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ANALYSIS OF EMOJI IN INSTAGRAM POSTS OF RUSSIAN AND AMERICAN BLOGGERS

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Abstract. In the last few years, emoji have aroused considerable interest. Researchers explore emoji from various perspectives. However, no attempt has been made, to the best of our knowledge, to reveal cultural peculiarities of their usage and interaction with verbal text and punctuation, so in this respect our research provides a novel perspective. The present paper aims at investigating emoji in Instagram posts of Russian and American bloggers. The methods employed include quantitative, qualitative and comparative analysis. Notable similarities and differences in the usage of emoji were revealed. Bloggers in both cultures tend to complement or duplicate verbal messages with emoji, generally avoid using emoji to accentuate or contradict the meaning of the verbal text and typically place them at the end of the sentence substituting the full stop. However, the results suggest that American bloggers use emojis less often than Russian bloggers do. Moreover, patterns of complementing and substituting verbal cues with non-verbal ones display variation affected by cultural context. National preferences concerning the position of emoji in the verbal message and type of their interaction with punctuation marks have also been discovered. The theoretical significance of our findings lies in their contribution to the theory of non-verbal means, especially written non-verbal cues. Our conclusions have practical implications for L2 students writing texts on the Internet and EFL teachers developing cross cultural communication skills. Further studies, which investigate emoji usage in comments in Instagram and compare the data with the findings on their usage in posts, will need to be undertaken.

Keywords: emoji, blog, multimodality, punctuation, verbal text, non-verbal cues, Internet communication, cross-cultural communication

Basic provisions

In an age of globalization, it is highly important to ensure successful communication with people of various nationalities: verbal and written messages should be conveyed and understood correctly. Emoji have become part of everyday communication for millions of people. Therefore, these non-verbal means are of great interest for researchers in different fields. Scholars have already studied functions of emojis in computer-mediated communication [1; 2; 3], their grammar [4] and semantics [5]. However, previous work has been limited to studies of emoji in a single culture, while comparative aspects have hardly been addressed. Differences in usage of emoji platforms may, however, result in a communicative failure. Consequently, it is necessary to know the peculiarities of using emojis in different cultures.

Introduction

Communication can be classified in different ways, with division into verbal and non-verbal being among the most widely accepted bases for typology. It is well-known that non-verbal communication makes up about 70 percent of all communication. So, it is considered a prospective field of investigation. But as any linguistic phenomenon non-verbal communication is viewed by scholars from various perspectives. Knapp et al. [6] put emphasis on the fact that non-verbal communication is implemented by means other than words. Other linguists [7] point out the means by which non-verbal communication is transmitted: sounds, artifacts, behaviors. Anicaeva [8] addresses typology of graphic non-verbal means of communication, including colour schemes and graphs, as well as punctuation and font. Emoji as a graphic device is generally considered to be one of the types of non-verbal communication.

Emoji belong to the sphere of Internet communication. The term *Internet communication* refers to communication via electronic and Internet technologies. This type of communication has some peculiarities. For instance, communicators tend to use spoken language and disregard language norms. The messages are characterized by expressiveness and emotiveness [9]. Verbal messages on social media use both verbal and non-verbal texts to explain the sender's meaning and express emotions [2].

Emoji are pictorial symbols used for expressing feelings and representing things or concepts [3]. They can stand for gestures and facial expressions as well as objects and places. Cohn et al. [4] note that emoji's vocabulary is provided through mobile phones and computers. It can differ significantly depending on the phone brand and platform [10]. Emoji developed from emoticons. However, some authors [1] do not differentiate the phenomena and use the terms interchangeably. Following Tang and Hew [10], we view emoji and emoticons as separate types of non-verbal means. The present paper deals with emojis only.

Emojis have widely been classified on the functional basis. Li and Yang [3] study pragmatic functions of emoji, whereas Arafah and Hasyim [2] focus on linguistic functions. Functions of emoji in regard to other elements of internet communication have also been considered as a basis for typology. Schneebeli [1] identifies groups of emoji according to the type of interaction with verbal modalities. Basically, such typologies are derived from Ekman and Friesen's classification of interaction between non-verbal and verbal messages [11]. They note five possible types of interaction: duplication, substitution, complementation, contradiction, accentuation. Emoji also interact with other non-verbal components of virtual communication, such as punctuation marks, following, preceding or substituting them. In the latter case, position at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of the message is possible, the position at the end being the most typical [12]. Emoji can interact not only with verbal messages but also with non-verbal messages like pictures. However, no typology based on the type of such interaction has been suggested to date, to the best of our knowledge.

