Well Begun Is Half Done: Comprehension Of The Compatibility Of Emoji's Phatic/Salutation Function In Keyboard-To-Screen Communication (KSC)

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ABSTRACT

A smiling face always signals a positive and warm welcome in all apposite circumstances. Mostly it helps conversations to begin, to go on and to end in a smooth and effective manner. Here, this paper discusses the digital rendition of this smile and the initiating role of these happy faces in electronic communication which could take the conversation almost half the way leading to the gradual flow of dialogues. Emojis, especially the face emojis which convey positive and happy emotions, are these similar happy faces online, mainly used in text-based electronic communication. AsComputer Mediated Communication (CMC) and henceforth the use of instant messaging applications and social networks are rising and spreading, it could be confirmed that the mobile phone users are using these 'stimulants' in their conversations for raising the warmth of their communication. Marcel Danesi (2017) by calling this function of emoji as 'utterance function' says that emojis add a positive tone to messages. Is it the same like 'First impression is the best impression?'... Yes! 😊 Thus, this study demonstrates that the emojis as a salutation could create the great impression at its first appearance in the beginning of a conversation and let the conversations endure and thus even let it done successfully.

Keywords: Emoji/s, Phatic function, Salutation, Keyboard-to-screen Communication, Speech Act Theory, Impression Management

PHATIC FUNCTIONS OF EMOJI

Phatic communication is the 'small talk' in the general communication between communicators to display and to assure the 'touch' and concern between each other. Bronislaw Malinowski (1923) coined the term "phatic communion" to characterise small talk as a social skill. According to Danesi (2017), "emoji usage seems to constitute, above all else, a visually based version of "small talk" that is used typically for establishing social contact and for keeping the lines of communication open and pleasant. Danesi (2017) after the detailed analysis of his respondents' (students) texts, came up with three phatic functions of emoji: 1. Utterance opener 2. Utterance ending and 3. Silence avoidance. As this paper is focusing exclusively on salutation function, the first two aspects will be taken into consideration to meet the purpose of this study.

The explanation provided by Danesi for the functions Utterance opener and Utterance ending are given below:

1. Utterance opener: "The smiley (or a similar emoji) is used in place of opening salutations such as "HI!" allowing the sender to present (literally) a positive face thus to imbue the message with a cheerful tone or mood. Such emoji are designed to strengthen or maintain friendly bonds between interlocutors even when (and perhaps more so) a message may have some negativity in its contents."
2. Utterance ending: "A quick message, such as a typical message or tweet, generally ends abruptly, and thus there is a risk that the sender may be appearing to reject or rebuff the receiver. So, the smiley (again) is used typically as the "good-bye" function in a message, thus allowing the sender to mitigate the danger of conveying any implicit sense of rejection, affirming the friendly bond that exists between the interlocutors."

As a nonverbal cue in CMC (Computer Mediated Communication), emojis are powerful in their own way. Stark and Crawford (2015) in the introduction of their paper adds "It began with a smile" to the heading and further explains that "these characters (emojis) are generally understood as a light-hearted, almost comedic form of communication, but they have a rich and complex socioeconomic history that precedes the range of mobile devices where they commonly appear."

Phatic speech is a crucial aspect of bonding rituals and a means for putting forth a "positive social face" during communicative interaction, mentioned Erving Goffman (1955) by coining the term. Similarly, emojis are doing the same by appearing in text-based electronic messages, whether it be in classic SMS or in any other text messaging interfaces.

Considering the social side of emojis, the salutation function of emojis takes a pivotal role in today's social communication (i.e. the use of language in social contexts). As given in the SwiftKey Emoji Report, April 2015, all languages (English, Portugese, German, French, Spanish and Italian) are more positive than negative (in relation to emoji use) with overall 70% positive and 15% negative. Thus, emoji as a nonverbal cue along with the verbal components in text-based electronic communication in diverse languages permeates a "positive social face."

