The Misuse of Emojis in Social Media: The Case of Kurdish Facebook Users

Karwan Karim Abdalrahman[1] & Chovin Awat Abdullah[2]

[1&2]ELT Department, Faculty of Education, Tishk International University, Erbil, Iraq
Correspondence: Karwan Karim Abdalrahman, Tishk International University, Erbil, Iraq.
karwan.karim@tiu.edu.iq

Abstract: Writing in online platforms does not have the animate qualities of face-to-face interactions. In a real context, people use body language, gestures, and facial expressions. These show different thoughts and emotions of the speaker to the listener. In the digital medium, lack of the above-mentioned qualities has resulted in creating an anonymous, vague and cold socialization. The invention of kaomoji, emoticon, and emoji was a unique step toward solving the issues in online writing. It was a step to make digital writing animate and alive. As there are different gestures, body language movements, and facial expressions, the same is true about having different emojis. There are thousands of emojis, and a lot of Kurdish Facebook users do not know where, when and how to use them. The misuse of emojis create misunderstandings on the level of language and socialization, between the addresser and the addressee. This study tried to understand the factors behind misusing emojis among Kurdish Facebook users. In this regard, there are a selected number of emojis used by Kurdish users to express their modes of feelings and thoughts in all circumstances. In most cases, the selected emoji does not fit the topic of the sender or vice versa. To tackle the current issue under consideration, ten visual documents are taken from the posts of Kurdish Facebook users in the year of 2021 in Erbil and Sulaimani, Iraq. These posts express different social situations. The researchers used Microsoft Excel to analyze the collected data statistically. To interpret the misuse of emojis, they used C. S. Pierce's theory of signs. The results of the current study demonstrate that most users fail to select a right emoji for the situation under consideration. Mostly, their use of emojis are not accurate and relevant. Of course, this misuse creates problems for both sides, the addresser and the addressee. The researchers recommend that Kurdish users should know the reasons behind their emoji selection, otherwise they should not use them. The same scenario is true for educational settings. Finally, the researchers present their recommendations for the educational institutions in order to avoid these issues of miscommunication.

Keywords: Electronic Medium, Language and Internet, Internet Linguistics, Online Communication, Misuse of Emojis, Semiotics

1. Introduction

People use different ways for communicating and sharing information among themselves. One way is verbal communication that is exchanging information between the addresser and the addressee, or the sender and the receiver, while having face-to-face interaction. On the other hand, nonverbal communication is sharing information by using body language, gestures, and facial expressions. In the electronic medium, the absence of body language and facial expressions has resulted in creating confusion

and misunderstanding among people while interacting via an online platform.

Writing, in digital communication, lacks some animate qualities including feelings in emotional reactions of the addressee to the addresser, body language, and gestures. The early awareness of the ambiguous nature of online writing resulted in the invention and widespread use of emoticons. Crystal (2011, p. 23) states that "apart from in video interactions, Internet exchanges lack the facial expressions, gestures, and conventions of body posture and distance (the *kinesics* and *proxemics*, as they are called in semiotics) which are so critical in expressing personal opinions and attitudes, and in moderating social relationships." In this sense, online users started to use signs and symbols, including kaomoji and emoticon, as a substitute of body language, gestures, and facial expressions. Some of the emoticons have different meanings to different individuals. For example, Crystal mentions that the basic smile, :), "can mean sympathy, delight, amusement, and much more…" (p. 23). For such symbols, the users have to be very careful because using it leads to more misunderstanding than understanding, hurting the feelings of both participants, the sender, and the receiver. Emoticons could not remove the communication barriers, confusions, and ambiguities in online writing. As a result, they developed the emojis. Currently, they are important symbols in digital medium. Up to this point, there are 3685 emojis. The widespread use of emojis is especially evident in the social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Viber, Messenger, Telegram, Snapchat, Instagram, etc. Emojis have given a vivid and animate feature to online writing through these platforms. They are used by both the addresser/s and the addressee/s. These pictograms assist people to show different emotions and other ideas where they cannot be expressed via words. In addition, they also add tone to written messages if used appropriately.

