From "That damn dog is barking again", to "That dog is barking again😠"

Emojis as a complex expressive morpheme in computer-mediated communication

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LING 433: Pragmatics

1. Introduction

With the advent of the Internet, and globalization as a whole, it has become increasingly simpler and easier to communicate with people across the world. However, not all of this communication is face-to-face. Computer-mediated communication (CMC), the interaction between individuals via computer software interfaces and the Internet, is the driving factor behind the growing popularity of non-spoken communication. While video and voice calling services have increasingly been developed to connect people internationally, and locally, the domain in which people largely communicate online is through text (Liang & Walther, 2015). This heavy reliance on text-based interaction alters the ways in which people can utilize certain linguistic functions, like those that exist to project and interpret meaning outside of the written word.

This paper will discuss the pragmatics of expressives in text-based and computer-mediated communication, the kind typically found in casual conversation, such as: text messaging, social media interaction, and instant messaging. The nature of CMC leaves great room for different interpretations in discourse contexts because, many of the necessary linguistic features used to deliver and interpret meaning—intonation, stress, visual cues of the interlocutor's body language, and gestures—which are normally present in spoken communication, is now largely unavailable in the textual domain. As such, the use of expressive morphemes can be useful in CMC. One can write, "That *damn* construction outside is loud," and a reader can interpret the writer's explicit emotional state towards the construction going on around them—that is, they are not happy about it, and the volume of the sound makes them angry. Compare this with just writing, "That construction outside is loud," and the writer's intentions are now open to speculative interpretation (is this a simple declarative? Is there some importance to the loudness of the construction outside?).

However, since I believe use of expressives in text functions in the same way as their use in speech, I will be looking specifically at the use of emojis—pictorial images used in digitally mediated interactions—as a complex expressive morpheme. Emojis themselves have a wide range of usage in text-based interaction, and by applying Christopher Potts's basic properties of expressives—independence, nondisplaceability, perspective dependence, descriptive ineffability, immediacy, and repeatability—I argue that emojis in computer-mediated communication can function as complex expressive markers, and hold the same properties of 'classical'—i.e., lexical—expressives and expressive content.

In order to make sense of the argument of emojis as a complex expressive morpheme, it is important to understand the general ideas behind expressives as they are used in regular spoken communication, as well as prior linguistic research into understanding the linguistic usages of emojis, and emoticons, in computer-mediated communication (§2). §3 will examine emoji use by the average Twitter user and compare those examples with the basic properties of expressives as described Potts (2007); leading into a discussion of the data analyzed (§4), and my overall conclusions (§5).

2. Expressive content and the linguistics of emotive iconography

2.1 Expressives and the multidimensionality of meaning

Expressive content are generally thought to cover a few 'classical' linguistic categories, such as: expressive attributive adjectives, like *damn*, which prenominally modify noun phrases; epithets, which are used as expressive arguments; honorific inflections, as they manifest as expressive content in languages like Japanese and Korean; and some would say they also include discourse particles, like German *ja* (Potts, 2003; Potts et al., 2009). Generally, expressive content adds meaning to the overall proposition of an utterance—as emotional strength by way of expressive adjectives and epithets, or by projecting deference or respect in the use of honorifics—without altering the meaning of the proposition itself. Nigh unanimously, the literature on expressive morphemes and phrases point toward their use as "syntactically embeddable, but semantically unembeddable" (Potts, 2003, p. 5); the meaning encoded in expressive content appears within the grammatical configurations of the language under review, but this encoded

meaning does not factor into the overall semantic structure of the sentence. Potts (2003) asserts that, in many ways, the use of expressive content elicits a kind of conventional implicature that adds another layer of pragmatic meaning to the sentence as a whole.

Strictly speaking, conventional implicatures occur when an aspect of meaning is context-independent—that is, the implicature that arises is due to the semantic nature of the item—and understood to be separate from conversational implicatures, which occur when the context of the utterance dictates the meaning the interlocutors understand from it. In addition, conventional implicatures are equally understood to not be truth-conditional; the implicature has no influence on the actual truth conditions of the proposition, nor does it have any bearing on whether or not those conditions can be fulfilled (Birner, 2013). In terms of expressives, these criteria, largely, hold true; consider the following examples:

(1) The *fucking* doctors want me to pay $200 for a routine exam!