Firth (1973, in MORADI, 2017) referred to greeting act as rite with verbal and non-verbal forms. The first one can occur in one of the three following linguistic unit forms:

(1) In question forms ("How do you do?", "What's up?", "How are you?" And so on.)
(2) In interjection forms ("Hello", "Hi" and so on.)
(3) In affirmation forms ("Good morning", "Good day", "Good evening" and so on.)

The last one can be expressed by gestures and mimics, that is, body language. Emoji in the text-based electronic communication, they are taking the shape of a combination of 'verbal' and 'nonverbal' forms by performing all the three above said functions imprecisely and the last function literally, based on the context. Plus, these days with the evolution of emojis into stickers which is described as "big bold emojis" (Jezouit, 2017 in Konrad et. al., 2019), these graphicons obtrusively are facilitating its users with emotional intensity, positivity, and intimacy (Konrad et. al., 2019) in their online interactions.

SALUTATION

Salutation is a basic form of phatic communication, write Danesi (2017). He adds that "in the text messages (collected) the traditional salutation of "Dear..." never occurs once. Rather, an informal "Hey" followed by an emoji is a common strategy; often only emoji are used.

"The power of a smile is unlimited. A smile is contagious. It is food for friendship," came in *The Mutualite,* the internal magazine of The State Mutual Company while announcing their campaign targeting corporate morale-building strategy – historically remarkable event and company which gave birth to the "smiley" face. Thus, a smile in face-to-face communication has a lot to do in relationship management, religious etiquette, personality management/ presentation of personality and more.Salutation is not a mere act of behaviour that

one follows as a custom. The salutation could even decide the acceptance of a man by others in the society as it has the power to present his/her personality.

In research field also, salutations have gained its own ground and importance. The aspect of salutations in the study context or in the web-based surveys is termed as the personalised salutation. The title, "Personalized salutation, power of sender and response rates to Web-based surveys," of the research article by Joinson and Reips (2005) itself talks out the potence of salutation and stressed that the personalized salutations could result in an increase people's sense of identifiability. Respi and Sala (n.d.) also are studying (work in progress) the impact of the personalised salutation in SMS invitation on response and measurement error and on respondents' characteristics and found that the personalization increases response rates.

In the same way, a smiley face in text-based electronic communication could create friendships, increase responses, express personalities, and so on. On the other side, the mood of the interpreter could affect the impressions made about other people (Forgas & Bower, 1987 in Wibowo et. al., 2016). According to Hancock & Dunham, 2001; Wall et al., 2016 in Glikson et. al. (2017) with the prevalent emoji usage there is an ample opportunity for smileys to influence virtual first impressions. On the contrary, they have their adverse effects on first impressions of competence that outweigh its benefits of creating positive tone to messages (Glikson et. al., 2017).

SPEECH ACT THEORY

As adopted and employed by Danesi (2017), the Jakobson's Model of Communication Process to explore the phatic function as well as other functions of emojis, we have made use of the one aspect of the speech act theory (MORADI, 2017). It is a theory developed by Searle (1969), student of Austin (1962) who proposed the term speech act.

"The speech act theory analyzes the functions of statements in accordance with the behaviour of speakers and listeners in conversation," (MORADI 2017). MORADI explained, "One among the Searle's categorisation among five speech acts are the 'expressive speech acts' (those that express the speaker's attitude and sensations). It is this category under which the 'utterance opener' falls. The speech act of greeting is a particularly appropriate speech act to investigate in a culture because it acts as a reflection through which we can find out what is valued in a particular culture. We cannot start our conversation without a greeting. Everyone can find himself trying to express pleasure each time when he meets a hearer. Consequently, "greeting" is one of the most repeated expressive speech acts in our life (Jibreen, 2010)".

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Phenomenological Research, one of the various types of qualitative research methodologies,describes how human beings experience a certain phenomenon. That means, the human experiences, feelings, and responses to a particular situation are given ample importance for studying various phenomena humans get involved in. Hence, though not adopting this approach, this section in this paper brings in one of the experiences whichexpress the salutation/phatic function of smile and smiley in face-to-face communication and text-based electronic communication respectively.

Face-to-face communication experience: Once while talking to one of my neighbours (to whom I had not talked earlier at all), she said "just 'give a smile' at least so that the person on the other end feels respected.'