1.1 The Invention of Emoticons

Emoticons are the primitive emoji. The term emoticon is a combination of two words that are 'emotion' and 'icon.' These signs were first based on a series of keyboard symbols that were invented and used by Sccot E. Fahlman in 1982. He used :-) and :-(as a representation of facial expression in a discussion forum at university. Some examples of emoticons would be: -O and: O for showing a surprised face. And <3 represents a heart for showing love. Rezabek and Cochenour (2016) insert that "emoticons are visual cues formed form ordinary typographical symbols that when read sideways represent feelings and emotions." These emoticons were used before emojis by people in online writing to embody feelings and facial expressions, and to convey non-verbal meanings.

1.2 The Japanese Kaomoji

Kaomoji is the Japanese form of emoticons. The difference between emoticons and kaomoji is that emoticons are horizontally oriented and do not exceed more than four ASCII characters (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) that is a standard set of digital codes representing letters and symbols. On the other hand, kaomoji is vertically oriented and sometimes twenty or more characters are needed to be created. The main point to distinguish the two is that in emoticons more attention is given to the mouth while in kaomoji more attention is given to the eyes. An example of kaomoji would be (∩‿∩) and (❶‿❶) for showing happiness and joy. Also these (*^-^) 人(^-^*) and (#^-^) 八 (^_^*) show two characters giving high five to each other.

1.3 The Widespread Use of Emojis

In 1999, emojis were designed by Kurita Shigetaka in Japan. Emojis are pictograms used in text messages to ensure that the receiver has received the appropriate emotional meaning from the sender or vice versa. People use emojis in online communication as a substitute for facial expressions and feelings. The semiotic perspective defines emojis as a mixture of pictograms and ideograms. Pictograms are signs and symbols that are used to reflect and embody an activity or an object. On the other hand, ideograms are pictures which are used to embody and represent an idea. Emojis can be used in all languages of the world. Since they are created in Japan, they reflect the Japanese culture and can hold and represent different meanings that lead to ambiguity. Maryam et al. (2020) believe that "the diverse meanings of emoji create ambiguity in interpretation." People interpret the meanings of emojis differently, whether it is due to having different cultural backgrounds or being in different social situations.

An example can be using the folded hands emoji in online discourse between a Japanese person and a Kurdish person that might create problems. These lead to misunderstanding because in Japanese culture this emoji is used for asking forgiveness while among Kurdish people it is not used for asking forgiveness. This is because different cultures have different interpretations for body language and gestures. That is why some groups or cultures avoid using emojis. According to Maryam et al. (2020) "in different countries the use of emoji is banned due to cultural and religious sensitivity." In certain places, emojis are not allowed since using them may offend some minor cultural groups. On the other hand, emojis can add tone and a soft touch if used appropriately in online interaction. Respectively, Talukdar (2021) inserts that "emoji make communication better." These pictograms help the sender to express their emotions, along with the words, appropriately. They also assist the receiver to understand the sender's mood and interest better. The figures below present some emojis that hold different meanings in different countries.

Figure 1: Pinched Fingers Emoji

The figure above is an emoji showing fingers held together in a vertical orientation. This hand gesture in Italy is used to mean 'disagreement' or 'disbelief,' while in Israeli and Kurdish culture can mean 'hold on, relax, or be patient'. In Turkey, it means 'delicious.'

Figure 2: Folded Hands Emoji

The figure above is two hands placed firmly together. This gesture in Japanese and Indian culture is used for asking 'forgiveness, prayer, and thank you,' but some other cultures think that this gesture represents 'high five.'

1.4 Statement of the Problem

The increased use of inappropriate emojis in text messages or comments will lead to misinterpretation of the sender's message by the receiver or vice versa and create linguistic problems. The current misuse of the emojis in Iraqi Kurdistan leads the researchers to investigate the factors and the reasons behind utilizing a limited number of emojis for all different socio-cultural situations. There are many reasons behind the misuse of the emojis among Kurdish Facebook users. First, there are thousands of emojis that express distinct ideas like feelings, thoughts, objects, places, etc. Second, people may have different interpretations for the emojis around the world due to their cultural backgrounds. As a result, they do not interpret them in the same way.

