

BOOK REVIEW

Tim Wharton & Louis de Saussure, *Pragmatics and Emotion*.

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Both language and emotions are ubiquitous to human experience, yet the latter is seldomly considered relevant in studies of the former. In *Pragmatics and Emotion*, Tim Wharton and Louis de Saussure make a plea to linguists everywhere to take the role of emotions in human communication and thus linguistic (*vis-à-vis* pragmatic) analysis more seriously.

In Chapter 1 “Introduction”, Wharton and de Saussure illustrate the tendency in linguistic pragmatics to focus on utterance interpretation related to propositional content, which is divorced from emotions. This is due, they claim, to the Western binary reinforcing rational thought over emotions. Their thesis is “that emotional or expressive meaning, along with other affect-related, ineffable dimensions of communication, play such a huge role in human interaction that any pragmatic theory worth its salt *must* account for them” (3). They draw a distinction between two types of content in communication: precise, propositional content vs. the imprecise or “descriptively ineffable” (4) content of emotion. The authors settle on a “clock vs. cloud” metaphor to illustrate this, with propositional content (the clocks) being systematically describable and mechanically reduceable and emotions (the clouds) being nebulous (!) and ever changing, difficult to pin down with the precision afforded to clocks. An overview of their study follows.

Chapter 2 highlights “Pragmatics and Emotion: The Challenges”, in which the authors lay out the challenge facing a pragmatic account of emotions. They first explore the difference between description and expression: there is a fundamental difference between *I’m in pain* (descriptive) and *ouch!* (expressive). Wharton and de Saussure argue against the position that these are just synonymous with one another, and that the latter simply cannot be reduced to the propositional status of the former. Next, the connection between propositions and ineffability is explored. In an historical survey of Western (language) philosophy, the authors highlight the propensity to focus on propositional content with little regard to the affective or expressive capabilities of language. They conclude the chapter with a discussion of their orientation to Pragmatics – with a nod to Chomskyan cognitivism, and one of its offshoots, Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson 1995).



The authors occupy themselves with the question “What is Emotion?” in Chapter 3, and how exactly is this term understood in the first place? They draw on the history of Western philosophy from Aristotle through Hume, then turn to the contributions of evolutionary biologists like Charles Darwin and William James. Then a survey of affective science, particularly evolutionary psychology, is provided. Wharton and de Saussure also argue against social constructionist views of emotion: they claim the actual experience of an emotion, similar to colour, is universal and that linguistic labels reflect differences of a more superficial nature. Appraisal Theory (see, for example, Ellsworth 2013) is then given some attention; emotional episodes are triggered by stimuli, and the authors note this connection to the notion of “relevance” across various theories.

Wharton and de Saussure trace the route “From Proto-Pragmatics to Pragmatics” in Chapter 4. They explore the history of pragmatics, particularly the (often neglected) domain of affect, as a branch of linguistic enquiry, from ancient times through the Enlightenment. With expressive meaning, the early potential of well-known figures like Saussure and Bréal to lesser-known figures like Charles Bally and his theory of *parole* (which consists of abstract ideas and affect) is discussed at length. Then the evolution of speech-act theory from John Austin to John Searle is given some attention. The authors commend the great advancements from logical positivism, but note there is still no adequate account of how emotion forms part of a pragmatic theory, rather than something that is merely parallel or orthogonal to it.

In Chapter 5, “Relevance Theory, Non-propositional Content and Ineffability”, the authors survey the development of Gricean pragmatics, the co-operative principle, and of course, the maxim of relation. The role of implicature is discussed. Then the authors proceed to the development of Sperber and Wilson’s cognitivist account of relevance (and that implicature is involved even in purportedly explicit propositions); conceptual vs. procedural meaning (natural vs. non-natural in Gricean terms) is also given due attention. There is a further focus on non-propositional content, particularly the showing-meaning continuum orthogonal to determinate and indeterminate meaning. The authors argue that communicative, linguistic statements are actually *less* determinate than, i.e. gestures that directly ‘show’ emotions; hence the latter must be accounted for in a serious theory of pragmatics. Wharton and de Saussure compare and contrast Relevance Theory with Appraisal Theory, and conclude they are in fact not in opposition but actually mutually compatible. For example, emotional stimuli (affectively relevant) can have effects on cognitive mechanisms (like attention and memory), which are pragmatically relevant.

