

Graphic (im)politeness. A pragma-linguistic study of the graphic elements in CMC

Raluca OPRESCU (ANGHEL)¹

Starting from March 2020, pandemic-induced online communication necessitated new forms of expression. This paper analyses graphic elements – emoticons and emojis – accompanying verbal communication in computer-mediated communication (CMC). The absence of paraverbal/verbal or visual cues from face-to-face interaction prompted users to seek alternative expressive methods through nonverbal visual graphics. The corpus contains interactions in virtual communities (two Facebook groups and two forums) organized by gender according to platform themes (culinary/mountains). Pragmatically, the analysis reveals how users employ emojis to manage positive face and preserve negative face. Emojis can mitigate threatening speech act but may also damage face when used inappropriately or offensively. Sociolinguistically, I examine emoji frequency and roles in gender-structured groups. In predominantly female groups, graphic elements appear more frequently with varied functions, while men prefer emotionally neutral messages, prioritizing sequence relevance.

Keywords: emoji, CMC, nonverbal, connection, emotion

1. Introductory remarks

In online communities, the relationships within the group's members are established through written messages. To compensate for the absence of nonverbal cues, online communication enhances the technological facilities of the technological devices they use, facilitating the exchange of static (emoticons, emojis) or dynamic images (GIFs), and the creative use of the spelling and punctuation marks. The role of the visual elements is not only to attach an image to the message; they are also important in decoding the meaning of the message. They have the potential to intensify the feelings they embed, and they offer a clue to the receiver for decoding the message.

¹ Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania, raluanghel@yahoo.com

Yus (2005) considers that the nonverbal context (vocal and visual) is essential in transmitting feelings and attitudes. Communication is not only an informational exchange based on words, and the CMC is no exception, the graphic elements being used to nuance or support the message. In face-to-face communication, the nonverbal elements often appear involuntary (the look, the facial expression, or the blushing), but there are also situations when they are used voluntarily (for example, when winking). In CMC, the use of nonverbal elements, whether we speak about emojis, GIFs, or punctuation marks, represents an intentional act through which the user searches the element and insert it into the message.

The unconventional use of punctuation marks created the first emoticon² :-). The nonverbal elements associated with facial expressions in face-to-face communication are often created through imitation. A linguistic analysis of these cues is insufficient because the CMC becomes more and more complex and multimodal (O'Reilly 2005). In CMC, the graphic elements are not details, nor something unimportant, they should be interpreted as being parts of the communication process that can help transmit and decode the verbal message.

Online communication's particularities appear intentionally, to maintain an informal relationship between speakers or spontaneously due to the context (hurry, convenience, or unawareness of the grammatical rules – Zafiu 2002). This fact is more and more visible after the 2000s, when the language started to transform under the influence of online communication, leading to a concern about the effects that CMC may have on the standard language. It is considered a turning point, comparable to the invention of printing (Crystal 2006).

In online communication, verbal interaction is associated with the use of emoticons. The term "emoticon" was coined from two words, emotion, and icon. These elements represent a graphic expression, and they can accompany a text or can appear alone. They are made up using punctuation marks which can be associated with facial expressions. Using these graphic signs, the user can transmit that a sequence should be interpreted as a joke, or on the contrary, to show disappointment. Thus, the language was replaced by a keyboard. From this moment on, hundreds of emoticons appeared, incorporating different forms and meanings. Over time, they became markers for speakers' feelings, transmitting nonlinguistic information which in face-to-face interaction is transmitted by facial expression and body language (Dresner and Herring 2010, 250).

Another term that has almost the same meaning is "emoji", an update of the emoticon. The origins of this term lie in Japanese, where "e" stands for image and

² Computer specialist Scott Fahlman from Carnegie Mellon University coined the term in 1982, using :-) to represent a smile, and :-(to represent sadness, and he posted them on a forum.

“moji” for letter or punctuation mark. It is the emoticon’s follower and was invented in 1998 by Shigetaka Kurita, an employee of the Japanese telecommunication network, with a passion for comics. The series was initially created for Japanese users, but in 2007 the iPhone’s producers started to use the emoji keyboard to be more successful on the Asian market (Danesi 2017). Gradually, the use of emojis became a global phenomenon. Unlike emoticons, emojis are represented by a more complex image that incorporates facial expressions, but also some images which represent families, buildings, food, flags, etc. The most used social platforms, companies that produce gadgets, and cultural communities have their own set of emojis.

2. Emoji – general characteristics

The importance of the emoji’s usage in communication nowadays was confirmed in 2005, when Oxford Dictionary chose an emoji – 😄 (tears of joy) – to be the word of the year; from 2011 to 2021 this was the most used emoji on all the social platforms (<https://emojipedia.org/>).