Text-based electronic communication experience: I am a 'person of emojis' personally. I use emojis frequently while chatting with my family, friends and even acquaintances. Chatting with one of my friends once, as I was not in that good mood, I did not add any smiley in my message. Then and there came the question from my conversational partner, "What happened to you?,"who observed the absence of this tiny happy face and thus my mood as well as tone.

So, this experience of mine could reveal the importance of a smile as well as a smiley in human communication.

METHODOLOGY

The study has adopted non-experimental research design with quantitative research methodology to achieve the following objectives:

- Establishment of the importance of phatic communication in both online and offline interaction.
- Analysisof the perspectives of Post Graduate students andResearch scholars in Communication about their preferences and functions of emojis.
- Delineation of the phatic function of emojis in mediated communication.

Certainly, convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling that involves the sample being drawn from that part of the population that is close to hand and it is the one which is apt for pilot testing. As a preliminary stage in the research of emojis, using convenience sampling with a sample size of 196, a thorough investigationis conductedthePost Graduate students and research scholars inCommunication infew of the universities in South India.As this form of communication using emojis is persisting in KSC and as these graphical icons is evolving from one form to another due to its successful adoption and usage, this data is worth studying to understand the changes in progress.The tool for data collection is a group administered survey questionnaire that contained the demographic questions followed by a large number of other closed-ended questions and few open-ended questions. For meeting the purpose of this study, the questions pertaining to phatic communication are taken into consideration for analysis.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Atreemap(Fig. 1) for a quicker perception and visualization of the selected pertinent questions/statements is computed in order to look at the valid and substantive evaluations.

The more than half response, I love you ☺, to the question "**Which msg do you prefer**"reveals the acceptance of emojis at the present time, though this is only a minute but pertinent percentage representing the population. Emojis are defined to be more fun, colourful and humane compared to its predecessor emoticons.
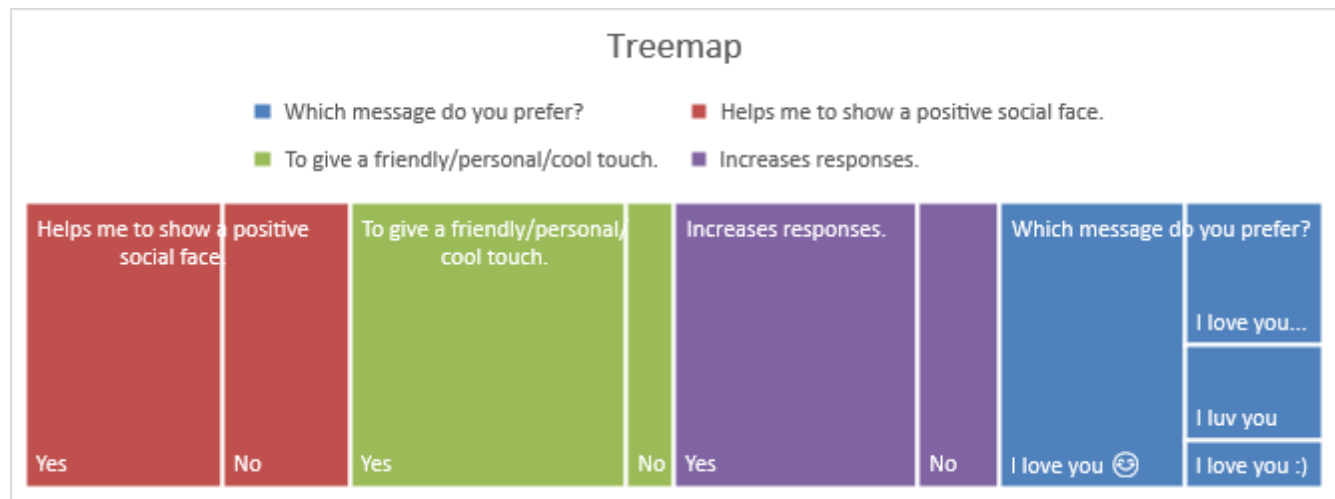

