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A Pragmatic Study of Emoji in English comments on Instagram
KEYWORDS: Pragmatics, Emoji, Taxonomic Functions, Social Media

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Abstract

The internet technology and social media are more prevalent nowadays because of the big influence they have brought to social life. These definitely change the way we communicate to the extent that they facilitate the interactions between people. In fact, the use of emoji is important because it changes the writing system of instant messaging in computer mediated communication to compensate for the lack of paralinguistic devices such as gestures, body language and facial expressions. This paper studies the pragmatic function of emoji which is one of the most widespread techniques that is brought up with the new technology. However, misunderstanding which occurs in written communication due to the lack of non-verbal means calls for looking for new device, i.e. emoji. This may help to give the correct interpretation when emojis are associated with written messages on the Instagram. Emojis on Instagram corpus are categorised and analysed within the main structure of Yus's (2014) eight-function taxonomy. These can be abbreviated into 'attitude signal' 'attitude intensity enhancer' illocutionary force modifier' 'humor' 'irony' 'emotion signal' 'parallel emotion signal' 'emotion intensity enhancer'. The results show that emojis can be analysed due to this taxonomy. In addition, the participants in different comments use these functions, and each emoji adds a new meaning to the utterance, which helps in showing the feelings and attitudes of the participants.

1. Introduction

Emoji is a pictorial character, which marks facial expressions, emotions, thoughts and actions. It has been widely used in social media to convey meaning parallel with words, but it takes place beyond textual information to make the

message more effective. However, misunderstanding may occur as a result of the wrong use of emoji, and this however causes problems in relation to the misinterpretation of the intended meaning of emoji. Moreover people from different cultures understand and use the same emoji differently because of its interpretive flexibility and its visual nature. Many emojis are visually similar especially when they are displayed in small size there is no standard application for them. Emojis lack many characteristics of written language and speech and this arouses a sort of difficulty due to the absence of suprasegmental features. As result, smooth and successful communication will be far-fetched among the interlocutors. Nevertheless, emojis have the function of paralinguistic device, which help in the interpretation of the message sent. The social and linguistic function of emoji are helpful device to facilitate the complexity of perceiving an appropriate emotion, attitude and the intended meaning of the message as well. Apart from their complexity, the different context and situation where participants of communication use emoji, in addition to individual preference, can all play a role in their interpretation. The benefit of using emojis lie in the indeterminacy of its pictographic and iconographic legibility as an indicator of illocution, emotion or social marker. It also reflect culture, life style and living conditions of different users of emoji of English social media. The study is concerned with the ambiguity in the interpretation of emojis, the variability in the representation and the overlapping between linguistic modalities and emoji.

2. Emojis

Cuhan, et al, (2018:1) argue that the word "emoji" comes from Japan and it is connected with the meaning "picture-word" and it can be translated into (e-picture), (mo-writing) and (ji-character); the invention of emojis enhance a shift towards visual language. In 1998, a Japanese telecommunications worker Shigetaka Kurita created an emoji and managed to replace emoji by the graphic emoticon style and clearly it was different from emoticon. The Oxford English Dictionary defines emoji as a "small digital image or icon used to express an idea, emotion, etc., in electronic communications." Goldman says that the word

"emoji" , in English, can be used both as singular and plural. He defines emoji as pictures (pictographs) that are characteristically designed in a colorful cartoon form and used in written communication; these emojis symbolize things such as faces, weather, vehicles and buildings, food and drink, animals and plants, or icons that represent emotions, feelings, or activities. Emojis are static images, but they can be animated (Goldman, 2018:1232). Hkami adds that the word emoji comes from japan, it is the new generation of emoticons and she defines "emojis" as " actual icons appear on the keyboard can be used in texting digital commination media"(ibid, 2017:1).

Emoticons on the other hand, are a combination of "emotion" and "icons", commonly accompanied by the expression of emotions has been used as an indicator of illocutionary force, conveying the author's feelings or intended tone. They satisfy comparable roles even though emoji have further complexity and may be expected to function in a different way in Computer Mediated Communication.(Schneebeli, Celia 2018). As for Dresner and Herring (2010:1) they define emoji as "graphic sign" which contains smiley faces, characterised as iconic indicators of feeling.

3.1 The Data

The data includes "emoji" from English social media comments on Instagram. The emojis used for the pragmatic analysis are 50. The Emojipedia and Unicode standard are helpful devices in providing us with the present data.