1.5 Purpose Statement

This study aims to find out the reasons of using wrong or inappropriate emojis among Kurdish Facebook users. Sometimes people react to a post with an emoji, where the post is shared on social media for a specific event and there is no relation between the topic of the event and the emoji used as a reaction. The emoji used and the event or the topic of the post ae not relevant. These irrelevances between the emoji and the topic creates problems for both the sender and the receiver. The purpose of this study is to find out the reasons behind the occurrence of these cases of using wrong emojis. Another goal of this study is to analyze why people misinterpret the meanings of emojis because the misinterpretation causes problems among them. Emojis have their own meanings, and they should be used based on their specific meanings not randomly. Sometimes it is possible for an emoji to have more than one meaning, while most of the people are not aware of this diversity in emoji meaning. On the other hand, the interpretation of emojis by people may vary according their cultural, religious, and social backgrounds.

1.6 Research Questions

To achieve the purpose of the study, the project tries to answer the following questions:

- Do Kurdish Facebook users know there are different emojis and they have different meanings?
- To what extend their use of the emojis reflect their knowledge of their meanings?
- Does the misuse of emojis create linguistic problems in the digital medium?
- What should be done to ensure that they are used appropriately?
- What can be done to eliminate the misuse and misinterpretation of emojis in online writing?

1.7 Theoretical Framework of the Electronic Medium

Electronic medium, or digital medium, is a new medium in communication. It has two facets that are the technological and social facets. According to Herring (2004), the technological facet focuses on the hardware and software design features of the medium. On the other hand, the social facet concentrates on the social use of the two features, hardware and software. If we apply the features of the technological facet of the electronic medium on Facebook, it includes these features:

- Synchronicity: this is to see whether the online interaction is synchronous or asynchronous. As for posting on Facebook, it is asynchronous.

- Granularity: this is the nature of the unit/s transmitted. It can be a text, a picture, a video, or an audio. For the current study, the users used texts and pictures.
- Persistence: this means the existence of the data in the online cloud after they are received. The posts are available in the Facebook website if the account is active.
- Length: the numbers of characters that a system allows in a single message. Facebook allows more than 1000 words.
- Channels: the multimedia channels involved, video, audio, etc. In Facebook, different channels are involved.
- Identity: it is to see whether the messages are identified or anonymous. That means the person who shares the message is identified or anonymous. Sometimes there are fake accounts.
- Audience: this means the accessibility of the messages, whether they are public or private. The sender, in this case, decides who can see their message, just friends or the public.
- Adaptation: it is to see if the system allows the content to be filtered, quoted, etc. for example, there are specific topics that are sensitive or political or religious. They are prohibited in Facebook so they will be deleted automatically. Sometimes these relate to ownership rights.
- Format: format means the appearance of the messages on the screen, both sender and receiver. In Facebook, the new messages appear at the top and once you scroll up/down other new messages or posts will appear.

The Facebook website/application has its own design features. These will create a limitation on language use and sometimes the company decides what should be posted. If we apply the social facet of the digital medium on Facebook, these should be considered. These characteristics show the reasons behind using language and symbols in specific ways in Facebook. Below are the features of the social facet of the electronic medium:

- Participation structure: this is the number of active participants in an interaction. For example, a sender may have 250 friends on Facebook so their shared messages will be seen by 250 people. The receivers are free to comment or not. Once they reply, they can use emojis and a text in the comment box.
- Participant characteristics: the characteristics of online users in terms of age, gender, cultural background, etc. The sender has 250 friends so these characteristics should be understood.
- Purpose: the reason/s behind the online interaction. What is the purpose behind the post or shared message?
- Activity: this means using texts, sending photos, voice messages to achieve the purpose.
- Topic: this shows the content of the online interaction. It is through the topic that users achieve the purpose of the activity.
- Tone: this is the manner of interaction. Is it aggressive or persuasive? Is it to be informative or ask information?
- Norms of organization: this shows the hierarchy in the online social structure. Who is the host/admin? Who are the members? What are their roles and duties? In Facebook, who can post and delete? Who can respond?

- Norms of social appropriateness: that means the social standard behaviors accepted in an online interaction. Simply, it means that people should follow the netiquettes.
- Code: this is the formality and informality of the language used by the participants. Do the users use formal or informal language in their posts?

