

James M. Wilce:

*Language and Emotion*

(Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language, 25)

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*Language and Emotion* by James M. Wilce is ostensibly a work that addresses issues in linguistic anthropology, a discussion of 100 ethnographic case studies designed, as the title indicates, to characterize the relationship between language and emotion. The work succeeds in that objective and, in fact, does much more, delving into rhetoric, literacy, embodiment, and identification, among other issues. Given this wide berth, *Language and Emotion* is a fascinating resource for scholars of rhetoric, broadly construed.

The monograph contains four parts (“Theory”; “Language, Power, and Honor”; “Identification and Identity”; “Histories of Language and Emotion”) with 12 chapters in all. The Introduction (pp. 1-15) offers a context and rationale, some definitions, and the overall argument. As Wilce explains, what began as an investigation into Shia Muslim laments became a study of “feelingful language” (p. 1), or language and emotion understood as inseparable from each other or their originating culture. As part of his redirected focus, he takes on the scholarly separation of language and emotion, which allows him “to capture the constant and significant shifts in the way we enact or perform emotion with words, in different contexts, across different historical eras – not to mention across cultural boundaries” (p. 3). To illustrate these themes, Wilce uses enhanced ethnography, that is, ethnography that incorporates history (pp. 3, 10), reflexivity, and performance (as a process of identification involving sensibilities) (pp. 3-4). Thus armed, Wilce moves beyond Cartesian ideologies (p. 3) and dichotomies (pp. 7-8), demonstrating how facts shape discourse to audience expectations; how intersubjective language and emotion are on social, personal, and local levels; and how important global, political economies, and ideologies are to language uses (p. 3).

Part I, Chapter 1, “Defining the Domain” (pp. 19-38), begins by breaking down the Cartesian mind-body divide. While language involves media, cultures, and forms (writing and gestures), for Wilce it is above all about social actions defined as human interaction and agency (p. 22). To locate the issue of emotion within this definition of language, Wilce offers a history of the anthropological treatment of emotion since the 1970s; this survey uncovers the importance of ethnography to understanding the complex connections between language, socialization, and emotion. To support his discussion, Wilce turns to a plurality of resources. As neuroscientist Antonio Damasio has shown, emotions are a vital and distributed element of human cognition (pp. 28-31). Others have demonstrated the importance of emotion to child development (pp. 32-33), to sociality and social interaction (pp. 33-34), and to embodiment (pp. 34-35). With this support, Wilce can pronounce the Cartesian split dead (pp. 35-36). Emotion cannot be contained in a single domain but belongs to several: the affective, the social, and the evolutionary/motivational.

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Having defined language and emotion, in Chapter 2, “The Relationship of Language and Emotion” (pp. 39-54), Wilce asks, “where shall we locate emotion [...] vis-à-vis language?” (p. 39). To respond, he examines words (pp. 40-41); metaphor (p. 41); phonology, sound, and iconicity (p. 42); the voice (p. 43); morphology and syntax (p. 44); discourse level structures such as poetics and genre (pp. 45-49); and the mind or body (p. 49). To illustrate the interaction of these elements, he considers laments written in the region of Karelia on the Finnish-Russian border (p. 52). Through their laments, the cry-women, as they are called, manifest audience-performer interactions by using the elements (words, metaphor, voice, sound, etc.) discussed earlier in the chapter (p. 54).

In Chapter 3, “Approaches to Language and Emotion” (pp. 55-66), Wilce foregrounds the upcoming presentation of case studies, by describing four relevant theories. The first of these, language socialization, studies language as the medium with which humans express affect and read it in others. Focusing on the work of Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin on babies and baby talk, Wilce discusses how this approach also involves variation within and across cultures. Whereas language-socialization theory focuses on human development and affect, cognitive theories consider the ways in which lexical terms express affect. Here, Wilce refers to Anna Wierzbicka and William Reddy who have demonstrated, for example, how language reflects cultural differences. The third theoretical approach, the phenomenological, stems from Carl Husserl’s work on consciousness and subjectivity, and considers language as a way of “enacting emotion” (p. 63). Finally, materialist theories examine how individuals or cultures ‘own’ language, and how the character of this ownership has political consequences (p. 64). As an example of the latter, Wilce mentions the American assertivist movement’s ‘I-language’, which conditioned how people owned language and emotions by focusing on pronoun reference (p. 64). Similarly, and building on Karl Marx, “Kenneth Burke (1969) developed a theory of **identification** not merely as a psychological process, but as the fundamental *social process*” (p. 66; original emphases). Wilce is ready to ground his own language model in the fourth theoretical approach.