Over time, it has become more and more obvious that using emojis means more than transmitting emotions, having a more and more active role in decoding the message. Using smiley and sad faces represents the object of numerous studies (Utz 2000 – positive and negative role, Baron 2003 – emotion markers, Markman and Oshima 2007, Provine 2007).

The frequency of emojis is influenced by a series of sociolinguistic factors like gender, age, or type of CMC (Bieswanger 2013). Numerous studies consider that the use of emojis is more frequent among women (Wolf 2000; Baron 2003; Nishimura 2015). The messages written by women are more expressive, being in connection with their concern for building and maintaining social relationships. When interacting, the women use more frequently smiley faces or laughing, while the males don’t feel the need to consolidate their relationship and are more concise and more direct when conversating (Perez-Sabater 2019).

Thanks to their design, emojis are perceived as a ludic and informal way of expression (Dresner and Herring 2010). They appear more often in familiar contexts, with a certain emotional charge, when the relationship between users is characterised by friendship. They help with group solidarity and are used to maintain connections (Kelly and Watts 2015). They are rarely used in formal or official contexts, which are oriented towards tasks completion, neutral contexts or at the workplace, therefore the context determines the frequency of the emojis.

The corpus used for analysing the graphic elements in CMC is represented by two Facebook groups and two forums that are sharing the same theme. The cooking

forum (<https://www.artaculinara.com/forums>) – source 1, and the Facebook group Jamila Cuisine (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/JamilaCuisineOficial>) – source 2, are mostly followed by women, whereas Carpați forum (<https://www.carpati.org/forum/>) – source 3, and the Facebook group Nu sunt singur pe munte (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/148798398549743>) – source 4, are about mountains and most of their followers are men.

The emojis' features and functions are multiple. They do not function only as graphic elements, but also as pragmatic elements. When interpreting a message which is accompanied by an emoji, the receiver puts more effort into understanding the graphic element and connecting it with the verbal sequence (Yus 2014).

2.1. Features of emojis

2.1.1. *Intentionality*

Emojis are often associated with facial expressions and body language. The nonverbal elements often appear involuntarily in face-to-face communication, but in CMC, the use of emojis represents an intentional act through which the person who transmits the message adds more meaning to it, exercising his control over the message. We can state that there is a paradox in the use of emojis: even if they represent facial expressions that are involuntarily produced in face-to-face communication, the use of these graphic elements is an intentional act (Dresner and Herring 2010). There are also situations when the use of emojis has no communicative purpose and are used to “improve the visual aspect of the text” (Yus 2014).

2.1.2. *Lack of emotional intensity*

The presence of a feeling or emotion is marked using an emoji, but is there a way to mark the intensity of a feeling when using an emoji? The answer to this question is provided by the receiver of the message.

In the cooking Facebook group, when a user describes the cakes she made as being “big undercooked cakes, hard and stonelike”, she is self-ironic. The funny replies to her post are meant to encourage her and to show solidarity:

Romanian (original)

(1) Le sparg sigur capul cu cărămidile
astea 🧱🧱🧱

Morrr 🍲🍲🍲 folosești în loc de
tigaie să le dai una 🍲🍲🍲🍲
(sursa 2)

English translation

(1) I am going to smash their head
with these bricks 🧱🧱🧱

LOOOL 🍲🍲🍲 you can use them
instead of a stir-fry to hit them
🍲🍲🍲🍲 (source 2)

The replies in the first example (1) refer to the people who comment critically on what's posted on the Facebook group. Repeating the same emoji suggests a higher intensity of the feeling they represent but using them twice or four times does not mean that the feeling is twice or four times more intense, leading to the conclusion that the number of times a graphic element is used is not dependent on the intensity of the feeling (Yus 2014), so we can state that the intensity of an emotion cannot be represented using emojis.

2.1.3. Text dependence

There are situations when an emoji can be interpreted in different ways, according to the context in which they appear (😊 – smile/sarcasm) and a textual frame can help avoid ambiguity in decoding the message but can also decrease the risk of misunderstanding. When the meaning of the message and the emoji are opposed, the text prevails (Dresner and Herring 2010). There are situations when an emoji is used as a reaction to the previous message (“naked emoticon” Provin 2007), and its correct meaning is given by the context.

Cultural differences can lead to misunderstanding of the emoji's meaning even if there's a textual frame because some users interpret the image according to their culture (Dansei 2017). For example, the emoji 🙏 is frequently used on social platforms, but its meaning depends on the cultural context. In Romanian, it often has a religious connotation, related to praying, but in the Japanese culture, it means thank you or please.

