral philosopher Thomas Brown, whom Dixon (2012) designated as the “inventor of the emotions” (p. 340).

Dixon held that the intellectual historian’s diagnosis provides the key to the definitional problem of emotion in contemporary psychology. Brown defined emotions as being indefinable. “Two hundred years later, we are still living with this legacy of Thomas Brown’s concept of ‘emotion’” (Dixon, 2012, p. 340). According to Dixon (2003), the “all-important distinction between troubling desires and passions” and “milder affections and sentiments” is at the heart of the matter (p. 109). While Dixon showed that Brown was important for the spread of the term emotion in English, it is less sure that the historical
diagnosis can solve the “definitional malaise” for psychology. The distinction between troubling passions and mild sentiments does not go to the heart of scientific psychology’s agenda at the time when the “concept of emotion” was forged.

As I attempted to show, the interdisciplinary field of emotion studies leaves out an entire body of texts that were not written in English but nonetheless formative in the creation of the scientific concept of emotion. The complexity of the epistemological discussion of Gefühl in 19th-century psychology is occluded by the focus on the English language. As we could see, the English term emotion has a more narrowly defined meaning than the German Gefühl, even though the terms were taken as equivalent in translation. The topic of emotion, Gefühl, emotion was debated internationally, and was fundamentally informed by German scientific psychology. The International Dictionary of Emotion (Smith & Hamilton, 1880) gave the German fühlen in brackets for the French translation (sentir) of the English term feel. The items listed in the entry, such as feelings of warm and cold, hunger and thirst, pleasure and pain, were the entities that physiological psychologists discussed when they debated Gefühl in the scientific literature. The questions raised ranged from sensation, touch, and perception, to feeling well, and to questions concerning apperception and conscious awareness (Wahrnehmung, Apperzeption and Bewusstsein in the German psychophysiological literature). Wundt addressed these questions beginning in Vorlesungen (1863), when he asked “Was ist das Gefühl?” James took this up in 1884, when asking “What is an emotion?” The German texts also discussed the feeling of self, the sense of self, and the distinction made by the brain between “I” and the environment during infant development. Furthermore, motivation, desire, and volition were included in the reflections about Gefühl; as was the relation between simple sense feelings (sinnliche Gefühle), more complex emotional composites (Gefühle or Affekte), and highly abstract intellectual emotions or sentiments (Wundt, 1874, 1902–1903). This set of meanings is not equivalent with the six “basic emotions” that are commonly associated with the term emotion in English today, referring to the classifications based on facial expressions provided by Darwin (1872) and Ekman (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). While the English term emotion and the French term émotion were used synonymously until the turn of the 20th century, these terms have become homonyms in the contemporary literature.

Concepts come into existence in through and across languages, the editors of the Dictionary of Untranslatables (Cassin, Rendall, & Apter, 2014) hold. The English translation of the entry for German Gefühl does not mention “emotion” as a translation for Gefühl (but only English: feeling, sensation, sentiment, opinion; and French: sentiment and sensation) and it glosses over the distinction made between Gefühl and Empfindung in German, because the editors felt that this was no longer a problem for philosophy. It was a central conceptual problem for psychologists though. The Dictionary of Untranslatables (Cassin et al., 2014) ends for the German emotion terms in the 18th century. The entry Gefühl draws on dictionaries by Adelung (1774–1786) and Eberhard (1795) and covers thinkers such as Kant, Christian Wolff, and Johann Nicolaus Tetens, but leaves invisible the continuation and transformation of their thought in the physiological psychology of the 19th century. The scientific concept of emotion was created in the confluence of Latin, French, English, and German. It is not properly understood, if taken solely as an English term. Translation is not just a matter of the past. It remains monnaie courant for the time being, even when it does not involve a translator (but maybe Google translate), it takes place in the mind and brain of the writer. Europeans are still raised in their native languages and cultures, and linguists rightly point to the limitations of English as a universal frame. The limitations show in the renewed debate on terminology, whether to use feelings, or emotion, or affect, and in the renewed attempt at conceptualizing “emotion” in more integrated and complex ways in psychological research. Therefore, it is timely to raise awareness for the German language texts and multilingual transformations that have informed the contemporary scientific vocabulary of emotion(s) in psychology.

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The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes
1 The German neurobiologist Hüther (2010) used this order in his numerous public lectures.
2 The Dictionary of Untranslatables (Cassin et al., 2014) explicitly erased the distinction Gefühl/Empfindung, which was still present in the French original (Cassin, 2004) and points right to the core of the problem (p. 355).
3 Lehmann (1892) still used “febril,” feverish, to describe an anxious state of mind.

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