1.8 The Use of Emoji on Facebook and Peirce's Triadic Theory of Signs

The use of emojis on Facebook platform among Kurdish Facebook users is linguistically problematic due to the misuse of emojis by the users. Kurdish Facebook users use wrong emojis due to lack of emoji literacy. People may use an emoji that does not fit the topic without knowing the real meanings of emojis, which creates different problems. Emojis should be regarded as signs and all signs or symbols have two levels of meanings that are denotative and connotative meanings. According to Abdalrahman (2022), denotative meaning is the primary meaning, the dictionary meaning, of the sign. On the other hand, connotative meaning is the secondary meaning of the sign that is the contextual meaning. For instance, the denotative meaning of a red rose is a flower with a good smell. While its connotative meaning signifies love and romance. Another example is the sign of the white dove. Denotative meaning of the dove is a kind of bird, while its connotative meaning is peace. In the light of this interpretation, emojis as signs describe emotions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, cultural and social meanings, and these make emojis difficult to be interpreted correctly by people. Knowing emoji meanings and how to interpret their uses assist in using the appropriate emoji that is relevant to the topic being discussed.

Charles Sanders Peirce, the son of Benjamin Peirce, America's foremost mathematician, created a triadic model for understanding the signs. According to Chandler (2021), This triadic mode consists of three elements:

- The representamen, the form of the sign,
- An object, what the sign refers to,
- Interpretant, the way the sign would be understood or interpreted.

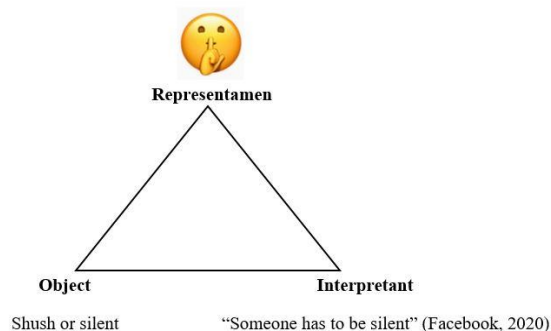The figure below shows triadic model of piece's theory of signs that is applied to an emoji.

Figure 3: This figure shows an emoji named "Shushing Face." This emoji works as a representamen of an object 'shhh!, shush, or silent.' The above emoji would be interpreted as 'keeping someone silent or

someone should be silent.' When a user uses this emoji in responding to a sender's message, it means that you should be silent. It can be used alone to react to the addresser's post or along with a comment.

Below is the analysis of the seven common emojis, used by Facebook users to react to a post, according to Pierce's theory of signs.
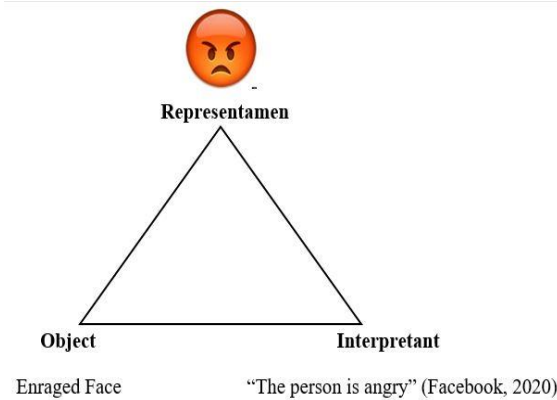