Fig. 1: Treemap showing the large contributors to each category

Unpredictably, the message with the emoticon – the precursor to emojis, has the least preference percentage – 7.1%, which is much lesser compared to the other two plain-text messages. The majority of the people emojis conveying the facial expressions associated with affect, like smiles, laughs, winks, and frowns, and of non-verbal gestures, such as waving, kissing, and sticking out one's tongue (Konrad et. al., 2020) are designed with the most vibrant and positive colour yellow, giving it more attractiveness and life. Ergo, its adoption and popularity in mediated communication platforms in higher rates. Emojis are proved to be the digital non-verbalsthat could enact as social cues by adding clarity to the context.James adds, "During a face-to-face conversation, our voice, facial expression, and body language communicate our feelings and tone.

Over SMS and email, emojis can help to communicate nonverbal cues.". On the other hand, the term quasi-non verbal is also used to mention emojis based on its ability to perform nonverbal communication functions. Durante (2016) reviewed and translated the elements of nonverbal elements like kinesics, vocalics, and chronemics to the digital elements of emojis. Emotional connect (Shah and Tewari, 2021), colourful and visual appeal (Crystal, 2001; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005 in Shah and Tewari, 2021), sustenance of a conversational connection (Kelly and Watts, 2015), conveyance of playfulness, sarcasm, laughter, surprise, sadness, even love (James, 2017) and so on could be regarded as the credits added to this preference of emojis. Inferred from these aspects, the predilection for emojis over text without emoticons or plain text is quite coherent that the users of emojis finds these two-dimensional graphicons as an appropriate tool to employ in their communication that could result in the facilitation of its another function – the improvement of the efficiency of communication (Tang & Hew, 2019).

The 64.3% percentage of them agreed to the statement,**"Emojis helps me to show apositive social face"**.That is, they feel that employing emojis with phatic function or salutation function works well in text-based electronic communication. By using these, they keep their interactions friendly and cheerful (Danesi, 2017) with the emojis/smiley showing their conversational partner a positive social happy face. Using emojis are even called as a modern social communication skill (James, 2017)in today's digital interactions. A quote by Judith Martin, an American columnist, author, and etiquette authority, utters the significance of salutation/emoji salutation in online conversations: "Email is very informal, a memo. But I find that not signing off or not having a salutation bothers me."The positivity (Konrad et. al., 2019) embedded in the emojis itself augments not merely the optimistic attitude towards the usage of emojis but also the irrepressible positive outlook towards the messages received by the receivers.Erving Goffman (1959) conceptualises that the interlocutors involved in mediated communication effortlessly manages their impression with the provision of self presentation in social interactions – they control the perception and thoughts of others using certain strategies; here the usage of emojis and thereby the portrayal of a positive face.

Moradi (2017) included that the greetings could reveal the politeness, the knowledge, the personality, the social status (rather than by considering the way s/he walks, eats and dresses), the attitude of a person to his/ her conversational partner (Nemani and Nasekh. 2013), and the culture of a person Duranti (1997). Accordingly, emoji also helps the interlocutors for presenting themselves. This could be stated as the reason for the substantial majority of 85.2% to agree with the statement that the **emojis give a friendly/personal/cool touch** to their message and thereby to their own personality.The light-heartedness (Prada et. al. 2018) of emojis could support the politeness of the sender in action. S/he could convey his/her greeting with much elegance and graciousness. Alongside, if the characteristics of emoticons such as non-seriousness, lightness, and/or humorous intent (Dresner & Herring, 2014) are associated with emojis, it is absolute that the emojis are also effective enough in satisfying these intensions of its users involved in KSC.Sociability and enjoyment (Tang & Hew, 2019) as two out of four main motives for using graphicons, the emojis allow its users to portray him/herself as amiable. Besides, the chances for the enjoyment in the usage of emojis in this way is plausible too as it is not a task laborious, but an easy one (Prada et. al. 2018). Here, the emoji user could enjoy two benefits at same time – impression management as well as effortless but interactive interactions.

