

Emojis in Sociolinguistic Pragmatics: Navigating Speech Acts in Non-Verbal Digital Communication

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Abstract: Emojis, a notable component of digital non-verbal communication, have integrated to modern expression. Beyond mere emotive symbols, emojis intertwine with speech acts and pragmatics, adding layers of meaning to messages. Using primary data collected from 105 respondents and using descriptive analysis techniques, this study describes the navigating speech acts in Non-Verbal Digital Communication. This research affirms that respondents perceive emojis as powerful tools for expressivity, conveying emotions, and adding depth to messages. The consistently high scores across various statements underscore a strong inclination toward embracing emojis as integral components of contemporary digital communication. While societal acceptance of emojis is apparent, the study also identifies opportunities for increased community engagement and awareness to foster a nuanced understanding of emoji usage. Despite a perceived low likelihood of emojis replacing verbal language in the future, respondents express a continued intention to use emojis more frequently, highlighting their enduring relevance in shaping the landscape of digital communication.

Keywords: emojis, pragmatics, speech act, sociolinguistic, non-verbal digital communication

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Human intelligence has an impact on the rapid development of technology every day, especially in the field of verbal and non-verbal communication. This development tends to make it easier for humans to communicate anytime and anywhere. The existence of technology also directs humans to automation and more interesting visualizations. This is demonstrated by the development of advanced features in digital communication platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Whatsapp, such as gifs, stickers, memojis, emojis, live stickers, and so on. One of the features to facilitate digital non-verbal communication that is growing rapidly is the use of emojis (Daulay & Berutu, 2023). This shift has led to a huge increase in the use of emojis. We're seeing a huge rise in using emojis as a modern way of expressing ourselves without words. The integration of emojis has become a fascinating aspect, intertwining with the realms of speech acts and pragmatics. Emojis, those small pictorial symbols, not only add a visual flair to our messages but also play a nuanced role in conveying intentions, emotions, and social nuances (Lime, 2023). The relationship between emojis and speech acts reveals a dynamic interplay where visual expressions complement the subtleties of language use. Understanding speech acts within the framework of pragmatics involves delving into illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, uncovering the speaker's intentions and the effects of those intentions on the listener. When paired with emojis, speech acts take on a new dimension, with each symbol enhancing the communicative richness of the message (Boutet et al., 2021; Logi & Zappavigna, 2023).

Nowadays, emojis aren't just about feelings. Emojis, a non-verbal communication feature, has become crucial in digital interactions. Initially, emojis served as pragmatic markers to express emotions and enhance communication via text (Li & Yang, 2018). They cover all kinds of stuff like food, animals, and activities. They've become a big part of how we talk online, adding fun and meaning to our messages. The non-profit organization, also known as the Unicode Consortium, said that 92% of netizens who use social media accounts use emojis and memojis. It is also not surprising that emojis

and emojis have also encompassed the human professional realm. This is demonstrated by the results of Adobe's 2022 US Emojis Trends Report, which shows 71% of their survey respondents stated that they have used emojis in the work environment. Their popularity tells us that we're moving toward a more visual and emotionally expressive way of talking online (Adobe Blog, 2023). By using these visual symbols, we're making up for the fact that we can't rely on the usual non-verbal cues we have in face-to-face conversations. In this changing world of communication, the need for non-verbal expression is still there, emojis have become powerful tools to fill that expressive gap in our digital interactions.

In this context, new elements such as emojis have become crucial in online linguistic expression, providing a new dimension in the understanding of pragmatic communication. Emojis, viewed as symbols and signs in the digital environment, play a key role in conveying emotional nuances and adding extra meaning in online communication (Alexander, 2019). Previous studies indicate that emojis are not just decorations but also help convey tones and emotions that may be difficult to understand in plain text, supporting more effective communication. Barkin & Barón, (2005) highlights the role of emojis in understanding expressive and social nuances in text messages, overcoming deficiencies in written communication that often lose non-verbal aspects. The use of emojis doesn't always consider the true meaning, often relying on images without considering the context. There is a tendency to assume that similar emojis have the same meaning, even though they may be different (Wijeratne, 2018).

This paper focuses on the study of emojis to explore how emojis align with various speech acts and pragmatic elements, adding layers of meaning to our digital conversations. The research involves analyzing the development of emojis in the current digital era, how emojis interact with illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, their frequency of use, the impact of emojis on conveyed sentences, society's understanding of emojis and emojis, similarity in the perception of the meaning of each emojis, the acceptance of emojis as a nonverbal communication tool by society, and the future use of emojis among society. This paper seeks to unravel the layers of intention and impact inherent in digital communication. Through an exploration of various speech acts, such as requests, positive expressions, questioning, and empathy, in conjunction with the strategic use of emojis, the objective is to shed light on how visual elements enhance and sometimes alter the pragmatic aspects of language use in our increasingly emojis-infused conversations.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is an exploratory study related to how emojis are developed in the current digital era, the frequency of their use, the influence of emojis on the sentences conveyed, society's understanding of emojis and emoticons, similarity in the perception of the meaning of each emoji, acceptance of emoji as a nonverbal communication tool by society, adequate literacy regarding the use of emoji in society, and use of emoji in the future among society. Furthermore, this research is based on *TikTok*, *Instagram*, and *WhatsApp*. The population of this research is social media users *TikTok*, *Instagram*, and *WhatsApp*. The number of samples to be taken is 105 respondents. Data was collected using *Google form* questionnaires.

