

Emoji Communication and Digital Pragmatics in English-Mediated Online Interactions

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ABSTRACT

Emoji usage has become a major aspect of digital communication. While some are just add-ons and ornaments in English mediated communication, in the present world emojis, are functioning pragmatically and convey emotions, attitudes, jokes, politeness, human relations in the realm of digital. In this research, we have scrutinized the role of emojis in the domain of digital pragmatics and computer-mediated communication; especially how they are functioning on platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, X and online educational context that also affect the meaning perception, emotional clearness of communication, the process of conveying and also helps users compensate the lack of nonverbal communication in digital space like facial expressions, gestures, and tones to lower ambiguity and make communication effective among interlocutors. It was also realized that emojis play roles in terms of enhancing politeness strategies, multimodality. It also contributes to diminish lack of facial expressions, gestures, tonal cues while communication through digital platform, which brings more clarity, to the communication. It has also shown how in online communication, it helps the senders avoid ambiguity and at the same time how the meanings can also differ with the contexts, culture, age group and the way the platform has been designed. Reviewing and comparing scholarly articles along with the real digital communication, it becomes evident that the emoji has come to acquire new position that has significantly impact the contemporary linguistic intercourse. It can also be argued that emojis' functioning has been modified as a sophisticated communication tools rather than the symbol for adornment.

Keywords: Emojis, Digital Pragmatics, Online Communication, English-Mediated Interaction, Computer-Mediated Communication, Multimodality.

Introduction

The pervasive influence of technological devices and the popularization of digital platforms and social media, which have radically modified social interaction, has profoundly reshaped social communicative practices. During the early stages of the development of digital technologies and especially with the growing reliance on online services, the principal form of communication has become the computer-mediated communication (CMC), used when individuals communicate through digital media, such as e-mails, short messages services (SMS), social media sites, web pages, internet chat, discussion on online communities, online educational environments etc. Online interactions do not always enable direct physical proximity that facilitate immediate direct exchanges and that allow participants to interpret the implicit socio-pragmatic features that enable humans to derive meaning beyond what can be directly understood from the text or verbal part. This has led to their integral and globalized role in English mediated online-mediated communication (OMC), employed on platforms ranging from WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok to LinkedIn etc. Emojis were introduced in late 1990s in Japan and today they can be used through any kind of digital devices (cell phones, smart devices) on which one can communicate. This would be achieved, by being support for the pragmatic goals the user might have on these new digital means and their pragmatic work thereon. Social media provide support to multimodal communication by using all sorts of multimodal elements such as text,

images, and videos, logos, hashtags, and emoticons and offer support to more interactive and expressive ways of communication, but it could pose communication in a complex position by their multiple interpretations which can differ depending on the context, culture, and how people use them.

Study Objectives

- Investigation of pragmatic functions of emojis in online communications mediated by the English language.
- Examining the contribution of emojis to emotions expression and meaning interpretation.
- Investigating the use of emojis in polite speech acts and interpersonal communication.
- Exploration of the multimodality of the communication with emojis in the context of digital discourse.[2]
- Exploring difficulties related to the interpretation of emojis.

Review of Literature

- Emojis and Digital Communication Online communications research has demonstrated how, by virtue of the absence of the nonverbal signals of the 2-person interaction setting, the use of emojis may bridge the gap of digital communication. These scholars propose that emojis play a comparable role as facial expressions would in face-to-face interactions.
- Emojis as Pragmatic Markers Studies in the field of pragmatics suggest that emojis fall under the category of markers that work as context cues to determine the intention.
- Politeness and Face Management Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory analyzes the many ways by which humans engage in the maintenance of face (e.g., the individual and public self), in order to preserve social equilibrium while communicating with one another. In online communications, emojis can reduce and mitigate a potentially face-threatening act (FTTA) and add friendly elements. For example, a friendly, a smiling emoji would appear in conjunction with an actual message to temper criticism/requests (which might otherwise be seen as imposing/pushy).
- The notion of social semiotics would also be applicable to, not only words, but to other semiotic resources (in the current context, emojis) of the text with which they co-function.