3.2 Criteria for Collecting Data

The researcher selected "emoji" according to their popularity, meaning and usage; for example" face with tears of joy" in 2015 was selected by the Ox Ford dictionary to be the word of the year. . In 2014, the Second popular emoji is "heart emoji" was selected as the word of the year by the Global Language Monitor (Labem2017:1). Smiley faces are the most popular emoji. According to Quintly, emoji usage helps to increase engagement by a whopping 48% on Instagram. Posts that use emoji on Instagram have interaction rate of 2.21%. On

the other hand, posts without emoji have 1.77% (Sabih Javed 2018). 56% of Instagram profile used emoji while the remaining 44% did not make use of them. In addition to the top emoji used on Instagram in which camera emoji is the first emoji in the list there are emoji used in specific time such as using "pumpkin" in Halloween and the "Christmas tree" used in December(Simon cocking 2017) . Insatgram seems to be the platform that is most emoji friendly in which 69% of emoji used on Insatgram. The second criterion: the availability of the English conversations on the annotated social platforms. The development of English language is faster nowadays that is due to social media and instant messaging, Professor John Sutherland's study reveals people use language entirely different on social media and the existence of emojis could be the next phase of language since people's communication moved to be pictographic with the emergence of Emoji

(http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article3063505/Generational-language-gap-seismic.html).

Phil Lewis's study in 2016 found that the following emoji are the top five emoji that are used in social media

Image	Emoji	Usage	Percent (usage based)				
			Strongly Dislike	Dislike	Unsure	Like	Strongly Like
1	😍	75.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
2	😊	88.89%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	78.13%	21.88%
3	😮	72.22%	3.85%	0.00%	96.15%	0.00%	0.00%
4	😔	83.33%	10.00%	90.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
5	😫	88.89%	96.88%	3.13%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

3.3 Data collection

The corpus data is collected manually from the conversations found on the English social platforms. The process take into consideration that such conversations are clear and do not include slang, two main source Emojipedia and Unicode standard are refered to, in order to scientifically base the data collection.

3.4 Data Sampling

Sampling data is not an easy task since it requires a lot of reading in order to select the appropriate and the most popular emoji. However, emoji are manipulated to convey certain emotional states and social purposes on the platforms.

3.5 Methods for Data Analysis

The pragmatic methods of analysis are used for the analysis of emoji in English social media comments. The type of the method depends essentially on the principles of the adopted pragmatic model of Francisco Yys's eight-function taxonomy.

3.6 The Adopted Pragmatic Model

The current study has adopted Francisco Yus's (2014) model of analysis. It is the revised framework of Eight-Taxonomy functions within Relevance Theory. Originally, Yus's model is based on his *Cyber pragmatics* (2011). In his study (2011:167), he suggests a list of seven instances based on a simple nonverbal behavior, taking into consideration the intention of the interlocutor and the possible effect on the receiver of the message, these functions are considered as the most comprehensive and complete pragmatic functions. However, from 1 to 8 are paraphrased and simplified by Li and Yang (2018:4) as 'attitude signal' 'attitude intensity enhancer' illocutionary force modifier' 'humor' 'irony' 'emotion signal' 'parallel emotion signal' 'emotion intensity enhancer'. However Yus (2014) explained that some of these functions could be mixed because the

divided line between certain couples is 'fogy' for example, it is difficult to differentiate emotions in functions 6 and 8 from 'attitude' in functions 1 and 2.

Inorder to acquaint the reader with the Eight-function Taxonomy, detailed account of the cognitive pragmatic model is given below by Yus (2016:8):

1. "Attitude intensity enhancer" this function used to identify the prepositional attitude behind the utterance, which would be hard to understand without the use of emoji. This function could be satisfied equally by the use of verbal elements in order to communicate successfully. Besides emoji could be used in a way parallel to paralinguistic cues in face –to- face interaction to express the attitude of the speaker.

2. "To communicate a higher intensity of a propositional attitude which has already been coded verbally." Additional layer of intensity is added by the use of emoji instead of using any linguistic elements.

3. "Illocutionary force modifier" strengthening or mitigating the intended effect of the utterance, softening the force of the utterance is much more frequent than strengthening.