2.1.4. Phatic function

Starting from the phatic function of the language (Jakobson 1960), emojis can be considered elements that facilitate and maintain the contact between the participants. Small talk establishes or maintains the social contact and contributes to a more open and pleasant conversation, saving the positive face in interaction (Danesi 2017). It can be compared to a “like” because, on one hand, it transmits the agreement regarding the previous message, the appreciation, and on the other hand it maintains the community's balance, leading to a better relationship between its members; on the other hand, it reduces the possibility of a conflict (Radovanovic and Ragnedda 2012). The emojis also increase the amount of social information, adding details of human interaction/social cues beyond the possibilities of the text (Derks 2007).

3. Emojis as illocutionary cues

At first sight, the emojis seem to be graphic cues of emotions, adding visual information to the message. Dresner and Herring (2010) analyze the emojis from the speech acts point of view (Austin 1962) and prove that they can function as illocutionary cues. Emojis are a nonverbal element and have an illocutionary force associated with the context.

There are contexts where the information they transmit is associated with the facial expression they copy. The purpose of these graphic elements is to embed feelings that in face-to-face communication are transmitted through facial expression and posture. In this situation, the emojis became nonverbal emotion cues.

In the second example, the emotion cues are reactions to an event that happened in the mountains, when a tourist chased a flock of sheep they met on the road, with the risk of making the sheep fall over a cliff. The author of the post is intrigued by the tourist's behaviour and expresses his anger:

Romanian (original)

(2) Individul merita niște dinți de câine
la fund 🤡 (sursa 4)

English translation

(2) This guy deserves some dog teeth in
his butt 🤡 (source 4)

The noun “guy” has a depreciating connotation and the scene he imagined suggests the anger he felt. To emphasize what he felt and to add force to his written message, the user inserts an emoji that transmits the same feeling: 🤡, a graphic representation of the entire post.

There are also contexts where emojis’ performativity has no emotional charge and where they are considered non-emotional cues represented by graphic expressions. It is the case of some emojis which have no emotive meaning (🐶, 🐱, 🐼) but help to transmit an important aspect of the sentence they accompany. In these situations, an emoji's meaning is closer to language than to emotion, being at the boundary between language and nonlanguage (Dresner and Herring 2010, 5). In this case, the emoji represents what the users are trying to transmit, having no emotional charge.

In the third example, there is also a picture of the cookie next to the comment. The user explains that he couldn't resist the temptation and prepared a new cake for the Facebook group.

Romanian (original)

(3) Nu puteam sa ratez ultima reteta a
 Jamilei 😊 de cand am vazut-o 😊
 am stat cu gandul numai la ea! 🤔
 Ador caramelul iar, combinat cu
 crema de branza, este o minunatie!
 😊😊 (sursa 2)

English translation

(3) I couldn't miss the last recipe that
 Jamila posted 😊 from the moment
 I saw it 😊 I kept dreaming of it! 🤔
 I love caramel and combined with
 cream cheese it's wonderful! 😊😊
 (source 2)

There are four emojis in this comment, but only three of them have no emotional charge; they add meaning to the sentence, and they reduce the social distance between speakers. The intervention represents a series of expressive speech acts, which transmit the excitement the recipe has produced and the decision to prepare the cake. Blinking 😊 is not an emotion, but this emoji is used to show the fun while the user relies on the common context (the people involved know the recipe), in which the receivers know the speaker's intention and manifest solidarity. Using this emoji, the user appeals to the complicity of the members who thought the same way when they read the recipe. The smiley face 😊 brings a positive emotion, the joy produced by the new recipe, and the third emoji 🤔 involves a confession: she does not want to recognise the fact that she is thinking about this recipe. Her intervention ends with an exclamation ("It's wonderful!") to show appreciation and she uses the emoji 😊 twice to support the verbal sequence. To conclude, all three emojis add unessential information to the message the sender has transmitted.

The emoji becomes an illocutionary force cue when it decreases the potential of negative face-threatening. If we speak about a request which is followed by a smiley face 😊, the user decreases the threatening potential of a directive speech act. The emoji does not indicate an emotion, but how one should understand/decode the message.

On the cooking forum, most of the conversations start from a picture of a dish, as in the fourth example (4). In this intervention a series of speech acts show appreciation for this dish ("a work of art") and express congratulations, saving the author's positive face; in the end, a request is also made:

Romanian (original)

(4)... cand ai timp poti sa scrii și reteta
 😊 (sursa 1)

English translation

(4) You can write the recipe when you
 have time 😊 (source 1)

This is a directive speech act through which the user asks for the recipe, but she takes into consideration its potential to threaten the negative face of the interlocutor. To reduce its threatening potential, the speaker uses the verb “can” and respects the politeness principles (Lakoff 1977), (it seems that) she lets her the freedom to choose the moment when she posts the recipe. The directive speech act is diminished using the emoji 🙄. The gesture symbolized by this emoji would be unacceptable in face-to-face interaction, but online the users can break the boundaries using a childish gesture to minimize the request. In face-to-face interaction, this would have taken another form. Thus, the request becomes an assertion that is easier to accept by the receiver, saving his negative face.

