

Crosslinguistic perspectives on the use and meaning of emoji in Asia and Europe

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The new ways of communicating in the 21st digital era gave rise to new ways of communication thanks to the social media and the ubiquitous use of the smartphone. This phenomenon has started to get a lot of attention in the field of linguistics (Evans 2017) and semiotics (Danesi 2016) regarding the universality of such modes of communication and the role they have in daily interactions. Similar to non-verbal cues in face-to-face interactions (gesture, facial expressions, tone of voice, etc.), emoji represent a powerful means of analyzing human communication, focusing on the emotional side of the speaker's message and their attitude. Recent research focuses on their figurative use (Danesi 2016), their emotional aspect (Barbieri et al. 2017), or speakers' intentions, for instance with the use of irony (Weissman & Tanner 2018).

This paper explores variation in interpretation of meaning of emoji between Chinese and French speakers. We focus on common emoji used by both Chinese university students (gathered from WeChat, a Chinese social media platform) and French university students. Surveys have been carried out in order to find out how often the participants use certain emoji and the meanings they attribute to them (as well as their negative-neutral-positive roles in conversations; see also Kralj Novak *et al.* 2015) which allows comparing their use in Asia and Europe. The findings show that, while some emoji have the same meanings for both Chinese and French users, others undergo semantic shift.

These findings will be compared to Ekman's (1979) analyses regarding facial expressions and emotion (such as anger, happiness, sadness, etc.), emphasizing the semantic/pragmatic role they have in daily communications across different media platforms. Our analysis emphasizes interaction and intersubjectivity, allowing to present these emoji within a background of dynamic meaning construction in a shared common ground between interlocutors (Clark 1996; Zlatev *et al.* 2008). The results bring into question claims of universality of emoji (Danesi, 2016) as well as of facial expressions and emotions (Ekman 1979), suggesting that their meaning is not universal but depends on several factors to which the users are exposed.

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