Before presenting his model, in Chapter 4, “The Panhuman and the Particular” (pp. 67-83), Wilce treats four key issues relevant to it. First, he asks if language has evolved vis-à-vis emotions. He notes that, since Darwin first compared how animals and humans expressed emotions within the context of evolution, others have associated it with gesture, or “verbal gesture” (p. 68) and ethnomusicology; ethnomusicologists in particular, have studied mimesis, mirror neurons, and embodied style (that is, prosody and rhythm). The second key issue treated here is whether emotions are universal; in this context, Wilce examines, for instance, how metaphors help cultures conceptualize their emotional relationships to the world. While the third issue focuses on whether emotions are natural classes, the fourth issue involves how emotion, language, and the self, relate to one another and to other topics such as aesthetics and sensibility. Wilce concludes this discussion by stressing the importance of considering the relationship of language and emotion in complex ways that address “linguistic diversity” (p. 83).

In Part II, Wilce illustrates these various theories and key issues by means of case studies. Chapter 5, “Language, Emotion, Power, and Politics” (pp. 87-99), explores the association between emotion and femininity, passivity and weakness, with fresh research. Turning to the 2008 election, Wilce notes how emotions and politics interacted in public debates, citing the reception of Hilary Clinton’s tears as rhetorically effective but Howard Dean’s screams as a failure; no longer did feminine emotion work against the female candidate while male aggression worked for the male (p. 88). Emotions and power are linked in other ways, as Wilce illustrates with a case study involving a ‘ritual’ practice by Bosavi Muslims. Here he refers to Steve Feld who has shown how the pas-

sionate becomes political, because the women's laments have the power "to move men to tears" (p. 90). Turning to power and inter-subjectivity – the cultural give and take through which language takes on connotative meanings – Wilce discusses, for instance, how memorials such as that of Pearl Harbor (pp. 95-97) create national sentiments and, in so doing "form an analytical bridge between speech and the political economy" (p. 98). The other half of Part II, Chapter 6, "Status, Honorification, and Emotion for Hire" (pp. 100-105), presents case studies that illustrate how status is embedded in language. To demonstrate how grammatical structures mark status, Wilce refers to the work of Judith Irvine who has shown, among other things, how grammatical structures mark status: the French pronouns "tu" and "vous", the familiar and formal versions, respectively, of the personal pronouns both of which we render as "you" in English, are well-known examples (p. 102). By focusing on the ways in which grammar and register mark status – a capacity now lost in the English language – Wilce demonstrates how deeply and how differently language can encode emotions and, thus, reflect cultural values.

Assessing such issues of language and emotion, Wilce asserts, requires more ethnographic work at the intersections of the local and global. That is the concern of Part III. Chapter 7, "Language as Emotional Object: Feeling, Language, and Processes of Identification" (pp. 109-118), examines how emotion is used to express arguments. For example, in the Tamil language emotion does more than 'merely' support arguments; rather, in this Indian language "feelings make language their object" (p. 109). Through this case study and others, Wilce illustrates how language uses represent cultural attachments.

Chapter 8, "Language, Affect, Gender, and Sexuality" (pp. 119-133), tackles a familiar issue with a fresh approach. Here Wilce notes a scholarly shift from studying women's discourse and performance to studying men's speech and emotion; he also mentions the increasing use of corpus linguistics to examine how language uses can be empowering or disempowering to their users in given cultures. To demonstrate the power of language to structure human relationships, he considers situations in which the relationships involve gender: in Lakhota (pp. 124-125) and other Native American languages (pp. 125-126); in Papua New Guinea languages (pp. 126-127); in Kaluli laments in Egypt (pp. 127-128); and in the Tamil language (p. 131), among others.