(2) The doctors want me to pay $200 for a routine exam!

The conventional implicature that arises here is the emotional state of the speaker of (1). With the addition of the expressive attributive adjective *fucking*, the implication that arises is that the proposition, "The doctors are charging $200 for a routine exam" is upsetting, and the speaker feels very strongly about the doctors charging this exorbitant sum. As such, with the omission of the expressive in (2), it is still clear that the proposition, "The doctors are charging $200 for a routine exam" holds, and is thus unchanged regardless of the inclusion, or omission, of the expressive morpheme. For expressives in particular, understanding *fucking* as a context-independent implicature is arguable; it is my sense that there is some dependence on the conventionalized understanding of what *fucking* can mean, and how it is largely used in similar contexts, in order to draw the implicature. However, for the most part, expressive content seem to functions quite similarly to conventional implicatures, and for the purposes of this paper, I will assume as much.

This separation between conventional implicature, or expressive content, and the proposition can be described as the "multidimensionality" of meaning. Implicatures arise in

the presence of expressive content that have no bearing on the proposition in question—or, the at-issue content—it is understood that they exist on separate "dimensions". Potts (2007) explains the dimension of expressive content in detail, along similar lines to the separation of conventional implicatures and its at-issue proposition. He formulated a set of basic properties all expressives are thought to share (taken from Potts, 2007, pp. 166–167):

1. Independence: Expressive content contributes a dimension of meaning that is separate from the regular descriptive content.

2. Nondisplaceability: Expressives predicate something of the utterance situation.

3. Perspective dependence: Expressive content is evaluated from a particular perspective. In general, the perspective is the speaker's, but there can be deviations if the conditions are right.

4. Descriptive ineffability: Speakers are never fully satisfied when they paraphrase expressive content using descriptive, i.e., nonexpressive, terms.

5. Immediacy: Like performatives, expressives achieve their intended act simply by being uttered; they do not offer content, so much as inflict it.

6. Repeatability: If a speaker repeatedly uses an expressive item, the effect is generally one of strengthening the emotive content, rather than one of redundancy.

In sum, expressive content exist outside of the basic at-issue semantic composition of the utterance in which they are contained. This multidimensionality is what gives pragmatic depth to sentences, or discourse contexts, and allows communication to be bundled in additional, and sometimes insightful, meaning. It is with these criteria that Potts (2007) has laid out that I use as the basic framework upon which I base my analysis of emojis as a similar kind of semi-linguistic expressive morpheme unique to CMC. Preceding the analysis, however, is a brief look into the pragmatic and general linguistic applications of emoticons and other graphical iconographies in CMC.

2.2 Use of emojis and emoticons in CMC

The growing proliferation of computer-mediated communication through e-mail, text and instant messaging, and social media accounts mean that, increasingly, people are choosing to communicate in a textual domain. This manner of speaking comes with the disadvantage of losing paralinguistic modes of conveying meaning that is typically present in spoken communication: pitch accent, sentence prosody, intonation, gestures, body language, et cetera. In light of these disadvantages, some researchers have turned to understanding the roles in which emoticons—and by extension, emojis—play in allowing interlocutors to interpret and project meaning outside of the descriptive dimension.

Dresner and Herring (2010) note that early studies conclude that emoticons are a purely emotive aspect of online and text-based communication, and a substitute for the normal kinds of visual cues in face-to-face conversation. However, when reviewing some of the literature on the subject, including Skovholt, Grønning, and Kankaanranta (2014) and their claim that the main use of emoticons are as pragmatic markers, similar to "hedges"—mitigating terms to downplay the speaker's certainty of their assertions. In the same vein, Luor, Wu, Lu, and Tao (2010) found that, statistically, only about 12% of emoticon use was for the express purpose of conveying emotion (Thompson & Filik, 2016). In terms of textual communication and the high likelihood of a multiplicity of interpretation of written correspondences, it is then the case that emoticons have far surpassed the boundaries of strict emotive usage. In their own research, Thompson and Filik (2016) looked at the use of emoticons—expressive markers written using the keyboard—in order to distinguish utterances intended literally, or sarcastically, as well as their use as markers indicating praise or criticism. The empirical results of their research conclude that certain emoticons were used more often to clarify the intention behind their messages, with sarcastic comments being more often accompanied by an emoticon. Additionally, they found that certain emoticons associated more with either criticism or praise. The results of this study, and the ones summarized within it, indicate a broad spectrum of linguistically viable emoticon use in CMC.

