Emojis: The Language of the future? – A Literature Review

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Abstract

This paper discusses in brief the shift of focus or the introduction of pictures – Emojis – to enrich the written form of communication. The paper is a literature review on when and how the emojis have evolved as part of communication. It discusses several research papers that have contributed to the evolvement of emojis.

INTRODUCTION

When interacting via text-based communication, it can be difficult for speakers to convey their emotions due to the absence of nonlinguistic cues such as facial expression and body language (Walther and D'Addario, 2001). The first recorded use of emoticons is attributed to Professor Scott Fahlman, of Carnegie Mellon University, in a message, on September 19, 1982. In his message, Fahlman proposed to use ":-)" and ":-(" to distinguish jokes from more serious posts. Within a few months, the use of emoticons had spread, and the set of emoticons was extended.

Emojis, literally translated to "picture character" in Japanese, emerged at the end of the 20th century, to facilitate digital communication. The creator of emoji, Shigetaka Kurita, wanted to enable communication of "thoughts or emotions without inspiring strong likes or dislikes in the way a picture might" (see Negishi 2014). An emoji is a graphic symbol, ideogram, which represents not only facial expressions, but also concepts and ideas, such as celebration, weather, vehicles and buildings, food and drink, animals and plants, or emotions, feelings, and activities (Novak et al., 2015). To quote Casper Grathwohl, the President of the Oxford English Dictionaries, "Emoji

culture has become so popular that individual characters have developed their own trends and stories," which is further substantiated by the fact that the "Face with Tears of Joy" emoji was declared as the "Word of the Year" in 2015.

The very first Emojicon - "a multi-day celebration of all-things emoji" was a unique event that took place in San Francisco in November 2016. It was aimed at engaging people from all walks of life with different flavours and forms of emoji, through exhibitions of emoji artwork, screenings of emoji films, and more, affirming the growing hype associated with emoji-driven non-textual communication. (Zhou, Hentschel and Kumar, 2017)

LITERATURE SURVEY

The existing literature on the psychological and linguistic aspects of emojis is limited, whereas a large amount of research exists in the fields of analysis of emoji usage. Succeeding is an in depth analysis of the existing related literature. In 2015, Eisenstein and Pavalanathan wrote that the introduction of emojis was a potentially dramatic shift in online writing, potentially replacing user-defined linguistic affordances with predefined graphical icons; with the ability to access a large number of colourful and expressive emoji pictographs, it became natural for users to stop employing non-standard orthographies for expressive communication in social media.

Kelly and Watts (2015) agreed, and said that emoji could serve relationally useful roles in conversation, not necessarily associated with discrete expressions of emotion, and could also play an important role in controlling a conversational thread or in encouraging playful behaviour.

In the same year, Novak et. al. (2015) showed that emojis were "tools" that reflect human sentiments, which was observed when sentiment classification models could be created, and applied to, several real-time scenarios, in the analysis of 1.6 million annotated tweets across 13 different languages.

Stark and Crawford (2015) believed that the practical use of the emojis were intended to normalize, capitalize and focus on the collective strength of affect in human social relations online, where emojis acted as exuberant forms of social expressions.

Zhu (2015) said that emojis were cartoon-style facial expressions used to express certain emotions in text-based communication, whilst, remaining rather similar to, but were different from, emoticons, which had changed the way people perceived the correct emotional, attitude and attention based intents in online interactions.

In 2016, Bliss-Carroll said that viewing emojis simply as a one dimensional lens is a complete underestimation of their ability to serve as a signifier of emotion, clarifier of intent and mediator of self-identity; they convey a host of interpersonal emotional expressions in a much more charming manner, and are ready to be hailed as a "new

universal language" by many.

Echoing the same sentiment, Gullberg (2016) wrote that the emojis were merely not used to convey emotions, but could also efficiently and politely react to another person's message, which may not need a long reply, act as tools in maintaining relationships, be used as inside jokes, and be an indication of the enthusiasm of the person.

Lu et. al. (2016) believe that the compactness of emojis reduces the effort of input, the rich semantics they convey expresses ideas and emotions more vividly. Andral and Larroque (2016) brought out the fact companies and marketers are aware of the target with whom they can use emojis, and that they are marketing tools that can be used to improve the brand image, to increase the interest of consumers towards a company and to make people more receptive to the brand.

Peele (2016) observes that "Artists have transformed several famous children's stories into emoji posters, Bible has also been anonymously translated in emoji. In context of broken English and visual culture, social media users adopted emojis as means of expression. Worriers fear that, in the existing ripe conditions, we are witnessing the demise of written English."

Chairunnisa and Benedictus (2017), said that people hope, while not communicating face-to-face, that the other person still understands their feelings, ideas and impressions, something that emojis make possible, and make the communication effective and understandable.

Kyle, Malone and Wall (2017) believe that emojis have become popular for clarifying online communication; they also believe the use of the same brings out certain psychological concepts such as emotional expression, emotional mimicry, emotional appraisal, pragmatics, and intention detection.

Tian et. al. (2017) wrote that emojis act as a cue for sentiment analysis of tweets result in better accuracy compared to using linguistic text alone, where positive emojis are more common in use than negative ones. Dürscheid and Siever (2017) talk about the rising chances of emojis becoming a universal language, but say that the probability is low, as emojis cannot convey complex matters, and seldom have a reference function. They also speak about certain conditions that a sign must fulfil to be a Unicode emoji.

CONCLUSION

Emojis are an emerging language that compete with the existing rules that govern the written mode of communication. But, it should also be understood that as is non verbal gestures for spoken communication, so is an emoji for written communication. It complements the written mode by filling the gap of message communicated through a smile, or a smirk or any other emotion. Thus, we come to understand that the use of

emojis are here to stay for a long time. But, whether they change the rigidity of written, formal language or blend with it to bring a new form of communication is yet to be seen.

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