Figure 4: This figure shows an emoji named "Enraged Face." This emoji works as a representamen of an object 'Intense degree of anger.' The shown emoji would be interpreted as 'The person is angry.' Using this by the receiver means that they are angry about content of the post in the sender's message.
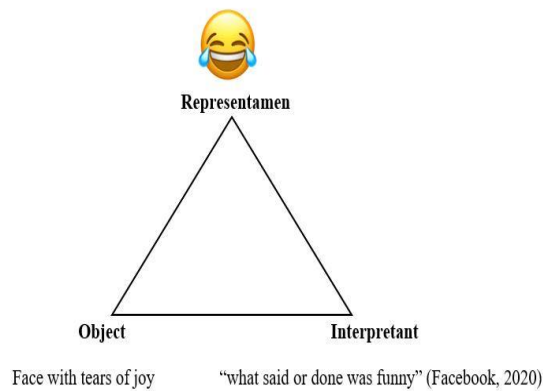
Figure 5: This figure shows an emoji named "Face with Tears of joy." This emoji works as a representamen of an object someone laughing so hard that tears are streaming down their face. The shown emoji would be interpreted as 'what is said or done was funny.' Generally, people use this when a post, text, photo, or video, is funny.
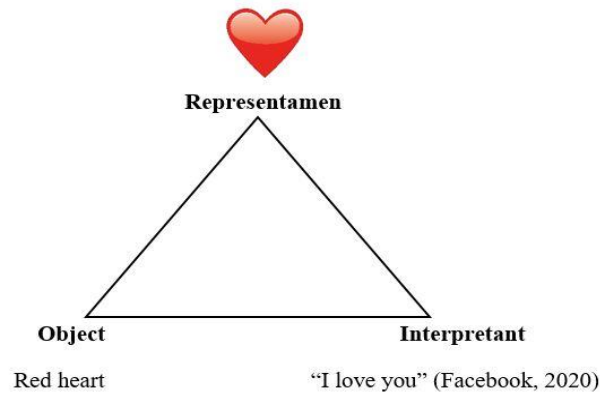
Figure 6: This figure shows an emoji named "Red Heart." This emoji works as a representamen of an object 'expression of love and romance.' The shown emoji would be interpreted as 'I love you.' This is used among intimate friends to connote love.
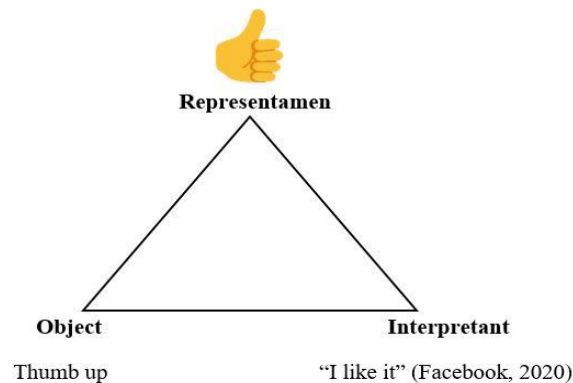

Figure 7: This figure shows an emoji named "Thumb Up." This emoji works as a representamen of an object 'expression of approval.' The shown emoji would be interpreted as 'I like it.' This emoji is the most used one among Kurdish Facebook users. Most users may not know to press this so that the other emojis appear. In this situation, they just press this emoji for almost all situations. Based on the interpretant of this emoji, it cannot be used for all circumstances. If you like or approve a post, you can use this.
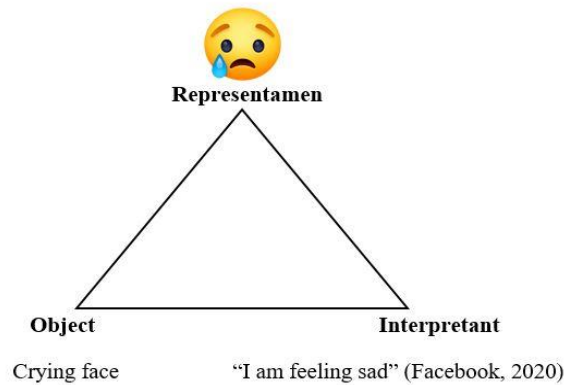
Figure 8: This figure shows an emoji named "Crying Face." This emoji works as a representamen of an object 'expression of sadness or pain.' The shown emoji would be interpreted as 'I am feeling sad.' If there is sadness in the sender's message, the receiver can use this along with a comment that expresses the same meaning. Both the emoji and the comment in Facebook should express the same reaction of the receiver to the sender or vice versa.
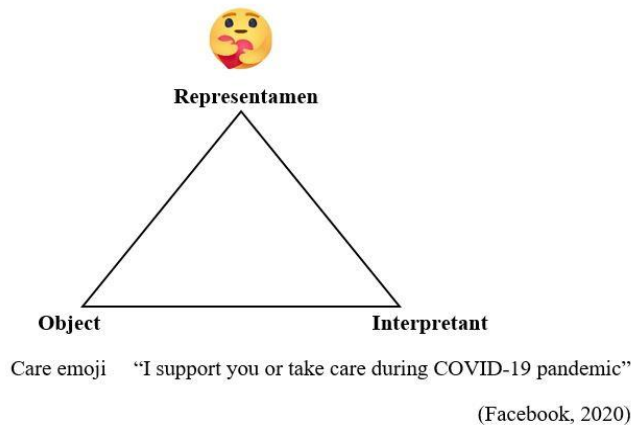