Chapter 6 moves “Beyond Propositions”. It includes a discussion of “affective effects”, both in terms of how emotional input can precede and influence con-

ceptual (cognitive) thought, which is primary, as well as follow on from it (secondary). This is integrated into the model of Relevance Theory. The authors then explore readers and the reading process, and they show how literature produces affective effects through stylistic devices such as focalisation, free indirect speech and metaphor. They conclude the chapter with a section on how affective effects influence persuasive rhetoric, noting how such effects sometimes override pure propositional or conceptual content.

Wharton and de Saussure explore the connection between “Emotion and Evolution” in Chapter 7. They postulate the role of affective relevance in the evolution of language, following Grice’s 1975 thought experiment in evolutionary psychology. They trace cognitive development from simple sensory organisms such as sea sponges to more complex organisms like lizards to early hominoids and the beginnings of meta-representational thought (*want x > I know that I want x*). The authors highlight the role of relevance and how emotions played a substantial role in the evolutionary game by allowing organisms to isolate functionally salient features of the environment.

The authors conclude with Chapter 8, “Pragmatics and Emotion: The Challenges Revisited”, in which they provide a brief summary of the arguments they’ve put forward – the contrast between description and expression, and the necessity of pragmatics accounting for both. A review of extra – or non-propositional meaning is provided, and they illustrate how they have augmented Relevance Theory to account for affect.

Wharton and de Saussure’s *Pragmatics and Emotions* is a stimulating read and provides much food for thought. They convincingly argue the centrality of emotions to human experience and to language usage, despite perennial neglect throughout the history of Western philosophy. Their modifications of Relevance Theory are no doubt a welcome contribution to the field, and this book will be of interest not only to those working in linguistic pragmatics, but also those with an interest in the philosophy of language, evolutionary psychology, and the cognitive sciences more broadly.

At the same time, I am not fully convinced that emotions have been ignored or overlooked by linguists to the degree that Wharton and de Saussure argue. In their discussion of the affective power of literary language (in Chapters 1 and 6), for example, the authors overlooked the contributions of scholars like Stockwell (2009) who have provided extensive accounts of the role emotions play in the reading of literature. And I was also surprised the authors did not devote any attention to affective stance expressions in their discussion (see Kaltenböck et al. 2020 for a good overview). Such expressions (as in *Amazingly Kate was able to finish the proposal by the deadline*) sit somewhere between the propositional (*I am amazed*) and expressive (*Wow!*) uses discussed by Wharton and de Saussure,





yet they are unaccounted for here. These oversights inadvertently reinforce the rigid Western binary of reason vs. emotion the authors so rightfully wish to leave behind. Admittedly, Stockwell's work on cognitive poetics is more in the spirit of second-wave cognitivism (Lakoff, Langacker, Fauconnier, Talmy) rather than the first-wave Chomskyan cognitivism preferred by the authors, and stance expressions tend to be explored more in the realm of sociopragmatics and applied linguistics rather than in the theoretical schools in which Wharton and de Saussure are working.

But Wharton and de Saussure are far from claiming the last word with their *Pragmatics and Emotion*, which is just as much a call for future explorations of the role of emotions in linguistic pragmatics as it is a theoretical account of emotions. The authors have done well in augmenting Relevance Theory to account for emotions, and their work certainly opens up new lines of inquiry. It will be exciting to see what comes of this, or in the spirit of the authors, perhaps I should conclude with something more expressive – *hooray!*

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