The blog is an Internet genre typically characterized by usage of emoji. Blogs are web pages in which dated entries are placed in reverse chronological order.

Types of blogs display considerable diversity. Basic classifications are based on the content of the blog, differentiating between filters, notebooks and personal journals. Multimodal types of blogs include videoblogs and photoblogs.

Instagram can be considered a type of photoblog – this is a blog-personal journal where the author writes posts about his or her life, discuss some significant issues. Even though some distinct differences with the traditional photoblog can be pointed out, the creolized character of posts in Instagram is undeniable, as they include two semiotic systems: verbal and non-verbal. The picture, verbal message and emoji interact with each other to convey the meaning as a whole [13]. The posts follow the same tendencies in writing as Internet communication [9].

Current studies of Internet pragmatics emphasize that “[a] thorough study of emoji pragmatics requires consideration not just of the local discourse context, but also of situational, interpersonal, and cultural contexts... Further studies of emoji interpretation should investigate differences in pragmatic functions across cultures” [14, p. 140]. In our research, we tried to compare the usage of emoji in Instagram posts of Russian and American bloggers. Understanding interaction of emoji with other verbal and non-verbal components of Internet communication, as well as the role of cultural context in molding such interaction, is likely to be of use for EFL teachers and students.

Methods and materials

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been employed in our analysis. Our hypothesis was that emoji usage on Instagram posts varies in different national and cultural contexts. To test it, we analysed interaction between emojis and other components of Internet communication, including verbal messages, punctuation marks and photos, in Instagram lifestyle blogs authored by users of different nationalities.

After downloading the app and registering there, we used the search bar to find bloggers meeting the criteria of age (from 18 to 30), sex (only females), nationality (American or Russian) and number of followers (more than 800.000). The criteria reflect general trends in Instagram blogging: 75.5% of Instagram authors are female, with the peak of blogging activity estimated at the age 18-30. The 4 Russian bloggers thus chosen were Kate Clapp, Sasha Spilberg, Milena Chizova and Katya Adushkina. The American bloggers selected were Haley Pham, Meredith Foster, Kristen McAtee, Daniella Perkins. We read the posts of every blogger and made screenshots of the posts where verbal messages were accompanied by emoji. The period of collecting was from January 2021 to December 2021.

Posts including several passages of text with different emojis were copied. We got 108 copies, three of which were posts of American bloggers: Meredith Foster, Kristen McAtee, Daniella Perkins. These copies were made for analysing the interaction of emoji and the verbal message. We also made 140 copies to investigate the interaction of emoji and punctuation.

At the first stage of analysis, quantitative comparative analysis of frequency of emoji usage in Instagram messages posted by Russian and American bloggers was carried out.

Further analysis revealed various degrees of complexity in interaction between different components of Internet communication. Some posts demonstrated close ties between emoji and the verbal message, as well as other non-verbal means employed directly within the verbal message, such as punctuation marks. Other posts were characterized by complex interaction between emoji, verbal text and photo images. The latter samples (83 instances in the two subcorpora) were excluded from further investigation, as analysis of those would require plunging in the theory of multimodality, which we do not do in the present paper, considering it a fascinating object for a separate study.

At the second stage we focused on interaction of emoji with verbal messages. The function of emoji with relation to the verbal text was identified, basing on Ekman and Friesen's classification [11]. Our aim was to single out cases of duplication, substitution, complementation, contradiction and accentuation of the verbal message by the emoji accompanying it. Quantitative analysis was employed to reveal the dominant type of interaction in either of the two national subcorpora, and comparative analysis was performed to observe similarities and differences in the current national trends of using emoji. We also investigated typical position of emoji in the verbal text. Cases of emoji used at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of sentences were identified, and trends in that respect were also detected and compared.

Finally, interaction of emoji with punctuation marks was investigated. First, types of punctuation marks which typically interact with emoji were identified in the Russian and American subcorpora, to be compared afterwards. Then, types of interaction between emoji and punctuation marks were revealed using Ekman and Friesen's classification, with their frequency subsequently quantified and compared.