Theoretical Framework

- **Pragmatics Theory:** In digital communication emojis act as a contextual marker for deciphering the participants' emotions, their attitudes, intentions as well as what was implicitly implied in the message. In the lack of any bodily expressions (facial expression etc.) and tone of voices in the cyber world emojis are beneficial in minimizing the ambiguities to achieve an effective communication between the participants. In English media mediated online communications it can be considered as one of the elements to provide effective meaning among the interlocutors.
- **Theory of Speech Acts:** Speech Act Theory is based on the fact that when speech is utterance, a person does not merely saying any one thing to do acts when for instance commanding, ordering someone, apologizing, congratulating, thanking, laughing at someone and making exclamations and suchlike. Online, it would be done with use of emojis and this will reinforce speaker's intentions meaning conveyed in speech to express true intended and emotions with no ambiguities – For example with smiles to show sender being friendly. Laugh smiley means joke, ironic or humorous as the case.
- **Politeness Theory:** Theory of Politeness, first proposed by Erving Goffman, and further developed by Brown & Levinson is all about how speakers manage to sustain their social relations and interaction, as well as protect themselves from any face-threatening acts while talking. The use of emojis could rescue speakers either in moderating the abusive remarks made, preserving peace in communication, portraying amicable behavior, or guarding speaker–relationship bonds.
- **Multimodal Discourse Analysis:** A new branch of study Multimodal Discourse Analysis which provides a framework for investigating the contribution to the meaning of different communicative mode, namely text, images, icons (emojis), videos, hashtags and punctuation etc. The purpose of multimodal discourse analysis is to study the relationship between the different modes within a single utterance or utterance complex, which in digital world they are utilized as integrated form for a better understanding and interaction between the interactants.

Research Methodology

• Research Design

This particular research utilizes the qualitative research design approach based on Discourse Analysis (DA) methodology, especially on digital communicative discourse. Application of the qualitative research method makes it possible to explore in detail the ways in which the emoji is used as a linguistic and pragmatic instrument in Communication in the English language. The analysis centers on the role of emojis in conveying contextual, emotive and interpersonal meanings during communication.

• Data Collection

- WhatsApp conversations
- Instagram comments
- Facebook posts and replies
- X (Twitter) interactions
- Online classroom discussions and virtual learning platforms

The collected data consist of English-mediated digital conversations containing emojis used in various communicative contexts.

• Sampling Technique

Research will use purposive sampling, in selecting the appropriate digital conversation messages that include the use of emojis. The study has decided to use purposive sampling. Researchers can concentrate specifically on an interaction where emojis that add to the interpretability and expressiveness, a kind of politeness, an inter-personal communicate between users in a digital medium.

• Method of Analysis

- **Pragmatic analysis** to examine contextual meaning and speaker intention
- **Discourse analysis** to study communication patterns in digital interaction
- **Multimodal analysis** to understand the relationship between text and visual elements such as emojis
- **Comparative interpretation analysis** to identify differences in emoji meaning across contexts and users

Analysis and Discussion

- **Emojis and Emotional Expression-** Emotional expressiveness Digital interactions can be quite challenging in regards to expressing emotions clearly without real facial expressions and nonverbal sounds from online conversational tools because the lack of these features, or the expression-deprivation online environment is what makes the system not being able to convey emotions well and emojis are used as a tool for these digital communications that can convey emotion clearly. A laughing smiley means happy or funniness while a love sign can express feeling of affection and care or love and caring.
- **Emojis and Meaning Interpretation-** Emojis impact the interpretation of meanings in online communications. The use of statements having similar content (the exact wording) can be interpreted differently based on the emoticons included. For instance, when an individual only writes "Fine," the sentence will be perceived negatively due to being considered rude and uninterested. However, the perception of the message will be different when using a smiling emoticon in place of a face or in case no emoticon is employed. Emojis act as de-markers since they enable the recipient of the message to know whether the emotional state of the sender has been appropriately interpreted.
- **Emojis and Politeness-**On the other hand, the other roles performed by these icons in online communication include those in polite communication. This is normally achieved by use of smiley face emoticons, hand palms folded emoticons and others in order to soften a request, criticize or to maintain good relationship with people through online interaction.
- **Emojis in Multimodal Communication-**The nature of digital communication can be called multimodal as meaning is made by using a variety of components like text, emojis, punctuation marks, images, memes, and hashtags. In addition to this, Punctuation marks and Emojis serve

to strengthen meaning in the context of digital communication. Due to its multimodal nature, digital communication is interactive.