Taking the number of responses into account, the majority (75%) of the students agrees that **the responses increase because of the use of emoji in messages**. Agyekum (2008) describes Akan[1] greetings as the basic oil of social relations that sets the tone and establishes the relationship between the interlocutors by performing its major functions such as the creation of social relationship, commitment to one another in social encounters and manifestation of an individual's communicative co. The relationship may show affirmation of equality or enact social inequalities. Thus, greetings can be used to indexicalize the social relationship between and among the interlocutors. Discovering how verbal and non-verbal behavior alters according to the relationships between Kirvonos and Knapp (1975), the result emphasizes the fact that the verbal greeting forms were less frequent between strangers. This means that by establishing the tone and a relationship between conversational partners, the emojis, though a nonverbal greeting form, acts as a salutation gesture and promotes a relationship.Additionally, the Contagion Theory and Information Signal

Theory explained in Shah and Tewari (2021) undoubtedly substantiates this capacity of emojis in increasing responses. This accrual could be as a result of the usage of emojis for the expression of emotions – either through the transmission of emotions from one to another like a contagion (the emotion felt-the emotion felt) and as the receiver's detection of emotion sent by the sender (the emotion felt-the emotion detected) respectively.

CONCLUSION

With the aforementioned features, the emojis could enable the initiation and establishment of conversations through the facilitation of salutation function. To conclude, 'Well begun is not half done, but almost done.' The following lines by Sheldon Allan Silverstein (2010) in his poem,Ations, will justify whatever we have discussed so far:

<div align="center">

If we meet and I say, 'Hi,'
That's a salutation.
If you ask me how I feel,
That's a consideration.
If we stop and talk a while,
That's a conversation.
If we understand each other,
That's a communication.
If we argue, scream and fight,
That's an altercation.
If later we apologize,
That's reconciliation.
If we help each other home,
That's a cooperation.
And all these actions added up
Make Civilization.
(And if I say this is a wonderful poem,
Is that exaggeration?)

</div>

Correlativewhen it comes to conversations which begin with a "😊" in place of "Hi"!... The phatic capacity of emojis travels from salutation to conversation to civilization, by facilitating positivity and amiability.In addition, these personalized salutations using emojis can signify the power of the sender and could result in increased response rate by symbolizing a positive social face and adding a friendly personal cool touch, displays the rectangles (Figure 2). To a greater extent would be the new extensionsand forms of emojis like stickers, motivating its users anddelivering their functionswith its newness, size, specificity and substantially more qualities.The same parameters in this study could be measured to comprehend the connection between emojis and stickers also. And thereby, the preference between emojis and stickers as well as the usage of stickers in meeting the phatic communication function could also be learned. The researchers could proceed from this point to explore the novel functionalities and contributions of graphicons (emoticons, emoji, stickers, animated GIFs, image macros, and video clips) in mediated communications and thereby comprehend it in an expansive perspective.

The evolutionary trajectories designed by Konrad et. al. (2020) is an indication of the graphicons' changes-in-progress. Emojis and stickers are positioned in the high phase and early phase respectively; with the former one crossing the stages like 1. Initial innovation 2. Highly variable use 3. Rise in popularity/frequency of use 4. Overlap in meaning/function with older form(s) 5. Displacing older form(s) 6. Conventionalization[2], bleaching[3], broadening[4] and the latter crossing the first four stages in the list. The predecessor emoticons are mentioned to have crossed the final stage as well, the seventh in the list – Declining popularity/frequency of use. That is, the emojis and the stickers have much more to go before its decline; providing conventional, unspecific, and non-descriptivefeatures through its different typesand

ensuring skillfulKSC. Certainly, the 'smartphone-bearers' of this day will leverage and utilize these ideograms furthermore to substitute their FTF (face-to-face) communications and embellish their KSC; especially their phatic expressions like greetings and farewells.

NOTES:

[1] Akan are the people of Ghana and their language; who live in present-day Ghana and Ivory Coast in West Africa.

[2] Conventionalisation – having become usual and generally accepted, or done in a way that is usual and generally accepted

[3] Bleaching – the loss or reduction of meaning in a word

[4] Broadening – the meaning of a word becomes broader or more inclusive than its earlier meaning

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