Results and Discussion

The results of the quantitative analysis suggest that American bloggers use emoji less often than Russian bloggers do. The total number of messages with emoji posted by the selected bloggers from January 2021 to December 2021 is 483. 341 of them were authored by Russian bloggers, with only 142 posts belonging to American bloggers. The figures seem to show that conveying one's ideas and attitudes through emoji is at least twice as popular within the Russian Internet community as it is within the American Internet community.

Regarding interaction of emoji with the verbal message, some similar trends can be revealed, as well as noticeable cultural variability (see Table 1).

Table 1. Type of interaction between emoji and the verbal message

Function	Russian bloggers		American bloggers	
	instances	%	instances	%
Complementation	133	34.7	50	40
Duplication	125	32.6	35	28

Substitution (part of the text)	94	24.6	18	14.4
Substitution (the whole text)	2	0.5	15	12
Accentuation	29	7,6	7	5.6
Contradiction	0	0	0	0
Total	383	100	125	100

Both Russian and American bloggers tend to complement verbal messages with emojis. The difference revealed in this type of interaction is that Russian bloggers prefer to complement the verbal message with a single emoji, whereas American bloggers use up to four emojis in this function (Fig.1). Non-verbal cues complementing the meaning of words typically convey the author's attitude to the topic and the addressee, helping to build up and maintain relations between communicators.

meredithfoster Back to your regular scheduled programming 📺😄🕺🎉
Nashville Vlog is up on my youtube channel!

Fig.1 Series of emoji complementing the verbal message

Duplication is also equally typical for both discourse communities (see examples in Fig. 2, 3), while accentuation is rarely employed in either subcorpus.

kristenmcatee hey big head, join me tonight at 6pm PST on #trillertv! you guys challenged me to "gummy bear sushi" and i think i got this 🍡 come watch and let me know how i did! LINK IN BIO

Fig.2 Emoji duplicating the verbal message in an American blog

milenamurmur Волшебство, не иначе 😊
Это я о своём новом окрашивании от талантливейшей @m.admiralova ❤️👩
Процесс покажу в новом влоге🎬😄
Как вам?)

Fig.3 Emoji duplicating the verbal message in a Russian blog

However, patterns of substitution differ in Russian and American Instagram posts. Russian bloggers tend to substitute part of the verbal message with emoji more frequently, which is demonstrated by the increased rate of substitution. The opposite trend is observed in substitution of the whole verbal message: American bloggers are more likely to express their ideas or emotions entirely with emoji, without any accompanying text (Fig. 4).



Fig.4 Emoji substituting the whole verbal message

No instances of contradiction between the meaning of emoji and the message expressed by words have been found. Generally, contradiction between verbal and non-verbal parts of the utterance is considered unintentional and may lead either to misunderstanding or undesirable revealing of true communicative intentions. Intentional contradiction of verbal and non-verbal, however, may be employed to produce sarcastic effect [15, p. 12-13]. Evidently, popular Russian and American bloggers are intent on avoiding communicative failure, which usage of such a risky stylistic device might result in.

Cultural context does not seem to significantly affect typical position of emoji within the verbal message. Emojis are generally placed at the end of a verbal message in both American and Russian subcorpora (Table 2). This is consistent with the results of Arafah and Hasyim’s research of emoji usage in WhatsApp messages [2].

Table 2. Position of emoji within the verbal message

Position	Russian bloggers		American bloggers	
	instances	%	instances	%
At the beginning of the sentence	8	2.3	2	1.4
In the middle of the sentence	5	1.4	6	4.1
At the end of the sentence	330	95.1	131	90.4
Before and after the word/phrase	4	1.2	6	4.1
Total	347	100	145	100

However, Russian bloggers in Instagram are inclined to use three or more emoji after each sentence or text passage, whereas American bloggers are likely to use no more than three emojis at the end of the text. Moreover, the initial position of emoji seems to be slightly more preferable for Russian bloggers, while the opposite is true

for the position in the middle of the sentence. In both subcorpora, the initial position was found to correlate with the function of accentuation (Fig.5).