4. "To contradict the explicit content of the utterance: humor" messages containing emoji with such function intended to be joking, which should not be interpreted literally so as the prepositional attitude have humorous association.

5. "To contradict the explicit content of the utterance: irony" in the instance the utterance have different prepositional content to have an ironic tone. This function differs from joking, iron, irony has explicit dissociative attitude.

6. "To add a feeling or emotion towards the propositional content of utterance (affective attitude towards the utterance)". Users use emoji to convey certain feeling and this is the traditional function of emoji, emoji are used to show feeling about the content of the utterance.

7. "To add a feeling or emotion towards the communicative act". In this case the use of nonverbal behavior not only qualifying the prepositional content but also have social connotation and used to show the act of communication in a parallel way to the verbal content.

8. "Emotion intensity enhancer" to increase the force of feeling or emotion which coded verbally by using emoji. (Francisco Yus: 2018)

4. A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF EMOJI

 Users of emojis are different, so the pragmatic functions and aims behind such use are different depending on the participants' attitudes, moods and situational contexts. The use of emoji is to add an affective tone to text understanding of messages, or else to assign different meanings to the symbols used. Evans (2017: 27) said that "[E]moji actually enables users to better express their emotions, and even appears to help them to become more effective digital communicators." In fact, using emoji in digital text communication via social media gives the users a highly expressive manner to represent their feelings. Like many words and other symbols, emoji is a means of digital communication, but sometimes it reflects ordinary linguistic evolution. emoji meanings pose a special problem because no definitive reference source catalogs the disparate meanings. However, emojis on Instagram (one of the most popular English social media) corpus in the present study are categorized and analyzed within the main structure of Yus's (2014) 8-function taxonomy. Moreover, these functions can also be classified into three groups: emotion signifier, interaction device and communicative effect device (Li and Yang, 2018: 1). It must be reminded that function 6 could be combined with function 1, and 8 with 2. However, our initial analysis has concentrated primarily on the most prevalent pragmatic function in the collected data.

4.1 Attitude/ Emotion Signal

Comment (1)

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The first two comments written by harsha-gowda and prachisingh767 (the names of users) on Instagram introduce (crying face emoji) to indicate sadness. The face users lamented Gene Deitch a prominent figure in animated series *Tom and Jerry* who died recently. harsha-gowda begins her comment mentioning the merits of Dietch as genius who made their childhood more interesting by his invention of an 'epic art' (meant the famous cartoon film *Tom and Jerry*). prachisingh767 felt sorry for missing Dietch and thanked him as he is the reason for making his childhood memorable through that cartoon film. Malik-abderrahim praised him because he made their childhood rosy and affectionate. However, all the commenters use emojis at the end of text messages. There is an aspect they share: the use of emojis. The users add this particular emoji to identify their attitudes, reactions and emotions towards a nominated person. The way they comment shows that they are really influenced by the death of Dietch. The 'crying face' (by the first two users) and the 'loudly crying face' (by Malik)

provide a visual and quick way to communicate, and they allow us to know that those users really miss Dietch, and their feelings are genuine.

In face to face communication, several means can be used to show attitudes such as facial expressions and body language, so we can see that somebody is sad by crying or facial gestures. In digital communication, it is difficult to show such feelings through words, so emoji makes it possible. Emojis are used to communicate simple things or feelings in a fresh, visual and condensed way.

