AL004462

A Pragmatic Study of Emojis on WeChat: from the Perspectives of FTA (face-threatening act) and Request Strategy

Shuyu Yang[1a*],

Wei Cao[2b,] **and**

Dongsheng Li[3c]

[1]School of Foreign Languages, Beihang University, Beijing, 100191, China
[2]School of Chinese Language and Literature, Central China Normal University, Wuhan, 430079, China
[3]School of Foreign Languages, Henan University, Henan, 475004, China
[a]yshuyu@buaa.edu.cn,
[b]1712873248@qq.com,
[c]1718261740@qq.com

Abstract:

The usage of emojis has become a ubiquitous and effective method of online communication. This paper focuses on emojis used in request messages on WeChat based on the face theory and request strategy, aiming to explore the features of emoji usage in terms of representational patterns and pragmatic functions. By analyzing the data collected through the Discourse Completion Task, it is found that emojis are most likely to occur singly and in the supportive move of requests. Emojis are usually used to represent emotions, attitudes, and virtual actions, indicating that they are always complementary to the text. Additionally, the weightiness of face-threatening acts has no significant influence on the pragmatic usage of emojis. This paper can enrich the pragmatic studies on emojis in terms of one-to-one online interaction. Moreover, it can help gain a deeper understanding of emojis used in request messages.

Keywords: emoji, face theory, request strategy, pragmatic function

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Communication through social media has grown increasingly prevalent, with emojis as a pivotal element [1]. Emojis are graphic symbols with predefined names and codes (Unicode), representing not only facial expressions, abstract concepts, and emotions/feelings, but also animals, plants, activities, gestures/body parts, and objects [2]. They fill the need for non-verbal cues in online communication to express the intentions and emotions behind information [3]. According to the Social Media Universe of Visual Capitalist, WeChat, a social media app, reached 1.0 billion monthly active users in 2018 [4]. It is believed that WeChat is immersed in people's lives in China and has also gained worldwide attention and usage.

In this work, we aim to explore the usage of emojis in request messages on WeChat from the perspective of pragmatics.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Pragmatic Studies on Emoji

The linguistic studies on emojis mainly focus on pragmatic functions [5]. Specifically, emojis are regarded as markers of illocutionary force [6], a kind

of politeness strategy [7], boosters of group rapport [8], and a useful way of tone modification [9].

Based on previous studies, Yus proposed a pragmatic function taxonomy, which mainly recognizes the emoji as an indicator of emotion or attitude and subdivides its indicative functions into several types [10]. More recently, Dainas and Herring developed a taxonomy based on data collected from public Facebook groups, which covers a wider range beyond attitude and emotion [11]. Both taxonomies have gained recognition in academic circles, inspiring quantitative research on emojis' pragmatic functions. Nevertheless, the applicability of these taxonomies across all genres of texts containing emojis is awaiting further validation.

For quantitative research, Cramer and his colleagues gathered the most recent messages containing emojis from 228 participants and solicited their interpretations of each emoji's intended meaning and function [12]. Li and Yang built a corpus of 34,047 words, including 46 types of emojis, by collecting data from Wechat groups and analyzing the most frequently used emojis and their pragmatic functions based on Yus's taxonomy [10,13]. By collecting popular posts over a three-month period on Weibo that contained both text and emojis, Yang and Liu analyzed the visual patterns and pragmatic functions of emojis, as well as the compositional and componential patterns of text-emoji co-occurrences [14].

1.2.2 Face Theory

The concept of "face" was initially introduced by Goffman, who defined "face" as "the positive social value" that individuals strive to claim for themselves [15]. Brown and Levinson further elaborated on this notion, characterizing "face" as the public self-image that each person aspires to uphold [16]. Drawing upon this framework, they coined the term "face-threatening acts" (FTAs) to refer to actions that may offend individuals' facial concerns. They also proposed an assessment of the weightiness of FTAs, which incorporates three sociological variables: The "social distance" (D) between the speaker (S) and the hearer (H), which is a symmetric relationship; the relative "power" (P) dynamic between S and H, representing an asymmetric relationship; the absolute ranking (R) of impositions within a particular cultural context.