Нравится: 105 472

haleypham !!! the last photo is NOT facetuned

Fig.5 Emoji at the beginning of the sentence accentuating the verbal message

Another factor contributing to the choice of the initial position might be the syntactical structure. Emoji are typically used at the beginning of the phrases in lists (Fig. 6).

haleypham This summer, I'm investing in myself and working towards achieving my goals:

- 🔍 find a new hobby (tennis!)
- 📖 exercise my brain (read more!)
- 🍳 learn how to cook & live a healthy lifestyle
- ☀️ enjoy lots of sunrises

Fig.6 Emoji substituting bullets in lists

American bloggers would seem to be rather more in favour of the generally less frequent position encircling the phrase (see an example in Fig.7):

katusha_adushkina Если вам интересно, как же было сделано это фото, то прямо сейчас переходите и смотрите моё ⚠️ НОВОЕ ВИДЕО ⚠️

Fig.7 Emoji before and after the phrase

Comparative analysis performed at the final stage of the research revealed a greater variety of Russian punctuation marks which interact with emoji in Instagram posts and notable differences in the functions of emoji (Table 3).

Table 3. Interaction of emoji with punctuation marks

Nationality	Russian bloggers									American bloggers				
Punctuation mark	.	!	?	,	–	...	:	??	;	.	!	?	,	–
Function														
Duplication	12	88	62	0	3	43	7	4	1	2	8	1	0	0
Instances %	5.5	6,4	100	0	100	100	78	100	100	1,8	32	20	0	0
Substitution	208	49	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	107	17	4	5	1

Instances	94.5	36	0	100	0	0	22	0	0	98.2	68	80	100	100
%														
Total Instances	220	137	62	2	3	43	9	4	1	109	25	5	5	1

While only the period, comma, exclamation mark, question mark and dash have been found to be replaced by emoji or accompanied by them in the messages of American bloggers, the list of Russian punctuation marks also includes the ellipsis, colon, exclamation mark used immediately after the question mark and semicolon. The more intense interaction between emoji and punctuation marks in the posts of Russian bloggers might be the result of a greater role of punctuation in Russian writing in general, and in Russian Internet communication in particular, which has not been affected by the introduction of emoji as a new sign system.

Of the five types of verbal/non-verbal interaction described by Ekman and Friesen [11], two types only – duplication and substitution – were identified during the analysis of emoji and punctuation marks in the two corpora of Instagram messages. Emoji have not been found to complement, accentuate or contradict any of the punctuation marks. The character of interaction varies depending on the kind of punctuation mark and the cultural context. Emoji substitute, and never duplicate, commas in both American and Russian posts analysed. Periods are also substituted, and not duplicated, in the absolute majority of instances by bloggers of both nationalities. With exclamation marks, duplication is more frequent in the Russian subcorpus, while substitution prevails in the American posts. Question marks were always duplicated by the Russian bloggers, and nearly always substituted by the American ones. The opposite is true for dashes.

It is not easy to see a clear pattern emerging from these findings. Upon the whole, there seems to exist a tendency towards substitution of punctuation marks by emoji in American Instagram posts, while Russian bloggers tend to employ duplication in a greater degree. However, as there were very few instances of interaction between emoji and such punctuation marks as commas and dashes (as well as question marks in the American posts), such hypothesis should be treated with caution. Further studies on a larger sample size are required to clarify the issue.

A notable exception is interaction of emoji with periods, which is by far the most frequent case. In both subcorpora substitution of periods by emoji is much more common than duplication. Viewed together with the widely described tendency of emoji to be placed in the final position (see above), these findings might suggest that emoji may be moving towards becoming a new type of punctuation mark, performing most of the functions of the latter. This tendency is likely to be universal and not affected by the cultural context.

Conclusion

In our research we attempted to analyze cultural peculiarities of emoji usage and their interaction with verbal messages and punctuation marks. In general, universal trends seem to prevail, which makes cultural differences less noticeable but no less important for successful communication. An overuse of emoji in English by L2 speakers, prompted by their native communicative patterns, might change the general tenor of communication and lessen the effect of otherwise carefully constructed message, for instance. Comparison of pragmatics in new communicative spheres is evidently a vital issue for future research.

Our findings on mechanisms of interaction between cues of different types in Internet posts might contribute to the actively developing field of multimodality studies. Most work in that direction has focused on verbal/non-verbal interaction, while our research provides some insights into correlation between emoji and punctuation, both of them non-verbal components. Further studies of emoji in Instagram should concentrate on their interaction with photo components of the posts.

Besides general cultural peculiarities of Internet communication discussed in the paper, the effect of specific genres on the usage of emoji is quite a promising area. One of the steps towards resolving the issue might be investigating usage of emoji and their interaction with other non-verbal, as well as verbal, cues in comments on Instagram posts and comparing the results with the findings of the present study.