Part IV focuses on the local and historical dimensions of his topic. With regard to local, or issues involving language and emotion in specific places, Chapter 9, "A History of Theories" (pp. 137-152), travels from locale to locale and from history to history. Beginning with Eastern Indian aesthetic philosophies, Wilce moves next to Western classical and Christian philosophy, and then to "modernism and the Otherization of emotion" (pp. 143-148). Again switching location and histories, he ends his survey with recent anthropological studies of various language groups, including Indian and Greek (pp. 149-150). Wilce concludes that such a history of language and emotion "leads not to a final truth, but to more history" (p. 152).

After this macro analysis, Chapter 10, "Shifting Forms of Language and Emotion" (pp. 153-167), presents case studies that demonstrate how issues of language and emotion are more than academic diversions. For example, recent growth in Pentecostalism, Wilce suggests, is linked to the fact that their religious practices incorporate styles and gestures in ways that are very different from and more emotional than the practices of more conventional Protestant denominations.

Chapter 11, "Language and the Medicalization of Emotion" (pp. 168-181), considers the global influence of the "psy disciplines" on the ways cultures conceptualize feelings in medical theory and practice (p. 168). After looking at ethnographies of Latino communities and analyses of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)*, Wilce identifies a new psychiatric register aimed at

relentless classification. By comparing English words involving depression with those in Bangla psychiatric discourse, Wilce shows changes in the latter as a result of globalization and the influence of former (pp. 177-180). He concludes by calling for more case studies to examine the influence of “psy discourse” at very local and particular levels (p. 181).

In Chapter 12, “Conclusion” (pp. 182-190), Wilce restates the importance of Burke’s theory of identification to his own approach (p. 186), and of using ethnography to study local linguistic histories and practices. Recognizing the limitations of his study, he suggests that scholars “should attend to the microinteractional engagement of bodies, and to the economies of language, feeling, and embodiment – that is, to the contextualization of local interaction, vis-à-vis the distribution and circulation of linguistic, emotional, and bodily signs” (p. 190).

A cross-disciplinary work with an enormous range of content and method, *Language and Emotion* will appeal to an equally wide range of scholars from anthropologists to linguists, rhetoricians, musicologists, psychologists, philosophers, and historians. For those studying rhetoric, it provides a rich and fresh history of and methods to approach the relationship between language and feeling. Wilce’s study supports all the work in rhetoric that considers the ways in which style, bodies, and various media inform persuasive practice, as well as such issues as identification, politics, medical discourse, literacy, corpus linguistics, methodologies, Burke, reflexivity, and the list goes on. Engagingly written, above all through the presence of the case studies, Wilce makes palpable the living nature of language. The glossary and bolded terms make for easy reference. Although the work takes a broad intellectual stance (some may want more evidence that certain hypotheses have been fully demonstrated) and although I am not convinced that rhetoric scholars are unfamiliar with these matters, any work which presents opportunities for transdisciplinary work is quite welcome. And while some may find Wilce’s range and depth a weakness, they are for me great strengths; he has certainly persuaded me to think and teach more about these matters.

Sara Newman  
 Kent State University  
 Department of English  
 P.O. Box 5190  
 Kent, OH 44242-0001  
 U.S.A.  
 snewman@kent.edu

Sara Newman holds a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and is Associate Professor in the Department of English, Kent State University. She is author of *Aristotle and Style* (reviewed by Lucia Calboli Montefusco in *Rhetorical Review* 4:1 (February 2006), pp. 20-23; see <<http://www.nnrh.dk/RR/feb06.html>>) and articles in *History of Psychiatry*, *Rhetorica*, and *Written Communication*, among others. Her current research deals with style, gesture, disability, and the rhetoric of medicine.