An argument that started from a photograph picturing the perfect technique for folding cabbage rolls represents a different situation. The person who posted the lines in the fifth example (5) notices that the similar dimension of the cabbage rolls is because the same plate was photographed from different angles; this observation leads to a series of harsh replies in which this post is criticized.

Romanian (original)

(5) 🙄

Nu mă mai extind in comentarii, și așa
au sărit multe contra mea și sunt
sigură ca voi fi blocată! O zi bună
și spor tuturor in ale gătitului!
(sursa 2)

English translation

(5) 🙄

I won't enlarge upon this, there are
already a lot of people against me and
I'm sure I'll be blocked! Have a nice day
and good luck with cooking. (source 2)

The emoji 🙄 is used instead of a reply and is substituting an expressive speech act to transmit irritation and disappointment towards the other users' reactions. Deciding to put an end to the discussion, the sender refuses to write a reply and uses an emoji as an expressive act. She prefers using an emoji not only to save time and words but also because it manages to picture the user's feelings. The attitude indirectly transmitted by the graphic element is confirmed by the verbal sequence from the second reply which imposes a distance between collocutors to save their negative face.

4. Functions of emojis

In recent years, emojis have become more and more frequent in online conversations, developing multiple roles and meanings. In his study about this specific aspect, Yus (2014) identifies eight functions of the emoticons, because “not

all emoticons are created equal". The author realises a pragmatical analysis to study how people filter important information based on the context in which communication takes place, based on Sperber and Wilson's (1986) relevance theory. Searching for relevance is the foundation of verbal interaction. Pieces of information are selected either because they help us conclude or because they interact with other pieces of information we already found. The functions that the nonverbal elements may be defined taking into consideration the degree to which the emoji can determine the (in)correct comprehension of the text they go with and can produce an (in)correct interpretation of the feelings and emotions the sender have. The participants aim to send a relevant message and they use emojis as a discursive strategy. The sentences can be interpreted based on the verbal and nonverbal elements they embed. Some people use emojis because they do not have the time to write all the information needed to correctly decode the message, or because they don't have all the necessary verbal elements to transmit emotions, attitudes, and feelings. The people involved in the communication process use emojis to ensure the proper coding for their message.

From the relevance point of view, Yus (2014) identifies the following functions of emojis:

1. They help clarify the message/attitude that can arise from the message, but which would have been difficult to understand without an emoji.

Example (6) appears in a series of notes the user took while hiking in the Retezat mountains.

Romanian (original)

(6) Indicatorul de dupa Portile
Inchise spre Lacul Gales este inca
cazut printre pietre se pare
😞(sursa 3)

English translation

(6) It looks like the sign situated after
Portile Inchise to Lake Gales is still
fallen on the ground. 😞(source 3)

The intervention is made of two elements: a graphic and a verbal one. The textual element is a representative speech act, transmitting specific information, but the emoji 😞 adds an expressive value to the sentence, showing concern and disappointment. The graphic element completes the meaning of the message, adding some information about what the speaker felt when he saw that the sign was "still on the ground", and without using the emoji, the sentence would have been a simple assertion.

2. They communicate a higher intensity of the attitude/emotion that has already been verbally coded.

Sometimes, the verbal sequence does not incorporate the entire information, attitude, or emotion that the speaker intended to transmit. The user employs emoticons for his performative goal. The following example is a reply to a post that presented a cake that had an impressive design.

Romanian (original)

(7) Vai ce-mi place si mie genul asta de prajituri!!! Tocmai de aceea evit sa le fac, ca imi plac prea mult 😊 (sursa 1)

English translation

(7) Oh, I like so much this type of cake!!! That's why I avoid making it because I like it so much 😊 (source 1)

The verbal message from the first part of the intervention is transmitted using elements that are specific to an expressive speech act: the interjection "oh", and the verb "to like". The attitude is also a specific one, supported by the punctuation marks the speaker used – the three exclamation marks at the end of the sentence suggest increased intensity of the emotion. The second sentence represents a break of the quality maxim through self-irony ("I avoid making them"), and the emoji used at the end of the reply, 😊, supports the expressive speech act and insists on the subjective (emotive) part of the message (it's delicious).

3. They decrease the illocutionary force of a speech act, reducing the face-threatening potential.

In such situations, the emojis' role as social factors is obvious: saving the negative face of the people involved in the communication process. Using a smiley face, the relationship between interlocutors is maintained and the atmosphere remains relaxed.