Figure 9: This figure shows an emoji named "Care Emoji." This emoji works as a representamen of an object 'expressing empathy.' The shown emoji would be interpreted as 'I support you or take care during COVID-19 pandemic.' This is a new emoji that Facebook added during COVID-19. It is used to show support and care among friends in the platform during the pandemic.
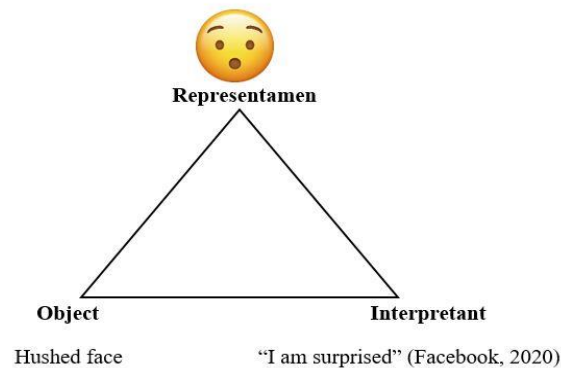
Figure 10: This figure shows an emoji named "Hushed Face." This emoji works as a representamen of an object 'being surprised or hushed by concern.' The shown emoji would be interpreted as 'I am surprised.' When the addressee is surprised by the addresser's message, they can use this emoji.

2. Review of the Current Literature on Emoji Use

Dansi's (2017) The Semiotics of Emoji defines the emoji as "the word emoji is an English adaptation of Japanese 絵文字 – the e of emoji means 'picture' and the emoji stands for 'letter,' character." In other words, the definition of emoji is 'picture-word.' This definition makes it clear that emojis are picture words used by people all around the world in online communication as an alternative of facial expression, body language and gestures. Simply, the absence of these on social media makes it difficult for people to show feelings and thoughts but using emojis can help people to express them. According to Rezabek (2016) "emoticons are visual cues formed from ordinary typographical symbols that when read sideways represent feeling or emotions." Primitive emojis were known as emoticons and these emoticons were popular before emojis appear and were used in digital communication by people to convey intention. It was the only way to wordlessly express their feelings and thoughts while chatting online. Rezabek also provides "emoticons can provide support to written communication, in much the same way that visuals or body language can enhance verbal communication." In addition, emoticons can add effectiveness to written communication and are powerful symbols as much as body language to be used in written communication. Simply, as written communication lacked the ability to express feelings and thoughts, emoticons were the best effective way of showing emotions. Arafah et al. (2019) declare "in social media conversations using text verbal and nonverbal text (emoji) in expressing emotions and determine the meaning of the senders improve effectiveness in communicating." In simple words, using emojis in online discourse by the sender makes the conversation more meaningful and easier for the receiver to define and interpret the massage and understand the destination. They also claim, "emoji became part of sentence structure."

Emojis users use emojis in online communication not only as a picture-word to convey their thoughts but have become part of the text. In other words, emojis are not used only as a symbol to show emotions. They have become an essential part of the sentence when chatting online among people. This shows that utilizing emojis has become a habit for social media users and the sentence may not be completed without emojis like how the lack of the verb in a sentence makes it incomplete. Talukdar (2021) states that "emojis make

communication better." The invention of emojis was to make digital communication more vivid and alive. He also adds that "every emoji is a sign in some category … these signs helped the communicators to understand the register, vocal intonation, hand gestures and facial expressions to some extent, which are essential to understand the discourse." In simple words, facial expressions and emotions are not easy to convey through words in the digital medium. But using emojis make the communication effective and the sender can express their feelings and emotions to the receiver, in case if it is interpreted correctly by the person who receives the massage.

