

## LECTURE SERIES

**Tuesday,  
26<sup>th</sup> June  
2018**

**12:15 - 13:15**

Campus Biotech  
Room H8.01 D  
9, chemin des Mines  
Geneva

## Language and emotion: the problem of expressive meaning

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The study of meaning in linguistics has tended to focus heavily on meaning couched in propositional terms, because only full propositions can be adjudged as true (or false). For example, if somebody utters the sentence “I am in a great deal of pain!”, it is easy to imagine the circumstances under which the utterance would be true (or false), and an analysis of its truth conditions is straightforward. But faced with an utterance like “Ouch!”, which is non-propositional, to speak of truth or falsity seems somehow inappropriate. Sometimes propositional and non-propositional meanings seem to coexist in an utterance. Consider the sentence “That fucking bastard has stolen my mobile phone”. In terms of the proposition expressed, “that fucking bastard” merely serves to identify a particular person. Clearly, however, the full meaning of the phrase is not exhausted by this. There is another dimension of meaning in which the speaker is directly expressing an emotion – a case of expressive meaning – entirely unrelated to anything propositional.

Expressive meaning creates a range of problems for the linguist. Having outlined some of these problems, I will go on to explore distinctions that linguists have devised to deal with them: between semantics and pragmatics, described and indicated content, and propositional and non-propositional meaning. I will also present a linguist’s conception of the distinction between cognition and affect. The talk will conclude with some ideas on how work on expressive meaning might inform not only linguistic pragmatics but also other disciplines, including psychology, cognitive science and even theories of art and literature ■

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