Intervention (8) appears in a discussion about built-in ovens when a user asked for experience-based advice to buy such an oven. After a high number of suggestions, one of the moderators posted the following reply, stopping all the comments:

Romanian (original)

(8) O sa pun acum o postare despre cuptoare incorporabile. Sa o citesti 😊 (sursa 2)

English translation

(8) I am going to post about built-in ovens. Read my post 😊 (source 2)

Wanting to help, the user responds to the request, proving that the act through which he was asking for advice was successful. The second part of the intervention is made up of a verb in the subjunctive mood³ (in Romanian), having an imperative value. The directive illocutionary act is decreased using the emoji which usually transmits a positive emotion or a positive attitude. Thus, the negative face of the interlocutor is saved; he should decode the directive speech act as a piece of advice, not as an order.

4. *They contradict the explicit content of a statement. There are two forms of manifestation of this function: (a) the joke, and (b) the irony.*

4. (a) *The joke* – the message should not be understood as it is; the emojis are relevant because they should orient the reader in decoding the real meaning of the statement. The following replies were selected from the comments on a picture showing a chocolate cake. A lot of users use pictures of their cakes as a reaction to the initial post.

Romanian (original)

(9) Nici nu mă mai uit la postările
voastre 😊😊😊

(10) Dacă voi nu mă vreti, eu va
vreau 😊😍😍❤️❤️❤️ (sursa
2)

English translation

(9) I don't even look at your posts
😊😊😊

(10) If you don't want me, I want you
😊😍😍❤️❤️❤️ (source 2)

In this context, the first message is a reinterpretation of the reply used by a lot of children "I Don't want to play with you anymore". The emoticon 😊 signals a self-mockery because she reinterpreted the reply and sounds childish.

The answer (10), which belongs to the initial post, is a strong directive act, not only because of the message it transmits but also because it is a quote from a literary work in which the character is a tyrant. The emoji 😊 is meant to save the receiver's negative face, while 😍 suggests that her cake is appreciated. The verbal sequence and the graphic elements suggest the decision to continue preparing cakes and to post photos of them. The emoji ❤️ is used to consolidate the speaker's positive face, who is a part of a community where her dishes are appreciated.

³ In Romanian *conjunctiv*

4. (b) *Irony* – by using an emoji, the meaning of the message is contradicted. Ironic communication is relevant if the interlocutors share the same information, so the involvement is mutual. The transmitter relies on the receiver's capacity to make the necessary deduction based on the communicative context, allowing him to correctly decode the message.

Example (11) represents a comment which appears next to the image of a plate full of pancakes. The user posts a self-ironic message, relying on the fact that the other members share common knowledge and can correctly identify his purpose.

Romanian (original)

(11) Daca tot sunt la dieta, am facut
si clatite jamila Cuisine pentru ca
ajuta mult 😊😊😬 (sursa 2)

English translation

(11) I'm on a diet, so I've made Jamila
Cuisine pancakes because they help
a lot 😊😊😬 (source 2)

The statement is an antiphrasis; there is no help from pancakes when we're on a diet. The receivers should decode the message correctly because they share a common informational context. Solidarity is marked by emojis, which highlight the affective involvement and the belonging to the group.

Example (12) is an intervention of the Facebook group moderator in a discussion that started from some images with koliva⁴ made to explain to a child what it is. There were a lot of reactions to this post, where people said that it brings bad luck if made for no specific reason.

Romanian (original)

(12) Dar sarmale se pot face dacă nu
e Crăciun? 😬 Întreb pentru un
prieten 😬 (sursa2)

English translation

(12) But can we make cabbage rolls if
it isn't Christmas? 😬 A friend
would like to know 😬 (source 2)

The entire intervention has the potential to threaten the negative face of all the users who previously commented from a religious perspective. The degree of impoliteness is obvious, as the reply comes from a group moderator, representing the authority (social distance). The directive speech act – the rhetorical question – is ironic, it goes without saying that cabbage rolls aren't made only at Christmas, becoming thus a counterpoint. The meaning is doubled by the emoji 😬, which symbolises suspicion and disapproval. Associating the verbal sequence and the graphic element, an impolite directive speech act is being realised, which has the potential to threaten the face of those who have commented on the images from a

⁴ A dish made from wheat, used in Eastern Orthodox Church liturgically

religious point of view. The second part of the intervention is a pseudo speech act, a cliché that delimitates the speaker and the potential recipient of the answer. In this context, the offending attitude of the entire answer is transmitted by the final emoji 🙄. In this sequence, the emoji support the sceptical attitude, maybe even mocking, questioning the pertinence of the previous interventions. Then the same moderator reminds the users of the purpose of the Facebook group:

Romanian (original)

atunci hai sa ne abținem de la comentarii fără rost, este un grup culinar, nicidecum religios

English translation

Then let's refrain from useless comments, it is a cooking group, not a religious one

5. They add a feeling or an emotion to the verbal content of the statement (next to a piece of neutral information there is an emoji that adds emotion)

The following examples are excerpts from a series of comments in which people were asking for/giving advice on how moussaka can be prepared. Even if the initial intervention had the purpose to present the dish, the verbal exchange led to advice about how to prepare it and improve the recipe. The excerpts are final interventions that stand for the conclusion and prove the results of the illocutionary speech acts from the previous comments.