The data in this research are perceptions of indicators expressed in a statement, which means they are qualitative. So that it can be processed according to the tools used, the data is quantified using a Likert scale approach of 1 - 4. A score of 1 means strongly disagree, a score of 2 means disagree, a score of

3 means agree, and a score of 4 means strongly agree. To obtain the research objectives, data was analyzed using a quantitative descriptive, namely mean central tendency. Respondents' responses were grouped into four score categories in the form of a total average score scale range. Those are 11.74, very low, 1.75-2.49 low, 2.50-3.24 high, and 3.25-4 very high. This research avoids moderate assessments in order to obtain clear tendencies regarding respondent responses.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION Respondents Profile

The research entitled "Emojis in Sociolinguistic Pragmatics: Navigating Speech Acts in Non-Verbal Digital Communication" includes the description of respondents based on age, gender, users of social media accounts, and the frequency of use of emojis. Based on the questionnaire data obtained, the data based on age obtained the following data: respondents aged 17-21 had the highest percentage of 78.6%. In addition, the second highest percentage, those under 22-26 years old, is 20.4%. Then, 1% of the respondents were under 17 years old. Based on gender, in this study, 59.2% of respondents were female, and 40.8% were male. When viewed from social media account users, all respondents use social media. Finally, based on the results of the emoji usage frequency data, 85.9% of respondents stated that they often used emojis, and the other 14.1% did not use emojis often.

The connections between the use of emojis and speech acts and pragmatics

Emojis play a crucial role in the realm of digital communication, exerting influence over both speech acts and pragmatics. These diminutive symbols introduce a visual dimension to messages, reshaping the underlying intent of words and molding their perception. Within the realm of speech acts, emojis amplify expressions of appreciation, soften requests, and provide contextual cues to questions, as mentioned also by (Shaari, 2020). Functioning as pragmatic elements, they contribute significantly to the overall impact of a message, thereby influencing its interpretation and eliciting specific responses. A comprehensive understanding of the intricate connections among emojis, speech acts, and pragmatics is imperative for effectively navigating the subtleties inherent in contemporary online communication. In this context, presented below are emojis commonly employed in social media conversations, accompanied by a delineation of the purposes each emoji serves:

Table 1 Speech act and purpose of emojis

Speech Act/Pragmatic Element	Example	Emojis	Purpose/Effect
Request	"Please help me."	🙏	Indicates hope or respect in the request.
Positive Expression	Compliment	👍	Adds kindness and joy to positive intentions.

Questioning	"What do you think?"	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reflects thoughtfulness or consideration in questioning.
Approval	"Great job!"	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reinforces the positive message of approval.
Humor	Sarcastic remark	<input type="checkbox"/>	Indicates a playful tone in humorous situations.
Empathy	Sympathetic message	<input type="checkbox"/>	Expresses feelings of sympathy or support.
Uncertainty	"I'm not sure."	<input type="checkbox"/> ♂	Represents confusion or lack of confidence.
Praise	"Well done!"	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adds a visual element to strengthen admiration in praise.

Source: Primary data, 2024.

Table 2 the interactions between emoji, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts

Speech Act/Pragmatic Element	Example	Emoji	Illocutionary Act	Perlocutionary Act
Request	"Please help me."	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhances a polite request by visually conveying hope or respect.	Influences the recipient to perceive the request positively, fostering a cooperative response.
Positive Expression	Compliment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhances expressing positive sentiment by visually adding kindness and joy.	Creates a favorable emotional impact on the recipient, intensifying the positivity of the compliment.

Questioning	"What do you think?"	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhances questioning by visually reflecting thoughtfulness or consideration.	Influences the recipient to perceive the question as contemplative, potentially encouraging a thoughtful response.
Approval	"Great job!"	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reinforces expressing approval by visually adding a positive gesture.	Visually reinforces the positive message, potentially boosting the recipient's confidence.
Humor	Sarcastic remark	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhances conveying humor by visually signaling a playful tone.	Indicates the intended humor, potentially eliciting a lighthearted response.
Empathy	Sympathetic message	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhances expressing empathy by visually conveying a sense of sadness or support.	Creates an emotional impact, fostering a sense of connection and understanding.
Uncertainty	"I'm not sure."	<input type="checkbox"/> ♂	Enhances expressing uncertainty by visually representing confusion or lack of confidence.	Signals to the recipient that the speaker is unsure, potentially prompting clarification or assistance.
Praise	"Well done!"	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhances expressing praise by visually reinforcing admiration.	Visually reinforces the positive message, potentially motivating the recipient and fostering a sense of accomplishment.