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РЕСЕЙ ЖӘНЕ АМЕРИКАЛЫҚ БЛОГЕРЛЕРДІҢ ИНСТАГРАМ ПОСТТАРЫНДАҒЫ ЭМОДЗИЛЕРГЕ ТАЛДАУ

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Аңдатпа. Соңғы бірнеше жылда эмодзилер үлкен қызығушылық тудырды. Зерттеушілер эмодзилерді әртүрлі тұрғыдан зерттейді. Дегенмен, біздің білуімізше, олардың қолданылу және ауызша мәтінмен және тыныс белгілерімен өзара әрекеттесуінің мәдени ерекшеліктерін ашуға әрекет жасалмады. Бұл мақала сандық және сапалық талдау арқылы ресейлік және американдық блогерлердің Instagram жазбаларындағы эмодзилерді зерттеуге бағытталған. Эмодзилерді қолданудағы елеулі ұқсастықтар мен айырмашылықтар анықталды. Екі мәдениеттегі де блогерлер ауызша хабарламаларды эмодзилермен толықтырады немесе қайталайды, әдетте ауызша мәтіннің мағынасына екпін беру немесе қайшы келу үшін эмодзилерді қолданбайды және көп нүктенің орнына сөйлемнің соңына қояды. Дегенмен, нәтижелер американдық блогерлер эмодзилерді ресейлік блогерлерге қарағанда азырақ пайдаланады деп көрсетеді. Сонымен қатар, вербалды емес белгілермен вербальды белгілерді толықтыру және ауыстыру үлгілері мәдени контекст әсер ететін өзгерістерді көрсетеді. Сондай-ақ ауызша хабарламадағы эмодзилердің орны мен тыныс белгілерімен әрекеттесу түріне қатысты ұлттық артықшылықтар анықталды. Біздің тұжырымдарымыздың теориялық маңыздылығы олардың вербалды емес құралдар теориясына, әсіресе жазбаша бейвербалды белгілерге қосқан үлесінде жатыр. Біздің қорытындыларымыз Интернетте мәтіндер жазатын L2 студенттеріне және мәдениетаралық қарым-қатынас дағдыларын дамытатын EFL мұғалімдеріне практикалық әсер етеді.

Инстаграмдағы түсініктемелерде эмодзилердің қолданылуын зерттейтін және деректерді олардың жазбалардағы қолданылуы туралы нәтижелермен салыстыратын қосымша зерттеулер жүргізу қажет болады.

Тірек сөздер: эмодзи, блог, мультимодальдылық, пунктуация, вербалды мәтін, вербалды емес сигналдар, интернет-коммуникация, мәдениетаралық коммуникация.

АНАЛИЗ ЭМОДЗИ В ПОСТАХ ИНСТАГРАМ РОССИЙСКИХ И АМЕРИКАНСКИХ БЛОГЕРОВ

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Аннотация. В последние несколько лет эмодзи вызывают значительный интерес. Исследователи изучают эмодзи с разных точек зрения. Однако, насколько нам известно, не было предпринято никаких попыток выявить культурные особенности их употребления и взаимодействия с вербальным текстом и пунктуацией. Целью настоящей статьи является исследование эмодзи в постах российских и американских блогеров в Instagram посредством количественного и качественного анализа. Выявлены заметные сходства и различия в использовании смайлов. Блогеры в обеих культурах склонны дополнять или дублировать вербальные сообщения смайликами. Они обычно избегают использования смайлов, чтобы подчеркнуть тот или иной смысл или противоречить смыслу устного текста, и размещают их в конце предложения, заменяя точку. Результаты показывают, что американские блогеры используют смайлы реже, чем российские. Более того, модели дополнения и замены вербальных сигналов невербальными демонстрируют вариации, зависящие от культурного контекста. Выявлены также национальные предпочтения относительно положения эмодзи в вербальном сообщении и типа их взаимодействия со знаками препинания. Теоретическая значимость наших результатов заключается в их вкладе в теорию невербальных средств, особенно письменных невербальных сигналов. Наши выводы имеют практическое значение для студентов L2, пишущих тексты в Интернете, и для преподавателей EFL, развивающих навыки межкультурного общения.

Необходимо провести дальнейшие исследования, которые изучат использование смайлов в комментариях в Instagram и сопоставят данные с результатами их использования в сообщениях.

Ключевые слова: эмодзи, блог, мультимодальность, пунктуация, вербальный текст, невербальные сигналы, интернет-коммуникация, межкультурная коммуникация

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