

About Emotions: Amberwind's Perspective

Terminology Note

I'm going to eschew the labels "positive" and "negative" for emotional states; these terms seem to be loaded with judgment on those experiencing second-declension-type emotions. I'm going to use "happy" and "unhappy" instead.

Emotions in Láadan

Suzette created Láadan when she was at the height of her powers. She acknowledged, some years later, that some of the "bells and whistles" that she included (like the "syllabic n") were just showing off and she regretted including them. Some few other things I perceive as too English-influenced (like "**widahuth**" (**why**))—which corresponds to an English word but departs quite fundamentally from the Láadan case structure I perceive it ought to reflect).

While not really declensions in any sense recognizable to students of declined natural languages, the first and second declensions for emotions are not in that category at all; they're key to the emotional sapience at the core of Láadan, and they delight me! As I said, Suzette was at the height of her powers; if, as has been propounded on occasion, one extended emotion declension-set (that included all the aspects of the first and second declensions) were what she was after, that's what we would have today. And the fact that we have so little direct-from-the-source information about them may very well derive from the fact that we who are in the second generation to work with Láadan came on the scene much later (in fact—at least in my case—long after she'd already declared the Láadan experiment a failure and moved on). Nevertheless, the only construction I can derive from what we *do* have is the following:

First Declension

These forms all are "happy" emotions, and the only meta-information we're providing relates to the quality of the *reason* for the emotion. It is one of the following:

- Good reason(s)
- Foolish reason(s)
- Bad reason(s)
- No reason at all
- Despite negative circumstance(s)

It has been argued quite correctly that the English phrases "good reason(s)" and "bad reason(s)" are ambiguous, and that this ambiguity is problematic.

I understand "good" to mean "positive," "harmonious," "contributing to the common weal," etc.

Eg: **I'm happy because X won the lottery.** (X can be "**I**"; "**you**"; "**she**"; "**my cousin**"; anybody, really.)

I understand "bad" to mean "negative," "disharmonious," "damaging to the common weal," etc.

Eg: **I'm happy because my foe fell down the stairs.**

To complete the set:

I understand "foolish reason(s)" to run the gamut...

...from just silly...

Eg: **I'm happy because we're trying on clothes we'll never be able to afford, and we're in hysterics, and the poor saleslady knows what's going on, but it's a slow day, so she's humoring us.**

...to truly unwise.

Eg: **I'm *happy* because I'm in *love*; I know he's *wrong* for me, but I *love* him, and being *with* him just makes me so *happy*!**

I understand “no reason” to mean, essentially, that the person isn’t willing to look at why she’s experiencing this happy emotion; it’s enough that it’s present.

Eg: **I don’t know what has made me so happy, but I’m going with it; self-examination is overrated when I’m this happy!**

The “despite negative circumstance(s)” declension is, for me, the dead giveaway that this declension was intended to convey information about “happy” emotions. An “unhappy” emotion might be *because* of a negative circumstance, but only a “happy” emotion can possibly be *despite* it.

Eg: **I know we’re so poor we’re food-insecure, and the rent and the utilities are always overdue, but we’re all together, and that makes me happy!**

Second Declension

Where the First Declension addresses only one aspect of the emotion, the “reason” for the emotion, the Second Declension addresses three distinct aspects: whether the cause of the emotion is internal or external; whether there is someone to blame for the situation giving rise to the emotion; and whether the situation can be remedied.

The fact that “remedy” is under discussion is strong evidence that the second declension is meant to describe “unhappy” emotions; I don’t know anyone who would want to “remedy” a “happy” emotion....

The fact that “blame” is under discussion is more evidence that we’re discussing “unhappy” emotions. I know of no one who’d try to “blame” another for a happy emotion—except, as has been pointed out in years-long discussions around these declensions, in jest.

That jesting would begin with “**Bíida...**” [**bíi** (Type-of-Sentence: declarative) + **-da** (Mood suffix: jest)] (**I say in jest**) and might very well include the word “**nínálh**” (the one to blame) [**nin** (to cause) + **-á** (DOER) + **-lh** (PEJ)]; it would not, grammatically (non-grammatical language in Láadan is, as yet, terra incognita), include a word such as “**thara**,” “**thena**” just doesn’t take that declension.

The forms the Second Declension *does* take are:

External Cause

Blame

- Remedy
- No Remedy

No Blame

- Remedy
- No Remedy

Internal Cause—Blame Impossible

- Remedy
- No Remedy

Opposites

I take as axiomatic that the opposite of a “happy” emotion is an “unhappy” emotion—and, vice versa, that the opposite of an “unhappy” emotion is a “happy” emotion. Given that, I would strongly advocate that any opposite of a First Declension word would be cast as a Second Declension word, and vice versa.

Before Suzette Haden Elgin died, several opposites of First Declension nouns were created, also cast in the First Declension. The second generation working with Láadan took the decision to recast these words in the Second Declension. We hope that Láadan will one day go out into the world and become a living language; we owe it to the future speakers of Láadan to craft a language that is as free of preventable error as possible—especially with regard to this essentially Láadan emotional sapience.