Similarly, Dresner and Herring (2010) studied the pragmatic functions of emoticons in online discourse; particularly as a marker for illocutionary force in computer-mediated communication. Illocutionary force—or illocutionary acts—fall under the pragmatic concept of performative utterances; a speaker utters some sentence (the locutionary act), and as a result of uttering that sentence, an act is performed (the illocutionary act, a "speech act"), and then there is some causal effects that arise from the sentence being uttered (the perlocutionary act) (Birner, 2013). Typically, these acts fall under categories of apology, invitation, or thanking someone; as well as, threats, bets, and requests. The mere act of uttering an apology—"I'm sorry"—means that the apology has taken place; that is the basic idea of a speech act, or performative utterance. It is then the addressee's decision to accept, or reject, the speaker's apology. In the context of emoticons, Dresner and Herring (2010) studied the performative aspect of their use; more often, emoticons are not used to project a certain emotion, because emoticons themselves do not always clearly map onto a particular emotion ("I'm still waiting to hear back from that job interview :-)". The speaker is clearly not "happy"; an anxious smile? Or, the projection of a positive attitude?). Therefore, they claim, that emoticons are used as an illocutionary act; where, by the very inclusion of the emoticon in the sentence indicates an act has been performed (Dresner & Herring, 2010). This opens up possibilities of more pragmatically functional uses of emojis and emoticons in communication, beyond their initial interpretation as nonverbal markers of emotions. It is with these ideas in mind that I find foundation to continue in the analysis of emojis—more complex in their nature than emoticons—as pragmatic expressive particles.

Before continuing, there should be some clarification between the various kinds of face-like graphic iconography available to participants of text-based communication. Emoticons—or "emotion icons", beginning as the classic :-)—were first conceived by computer scientist Scott Fahlman in 1982 for use on an online computer science forum. The idea was taken from Japanese *kaomoji*—or "face characters", shown as non-rotated face-like symbols like, (•◡•). As computer interfaces became more sophisticated, the :-) style gave way to actual graphical representations like ☺ (Dresner & Herring, 2010). Eventually, these simple depictions gave way to what are now known as emojis; in different

styles depending on the software interface, this is what they look like on Twitter: 😊. Obviously, emojis are now much more sophisticated in their representation than their precursor, emotions. Emojis have also expanded beyond the facial—and symbolic, like <3—representations of emotive expression, as was the case previously. They now cover a wide range of representations, as exampled below (from "Twitter Twemoji 2.0 Emoji List," n.d.):

1. More humanoid representations: 👦🤷‍♀️🚶‍♂️👌🏻
2. Flora and fauna: 🐻🌵🍁
3. Food and drink: 🍝🍾
4. Infrastructure and locations: 🚆🛫⛲🏟️
5. And many more.

As shown, emojis can encompass a far greater range of semantic expression, than was previously possible with emoticons. Such that, when Dresner & Herring (2010) make the claim that emoticons are not penetrating the linguistic dimension of language, lexically or morphosyntactically, emojis have the ability to be applied, at least, in the pragmatic, semantic, and lexical domains: (3) and (4).

(3) Happy 🍁 Day!

happy [maple leaf] day

'Happy Canada Day!'

The 'maple leaf' emoji is understood as a substitute for the lexical item, *Canada,* by way of the country's iconic maple leaf flag (from which this emoji is liked stylized after) and metonymic interpretation;

(4) That 🏗️ is so 🔊 😠 😠

That [building construction] is so [speaker with three sound waves] [angry] [angry]

'That construction is so *damn* loud!'

The 'building construction' emoji is a simple NP, noun phrase, substitute for the word *building construction*. If you have ever had to change the volume of your smart phone or computer, the 'speaker with three sound waves' emoji can be understood as *loud*, or indicative of something having a higher volume of sound. In light of this, how do the 'angry' face emojis factor into linguistic expression?