According to McCulloch (2019), "the lack of body is writing's greatest disadvantage, especially when it comes to representing emotions and other mental states". Simply, expressing emotion through writing is not as easy as direct interaction. People have difficulty in conveying and showing thoughts via writing in social media. When emojis came, things have changed. Maryam et al. (2020) point out "internet and digital media have removed the barriers of communication through the development of emoji to make it an effective tool to express thoughts through images and icons instead of going through the hard process of word construction." To simplify it, internet has connected the world together. They also mention that "emoji are embodiments of representation but due to diverse meanings these emoticons are creating ambiguity of interpretation." In this regard, interpretation of emojis by people from different countries can have different meanings that sometimes may cause problem and embarrassment to the sender and receiver.

Ethnic, religious, and cultural differences should be taken into consideration when using emojis in online discourse. Bakir and Haji (2019) believe that "many of those who use emoticons, use it randomly without knowing the exact meaning of emoticon …which cause misunderstanding and the communication will not be appropriate." Some social media users do not have background information about different meanings of emojis, and where and when is appropriate to use them. People use emojis in a wrong place and time due to having no knowledge about their meanings. According to Arafah and Muhammad (2019), "visual language has dominated the communication of internet users on social media and the visual language that is widely used in conveying messages is emojis." They also add "conversation on social media use verbal and non-verbal texts (emojis) to express emotions and explain the sender's meaning." In other words, graphic language has become a main part of online communication by social media users to express feelings. And emojis are the most popular graphic icons that come to be used by internet users.

Social media users see emojis as an effective tool in conveying and delivering emotions and ideas from both sides. Arafah and Muhammad (2019) believe "emojis express connotation meanings in conversation." Sometimes it is difficult for people to integrate their internal feelings in online writing. Using emojis have changed the situation as Tandyonomanu and Tsuroyya (2018) state that "emoji can potentially serve as a basis to portray personality traits of its users namely 'emotional stability, extraversion, and agreeableness.' In the same vein, they add that "the absence of emoji in text messages might lead to failures in comprehending the underlying of respondent's emotion." In the light of this interpretation, the existence of emojis in messages makes the sender to express their ideas and thoughts more easily. It also helps the receiver to understand the feelings and the content of the sender's message clearly. Emojis assist the respondent to be more helpful with the sender. According to Riordan (2017), "emoticons were first based on a series of keyboard symbols, which were limited in their ability to express nuances of emotion." Simply, emoticons were created from punctuation marks to convey emotions.

Riordan also state that "emojis evolved as a result of this graphic interface (emoticons) allowed representations of more than simply faces made up of punctuation marks."

Online users should be careful about the sensitivity of emojis. Gammoh (2021) states that "emojis are able to transfer emotions of the non-verbal language." Emojis can transfer thoughts, emotions, and ideas. The writer also inserts "some emojis could hold meaning of sarcasm or humor, however, they could be considered provocative for others." Emojis have different meanings. Emoji users must use them carefully in a way that could not hold meaning of sarcasm to avoid provocations. As Durscheid explains "since emojis originated in Japan, it is unsurprising that the original meanings of many emojis reflect Japanese culture and language use." In other words, the meaning of the emojis differ from one culture to another, and one country to another. That is why emojis could be offensive to some people sometimes. Ethics, culture, and religion must be taken into consideration when using emojis in text-based conversations.

3. Methodology

Emoji use in online communication, especially in social media platforms, is a recent phenomenon. A lot of Facebook users, in their posts and chats, do not understand the fundamental idea that these graphic icons have their own specific meanings. As a result, they should be used carefully and accurately to express the emotions and feelings of the receiver to the sender or vice versa. To analyze the current use of emojis in Iraqi Kurdistan, the qualitative research design is used to find out whether online communication among Kurdish Facebook users is accurate or not, from a linguistic perspective. Understanding the meaning of emojis and using them accurately is an integral part of a polite online conversation between the sender and the receiver. To achieve the specified goal, ten samples are collected from Kurdish Facebook users that are posted in the years 2020 – 2021in Sulaimani and Erbil, Iraq. The collected data are visual documents, and these are about the messages and reactions of the Kurdish users that are posted to share their views on social, cultural, religious, economic, political, familial, and security issues. In analyzing the collected data, the researchers used Microsoft Excel. The percentages in the pie charts show the results of the most common emojis used by Kurdish Facebook users. To help, both the addresser and the addressee, the Facebook users grasp the meaning and use of the emojis, C. S. Peirce's theory of signs is used to explain the misinterpretation and misuse of the most common emoji used in Facebook among the Kurds.

