

ISSA Proceedings 1998 - Language, Words And Expressive Speech Acts



This essay is in three parts; each subsequent part shorter than the previous. In the first I discuss the *Principle of Pragmatic Emotionalization*, (Gilbert, 1997a) and the role of emotion in argumentation. The specific issue concerns the role of emotional messages in argument. This is used as a foundation for the second part where I will describe the role of expressive speech acts, or, as I will call them, emotional message acts, in everyday argumentation. Finally, I say a very few words regarding the question as to whether or not we are doing Argumentation Theory or Psychology in studying emotional argumentation.

To begin with, I must reiterate that the role of emotion is significant and can be crucial to both the comprehension of a position and the resolution or settlement of an argument. I have argued these points at length elsewhere, and rather than repeat myself in the limited time available, in this discussion I shall simply assume the following. Emotions invariably enter into argumentation (Gilbert, 1996). Emotional interaction can be observed and structured as informational cues (Gilbert, 1995, 1997).

(3) Arguments can have emotional data, warrants or claims (ibid.).

1. *The Principle of Pragmatic Emotionalization*

The *Principle of Pragmatic Emotionalization* [PPE] is a cornerstone in interpreting the role that emotion plays in argumentation.

The principle relies on a discord or inconsistency between the words being uttered and the message being communicated. Put another way, when emotion and logic are in agreement, there is no difficulty; we know how to deal with such situations. Emotion plays the role we expect it to, communicating information about our internal states, feelings, beliefs and desires. However, in other circumstances, our communicative tools tell us that there is something wrong, a discordance. In these interactions the principle plays an important role. The principle is as follows.

The Principle of Pragmatic Emotionalization:

Given that a communicator is presenting an emotional message that is inconsistent with the logical message, then the recipient may assume that

1. the logical message may not be reliable, and/or
2. the complete message may be compound, and/or
3. the goals of the communicator may have been misidentified, and/or
4. the communicator's position may not have been fully exposed.

In short, the PPE gives us license to assume that an emotional factor that has not been made explicit is a significant component of the argument. In that case, one must turn to non-logical techniques relying upon the tools human communicators normally use when interacting. Emotion can enter an argument in two different ways. First, it can be open, straightforward and consistent with the discursive messages presented. I want to call this "open emotion." Open emotion is present when it is itself the topic of discussion, or when it is consistent with the topic of discussion. Thus, if I am having an argument with my wife and the issue is one of emotional significance to both of us and, as a result, emotions begin to become evident, there is no surprise or confusion. Similarly, if, as part of my argument I am relating the trials suffered by refugees and my voice shows emotion, then there is no puzzlement as to why it is there. Indeed, one may well be surprised when someone ought be expressing emotion and is not. Open emotion is present all the time, most especially in non-academic or non-clinical arguments (Gilbert, 1995.)

Emotional messages convey information that is often vital to understanding an opposer's position. Emotional messages tell us, for example, whether or not to believe someone's statement. Someone, for example, apologizing in a flat toneless voice will, typically, not be thought sincere. Emotional messages also indicate an individual's degree of commitment by demonstrating how strongly they feel about the position at issue. Certainly, one can be wrong. You might think that Trudy is upset about something when really she is upset, but not about what you think she is upset about. Similarly, Ralph might care very much about the topic of your disagreement, but not be someone who shows emotion. But while this might be thought to be a difficulty peculiar to emotional argumentation, in reality the same pitfalls lie in wait for discursive communication. We frequently interpret someone's words wrongly, misunderstand their message, or mis-ascribe beliefs. The realm of logical language is as vague and imprecise as is the language of emotions.

A classical speech act contains four parts: the utterance act, the propositional act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act. In van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1984: 21) *Speech Acts in Argumentative Discussions*, illocutionary acts have, following Searle (1969), list four kinds of conditions for speech acts. These are

1. preparatory conditions;
2. propositional conditions;
3. sincerity conditions;
4. essential conditions. They are separately necessary and conjointly sufficient to delineate a communicative action.

If we think about emotional expression as a speech act then it can be quite confusing. After all, the whole idea of emotionality is that it is beyond or, if preferred, behind the words (if, indeed, there are words at all.) So, it is better not to think of emotional expressions as forming speech acts, but rather as involving *message acts*. The key difference between a speech act and a message act is that the latter de-emphasizes the verbal. Rather than putting the linguistic in the forefront as the primary carrier of information, the message act views communication as a package of information drawing on various forms of communication and as many modes as required. Indeed, being realistic about language and communication quickly leads one to the conclusion that words are merely a small part of the communication process. Yet, for some reason, words are glorified to the extent that other forms of communication are relegated to peripheral roles.

Van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1984:22) state: "... we believe we may ... say that the understandability of illocutionary acts in colloquial speech depends strongly on *pragmatic* conventions. One indication is that *implicit* and *indirect* illocutionary acts are as a rule understood perfectly and the speaker can also assume in principle that they will be understood, so that it is plausible that other conventions besides strictly semantic ones will (also) play a role." In other words, there's no real argument but that a good deal of communication, even speech acts, takes place "implicitly" or "indirectly", i.e., without words. So, words are not required for communication.