The ways in which emoji are penetrating the linguistic sphere is vast and changing, so why shouldn't their range of use extend past previous ideas of extralinguistic emotive expression? In taking this stance, I argue that instances of emojis similar to that of (4) and the 'angry face' indicate a pragmatic contribution of emojis to the descriptive dimension, as a marker of an additional expressive dimension and conveying expressive meaning.

3. Emojis as complex expressive morphemes: in practice

In order to argue the complex expressive nature of emojis in CMC, it is important to understand emojis under the basic properties as outlined by Potts (2007) in his study of expressives, and the expressive dimension. To reiterate, these properties are: independence, nondisplaceability, perspective dependence, descriptive ineffability, immediacy, and repeatability. All of the examples under discussion in the following subsections and footnotes are taken from publicly viewable posts on Twitter, as these are probably the most natural usages of emojis in the expressive context I am arguing for in this paper. By choosing public tweets, I hope to minimize the possibility of stumbling across in-jokes, or personal interpretations that might arise in more private discourse contexts. In an attempt to preserve authenticity, in their initial introduction—usually demarcated (#a), the example tweets have not been altered nor corrected. The following subsections will break down my analysis by the properties of expressives, as listed in §2.1, previously.

3.1 Independence

The property of independence ensures the separate dimension that expressives must have from the descriptive content, the at-issue meaning of the sentence as a whole,

while also informing the addressee about some additional meaning the speaker wishes to convey (Potts, 2007). With emojis, they are quite visibly separate from the sentence under review, so how do they inform meaning? Consider (5):

(5) a. My sister got a sweet anonymous note in the mail w/ a Starbucks gift card in it & I can't even get my BF to FaceTime me bc it's ⚾season. 😕

Despite the visual separation between emoji and text, the overall meaning of the tweet should be considered in its entirety. Additionally, the emojis in this tweet function separately, calling for a distinction between the linguistic usages of emojis. The 'baseball' emoji is clearly a pictorial substitute for the lexical item *baseball* in the term *baseball season*. The expressive morpheme here is the 'slightly frowning' emoji—not to be confused with ☹️, the 'white[1] frowning' face, which is frowning slightly deeper, and therefore, is a little bit sadder. Meaning, it is not the presence of the emojis themselves which separate dimensions of meaning; one emoji can exist within the descriptive dimension, while another can exist without. The multidimensionality becomes clear if you consider (5b) and (5c):

(5) b. Descriptive dimension: My sister got a sweet anonymous note in the mail, with a Starbucks gift card in it. And I can't even get my boyfriend to FaceTime me, because it's baseball season.

c. Expressive dimension: My sister got a sweet anonymous note in the mail, with a Starbucks gift card in it. And I can't even get my boyfriend to FaceTime me, because it's baseball season (and I am slightly sad about our different circumstances)

Unlike regular expressives, getting at the expressive meaning emojis are meant to convey can be difficult, and largely pragmatic. Face emojis can be fairly straightforward, as we see in prior discussions on discerning the relationship between emoticons and meaning in CMC. Interesting aspects of the expressive value of emojis arise when you look at non-face emoji examples like (6a):

[1] "When describing pre-emoji Unicode symbols, white in a character names refers to the symbol being hollow/outlined", i.e. ☹ ("Emojipedia", n.d.).

(6) a. Pretty sad how some people assume they know everything about someone just because they stalked their social media👀🐍

How is an example like this supposed to be interpreted? What do a pair of eyes and a snake contribute to the at-issue content? The descriptive dimension, however, is clear and must follow the same pattern:

(6) b. Descriptive dimension: I think it's pretty sad that people will assume they know everything about someone, just because they looked at that person's social media account

Interpreting non-face emoji can be difficult for some, but if you regard the emojis in the context of the descriptive dimension, even someone who is unused to interpreting emojis can understand the gist of the expressive meaning. Sometimes non-face emoji can be interpreted literally—as seen in (4) above, or with the mapping of ⚾ as *baseball*—or figuratively. 👀, or the 'eyes' emoji, is "sometimes used to indicate 'pervy eyes' to indicate approval of an attractive photo posted online; or 'shifty eyes' to convey a deceitful act" ("Emojipedia", n.d.); when considered alongside the 'snake' emoji, the interpretation that is drawn is one of disapproval of the descriptive dimension, or the demarcation that such behavior is a 'shifty' or 'snake-like', deceitful act, as in (6c):

(6) c. Expressive dimension: I think it's pretty sad that people will assume they know everything about someone, just because they looked at the person's social media account (and [I think] that is very deceitful or dishonest and people that do this are snakes: deceitful)

The independence property is fundamental in the idea of pragmatic multidimensionality in studying the use of expressive content. As shown, emojis are quite visibly apart from the sentences as a kind of paralinguistic entity, but still function in tandem with, or sometimes quite expressly within the linguistic parameters as substitutive of actual words. As expressive content, emojis color the black and white text of computer-mediated communication, and add depth of meaning to what can otherwise be read as simple declaratives or offhand statements.