Romanian (original)

(13) Opresc cuptorul, las să se răcorească și mănînc 😊

(14) Perfect! Multumesc! Acum nu imi ramane decat sa imi suflec manecele si sa ma apuc de treaba 😊 (sursa 1)

English translation

(13) I stop the oven, let it cool down and then eat 😊

(14) Perfect! Thanks! All I have to do is to roll up my sleeves and start working 😊 (source 1)

Both examples provide information, but at the end, after the representative act (13) and the expressive act (14), the emoji picturing a big smile and the emoji 😊 transmit a positive emotion, joy. In the first example, using the emoji to transmit feelings, the satisfaction produced by the preparation of the dish is also transmitted, while the second example incorporates the acknowledgement for the received information, but also the decision to start working. With the help of emojis not only the feeling that the user feels is embedded, but also an affective state which becomes relevant for the communication context.

Example (15) accompanies a series of pictures taken on the Piatra Craiului Mountain where there's a very small path, covered by snow. The author of the post receives congratulations and is praised, but some users say he's unaware of the danger he has been through. In his defence, he posted a reply that threatens the negative face of the members who consider him unaware of the danger, saving his negative face.

Romanian (original)

(15) Mister Jack, ai dreptate până la un punct. Ideea e că cei inconștienți nu ajung niciodată prin aceste locuri 😊. Iar referitor la echipament îți atașez o poză 😊. Mulțumesc pentru grijă 😊 (sursa 4)

English translation

(15) Mister Jack, you're right up to a point. I think that those who are unaware of the danger will never see these places 😊. And as far as the equipment is concerned, here's a picture 😊. Thanks for your concern 😊 (source 4)

The salutation is ironic. Even if he has to save his negative face, the author respects the negative face of his interlocutor: "you're right up to a point". He consolidates his position by delimiting himself from the people who might be considered unaware. The emoji 😊 doesn't transpose the direct feeling of happiness, but pride. He saves his negative face by posting the picture to prove that he had the necessary equipment for a hike. The emoji 😊 makes the conversation even more ironic, being put next to the proof that he knows how to hike. To maintain a relaxed atmosphere and to avoid threatening the positive face of his interlocutor, the user thanks his interlocutor. The emoji 😊 put next to the expressive speech act at the end of his intervention suggests an angelic behaviour, which means that he cannot be accused of being impolite.

6. They add a second feeling, a second emotion to the speech act, suggesting how the interaction made them feel (the social function of the emojis).

In face-to-face communication, when we transmit a message, it can be accompanied by (visual or vocal) nonverbal elements. In CMC, the graphic elements can express the speaker's attitude towards the message.

In a series of comments on the rudeness of some tourists, a story in which a mountain rescuer's dog was hit by a tourist because it got too close to him is used as an argument. It is a reply to a comment in which its author stated that "the human being is free in the mountains".

Romanian (original)

(16) Da...la fel cum cainele unui salvamontist a fost lovit de o turista nervoasa 😡😡😡 (sursa 4)

English translation

(16) Yes... just as the dog of a mountain rescuer was hit by an angry tourist 😡😡😡 (source 4)

The verbal sequence is followed by an emoji, 😡, which transmits anger and revolt. It represents a reaction to the tourist's behaviour, but also the interaction with the other user, and its meaning can be decoded by analysing the context. The emoji becomes relevant if we take into consideration the whole conversation.

7. They carry the intensity of the verbally coded emotion. The emojis assure a more accurate interpretation of the emotion's intensity.

Even if it may look redundant, emojis plays an important role in creating relevance. They can graphically transpose the entire verbal content, as in the following example. It is an intervention in which one transmits his appreciation regarding a dish.

Romanian (original)

(17) Arata delicios! 😊 (sursa 2)

English translation

(17) It looks tasty! 😊 (source 2)

The emoji repeats the verbally transmitted information underlying the quality of the dish using two different codes – verbally and graphically.

In example (18) are criticized the people that do not pay too much attention to certain details. The ambiguous language can be upsetting, and this fact is marked verbally and nonverbally.