What then is the relationship between words and language? I have no difficulty at all in conceptualizing language as containing words as one communicative tool, but since we know that words alone are imprecise and underdetermine meanings, other clues are required. This is important: Nondiscursive communications are required in order to clarify discursive communication. Words alone tell us

nothing, or, mislead us as to the intended message. (See Willard, 1989:91-111.) Out of context, in isolation, removed from innuendo, action, nuance, tone, insight, history, and interaction words require great precision to communicate clearly. The most carefully wrought legal decisions, the most precisely worded academic tracts are subject to misinterpretation, heated dispute as to meanings, involved analyses, and even, today, deconstruction. A position's being put into words is hardly a guarantee that it will be clear and unambiguous. Meanings are not manifest.

Expressive speech acts are, at the very least, the handmaiden of meaning. When genuine, (a requirement for any speech act,) they can clarify, amplify, and precise the intended message. Is a particular sequence of words to be taken as a threat? Or a warning? Or a description? This may depend on the degree of anger evinced in an associated expressive speech act occurring concurrently with the illocutionary speech act. Alternatively, as in an argumentation, we might want to say that a given speech act can be viewed or re-interpreted through the various modes. This would mean that a proposition expressed by a speech act would itself not be understood linguistically, but be re-interpreted as a message with manifold aspects. Indeed, we pay lip service to the idea that propositions are not invisible sentences, but when the chips are down they are always treated that way.

The desire among rationalists, or, as I prefer, neo-logicians, to embrace precision and vainly seek the rules and procedures that will render arguments clear and unambiguous icons of reason is understandable. Virtually every Argumentation Theorist is in the field because she believes that the study of argumentation, its advancement and propagation will lead to a better, less violent world. Animals fight over territory, slay each other, and behave in brutish non-rational fashion, or so it is thought and so the entire history of Western philosophy leads one to believe. And the crucial difference between ourselves and The Animals is that we have language, or, more accurately in some instances, a finer and richer language. We think, speculate, form hypotheses, create theories, and otherwise use our mental talents for amusement and diversion. Animals do not do this. They do not have competing theories of the creation of the world, they do not argue interminably over the legitimacy of mind-body dualism, they do not even play Scrabble. So, if we are going to be "better" or "higher" than our animal cousins, we must rely on that talent we have that they do not: I.e., the ability to use a word processor (I know that anthropologically adept listeners will have tales of apes and chimps that can read and write. I would mention them myself, but I am

concerned not to alarm our confreres).

You will say that I am being facetious, and you may be right, but only partly so. We know that animals have emotions, desires, and feelings. I can tell when my dog, Bojay, is happy, excited, aroused, angry, or content. As a result of being able to read his desires I can say that I have, at least once, had an argument with him. That is, we each wanted to do different things, and I, ultimately, yielded to his greater want. Neo-logicians do not want to allow that we can argue with animals. I do not pretend to understand why, but it seems to loom large in their thinking. It has something to do with the notion of 'rational,' a predicate that is intended as an honorific for styles of communication not available to the lower species. Emotions will not serve as a species differentiator: We can freely acknowledge that animals have feelings, i.e., we see animals interacting with each other on nature programmes, exhibiting anger, affection, amusement, and so on in ways that we recognize. They seem to communicate, to send messages, to conduct exchanges, in ways that are recognizable to us. Sometimes it is as if they are a parody of our own emotional interactions. When apes beat their chests, approach and flee and clash and combat, we can feel the underlying similarity to schoolyard posturing, the barroom brawl, corporate fencing, and, dare I say it, the odd academic symposium.

The neo-logician finds this unacceptable not because he does not like animals or thinks they never show traits that are worthwhile, indeed I am sure many are vegetarians. Rather, it is because of the high standards he holds for humans. We must always have reasons, and the reasons we have must be articulated, defended, and laid out in such a way as to persuade any other human who is capable of entertaining and understanding the hypotheses and defenses put forward. We are not persuaded by sentiment, raw feeling, pre-dispositions, or other non-rational aspects of the human messaging system. We, the neo-logician would have us believe, are never persuaded, but only convinced. We sift through data, examine warrants, and determine carefully how these are applied to the presented claims. We are disinterested, we are objective, we hear the arguments presented and weigh them carefully to see how they tell against the positions we hold.

All of this, of course, is nonsense.

2. *Expressive Message Acts*

The classical speech act has four key components. These are the *utterance act*,

the *propositional act*, the *illocutionary act*, and the *perlocutionary act* (Eemeren, 1984:19). Mapping this onto the emotion story, we can discuss the *message act*, the *information act*, the *illocutionary act*, and the *perlocutionary act*. That is, given the considerations above, the first two categories must be broadened, while the latter two can retain their original terminology. Just to confuse things, and in the tradition of Austin, I will also use *emotional message act* to indicate the entire activity analogous to the speech act.

A message act, being analogous to an utterance act involves an expression of emotion that is identifiable to the recipient or observer. There are many emotions, and we are typically adept at identifying them. Sillince (1994), for example, identifies 40 ranging from anger to boredom. Certainly, emotional acuity varies widely within the population and is, as well, culturally relative (In most cultures, for example, women are more adept at identifying emotions than are men). But the message act in most situations can be recognized, and, importantly, its appropriateness can also be identified.