Generally, scholars have conducted quantitative researches through methods such as interviews, corpora construction, and data annotation, explaining the pragmatic usage of emojis from a more scientific and rigorous perspective. However, the sources of data are primarily focused on one-to-many interactions on public social media. There is also a lack of constraint on the context of emojis, potentially leading to overly generalized conclusions.

1.3 Research Questions

Broadly speaking, our research aims to explore the features of emoji's pragmatic usage on WeChat. Specifically, there are three research questions:

1) What are the features of emoji's representational patterns in requests made by Chinese college students on WeChat?

2) What are the features of emoji's pragmatic functions in requests made by Chinese college students on WeChat?

3) Will the weightiness of FTA affect emoji's pragmatic usage in requests made by Chinese college students on WeChat?

1.4 Significance

Based on the literature review, it is found that current pragmatic studies on emojis are mainly qualitative. For quantitative research, the data are mostly from one-to-many interactions on public social media, which reflects a notable lack of thorough exploration of emojis in one-to-one instant messages. Furthermore, investigations into request strategies seldom focus on online communication, particularly texts incorporating emojis.

Therefore, our research takes Chinese college students as the research object, investigating their usage of emojis when sending request messages on WeChat by a survey designed based on the face theory.

The significance of this research lies in its corpus built from one-to-one instant messages on WeChat, which could enrich the pragmatic studies on emojis in terms of one-to-one online interaction. Moreover, by confining the context of emoji usage, our research could help gain a deeper understanding of the pragmatic functions of emojis used in requests.

2. Method

2.1 Data Collection

2.1.1 Survey Design

The survey is designed based on the Discourse Completion Task (DCT). First proposed and adopted by Blum-Kulka, DCT can help researchers efficiently elicit and analyze a specific speech act through designed scenarios [17].

Combining the three influence factors of FTA, 18 scenarios are designed in total, 12 of which are related to request making, and the rest are fillers. The 12 scenarios can be divided into three groups. Each group contains two pairs of scenarios, with social distance, power, and absolute ranking being the independent variables, respectively.

More specifically, for scenarios with "social distance" being the independent variable, the level of familiarity between the requester and the requestee varies. For example, the participant needs to ask for information about a course from 1) an unfamiliar student and 2) a friend. Scenarios of "power" reflect different power dynamics between the requester and requestee, such as asking a superior or a peer for help. When "absolute ranking" is the independent variable, the participant needs to make requests of different levels of imposition, such as borrowing 20 Yuan or 1000 Yuan from a friend.

When conducting the survey, the emojis used by the participants are all official on WeChat. The emoji usage is not compulsory, but memes are not allowed.

2.2 Participants

Our research recruits a total of 40 Chinese college students as participants, comprising 20 males and 20 females, aged between 18 and 24 years. In addition, they all use WeChat frequently and are familiar with emojis.

2.3 Procedures

Firstly, participants are recruited through WeChat and are informed about the research's objectives, procedures, and data handling practices in the consent. Then, the survey is conducted on WeChat, with participants presented with the 18 scenarios in a randomized order. After that, a further interview will be conducted when necessary.

2.4 Data Processing

After collecting all the request messages sent by the participants, invalid data are deleted, and then a corpus is built.

Data annotation can be divided into two parts, focusing on the emoji's representational patterns and pragmatic functions, respectively. For representational patterns, emojis used in a sequence will be regarded as a grouplet. The number, type, and positioning of each grouplet will be annotated. For pragmatic function, our research develops a new taxonomy based on current ones proposed by Yus, and Dianas and Herring, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptions of pragmatic functions of emoji

Function	Formal Descriptions
Attitude/Emotion Signal	To signal the propositional attitude/to add a feeling or emotion that underlies the utterance and which would be difficult to identify without the aid of the emoji
Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer	To communicate a higher intensity of a propositional attitude/a feeling or emotion which has already been coded verbally
Softening	Softening the message to make it less impolite or forceful
Action	Performing a virtual action
Humor/Irony	To contradict the explicit content of the utterance

