

Chapter 14

You Tell Me in Emojis

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ABSTRACT

As communication is predominantly realized on digital platforms, both the language used and the way actors of communicative events create and perceive messages have changed and taken new forms and functions. Emoticons, which have been transformed into emojis, have become a new language phenomenon that promise new research areas in various fields from linguistics to media studies, cognitive science to narrative studies. This chapter aims at exploring how computer users have integrated emojis in their daily narrative practices not only as emotive devices but also as conceptual tools and create a new mode of language to communicate their stories on digital platforms.

INTRODUCTION

The growing interest in communication brought the query about how messages are constructed and people interpret and make meaning out of messages. Towards the second half of the 20th century, scholars with the interest to understand how the process of communication between different agents is realized proposed communication models. They in fact aim at “identifying the elements of a process and then suggesting how, through connection, they work in a generalized way” (Hill, 2007, p.6). In the course of time, as new paradigms in communication practices emerged, these models evolved, and the language constructed and reconstructed by the participants of communicative processes has gone through major transformations in the course of time. With the emergence of digital technologies both the communication models together with the participants and the language and certainly the discursive features of communicative events that they utilize have taken new forms and meanings. In daily communicative practices, people started constructing and comprehending messages in different forms on different digital platforms. With the spread of digital messaging platforms that enable users to send synchronous and asynchronous messages, users have transformed their everyday literacy practices and adapted their multimodal literacy experiences to messaging systems. Today, it is certainly common that users construct linguistic texts that are accompanied by visual or rather iconic and even pictorial texts to communicate both emotive

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and conceptual messages. It is evident that in majority of digital communities, emojis have become an indispensable language unit utilized to communicate meanings.

This paper is going to focus on the language or coding system utilized in messaging systems that has evolved into multi-modal systems and the participants' attachment to such systems, one of which is the emojis that almost every user spontaneously and voluntarily use while messaging during their encounters through digital media. Today, emojis, the new icons that refer to various meanings in the digital context, have become one of the means of digital narratives, and emojis have gone further than being merely emotive elements in the construction of digital narrative and started function as semantic units in the language evolving on digital platforms.

BACKGROUND

Language and Reality

Ludwig Wittgenstein uses a fascinating metaphor for language, *an ancient city*. He describes language as “a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses” (Wittgenstein, 1986, p.8). This metaphor manifests his conception of language as a logically ordered system that functions as “a form of life”, an organic entity. As Litwack (2009) argues, people experience various practices within forms of life, and “they are capable of a very wide range of expression and perception” (p.21). Then, it can be concluded that people have the potential to have different experiences of language use and communication while they are integrated in this organic entity. The term *language-game* used by Wittgenstein refers to “the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (Wittgenstein, 1986, p.11). The language-games are the socially integrated linguistic activities that people are involved in and through which they construct and reconstruct meaning depending upon not only linguistic knowledge (vocabulary, grammar) but also knowledge of socially constructed discursive features of the language. Litwack (2009) refers to the act of ‘knowing’ as this type of capacity that is demonstrated through actions like answering a question correctly or making a correct description of something. Then, meaning in language is socially constructed, and it is something that is negotiated in the community since “without the possibility of public agreement or correction, it makes no sense to speak of truthful or false assertions of any kind” (p. 17). Wittgenstein in *Tractatus* makes “a distinction between that which can be *said* in language and that which can only be *shown*” (p. 60). Bertrand Russell, in his *Introduction to Tractatus* asserts that Wittgenstein is concerned with that “the whole function of language is to have meaning,” and “in order that a certain sentence should assert a certain fact there must, however the language may be constructed, be something in common between the structure of the sentence and the structure of the fact” (p. 8).

Wittgenstein was influenced by Schopenhauer during his early years. His use of the term “field of vision” reminds us of Schopenhauer’s famous quote “every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world,” which reflects the idea that knowledge is limited to human experience, and Wittgenstein brings the use of language in this world of reality. Language whose whole function must be to have and also to convey meaning consists of signs (not necessarily a word) that are attributed meaning within social environment. How do we come to learn the meanings of words like car, building, red (Wittgenstein’s example)? It is through being a participant in a social community of language users

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