3.2 Nondisplaceability

Nondisplaceability requires that the expressive dimension predicates something of the utterance situation (Potts, 2007); the expressive meaning can only describe the feelings of the speaker at the moment in which they are speaking it—the expressive dimension cannot be applied to past feelings, if the current ones are different, nor can it be ascribed to future feelings about the subject. Looking at (7), we can make a case in this regard:

(7) a. I forgot to do my homework 😂[2]

b. Descriptive dimension: I forgot to do my homework

c. Expressive dimension: I forgot to do my homework (and [presently] that is hilarious to me)

It is the expressive dimension that encodes the emotional state of the writer as how they are feeling at that particular utterance time. This present-state emotion can be understood through some applicational tests:

(8) Last week, I forgot to do my homework😂, # and now I strongly regret doing so

(9) What if I forget to do my homework next week😂, # right now imagining that makes me sad

Attempting to ascribe the expressive dimension given by the emoji to a past time in (8), while asserting an opposite feeling in the present is difficult to understand in that way, and is therefore infelicitous. The immediate understanding of (8), if trying to reconcile the infelicity, is more along the lines that the current emotional state of the writer is, both, feeling flippant about forgetting their homework last week, but tinged in regret at the same time. The two emotional states work in tandem with each other, and cannot be parsed apart on the basis of time. Similarly, (9) shows that the expressive dimension cannot be

[2] This emoji encodes 'laughing with tears of joy', ("Emojipedia," n.d.)

ascribed to any future actions or considerations, where the present emotional state of the writer is supposed to be different.

As an expressive marker, emojis fall in line with the more 'classical' representations of expressive content, as they cannot be interpreted as ascribing emotional content to any time besides the utterance time, or the immediate time of their use. The reasons that go into the notion of nondisplaceability become clear when considered alongside the other basic properties of expressive content.

3.3 Perspective dependence

The important nature of the expressive dimension is that the expressive content offered in an utterance is, generally, restricted to the perspective of the speaker uttering it. Although, there are some cases where an expressive can be used, to indicate the emotional state of a person being talked about (Potts, 2007). In much of the same manner, emojis are indicative of the writer's feelings on the descriptive dimension under review. Consider again example (7), and compare it to (10):

(7) a. I forgot to do my homework 😂

(10) a. My sister said she forgot to do her homework 😂

The descriptive dimensions of the two examples above are different; (7) encodes the writer forgetting to do their homework, while (10) encodes a recount of the writer's sister forgetting to do her homework. However, the emotional layer lent to the propositions by the expressive morpheme clearly situates the perspectives to be from the writer's point of view. Attempting to understand it otherwise becomes infelicitous:

(10) b. My sister said she forgot to do her homework (and I, the writer, think that's hilarious)

c. My sister said she forgot to do her homework (# and she thinks it's hilarious, but I wish she would take her education seriously)

However, Potts (2007) does make exception for perspective shifting, "if the circumstances are right", which is typically understood to be embedded clauses indicative of quoting someone else's perspective. At present, it is my understanding that emojis are extremely limited in perspective shifting, and can essentially only appear in actual quoted instances:

(11) a. 😒sister just said she "forgot to do her homework😂" this girl...

b. (I'm unamused but) my sister just said how she forgot to do her homework (and she thinks that's funny) this girl…

Generally, the use of emojis to convey some kind of emotional meaning largely began as additions to the ends of propositions. This kind of "tacked-on" functionality could then be interpreted as a "commentary", or "afterthought", to the at-issue content. Therefore, understanding expressive content portrayed by emojis then take on the nearly strict perspective of the writer of the utterance. Any instance of perspective shifting is still clearly marked in some visual representation of quoting the other person, in order to shift the expressive to the other person's perspective. In CMC, setting aside the person's initial comment also requires additional commentary by the writer in order to differentiate their views as one possibly different from the emotion portrayed in the expressive dimension.