3. Results

3.1 Representational Patterns of Emoji

There are 62 types of emojis in total, and the top 6 high-frequency emojis are shown below in Figure 1.
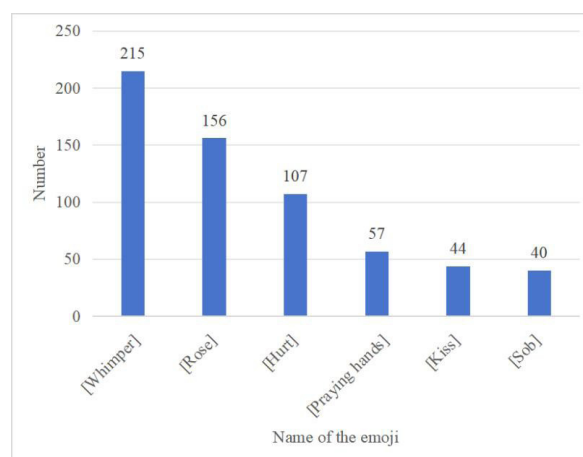
Figure 1 Top 6 High-frequency Emojis in WeChat Messages

As shown in Table 1, [Whimper], which can be visually interpreted as an expression of sad emotion or pleading, is used 215 times. [Sob] and [Hurt] also represent sad facial expressions, which may help users modify their tones. Meanwhile, [Kiss] and [Praying Hands] rank second and fourth, respectively, which are always associated with gratitude and request.

Given that the scenarios are all asking participants to make requests, it is reasonable to combine request strategy with data processing. In terms of number, the occurrences of emojis can be divided into three types: single, replicated, and mixed [14]. In terms of position, the performative system of requesting can be divided into three types of acts: 1) Opener; 2) Head Act; and 3) Supportive Move [18]. The following table 2 demonstrates the representational patterns of emojis in request messages.

Table 2 Number of Emoji Grouplets of Different Types and in Different Positions

Type of Emoji Grouplets	Position of Emoji Grouplet(s)			Subtotal
	Opener	Head Act	Supportive Move	
Single	22	58	86	166
Replicated	4	41	46	91
Mixed	0	6	15	21
Subtotal	26	105	147	278 grouplets

It shows that emojis are more likely to appear single. When inserting multiple emojis as one grouplet, the users prefer repeating the same emoji over mixing different emojis. At the same time, college students tend to use emoji grouplet(s) in the supportive move rather than opener.

3.2 Pragmatic Functions of Emoji

Table 3 shows the total numbers and corresponding percentages of participants' use of all the functions.

Table 3 Number of Pragmatic Functions Used in Different Scenarios

Scenarios	Pragmatic Functions				
	Attitude/Emotion Signal	Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer	Softening	Action	Humor/Irony
Social Distance(Far)	34	29	9	26	0
Social Distance(Close)	32	26	14	6	3
Power(High)	24	31	1	52	0
Power(Low)	31	29	6	29	0
Absolute Ranking(High)	24	31	1	52	0
Absolute Ranking(Low)	31	60	6	29	0

"Attitude/Emotion Signal", "Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer", and "Action" are the most important pragmatic functions under most scenarios, while "Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer" accounts for almost 50% in half of the scenarios. Here are two examples of "power" scenarios (Figure 1 and 2), when participants are required to ask a professor and a student that they are not familiar with to modify a course paper, respectively.

Original message:

X (the last name of the professor) 教授您好！🙂 (Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer) 我是您的学生 XXX (the name of the student)，我最近在写一篇课程论文，现在已经完成了初稿，但是还是感觉不够完善，所以想找您请教一些专业的指导🙂 (Attitude/Emotion Signal) 能不能麻烦您在百忙之中给我的课程论文提一些意见呢?谢谢老师！🙂 (Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer) 🌹🌹 (Action)

Translation:

Hi professor X (the last name of the professor)! [Sun] (Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer) I am your student XXX (the name of the student). I've recently been working on a course paper and have now completed the first draft. However, I still feel that it's not perfected, so I would like to seek your professional guidance. [Joyful](Attitude/Emotion Signal) Could you please take some time out to offer some suggestions for my course paper? Thank you, teacher. [Sun](Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer) [Rose][Rose] (Action)