Romanian (original)

(18) Mor dupa expresiile de genul „3 vanilii”. Pe bune?!?! Flori de vanilie, pastaie de vanilie, zahar vanilat, extract de vanilie, pastă de vanilie? Ce vanilii?!?!? 😬 (sursa 1)

English translation

(18) I love the expression “3 vanillas”. Really?!?! Vanilla flowers, vanilla bean, vanilla sugar, vanilla extract, vanilla paste? Which vanillas?!?!? 😬 (source 1)

The rhetorical questions, followed by three dots produces tension, which is also suggested by the 😬 emoji. This feeling is caused by the imprecise language which may lead to confusion. The beginning of the sentence (I love) doesn't suggest if the

setting is informal, friendly, or tensioned. The question “Really?” suggests familiarity, but the punctuation marks which follow it suggest indignation, dissatisfaction. After he states the various meanings that “vanilla” can have, the user addresses another rhetorical question: “Which vanillas?!?!?”, and to transmit his dissatisfaction, the user inserts the graphical sign at the end of the statement, underlying a critical attitude towards the receiver’s positive face.

In CMC, the use of emojis helps transmit the feelings and the emotion that the sender feels when he writes the message, reducing the risk of misunderstanding. Even if it might be considered irrelevant or useless, the emoji is very useful for the receiver because it clarifies or it substitutes different aspects of the verbal sequence.

Lo (2008) and Luor (2010) think that when the receivers read a message which contains no emoji, most of them do not notice the feelings and the emotions that the sender intended to attach to his message. The cognitive effort is very big compared to the contextual effect it has, so the statement is not relevant enough. A user that uses emojis is perceived as being open, extroverted, and the messages which contain emojis are easier to understand and have a positive effect on the receiver: 70% of the messages containing emojis transmit positive emotions, 15% of them transmit negative emotion, and 15% are neutral (Danesi 2017).

There are also situations, as in example (19), when using only emojis or combining them with text creates a parallel language. Mixed textuality is a hybrid form of communication in which written messages and text appear at the same time, and whose role is to underline elements from the message (Danesi 2017, 38).

Romanian (original)

(19) Superb, draga mea! Esti top !

Felicitari pentru tot ceea ce faci,
pentru prezentare, eleganta, esti
atentă la detalii. Felicitari



  (sursa 2)

English translation

(19) Wonderful, dear! You’re top !

Congratulations on everything
you’ve done, for the presentation,
elegance, for paying attention to
details. Congratulations



  (source 2)

The nonverbal compound of this intervention is very clear and transmits a second message. The emojis could be translated as: “you’re a force and what you have done is delicious. I love you and I appreciate you. Let the party begin!” Even if the meaning of this graphical sequence is clear, its interpretation wouldn’t have been easy if it had lacked the graphical elements.

In CMC, the emojis add information or change the meaning of the message, as in the previous message, but they also have an important role in saving the speaker's negative or positive face. On Facebook groups or forums, the netiquette rules impose avoiding any element that could be considered offending, and the moderators can delete or reject any intervention that violates the rules, thus bald on-record impoliteness is not very often. In statements containing impoliteness markers, the speaker's involvement is very intense, and his experience can be associated with the emoji's playful tone. The use of these graphic elements suggests a friendly atmosphere and a lack of tension. Sometimes irony and emojis appear in the same intervention, but the message is rather funny and self-ironic. Using the message implicature, the receiver can decode the irony.

5. Conclusions

The most important nonverbal elements used on forums and Facebook groups are the graphic elements – emojis. Using these elements creates a playful and relaxed context and produces a high expressivity. Regarding the role these elements have, they play an active part in the message, nuancing or enforcing the meaning of the message. Nowadays, using emojis on social networks is natural and this aspect is a feature of online written communication.

Analysing the corpus, I concluded that the nonverbal elements are more frequently used on Facebook than on other forums. Here, the conversation is more dynamic, as most of it is synchronous. The forums have a higher degree of formality and the emojis are less used. As the messages are more complex and there is no time pressure, the emojis are not useful, and the information is transmitted by the verbal sequence.

The analysis of the nonverbal elements in groups from the point of view of the users' gender demonstrates that the females use the graphic elements more often than the males. For females, emotional involvement, affectivity, and social relationship are important, and their messages are more expressive. In groups where men are more active, the degree of formality is higher, and a direct approach is preferred to convince others.

As the Romanian language is concerned, there is a dynamic of the nonverbal elements which should not be regarded as a threat to the use of standard language. Placing an emoji at the end of a sentence can sometimes make its meaning clearer (Dresner and Herring 2010). One or more emojis appear in a sentence, which proves

that they become a part of the text carrying emotion and helping with decoding the meaning.

CMC cannot be analyzed without paying attention to the nonverbal elements which are present on social networks. Understanding and interpreting emojis can be associated with online communication, and their presence has become a fact.