4.2 Attitude/ Emotion Intensity Enhancer

Emojis are perceived as a better way of communicating emotion than text. In terms of 'emotion intensity enhancer', the social media users utilize emojis for this purpose. The positive effect of including emoji in a message extends to how the sender is perceived (i.e., as more extroverted) and how the recipient feels (i.e., more positive mood); it also has a positive impact on emotional responses (e.g., higher arousal, reduced frowning, and enhanced smiling (Ganster et al., 2012). However, some participants use emoji within text as an enhancer to achieve a particular function. Hence, this means that emoji meaning is fluid and subject to contextual and cultural interpretation. The interaction of the emoji and text results in a lively cultural image which arouses an influential communicative act. An act that is misunderstood if a pictographic symbol is missing. Consider the Comment (4) The #BlackLivesMatter hashtag (BLM) has been used by millions of social media users to call attention to cases of police brutality since 2013. Since May 2020, millions of American people have participated in the protests following the killing of George Floyd, a 46-year-old African-America man. Actors, journalists, players and influencers support protesters with many posts.
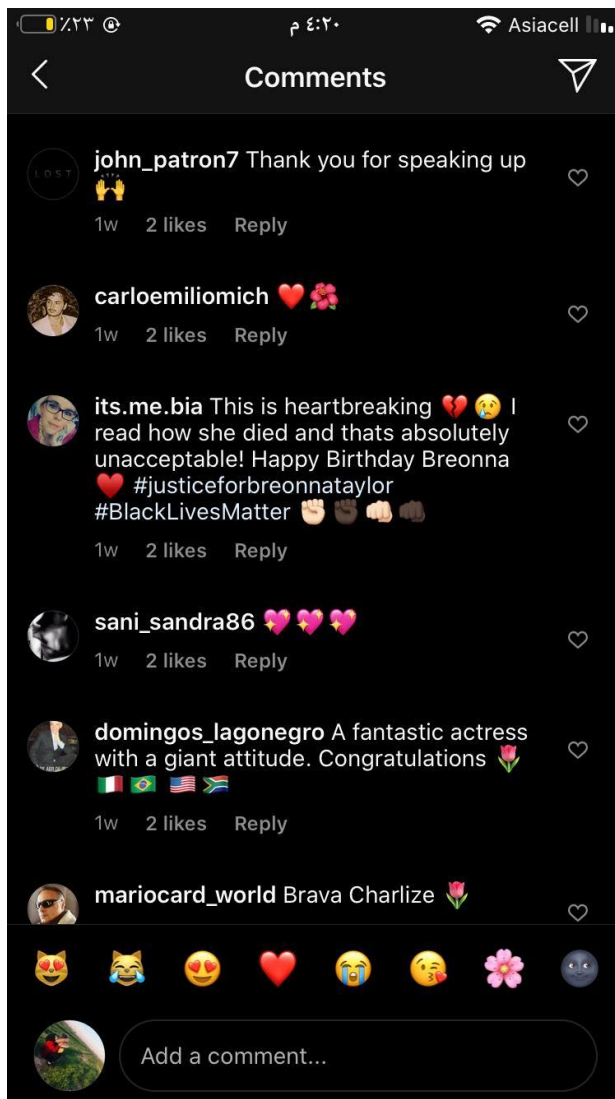
4.3 Illocutionary Force Modifier

Within Speech Acts Theory, two main ideas are at the core of this theory: the first holds that the meaning of an utterance is distinct from the function that the utterance performs (what is called its 'force'); the second is that all utterances amount to the execution of an act.

Comment (6)

The first comment by siamvelvet72 on Instagram is a reply to what Donald Jr. (WHO IS WHO) posted about the things that make you sick according to media. He announced that church, work and Trump rallies are prevented because of Covid-19, while people are protesting in streets. This contradicts the fact that people should take care of themselves and stay home during the time of Corona. This post is a criticism to the media. However, the

context of siamvelvet72's comment is that she numerates the events which happened to her family at the time of Covid-19, i.e. they could not make funeral for her nephew, and her daughter could not have a graduation ceremony for her master degree. In fact, she is enquiring how people can bunch together to protest in such hard time. The end sentence is an intonational one as it ends with a question mark. The comment displays the intention of the sender that is the illocutionary force of her utterances. The use of 'angry face' emoji at the beginning and at the end of the comment strengthens the illocutionary force of her speech act. Here, emoji acts as a modifier of anger towards its highest level. One must acknowledge that using this emoji shows strong agreement with Donald's opinion. In addition to the strengthening of the illocutionary act of

'querying'.

4.4 Humor

Yus (2016:10) defines humor as the contradiction of the explicit meaning in the utterance, the meaning of humor is not understandable literally, and the intended meaning is a joke; the use of emoji in this instance to direct the reader toward interpretation of the intended meaning.