Figure 2 Example (1)

4

Original message:

XX (the name of the requestee)，可以麻烦帮我改一下课程论文嘛 😣 (Attitude/Emotion Signal) 我有点迷茫了 😵😵😵 (Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer)

Translation:

XX (the name of the requestee), could you please help me to modify my course paper [Whimper] (Attitude/Emotion Signal) I am a bit confused [Dizzy](Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer)

Figure 3 Example (2)

In contrast, people tend to make a request straight when facing good friends, and emojis usually have an auxiliary effect. Example (3) is in "social distance" scenarios when participants ask their good friends about a course they are interested in (Figure 4).

Original message:

华仔 (the nickname of the requestee)，给分高吗 🐱 (Softening)

Translation:

Hey bro (the nickname of the requestee), did the teacher give you a high grade? [Doge] (Softening)

Figure 4 Example (3)

Meanwhile, college students are accustomed to conveying gratitude, pleading, and admiration by using emojis to represent certain actions. It is helpful to persuade the requestee, especially in scenarios of "high power", when participants are supposed to ask their teacher for a PPT (shown in Figure 5) and their professor for suggestions (shown in Figure 6).

Original message:

老师您好～

不知道可不可以参考一下您上课的 PPT 内容呀 🌹🌹(gratitude)

Translation:

Hi, teacher~

I wonder if I can refer to the PPT of your class[Rose][Rose](gratitude)

Figure 5 Example (4)

Original message:

教授您现在有时间吗？我论文的 XX 地方有一些想不明白，可以麻烦您帮我看一下吗？🙏🙏 （pleading）

Translation:

Are you available now, Professor? I'm having some trouble understanding part of my essay, could you take a look for me? [Praying hands][Praying hands] (pleading)

Figure 6 Example (5)

"Action" also frequently occurs in scenarios of "high absolute ranking" to draw closer relations or extend gratitude. Figure 7 shows an example of asking a good friend to get your laptop from a distant teaching building.

Original message:	Translation:
亲爱的 😰 我的笔记本落教学楼了，能不能劳驾你帮我捎一下 😳 （closeness)回宿舍给你吃好吃的 😸	Darling [Whimper] My laptop was left in a teaching building. Could you help me to pick it up [Kiss] (closeness) I will treat you when you back to doom [Doge]

Figure 7 Example (6)

3.2.1 Social Distance

As shown in Table 4, only "Action" seems to be influenced by the weightiness of FTA, since there is an over 0.5 difference between the means when the social distance varies.

Table 4 Data on Pragmatic Functions Used in Different Scenarios of Social Distance

Functions	Social Distance(Close)		Social Distance(Far)	
	Mean	Std. EV	Mean	Std. EV
Attitude/Emotion Signal	0.89	1.05	0.84	0.74
Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer	0.69	0.76	0.63	0.87
Softening	0.24	0.63	0.37	0.58
Action	0.68	0.98	0.13	0.34
Humor/Irony	0	0	0.08	0.27

3.2.2 Power

In scenarios of "power", the weightiness of FTA has certain effects on the uses of "Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhance" and "Action". According to Table 5, "Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhance" is more frequently used in scenarios of "low power" than in scenarios of "high power". In contrast, "Action" seems to be more important in scenarios of "high power".

Table 5 Data on Pragmatic Functions Used in Different Scenarios of Power

Functions	Power(Low)		Power(High)	
	Mean	Std. EV	Mean	Std. EV
Attitude/Emotion Signal	0.78	0.83	0.60	0.81
Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer	1.50	1.38	0.78	1.03
Softening	0.15	0.36	0.03	0.16
Action	0.73	1.01	1.30	1.16
Humor/Irony	0	0	0	0

3.2.3 Absolute Ranking

As shown in Table 6, the mean in "high absolute ranking" scenarios is more than 0.5 higher than that in "low absolute ranking" scenarios in terms of "Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhance", which may be caused by the different weightinesses.