3.4 Descriptive ineffability

Descriptive ineffability describes the feeling of insufficiency when trying to paraphrase expressive content in nonexpressive ways (Potts, 2007). Expressive adjectives like *fucking* or *damn* lend a kind of verbal aggression that maximizes the emotional effect of the statements in which they are embedded. In terms of emoji, their pictorial representations stand-out quite readily amongst the text, drawing the eye directly for the little colorful symbols. When considering examples like (11), the emoji stands out, not just as a little picture in a sea of text, but it lends an emotional depth that paraphrase could never quite capture:

(11) a. Gutted to hear about David Gest. Spoke last month, he was larger than life, sillier than ever. Safe journey friend 

b. Gutted to hear about David Gest. Spoke last month, he was larger than life, sillier than ever. Safe journey friend (I take my hat off to you)

Quite clearly, the paraphrase in (11b) just doesn't seem to capture quite the same somber, respectful acknowledgement of the deceased's life, as is embodied and interpreted through the visual cue of the 'top hat' emoji.

In general, the versatility of emojis and their wide range of interpretation lend them to the property of descriptive ineffability. They can visually "shock" readers, in much of the same ways that coloring your speech with profanities or epithets can "shock" interlocutors. In emojis, and as with expressives as a whole, paraphrase is not as sufficient in conveying the same kinds of pragmatic intent; this is likely, in no small part, due to the visualization of emojis, and translating the interpretations drawn from seeing the graphic image into words will never be quite as fulfilling to interlocutors, when they can just add the emoji in few words with more meaning.

3.5 Immediacy

Immediacy deals with the performative nature of expressive content: the simple act of uttering the expressive elicits the interpretation behind it (Potts, 2007). As Dresner and Herring (2010) have noted, there is a performative aspect to use of emoticons in speech, where the inclusion of the graphic symbol immediately elicits the expressive information it encodes. As seen throughout the examples included in this paper, I find it to be quite salient that emojis are a visual representation of the emotion felt about the descriptive element of the utterances. Much like how *fucking* and *damn* readily, and immediately, alerts interlocutors of the speaker's emotional state; emojis also provide the same kinds of expressive information, just as readily, and just as immediately.

3.6 Repeatability

In regards to expressive content, repeatability is a property where repeated uses of the expressive morpheme do not result in a sense of redundancy. Rather, it has the effect of strengthening the emotion behind the expressive (Potts, 2007). Consider the interesting example in (12a):

(12) a.  gamer culture  [3]

The at-issue content here isn't so much an actual proposition, but a topic of interest (9b); the truncated style of communication found on Twitter will oftentimes take advantage of the complex meanings and wide application allowed in the use of emojis to, at the same time, incorporate the emoji into the at-issue content, as well as enhance it by way of expressive usage. The expressive dimension realized in the excessive use of the 'smiling poop' emoji is on one hand very aggressive. On the other hand, its friendly, smiling face can, perhaps, be interpreted as ironic in this aggression, or as indicative of a more passive aggressive stance on the matter (9c).

(12) b. Descriptive dimension: Gamer culture (a topic I want to make a comment on, is *shit*)

c. Expressive dimension: Gamer culture (a topic I want to make a comment on, is the biggest, most gigantic load of *goddamned fucking bullshit* [maybe said with a smile, or in some other joking, ironic manner])

Conditionally, the older versions of this emoji did not include the smiling face, nor are there other emojis of this style with other kinds of faces, or without any face at all ("Emojipedia," n.d.). It is not absolutely clear to me if the face expressly adds this ironic and/or passive meaning, or if all users will interpret it this way. It may be likely that for lack of other alternatives, the style of the emoji overrides the smiling face. Or, it may be that this ironic interpretation was introduced with the introduction of the smiling face.

[3] Interesting to note is that the 'smiling poop' emojis surround the text. And, it is still clearly understood that the iterations of the emoji are modifying the text they are surrounding. Outside of the scope of this paper, but perhaps can lend evidence to some syntactic argument about emoji use in CMC.

