Historical analysis of German words of emotion

Presenting the history of words in a semantic dictionary always means to choose one storyline from a bunch of possible storylines that open up as you delve into the sources, read through the material and evidence that someone else collected (possibly with yet another storyline in mind) and add further research that might eventually lead you in a completely different direction. As a lexicographer, you choose one path over the others in the end because reading through your results made you think it to be the most plausible one.

With words of emotion, this situation becomes a lot more apparent than with rather "clear", unambiguous words (if they do exist) as "dog" or "table" (the problems that go with these words are different). As a human experience, emotions are inherently complex, so one might expect a similar complexity in the words relating to them or describing them.[1] If you ever looked up "Liebe" (en. 'love') in any dictionary, you will know what that means. Needless to say, "Liebe" depicts the love between human beings - which is where the word already tries to lure you into a trap as loving your child or a friend is of course different from loving your husband. And that is where you might add 'affection including sexual lust' to your list as another meaning of "Liebe". This aspect then connects "Liebe" to the field of legal issues as marriage and parental care were where love would inevitably take anyone who engaged in physical love some hundred years ago. The latter can of course never be the same as love in a religious sense: the Bible's texts aside, poets of all kind have written about God's love towards man and vice versa throughout the centuries (see, for example, the sources for the entry "Liebe" in Grimm's Deutsches Wörterbuch). And, as many words do, "Liebe" presents us with an aspect that seems to be isolated from the rest: according to the Deutsches Rechtswörterbuch (en. German Dictionary of Law), "Liebe" is also a fee charged for "Kennis", which is 'the right or competence to know of a legal case and decide on it'.[2] Finally, the lemma entry in Goethe's dictionary lists a "general phenomenon in life and a transcendent/transcending force"[3]. One of today's most common German dictionaries, the Duden, includes the meanings of "Liebe" as mentioned above: parental affection, friendship, and Eros.

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[1] Jäger and Plum state that mere analytical definitions do not suffice to describe the meaning of most words, words of emotion included. See Jäger, L./ Plum, S. (1989), p. 851.
[2] See entry "Liebe": http://drw-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/drw/
Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.
[3] "A 1 *allgemein als Lebensphänomen u transzendente/transzendierende Macht*". See entry in Goethe's dictionary: http://woerterbuchnetz.de/GWB/.

This example shows one of the core features of words of emotion: they are manifold in meaning and must therefore be depicted clearly and carefully. This applies to any kind of lexicographic description, of course, but should be mentioned here as the field of "emotions" has been set as the starting point for the creation of a European dictionary within the ENeL Working Group 4. Involving several European languages in this project is a challenging task as the question of *transfer* will be an ever-prevailing issue. In this case, "transfer" means more than a mere translation of words: precision, accuracy and awareness (e.g. of cultural contexts of both individual languages and domains within these languages) will be the necessary tools to handle a task involving lexis, etymology, meaning and contexts.

Complementary to the short analysis of "Liebe", here are a few examples of German words of emotion and their history:

Dictionary	**Lemma**				
	Angst *f.*	**tapfer *adj.***	**frech *adj.***	**empfinden *vb.***	**fühlen *vb.***
Gasterstädt (dict. of Old High German)	1) emotional distress, fear, sorrow 2) bodily distress 3) anxiety	heavy, serious (Schützeichel, Glossen-wortschatz)	1) greedy 2) daringly	1) to perceive something, feel (by touching etc.) a) physically b) psychic 2) to undergo something 3) to suffer 4) to feel for sb. 5) to suffer from 6) to feel oneself 7) [word in glosses]	1) to touch something 2) to feel (emotionally), to experience something
Gärtner/ Grubmüller/ Stackmann (dict. of Middle High German)	1) emotional distress, worry 2) one's own risk *(legally)* 3) chiming of bells in remembrance of the Passion of Christ	strong, heavy, serious, daringly (Benecke, Müller, Zarncke)	daringly, perky (Benecke, Müller, Zarncke)	to perceive, apprehend, feel	to perceive (senses)
Reichmann (dict. of Early New High German)	1) danger, emergency 2) psychic state of anxiety 3) warfare 4) chiming of bells in remembrance of the Passion of Christ 5) risk	[not yet published]	[not yet published]	[not yet published]	[not yet published]
Adelung (1793/1811)	distress; high level of anxiety	1) + 2) ready to overcome	1) strong *(archaic)*	1. to be aware of something	I. to try to become aware