Table 6 Data on Pragmatic Functions Used in Different Scenarios of Absolute Ranking

Functions	Absolute Ranking(Low)		Absolute Ranking(High)	
	Mean	Std. EV	Mean	Std. EV
Attitude/Emotion Signal	0.85	0.70	1.20	1.16
Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer	1.35	1.14	1.88	1.54
Softening	0.25	0.54	0.13	0.33
Action	0.50	0.96	0.53	1.64
Humor/Irony	0.03	0.16	0.05	0.22

4. Discussion

4.1 Emoji in Representation

4.1.1 High-Frequency Emoji

In terms of visual-semantic features and pragmatic functions, the top 6 high-frequency emojis can be divided into two groups. Visually, [Whimper], [Sob], and [Hurt] are all sad facial expressions containing the component of "tears," which can be used to express negative emotions such as sadness, sorrow, or pessimism. Therefore, these three emojis often play a role as a tone modifier. In other words, they are more likely to work as Attitude/Emotion Signals or Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancers.

Original Message:

宝～我有个电脑落在教学楼里了🙏🙏不知道可不可以麻烦宝帮忙拿一下呀🙏🙏如果不方便也没关系！

Translation:

Babe, my laptop was left in a teaching building[Sob] [Sob] and I wonder if it is convenient for you to get it for me[Sob] [Sob] Forget it if it is inconvenient.

Figure 8. Example (7)

As shown in Figure 8, in example (7), the first two [Sob]s in a row reflect that the requester feels unhappy with the fact that he or she has left the laptop. Since the text itself has no obvious emotion, the emojis here work as an "Emotion Signal". In comparison, the second two [Sob]s in a row closely follow the polite request, making it more polite and difficult to reject. Therefore, they work as the "Attitude Intensity Enhancer" for they highlight the requester's polite manner.

Moreover, the usage of [Whimper], [Sob], and [Hurt] can arouse sympathy. According to the Politeness Principle proposed by Leech, the Sympathy Maxim aims to maximize sympathy and minimize antipathy between the speaker and hearer [19]. In example (7), the requester uses [Sob]s to make him or her more pitiable, in order to arouse the requestee's sympathy, so that the imposition will be justified and the potential burden will be reduced.

On the other hand, [Praying Hands] and [Kiss] both can be seen as virtual actions. While the former is largely interpreted as requesting or pleading, the latter is usually used to express thanks or build closer relationships.

Original Message:

你知道xx老师咋样吗😘😘😘

Translation:

Do you know how is that teacher[Kiss] [Kiss] [Kiss]

Figure 9 Example (8)

In Chinese culture, kissing is an action that usually happens between people who have a close relationship, so the usage of [Kiss] is also an approach to drawing a closer relationship. Given that "positive face" refers to the social members' desire to be supported, understood, liked, and admired by others [16], a closer relationship can somehow satisfy the requestee's positive face. Therefore, as shown in Figure 9, in example (8), [Kiss]s are used as a positive politeness strategy.

Although [Rose] does not seem to represent action visually, it is conventionally used to extend gratitude, which is confirmed by our data. Thus, in most contexts, [Rose] can be recognized as a virtual action.

4.1.2 Visual Representation of Emoji

The results show that participants are more likely to use a single emoji at a time. When inserting multiple emojis, they are inclined to repeat the same emoji rather than mix different emojis. This preference is in line with Yang and Liu's results, whose data were collected from comments on Weibo [14]. It probably indicates that this kind of preference universally exists in text-emoji of different genres. For position patterns, a majority of emojis occur in the supportive move of requests.