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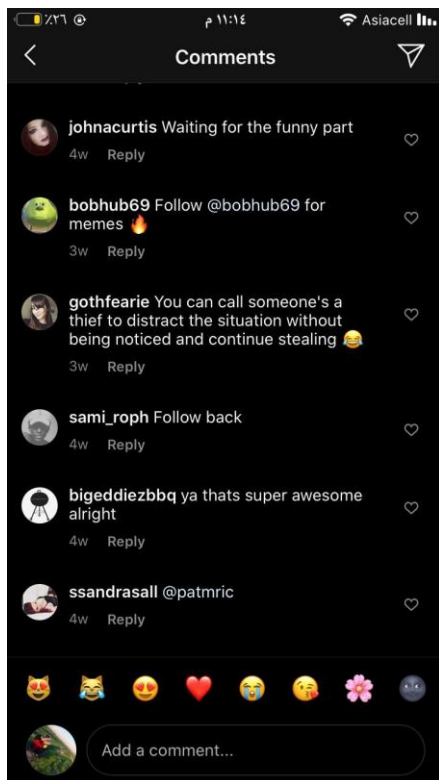
'Funny videos' is a public page on Instagram. It posted a video about a girl who said that while you are wearing facemask, you can shout in any place and no one will know you. One of the comments is raised by gothfearie, writing: "you can call someone's thief to distract the situation without being noticed and continue stealing". Definitely, the addressee does not know whether gothfearie is serious or not until she uses 'face with tears of joy' emoji. This process proves that the user of Instagram is simply joking, and she uses this emoji for humorous action. Instead of saying that "I am joking".

4.5 Irony

  Hu, et al. (2017: 3) explained the difference between humor and irony: "Humor uses emoji to make communication more funny and lively. Irony uses emoji to make communication more sarcastic or ironic"

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We notice that three comments in (7) have different emojis as a reaction to the photo posted by Justin Bieber who is a famous singer with his new love. We find that most of the comments remind him of his ex-love, Selena Gomez. We focus on the first comment by SoHel used ironically. He writes "Rest in peace Selena Gomez" with a 'grinning face with smiling eyes'. The user does not mean that Selena really died, but he expresses this in a sarcastic way. He means that Selena is no longer in Bieber's life. So, the intended meaning of this comment is to make fun of his ex-love. Using this emoji in this context is an evidence of irony and an indicator that this comment should not be literally interpreted.

4.6 Turn Taking/Giving

picture shows Susanne Vogt, Julia O'Brien, Deb Sutherland and Kshitij Kapalta who are engaged in a conversation commenting on David Beckham's post on Facebook. The post is about two men wearing colorful old fashion suits, which appeared to be something strange and humorous. The conversation starts with Vogt who explains that she laughed aloud and thanked David for sharing such post. O'Brien replies, "you're easily amused!", to show that there is nothing funny to be laughed at and criticizes Vogt. Sutherland mocks O'Brien's

comment: "congratulations on your negativity",   using two emojis (face with rolling eyes and women face blaming). They   show her dislike and disappointment with this comment. In spite of this, the conversation continues by Kapalta in an impolite way using the word "granny" with laughter emoji to bother Sutherland. In such   comments which seem to like a conversation between a speaker and addressee, there are two sides: one uses laughter emoji, mocks and talks in a humorous way, and the other talks seriously using specific emojis to show her disappointment. So the use of emoji is important here to run the flow of speech and to show reaction and attitude.
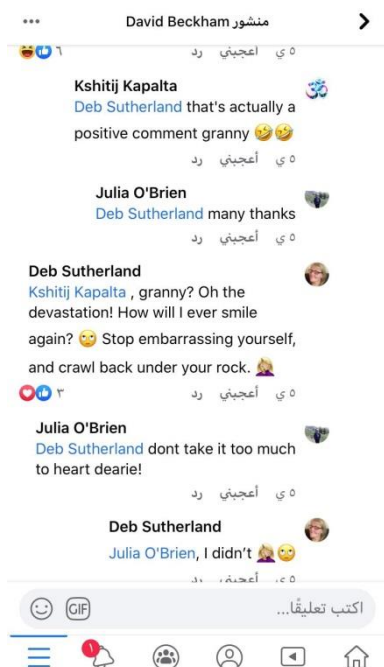
4.7 Backchannel Device

In linguistics, backchannel is coined to describe listeners' behavior during verbal communication. The listener uses verbal (yeah, right, uh-huh, hmm,) and non-verbal to show their attention, so interlocutors use backchannel to communicate efficiently (Rivero, 2019:1). In net communication, the emojis replace verbal and non-verbal devices to accomplish a successful conversation. Kaylene James uses a 'thump-up' emoji twice commenting on a video about the correct way of cutting onion. The first time, when she responds to a comment by Bertha to strengthen the speaker's opinion, and with a smiling face to signal her emotional attitude that she is happy to share her opinion. The second time,

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when she acts as a listener to Jason Knieriem signaling her agreement and appreciation through backchannelling. it is one of the pragmatic functions of emoji that is satisfied by using the 'thump-up face'. In communicative context, the emoji provides 'continuers' defining Kaylene's interest in the topic of the conversation .   Moreover, she shows the other participants that she is cooperating through backchannel responses.