	and sorrow	obstacles or danger 3) strong in body	2) daringly, brave 3) audacious	2. in a narrower sense 1) to feel tender affection 2) to feel sth. unpleasant 3) to resent	of sth. by touching II. to try to become aware of sth. by drawing on one's emotions 1. [examples, e.g. feel one's heart beat] 2. feel one's body 3. fig. 1) feel emotions 2) feel oneself (traits)
[1]DWB (ca. 1860)	fear, anxiety	1) strong (in glosses) 2) strong, important, heavy, serious (a): things, b): persons) 3) strong, fearless	1) greedy (for money) 2 a) + b) audacious, daringly, perky (also in a negative way)	to feel (on a mental or intellectual level – as opposed to "fühlen", which means to feel on an emotional level)	[only as "praet."; the meaning is described in the entry on "empfinden"]
Wörterbuch der Deutschen Gegenwartssprache ("WDG"; New High German, 1964)	anxiety	1) brave, daringly 2) proper (colloquial)	a little disrespectful, rakishly	to feel, to be emotional	1. to perceive bodily 2. to inspect by touching 3. to perceive emotions
[6]Duden Universalwörterbuch (New High German, 2006)	distress	1) fearless a) facing danger without fear b) composedly, restrained 2) proper (colloquial)	a)[4] impudent b) perky, bold (impudent in a charming way)	a)[5] to perceive (senses) b) to notice emotions c) to touch	1) to perceive by the senses or by touching 2) to feel emotionally 3) search by touching 4) to be aware of one's bodily/ emotional situation
Deutsches Rechtswörterbuch (German dictionary of law, 1984-)	risk, danger; harm	[to be published]	bold	I) to notice II) to enjoy III) III 1) to steal; to rob sb. III 2) to wrangle sth. from sb. III 3) to deprive sb. of sth. (based on a legal judgement) IV) to outcast sb.	[not included]

[4] Duden does not have a superordinate level here.
[5] See footnote 3.

Jäger and Plum posed the question whether emotions are independent from the people experiencing them (and then from history and cultural eras), or if they are subject to humans as individuals. Both structures would result in different kinds of dictionaries: one focusing on general descriptions and one pointing out emotions' connections to history and cultural backgrounds.[6] This question addresses the practice of definition. In terms of a European dictionary that starts with the semantic field of emotions, we thus should keep in mind that describing emotions lexicographically could lead in more than one direction. Therefore, it might be necessary to find and define such a direction or concept that is applicable to all languages participating in this project.

As a European dictionary should be accessible and understandable for anybody, the issue discussed in the former paragraph inevitably leads us to further questions: how can words of emotion be adequately translated in such a dictionary? Do the languages have similar nuances in terms of emotions? And if not, how can the differences be described in a way that speakers of other languages can understand? Just think of one popular example of language differences, the more than 40 words Inuits have for "snow". Wierzbicka discusses this exact problem and postulates: "If we want to posit universal human emotions we must identify them in terms of a language-independent semantic metalanguage […]."[7] You can easily find out from the table above how difficult this is: it contains my translations of entries in German dictionaries and they seem plausible to me. But do they to a native speaker of English, French, or Portuguese? It is a paradox: if emotions are, as Wierzbicka indicates, communal phenomena of human life, language seems the obstacle we have to overcome – though it is yet our only tool – when writing a dictionary that includes emotions.

Sources

Jäger, Ludwig; Plum, Sabine (1989): Probleme der Beschreibung von Gefühlswörtern im allgemeinen einsprachigen Wörterbuch. In: Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft = Handbooks of linguistics and communication science. Ed. Armin Burkhardt. Bd. 5,1: Wörterbücher: ein internationales Handbuch zur Lexikographie = Dictionaries. ed. Franz Josef Hausmann. Berlin. p. 849-853.

Wierzbicka, Anna (1992): Semantics, culture, and cognition: universal human concepts in culture-specific configurations. New York.

[6] See Jäger/Plum 853.
[7] Wierzbicka 120.