Original Message:

宝！我最近胸闷今天不是去医院检查了嘛，医生另给我加了一个胸部ct，我发现我的余额不太够🙏🙏你可以借我1000嘛😭😭😭

Translation:

Babe! I have had a chest distress recently and go to the hospital today. The doctor says I need an extra Chest CT, and I suddenly find that I don't have enough money in my account[Sob] [Sob] [Sob] Could you lend me 1000 Yuan [Hurt] [Hurt] [Hurt]

Figure 10 Example (9)

According to the classification of request strategies proposed by Blum-Kulka and his colleagues [18], in example (9) (Figure 10), "babe" belongs to the opener, in order to attract the hearer's attention; the two sentences in the middle "I have had ... ." and "The doctor says " together with the three emojis [Sob]

all belong to the supportive move, which aims to adjust the intensity of requests and soften the intensity of the head act; the last sentence and the three emojis [Hurt] are the head act, which is namely the mean of making a request. The supportive move here can be further classified as "grounder," which means to explain the reason for request. Given that the absolute ranking of imposition is relatively high, the requester is trying hard to explain the tough situation he or she is in. The [Sob]s in the supportive move strongly convey the requester's helplessness and worry, which can arouse sympathy and reduce the absolute ranking. The three [Sob] following the explanation strongly convey the requester's helplessness and worry, which can arouse sympathy, justify the explanation, and reduce the absolute ranking. Therefore, emojis usually

play an auxiliary role by making the request more acceptable, while texts always compose the principal part of a request.

4.2 Pragmatic Functions of Emoji

The results show that differences do exist in emoji's pragmatic usages when the weightiness of FTA varies. However, all the differences are not significant, probably indicating that they are caused by subjectivity to a larger extent. Meanwhile, it is found that "Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer" and "Softening" both play special roles in request messages, which will be elaborated in the following subsections.

4.2.1 Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer

"Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer" accounts for nearly half of all pragmatic functions in scenarios of "high power", "high absolute ranking", and "low absolute ranking". It demonstrates that emoji usually has a complementary relationship with the text when its meaning is coherent but does not determine the text [20].

Original Message:

同学你好哇！！不好意思打扰你一下😭😭听说你的论文写得特别好！不知道有木有时间请教一下你🙇🙇🙇

Translation:

Hi! I'm sorry to bother you[Sob] [Sob] I heard that you were really good at academic writing! May I ask if you have time to teach me[Whimper] [Whimper] [Whimper]

Figure 11 Example (10)

All the emojis in example (10) are complementary (Figure 11), as the meaning of the text will not be fundamentally changed without emojis. By using expressions such as "may I ask...", the text itself has already been polite. In this message, [Sob] and [Whimper] work as "Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer" to make the request even more polite and acceptable for the requestee. This approach of request-making indicates that the text is more responsible for implementing politeness strategies, while the emojis are dominated by the text.

4.2.2 Softening

"Softening" becomes one of the top 3 pragmatic functions only in scenarios of "close social distance". To explain this, each scenario is decomposed into the three influence factors. By respectively comparing "social distance," "power," and "absolute ranking" in all scenarios, the

weightiness of FTA in each scenario can be estimated. Firstly, the social distances between the requester and requestee in 12 scenarios are sequenced from near to far: good friend < classmate/professor/teacher/teaching assistant (rarely communicate) < college student (have not talked before). Secondly, the levels of power of the requestee are sequenced from low to high: good friend = classmate = college student = teaching assistant < teacher/professor. In the two scenarios of "close social distance", the requestees are both set as "a good friend of the requester", which means the weightiness caused by "social distance" and "power" would be at the lowest level. For absolute ranking, the requester needs to ask for information about a course or a secondhand book, which is also at a low level. Therefore, The weightinesses of "close social distance" scenarios are theoretically among the lightest.

Original Message:

书还有吗，有的话给我留着😚

Translation:

Have you sold that book? If haven't, keep that book for me [Shy]

Figure 12 Example (11)

In example (11) (Figure 12), the head act is direct and imperative, which is relatively forceful and impolite. However, by inserting a [Shy], the tone is largely softened. Thus, it can be inferred that when the FTA is not serious,

Chinese college students tend to make requests with less polite texts, while emojis are important in maintaining politeness.

5. Conclusion

Firstly, [Whimper], [Sob], [Hurt], [Rose], [Praying Hands], and [Kiss] are the top 6 high-frequency emojis. While the first three are associated with sad emotion and mainly used for arousing sympathy, the last three are mostly used as virtual actions of thanking or requesting.