References

- Austin, John Langshaw. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words. William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University 1955* (ed. by J. O. Urmson). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Baron, Naomi S. 2003. "Language of the Internet." In *The Stanford Handbook for Language Engineers*, ed. by Ali Farghali, 59-127. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Bieswanger, Markus. 2013. "Micro-linguistic structural features of computer-mediated Communication." In *Pragmatics of Computer-Mediated Communication*, ed. by Susan Herring, Dieter Stein, and Tuija Virtanen, 463-485. Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter.
- Crystal, David. 2006. *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Danesi, Marcel. 2017. *The Semiotics of Emoji. The Rise of Visual Language in The Age of The Internet*. London / Oxford / New York / New Delhi / Sydney: Bloomsbury.
- Derks, Daantje, Arjan E. R. Bos, and Jasper von Grumbkow. 2007. "Emoticons and social interaction on the internet: The importance of social context." *Computers in Human Behavior* 23: 842-849.
- Dresner, Eli and Susan Herring. 2010. "Functions of the non-verbal in CMC: Emoticons and illocutionary force." *Communication Theory* 20(3): 249-268.
- Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Liliana. 2003. *Limba și comunicare. Elemente de pragmatică lingvistică*. București: Editura All Educational.
- Kelly, Ryan M. and Leon A. Watts. 2015. "Characterising the inventive appropriation of emoji as relationally meaningful in mediated close personal relationships." *Proceedings of Experiences of Technology Appropriation: Unanticipated Users, Usage, Circumstances, and Design, Oslo*.
- Lakoff, Robin. 1977. "What You Can Do with Words: Politeness, Pragmatics and Performatives." In *Proceedings of the Texas Conference on Performatives*,

- Presuppositions, and Implicatures*, ed. by Andy Rogers, Bob Wall, J.P. Murphy, 79-105. Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Lo, Shao-Kang. 2008. "The Nonverbal Communication Functions of Emoticons in Computer-Mediated Communication." *Cyberpsychology & Behavior* 11(5): 595-597.
- Lour, Tainyi, Wu Ling-ling, Lu Hsi-Peng, Tao Yu-Hui. 2010. "The Effect of Emoticons in Simplex and Complex Task-Oriented Communication: An Empirical Study of Instant Messaging." *Computers in Human Behavior* 26: 889-895.
- Markman, Kris M., Sae Oshima. 2007. "Pragmatic Play? Some Possible Functions of English Emoticons and Japanese Kaomoji in Computer-Mediated Discourse". *Association of Internet Researchers Annual Conference 8.0: Let's Play!*. Vancouver.
- O'Reilly, Tim. 2005. "What is Web 2.0? Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software". *O'Reilly Network website* <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>. accessed on 1.05.2025
- Nishimura, Yukiko. 2015. "A sociolinguistic analysis of emoticon usage in Japanese blogs: Variation by age, gender, and topic." *Internet Research 16: The 16th Annual Meeting of the Association of Internet Researchers*, 21–24 Oct. 2015, Phoenix, AZ, USA. *AoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research*, no. 5. <https://spir.aoir.org/ojs/index.php/spir/article/view/8396>, accessed on 16.06.2024.
- Pérez-Sabater, Carmen. 2019. "Emoticons in Relational Writing Practices on WhatsApp: Some Reflections on Gender." In *Analyzing Digital Discourse*, ed. by Patricia Bou-Franch and Pilar Garces-Conejos Blitvich, 163-189. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Provine, Robert R., Robert J. Spencer, and Darcy L. Mandell. 2007. "Emotional expression online: Emoticons punctuate website text messages." *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 26: 299-307.
- Radovanovic, Danica and Massimo Ragnedda. 2012. "Small talk in the Digital Age: Making Sense of Phatic." *Posts Workshop proceedings*, available online as CEUR vol. 838, at: [#MSM2012](http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-838), April 16, 2012, Lyon, France.
- Sperber, Dan, Deirdre Wilson. 1986/1995. *Relevance. Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Utz, Sonja. 2000. "Social information processing in MUDs: The development of friendships in virtual worlds." *Journal of Online Behavior* 1(1). <http://www.behavior.net/JOB/v1n1/utz.html>, accessed on 22.10.2024.
- Wolf, Alecia. 2000. "Emotional expression online: Gender differences in emoticon use." *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 3(5): 827-833.
- Yus, Francisco. 2005. "Attitudes and Emotions through Written Text: The Case of Textual Deformation in Internet Chat Rooms." *Pragmalingüística* 13: 147-174.
- Yus, Francisco. 2014. "Not all emoticons are created equal." *Linguagem em (Dis)curso* 14(3): 511-529.
- Zafiu, Rodica. 2002. „Mărci ale oralității în limbajul jurnalistic actual.” In *Aspecte ale dinamicii limbii române*, coord. By Gabriela Pană Dindelegan, 399-430. București: Editura Universității din București.