Source: Primary data, 2024.

Emojis expressivity, convey emotions and deepen the meaning of messages.

According to the results obtained from the questionnaire, the statement "I feel more expressive when using emojis while interacting with friends on social media" has the highest total score, namely 3.30. This shows that respondents have a very high perspective regarding emojis, which can increase the expressiveness of the meaning they convey. The finding is confirmed by the data results, which state that the score for "I feel that my emotions can be conveyed by adding emojis" is 3.07, which means high. In this way, respondents agreed that adding emojis or emojis to the messages they sent could convey and channel their emotions. Furthermore, based on the results of the statement "I feel a better

understanding of someone's message when emojis are used," it obtained a value of 2.86 which indicates high. That way, using emojis in messages can increase understanding of the meaning of someone's message. The data results based on the statement "I prefer using emojis to convey messages" obtained a high score of 2.69, meaning respondents prefer using emojis to convey their messages.

Table 3 Responses on Using Emojis

Indicators	Skor
I feel more expressive when using emojis when interacting with friends on social media	3.30
I feel my emotions can be conveyed by adding emojis	3.07
I feel like I understand someone's message better if I use emojis	2.86
I prefer the use of emojis to convey messages	2.69
The use of emojis will replace words in the future	2.22
I always have the same perception about the meaning of an emoji as other people in general	2.58
One type of emoji can symbolize more than one message	2.98
All groups of society have accepted the use of emojis on social media as non-verbal communication	3.00
Social media users have adequate literacy/knowledge regarding the use of emoji	2.74

Source: Primary data, 2024. **Attitude**

toward Emojis

1. A Person's definition of an emoji

The results show that respondents tend to have the same perception of the meaning of an emoji. Such a condition is reflected on respondent's response on the statement "I always have the same perception of the meaning of an emoji as most other people," with a value of 2.58. This score is considered high but is more likely to be closer to a low score. Likewise, the statement "One type of emoji can symbolize more than one meaning" has a score of 2.98 which is included in the high category. This is understandable because how someone gives meaning to emojis depends on their personal point of view and the context or situation.

2. Acceptance of Emoji as a non-verbal communication tool by society

According to data from a disseminated survey, "The use of emojis on social media has been widely accepted by all groups in society as a form of non-verbal communication" received a high score of 3.00. This means that respondents as a society accept and acknowledge the existence of emojis as a non-verbal communication tool. The data from the statement reinforces this, "Social media users are already accustomed to using emojis" which received a score of 3.08. This score is included in the high score category. With social users accustomed to emojis to convey their messages, this indicates that emojis have been accepted in society as a non-verbal communication tool.

3. Adequate literacy regarding the use of emojis in society

The results of "Social media users have sufficient literacy/knowledge about emoji usage" show a figure of 2.74. The weighted score obtained indicates that this statement has a high score. A high score indicates that, according to respondents who are also social media users, they have a sufficient understanding of the use of emojis. However, unfortunately, there is a lack of discussion forums between communities and invitations regarding the use of emojis. This is shown by the data results from the statements "I often discuss emojis with others" and "I will encourage others to use emojis," which obtained low scores with total scores of 2.19 and 2.46. These two statements have the lowest total scores compared to the other statements.

Table 4 Intention on Using Emojis

Social media users are used to using emojis	3.08
I will be using emojis more often in the future	2.73
I would encourage others to use emojis	2.46
I often discuss emojis with other people	2.19

Source: Primary data, 2024.

4. Intention to Use in the Future

According to the data, "The use of emojis will replace verbal language in the future" has a score of 2.22. This number indicates a low score. This means that, according to respondents, in the future, emojis will still not be able to be used to convey messages digitally. Using unambiguous emojis to

convey emotions could reduce miscommunication and improve digital social interactions. (Boutet et al., 2023) However, despite this, respondents will continue to use emojis more frequently, as shown by the data results regarding the statement "I will use emojis more frequently in the future," with a high score of 2.98.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this extensive research provides valuable insights into the pivotal role of emojis within the realm of digital communication, offering a profound understanding of their impact on speech acts and pragmatics. The study reveals how these visual symbols play a transformative role in shaping the underlying intent of words and influencing their perception. Through a detailed exploration of specific interactions, such as requests, positive expressions, questioning, approval, humor, empathy, uncertainty, and praise, the study unveils the nuanced ways in which emojis enhance both illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. The research findings, rooted in thorough data analysis, affirm that respondents perceive emojis as powerful tools for expressivity, conveying emotions, and adding depth to messages. The consistently high scores across various statements underscore a strong inclination toward embracing emojis as integral components of contemporary digital communication. While societal acceptance of emojis is apparent, the study also identifies opportunities for increased community engagement and awareness to foster a nuanced understanding of emoji usage. Despite a perceived low likelihood of emojis replacing verbal language in the future, respondents express a continued intention to use emojis more frequently, highlighting their enduring relevance in shaping the landscape of digital communication.

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