Secondly, emojis are most likely to occur singly and in the supportive move of requests, which reflects that emojis are typically used to make requests more acceptable, whereas texts are always the essential component of a request.

Thirdly, "Attitude/Emotion Intensity Enhancer" accounts for almost 50% in half of the scenarios, demonstrating that emojis are always complementary and subordinate to the text. "Softening" seems to be emphasized when the weightiness of FTA is relatively light, as texts tend to be less polite, while emojis are essential to maintain politeness.

Fourthly, the weightiness of FTA has no significant influence on the pragmatic usage of emojis.

Given the small sample, this study's limitations include reliance on mean comparisons, restricted participant demography, and a lack of comparison between the three influence factors. Additionally, evaluating emojis' functions by decomposition offers a promising direction for future research.

References

[1] Yao, W. (2021). 'Emoji-based Communication' Shows the Prevelance of Visual Language Media and Reconstructs the Digital Social Interaction Methods: a Case Study of the Emoji Use Among Young People on Wechat Platform. Journalism & Communication Review, 74(3), 81–95.

[2] Rodrigues, D., Prada, M., Rui, G., Garrido, M. V., and Lopes, D. (2017). Lisbon emoji and emoticon database (LEED): norms for emoji and emoticons in seven evaluative dimensions. Behav. Res. Methods 50, 1–14. doi: 10.3758/s13428-017-0878-6

[3] Alshenqeeti, H. (2016). Are emojis creating a new or old visual language for new generations? A socio-semiotic study. Adv. Lang. Lit. Stud. 7, 56–69. doi: 10.7575/aiac.alls.v.7n.6p.56

[4] Hou, R., Han, S., Wang, K., & Zhang, C. (2020). *To WeChat or to more chat during learning? The relationship between WeChat and learning from the perspective of university students | Education and Information Technologies.* https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10639-020-10338-6

[5] Bai, Q., Dan, Q., Mu, Z., & Yang, M. (2019). A Systematic Review of Emoji: Current Research and Future Perspectives. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02221

[6] Dresner, E., & Herring, S. C. (2010). Functions of the nonverbal in CMC: Emoticons and illocutionary force. Communication Theory, 20, 249–268.

[7] Darics, E. (2010). Politeness in computer-mediated discourse of a virtual team. J Politeness Res, 6(1), 129–150.

[8] Golato, A., & Taleghani-Nikazm, C. (2006). Negotiation of face in web chats. Multilingua-Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication, 25(3), 293–321. https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.18018.yan

[9] Lo, S.-K. (2008). The nonverbal communication functions of emoticons in computer-mediated communication. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior: The Impact of the Internet, Multimedia and Virtual Reality on Behavior and Society*, *11*(5), 595–597. https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2007.0132

[10] Yus, F. (2014). NOT ALL EMOTICONS ARE CREATED EQUAL. Linguagem Em (Dis)Curso, 14(3), 511–529. https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-4017-140304-0414

[11] Dainas, A. R., & Herring, S. C. (2021). Interpreting emoji pragmatics. Approaches to Internet Pragmatics: Theory and Practice, 107–144.

[12] Cramer, Henriette, Paloma de Juan, and Joel Tetreault. (2016). "Sender-Intended Functions of Emojis in US Messaging." In Proceedings of the 18th International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction with Mobile Devices and Services, 504-509. New York, NY: Association for Computing Machinery. doi>10.1145/2935334.2935370

[13] Li, L., Yang, Y. (2018).Pragmatic functions of emoji in internet-based communication---a corpus-based study. Asian. J. Second. Foreign. Lang. Educ. 3, 16.

[14] Yang, X., & Liu, M. (2021). The pragmatics of text-emoji co-occurrences on Chinese social media. Pragmatics, 31(1), 144-172.

[15] Goffman, E. (1967). Interaction ritual: Essays in face-to-face behavior. Aldinetransaction.

