

The use of emoji, stickers and gifs in chat conversations

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



In modern communication, direct messaging tools are used in almost every social media platform such as Facebook or Instagram. Some applications such as Viber or Whatsapp are exclusively based on allowing users to send messages. In all these platforms, the ability to use emoji, stickers or GIFs which is a format of images that could be animated, was well-received and has become an essential part of chat conversations (Ai, Wei, et al). Users have gotten familiar with the emoji keyboard almost as much as the regular keyboard. At first glance, addition of these tools to chat platforms and the high rate of their usage might seem to be based off on curiosity or the novelty. Yet the fact that it remained in popularity since emoji were first created in 1999 suggests that they are serving some purpose for most users (Steinmetz). Analyzing the way humans use emoji when chatting could clarify why it is liked and why it is essential for communication in social networks.

Each emoji imitates a human expression or behavior and connotes differently depending on the context. The laughing emoji with tears in its eyes is obviously connected with humor. It implies that a person is laughing to the point of tears. Yet as with many others, this emoji can be used in various ways for different purposes. It can be used to convey the obvious meaning, that whatever was mentioned in a conversation is hilarious or it could be used to make a normal sentence insulting or passive-aggressive. For example, if someone texted " It's good" followed by the crying-laughing emoji it is safe to assume that they actually mean the opposite. This emoji can also be used to make any extremely threatening, violent or rude

statement more lighthearted. An example would be the words “ I’ll kill you” followed by this emoji.

New varieties of emoji are being created by each software update to upgrade chat conversations. The eye-roll emoji, mimicking a person rolling their eyes, is intended to convey a situation to be ridiculous and displeasing. This emoji, in contrast to the previous, almost always gives a negative connotation to an otherwise neutral sentence. For example, a message with any proper noun followed by this emoji expresses a negative opinion on it. The usage of this emoji means the person is frustrated with the mentioned person, object or situation.

The debate arises that whether emoji itself can be considered a language. However, to become a language emoji must attain properties such as productivity, displacement, arbitrariness, duality and cultural transmission (Yule). Most of these properties are not fulfilled by emoji, except for productivity and creativity. Emoji clearly do serve a purpose as proved above and they allow users to find combinations that can convey divergent meanings. Hence, even though they are sometimes interchangeable, as in, an emoji can replace a few words in a sentence, they do not qualify as a language. Therefore, the purpose of emoji should be further explored. Emoji are needed in chat conversations for communicative fluidity (Lim). They assist in recreating a real-life conversation through a chat conversation. In traditional face-to-face communication people are able to express their emotions through facial expressions, body language and tone in addition to

the words they are saying. Even in a phone conversation, people can understand the emotions of the speaker through their tone of voice.

Emoji work as a replacement method to transmit the same information. The feelings of the communicator controls the message so that the words they are saying would be accurately interpreted. The emotion or the tone of a sentence uttered could make it anything from an insult to a compliment. Therefore, in a case where words are communicated without the emotions, there is a big chance of the receiver misinterpreting the information. This is why the use of emoji, GIFs or stickers are important in a digital conversation. They set the tone and mirrors the expressions that convey emotions of the person minimizing the chance of any confusion or misinterpretation. This also makes it much easier to use speech attributes like sarcasm in chat conversations.

In conclusion, the intended purpose of emoji is not to replace or become a language, but to facilitate language in chat conversations to reach the level of a face-to-face conversation.