Conclusions

Four hypotheses that put for the current study are being proved in the pragmatic analysis of the emojis in different English social media comments, the research discussed the use of emojis which is really ambiguous because it depends on the intended meaning and the shared knowledge and context, emoji can partially replace words, emojis used universally and platforms display emoji differently which cause different interpretations.

1. This research concerns with the rise of internet and the development of technology and social media that offer effective communication, despite distance messages are sent and received in quite short period, social media communication are developed to involve emojis which become increasingly

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prominent, these are pictorial characters resembling things and faces, colorful and highly visualized which attracted people in social media

2. Meaning may be interpreted incorrectly in the absence of nonverbal cues so the role of emoji is to be the link and to make sure that the tone of the message interpreted accurately. The use of emoji differ from one to another resulting in different usage for the same symbol so there is flexibility in using them to make communication effective and understandable because emotions and attitude cannot be seen in CMC emoji can successfully interpret sadness for example because they have faces resembling human expressions. Concepts such as love and sad or illness appeared on the faces of the speakers so with emoji it will be more expressive than words.

3. Emojis are easiest way to show love, enthusiasm and encouragement. Most of them used positively, in comments directed to famous people commenters tend to use emoji to show their admiration, some emoji are used to show disagreement without writing a word they only posted an emoji indicate their upset in this instance emoji replace words.`

4. Emojis are used as tools to reinforce the statement, strengthen the force of the utterance like the tone of voice in face to face communication, emojis can indicate the tone of the comment if it is threatening or general statement so in the given examples in chapter three emojis add specific meaning, tone and attitude in each comment without them there will be gap in the interpretation or misunderstanding .

5. People use more than one emoji in the same utterance to convey all feelings they have and to modify their utterance another fact that we can know the state of the commenter without reading the sentence by looking at the emoji he/she used and for this we hypothesize that emojis are universal, if you do not know the language you can guess whether the comment is positive or negative.

دراسة تداوليه في الرموز التعبيرية للتعليقات الإنكليزية في الانستاغرام

الكلمات المفتاحية: الايموجي ، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي ، الوظائف الدلالي

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الملخص

ان انتشار تكنولوجيا الإنترنت ووسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في الوقت الحاضر أحدث تغيرا كبيرا في الحياة الاجتماعية للناس، مما غير في الطريقة التي نتواصل بها وجعل التفاعل بين الناس اكثر يسرا. حقيقة ان استخدام الرموز التعبيرية التي تعد من أكثر التقنيات انتشارًا في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي مثل الانستغرام ،حيث انها تتجاوز سوء الفهم الذي يحدث مع الرسائل الفورية. ان استخدام هذه الصور قد غير من نظام الكتابة التي تفتقر للغة الإيماءات وتعبيرات الوجه وغيرها من الوسائل غير اللفظية ، لذا فإن استخدام الرموز التعبيرية ساعد في إعطاء التفسير الصحيح للرسالة نظرا لوجود عوامل مشتركة بين المشاركين في التواصل. تتبنى هذه الدراسة نظرية التصنيف التداولي الوظيفي للعالم اللغوي "يس" حيث يتم تحليل هذه الرموز بالاعتماد على وظائفها الواقعية التي حددها التصنيف المكون من ثماني وظائف يمكن ترجمتها إلى "إشارة الموقف" و "محفز شدة الموقف" ومعدل القوة التنبيهية " و"الفكاهة" و"السخرية" و"إشارة الانفعالات" و " إشارة المشاعر الموازية ". لقد اظهرت نتائج البحث أن الرموز التعبيرية قابلة للتحليل على وفق هذه الوظائف في عدة سياقات لتعليقات مختلفة على منصة الانستغرام ،كما انها اضافت معنى جديدا إلى الرسالة النصية يسهم في إعطاء تفسير صحيح وواضح ويظهر مشاعر المشاركين ومواقفهم واتجاهاتهم والتي لا يمكن أن تكون متاحة دون الرموز التعبيرية.

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