- **Challenges in Emoji Interpretation-** Although there is great potential for communication with the use of emoji, it can equally create barriers in interpretation. This is because the meaning of an emoji changes based on culture, age, society, design of the screen, and context of the communication process. Although it is fun for one person, it can be offensive for another person. In essence, the context of the communication will define the meaning of the emoji.

Positive Affect

- The hypothesis is that positive emoji messages would increase positive affect. Messages with positive emojis would generate feelings such as happiness, friendliness, and security from the message recipient. Positive emoji use would create an emotional bond and cheerful feelings that would make the digital messages friendly, friendly, secure and socially responsible.
- The hypothesis is that negative emoji messages would decrease positive affect. Messages with negative emojis would generate negative feelings and reduce happiness and goodwill in the messages. These negative emoji would generate anxiety, sadness and anger in recipients that would harm their emotionality and goodwill of the messages.
- The hypothesis is that neutral emojis and no emoji messages would have little impact on positive affect. Messages with neutral emojis and messages without any emojis were relatively less expressive. Thus, these would not significantly increase or reduce a participant's positive emotions indicating that neutral and no emojis use did not trigger any emotional response from the participant.
- There would be no significant difference between positive and negative emoji messages on positive affect. It hypothesized that even if there were differing impacts, the messages with negative emojis and positive emojis may have similar emotional effects on the message recipient in the sense that positive emotions increase and negative emotions decrease the level of emotional state of the participant.
- There would be no significant difference between neutral emojis and no emoji messages. It hypothesized that neutral emojis would not generate any significant emotional cues; thus, participants will react in the same manner towards positive and negative stimuli in their perception. On the other hand, responses to neutral emojis and no emojis would be alike in their perceptions.

Negative Affect

- **Positive emojis would decrease negative affect:** The positive emojis are predicted to serve the function of decreasing the negative affect such as unhappiness, depression, anxiety, anger, and so on, within online communications. Friendly and cheerful faces related to some reassuring messages would help to reduce the level of participants' emotions.
- **Negative emojis would increase negative affect:** The negative emojis such as angry, upset and anxious ones would increase the negative affect of participants during their interactions with other communicators. They give a certain tone which indicates the presence of disagreement or tension and this would make participants experience negative emotions.
- **Neutral emoji or no emoji would have relatively little effect on negative affect:** The neutral or no emoji does not convey any clear emotion, hence they are not predicted to be a major factor which strengthens participants' negative emotional state. Or rather, a message without any signals for emotions will be perceived as more normal, therefore, more reasonable.
- **No significant differences between positive emoji and negative emoji:** Both positive and negative emojis have similar valences as they increase/decrease one person's emotion by a similar degree. Moreover, there will not be a great difference in participants' emotional arousal in two conditions.
- **No difference between neutral and no emoji conditions:** There are no anticipated significant differences in participants' negative affect within neutral emoji condition and no emoji condition, as the neutral emoji is not likely to influence participants' emotional state significantly.

Findings

The research identifies that the emojis play the role of highly significant pragmatic devices in English-mediated communication online, which stresses the significance of emojis in the process of conveying emotions, attitude, intentions and interpersonal meanings in the digital environment. They help clarify the intention of the message by conveying emotion and ideas via emoji, hence emoji helps convey the emotion or express emotion via text. They help ensure easy text & easily readable text along with an emotional rendition. Other uses of the emoji might be that it can be used as an emotion to make a request politely, to compliment, to soften a rude message and build social relations. Several studies have revealed that the interpretation of the emoji may depend on the context because of the reason that the emoji itself could convey a very diverse meaning. The interpretability of the emoji depends heavily on culture, age and channel of communication. Multimodal communication (including text, emojis, images, GIFs, punctuation marks, hashtags) helps enhance the effectiveness of communication in digital interaction.

Culture does play a role in the selection and interpretability of emojis.

Conclusion

The function of communicating emotions via the use of emojis has gained prominence in digital communication, where English is the language of choice. Emoji has a number of functions besides just being decorations for emotions. They play a role in meaning making, emotion communication, politeness, and multimodal discourse construction. With the advancement of digital communication, the use of emojis is becoming increasingly viewed as linguistic and semiotic means of communication. However, the interpretation of the emojis remains dependent on culture and technology. Future research will involve emojis in online learning and AI communication.

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