[16] Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511813085

[17] Blum-Kulka, S. (1982). Learning to Say What You Mean in a Second Language: A Study of the Speech Act Performance of Learners of Hebrew as a Second Language1 | Applied Linguistics | Oxford Academic. https://academic.oup.com/applij/article-abstract/III/1/29/170227

[18] Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. (1989). Investigating Cross-Cultural Pragmatics:An Introductory Overview. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House, & G. Kasper (Eds.), Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies (pp. 1-34). Ablex.

[19] Leech, G. N. (1983). Principles of pragmatics. London: Longman.

[20] Ai, W., Lu, X., Liu, X., Wang, N., Huang, G., & Mei, Q. (2017). Untangling Emoji Popularity Through Semantic Embeddings. Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media, 11(1), Article 1. https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v11i1.14903

Appendix

Scenario 1 (close social distance)

At the beginning of the semester, you want to buy a secondhand book for a compulsory course, and you happen to see a person selling the book you need on WeChat moment. If this person is a classmate you are quite familiar with, how would you send the message?

Scenario 2 (far social distance)

At the beginning of the semester, you want to buy a secondhand book for a compulsory course, and you happen to see a person selling the book you need on WeChat moment. If this person is a student of your university with whom you rarely communicate, how would you send the message?

Scenario 3 (close social distance)

You want to select a course taught by Professor X next semester, and you want to get more information(course orientation, course assessment, etc.) about this course. Therefore, you send a message to the WeChat group of your university to ask if anyone has taken this course. Now, one of your friends sends a message to you saying that he/she has taken the course, and you want to ask him/her for some information. How would you send the message?

Scenario 4 (far social distance)

You want to select a course taught by Professor X next semester, and you want to get more information(course orientation, course assessment, etc.) about this course. Therefore, you send a message to the WeChat group of your university to ask if anyone has taken this course. Now, a student you are unfamiliar with replies in the WeChat group, and you want to ask him/her for some information. How would you send the message?

Scenario 5 (low power)

You want some advice on revising your term paper, and you decide to ask a classmate who is experienced in academic writing. You seldom communicate with that classmate in daily life. How would you send the message?

Scenario 6 (high power)

You want some advice on revising your term paper, and you decide to ask your professor for help. You seldom communicate with your professor in daily life. How would you send the message?

Scenario 7 (low power)

At the end of the semester, you want to review a course with PPT, so you decide to ask for PPT from a teaching assistant (who is about the same age as you and with whom you rarely communicate). How would you send the message?

Scenario 8 (high power)

At the end of the semester, you want to review a course with PPT, so you decide to ask for PPT from the teacher (with whom you rarely communicate). How would you send the message?

Scenario 9 (low absolute ranking)

When you are in the dormitory, you suddenly find that your laptop is left in a teaching building. You are afraid of losing your laptop, so you want to ask your roommate to bring it back. At this moment, your roommate is in the same teaching building. How would you send the message?

Scenario 10 (high absolute ranking)

When you are in the dormitory, you suddenly find that your laptop is left in a teaching building. You are afraid of losing your laptop, so you want to ask your roommate to bring it back. At this moment, your roommate is in a library far away from the teaching building. How would you send the message?

Scenario 11 (low absolute ranking)

Now you are in the hospital, and you suddenly find that you don't have enough money to pay the bill, so you want to borrow some money from a friend with whom you have a good relationship. If you need to borrow 20 Yuan, how would you send the message?

Scenario 12 (high absolute ranking)

Now you are in the hospital, and you suddenly find that you don't have enough money to pay the bill, so you want to borrow some money from a friend with whom you have a good relationship. If you need to borrow 1000 Yuan, how would you send the message?

Fillers

1. You are watching a comedy and find it really impressive, so you want to recommend it to your friend. How would you send the message?

2. You are stuck in a traffic jam, feeling bored, so you want to complain to your friend. How would you send the message?

3. You just got full marks in an exam, and you want to share this good news with your mother/father. How would you send the message?

4. Today, you climbed a mountain and walked a lot. Your feet hurt. How would you complain to your good friends?

5. If you are late for a class activity, how would you send a message to the class monitor to explain?

6. You are currently in the dormitory. Not long ago, you heard the sound of rain outside the window. You want to ask your roommates if the rain has stopped outside. How would you ask?