This is important because it means that the *Principle of Pragmatic Emotionalization* can come into play and signal situations where the normal situation is being skewed. To this extent, the PPE can be considered analogous to Grice's *Principle of Cooperation* in the sense that when things seem incorrect, a different interpretation must be sought.

The emotional message act is the actual demonstration of emotional content itself. It communicates to the audience that a specific emotion is present in the actor. The emotional information act, on the other hand, is the communicative assertion that some causal relationship exists between the expression of emotion and the issue at hand. The information can be of several types. For example, it might be that the issue is emotionally charged for me, or that you are making me angry, or that I am frustrated, or that I am alarmed, or that you are in danger, and so on. On the linguistic side, the information act corresponds to the propositional act wherein a particular predication takes place. There is a predication taking place in the message act as well. A protagonist is communicating the information that there is a certain relationship between the presence of an emotion as exhibited in the message act and the interaction taking place. These predications take the general form:

S is experiencing emotion E as a result of I.

As with straightforward verbal communication, the context must be relied upon to fill in the blanks. This includes the kind of emotion and what it is a result of.

The next aspect is the illocutionary act, and that is the action that is performed in doing the communicative episode. That is, it is the force of the experience taken as a communicative event. In the classic example of promising, one “makes a promise” by uttering a variety of words under certain identifiable circumstances. Similarly, the expression of emotion under circumstances recognizable by most humans also performs a complex action beyond the mere presence of the emotion itself. These include the following.

S makes an accusation

S makes a threat

S makes an appeal

S gives a warning

S intimidates T

S cajoles T

S appeals to T

S threatens T

S blames T

S frightens T

S accuses T

S alienates T

S condescends to T

S bores T

S pacifies T

Each of these actions can occur linguistically or nondiscursively. More importantly, the emotional act can occur at the same time that a linguistic act is occurring. That is, S might be performing the speech act of making a proposal while at the same time performing the emotional message act of making a threat. Indeed, each also has its corresponding perlocutionary act, as in causing fright, alarm, tenderness, and so on. The intended perlocutionary effect of the emotional message act may well be much more important to the dynamics of a given argumentation than the actual linguistic facade. Such situations occur, for example, when someone is speaking kind words, but the emotional message act is much harder, perhaps even threatening.

In sum, the emotional message act carries a significant weight in argumentation, especially if we desire to understand the positions of the players, their goals, desires and needs. By dismissing expressive speech acts and not exploring them we miss a great part of actual argumentation, which, in turn, means it escapes

our observation and regulation. Simply stating that emotion play no role in argumentation is not only wrong, but shortsighted. It is shortsighted not only because those who believe in the importance and efficacy of emotional expression are dismissed (Campbell, 1994), but because far too much of what happens in the very human process that is argumentation occurs on the emotional level.

3. Why Is This Argumentation Theory Rather Than Psychology?

The third aspect of this inquiry is to ask the question regularly asked of me, “Why is this Argumentation Theory rather than Psychology?” First, I have to express my puzzlement at the very asking of the question. Presumably, there is some demarcation between subjects that the discipline police feel is sufficiently clear so as to be able to patrol. But even leaving that issue aside, the question is still puzzling. It is puzzling because it seems obvious to me that Argumentation Theory must have to do with psychology. After all, argument involves emotions, attitudes and desires, and those are foursquare within the psychological arena. Perhaps, then, the real issue is that the questions are psychological rather than philosophical, and this may well be the case (provided, of course, that we give the discipline police their due). But the answer to that must be, I am an Argumentation Theorist as well as a philosopher, and an Argumentation Theorist must go where the argument goes.

The fear takes us back to the discussion in section (1) about the concerns of the neo-logicians, as well as other matters (for example pedagogical issues (Gilbert, 1995a.)) That is, if Argumentation Theory is going to be a careful and controlled discipline then it is infinitely easier for it to pay attention to the external, the quantifiable, and the public. As soon as we permit the fuzzy, the implicit, the hard to isolate and point at in our borders, then the kind of precision the neo-logician wants goes by the board. The Holy Grail of the Informal Logician, the Pragma-Dialectician, is the sort of argument that follows careful rules, keeps everything on the table, open and public. It is the goal of “settlement” which, according to Pragma-Dialectics occurs when there is a critical discussion in which no one is attached to the outcome. Maybe there is such a thing; I have never found one.

So, my answer is that emotion plays a significant role in argumentation, regardless if one is using “settlement” or “resolution” as the ideal framework. As a result, obstacles to a successful conclusion of an argument can arise if rules for the proper and improper utilization of emotional argument are not clearly identified. It is quite possible that psychological insights are and will be required in order to properly dissect and analyze the forms of argument used in the

emotional mode, and, to that extent, psychology is part of Argumentation Theory. So, the final answer is that the study of the emotional mode in argumentation is Argumentation Theory because, once one accepts that emotions are an integral component of argument, their study deals directly with how one ought conduct oneself in an ideal argument.

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