Less obscenely, (13) is another example of repeatability as a feature of expressive use of emojis:

(13) a. Cristiano Ronaldo this season: Games: 42 Goals: 46 ⚽[4] Assists: 15 And people say he's having a bad season. 🔥🔥🔥

b. Descriptive dimension: In 42 games this season, Cristiano Ronaldo scored 46 goals and had 15 assists. And people say that he's having a bad season.

c. Expressive dimension: In 42 games this season, Cristiano Ronaldo scored 46 goals and had 15 assists. And people say that he's having a bad season (he is doing so well, he's not just hot, he's on fire!)

Of course, the 'fire' emoji used once could signify being "on fire", but as it is repeated, the size of the metaphorical fire, so to speak, increases—a sense similar to comparing a campfire to a three-alarm house fire, in terms of Ronaldo's current performance and successes this season.

Repeatability is the property that allows expressive morphemes to be repeated in the same utterance without the awkward feeling of redundancy in expression. The repetition of the expressive content, instead, inflates the expressive dimension and strengthens the emotional power of the speaker's feelings. Emojis, as graphic images, are easily repeatable when being applied to text. What makes them useful as complex expressive morphemes is that the multiple iterations of the emoji are 1) not disregarded; 2) they do not lend a feeling of redundancy in their repetition, and 3) the repetition of emojis adds strength and emphasis to the expressive dimension that they represent.

[4] The 'soccer ball' emoji here is seemingly used in the kind of 'highlighting' application that is also common in emoji use, as reiterating an already present lexical item or basic idea. This is probably the most 'visual' usage of emojis:

(i) Keep in mind that: 🍟 fries 🍔 burger 🍕 pizza 🍝 spaghetti 🍩 donut 🍦 ice cream 🎂 cake 🍫 chocolates will never break your ❤️

4. Discussion

Accurately pinpointing exactly what expressives are, or the category of expressive content is, seems to be tricky, variable, and sometimes nebulous. Therefore, there can be some value in interpreting the pragmatic functions of emoji under some basic criteria. Looking at Potts's (2007) basic properties of expressives—independence, nondisplaceability, perspective dependence, descriptive ineffability, immediacy, and repeatability—it is my stance to argue the expressive nature as emojis can be used in computer-mediated communication.

In terms these basic criteria, emojis appear to have the same functional properties as lexical depictions of expressive meaning. In terms of independence, emojis can be immediately separated from the text visually, but more importantly, they are separated along the lines of interpretational meaning. This demarcation between at-issue and expressive content can set the tone for the rest of the categories of interpretation. As nebulous as defining expressive content seems to be, they are effectively working alongside each other. The property of independence is not necessarily viewed as expressly separate as from nondisplaceability, perspective dependence, or immediacy. It is the pragmatic functions of expressives as a whole that encode for these various properties. As such, the properties themselves do not appear in a vacuum as separate from one another. If the expressive morpheme can be interpreted as descriptively ineffable, it follows that it is at the same time immediate, nondisplaceable, and ultimately independent from the at-issue content.

For the most part, it appears that emojis can be applied as functional pragmatic morphemes to regular text in CMC. Judging the linguistic interpretations of emojis alongside attested criteria for determining expressive content has proven the same. In consideration of the growing proliferation of CMC in global social networking, it is understandable that users are adapting to the barebones nature of textual communication, and applying linguistic functionality to anything within reach—in this case the graphical icons known as emojis.

5. Conclusion

As human societies have evolved throughout history, introduction of new domains for language use has continuously altered the way people use language, as well as expanded it. In this modern era of globalization and increasing reliability on social interaction via the Internet and computer-mediated communication, it can then be expected that the language used online would evolve to suit the needs of its users. Perhaps it was the case that beginning uses of emotive icons were used purely to provide extralinguistic emotion to the generally emotionless textual exchanges. As it stands now, the applicational value of emoticons and emojis have far surpassed the simple "emotive" aspect, despite first impressions. Taking examples from social media site Twitter, with consideration the baseline properties of expressive content, as outlined in Potts (2007), I argued that emojis can function as complex expressive morphemes in computer-mediated communication. Emojis and other non-linguistic entities color the textual landscape of digital interaction, and by acknowledging the possibility, could have implications for further understanding of linguistic perception and processing by users across various domains.

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