4. Results and Discussion

Emojis in Facebook are used by people to react to a post, or a message received. Recently, Facebook updated the emojis used to react to a post and now the users can use these seven emojis below:
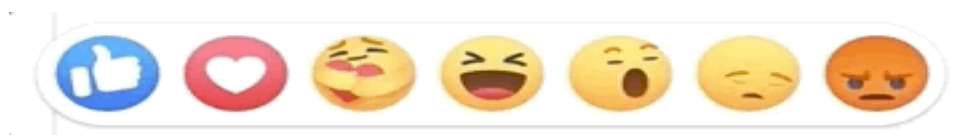
The table below shows how people used different emojis to react to different posts for specific events in the Facebook platform. It also shows the percentage of emojis used for each situation.

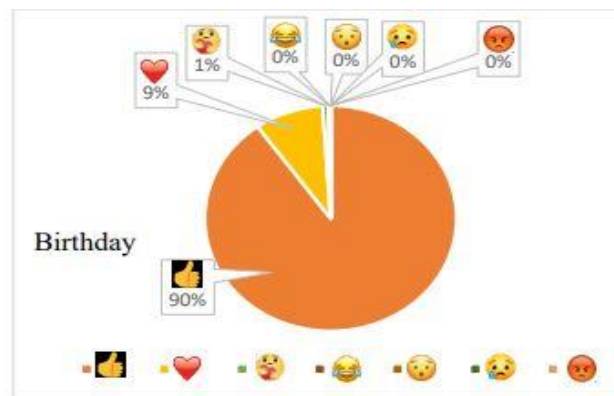| Events	👍	❤️	🥰	😂	😯	😢	😠
Graduation	129	31	9	0	0	0	0
Birthday	11200	1100	93	27	0	2	2
Anniversary	36800	3300	312	730	30	0	0
Engagement	106	36	0	0	0	0	0
Wedding	19000	1700	428	195	30	0	0
Travel	12100	74	14	1	1	4	0
Celebration	16100	1600	267	98	0	0	71
Death	1000	3	1	0	1	387	0
Protest	93100	1100	0	1000	644	544	0
Accident	24600	342	0	0	124	4100	51
Total	214135	9286	1124	2051	830	5037	124

Pie Chart 1: Emoji used for a graduation event
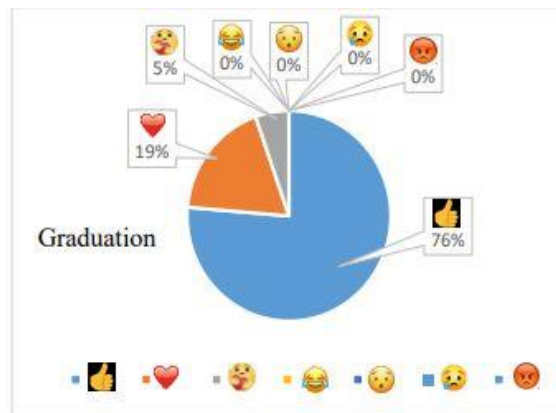
Pie chart 1 shows the percentage of emojis used for a graduation event. Three emojis are used by those who responded to the sender's message. Seventy-six of the receivers used 'thumb up' emoji. The 'red heart' emoji is used by 19 percent. And 'care emoji' is used by 5 percent. The other four emojis are not used. As for this case, there is a Facebook user who shares their own experience at the graduation ceremony. The sender did not use any of the emojis (🎓 👨‍🎓 👩‍🎓 👨‍🎓) used for graduation. As a result, the receivers fail to use an appropriate emoji that best fits the topic of the event. There are a selected number of emojis used for congratulating (🎉 🥳 👏 🎀 🙌 🍾 🥂). If the receivers want to respond appropriately, they should use one of these plus a short text in the comment box. For this event, the receivers have used three emojis and they are not appropriate. According to the social facet of the digital medium, the misuse of emojis creates problems in these features: code, tone, and norms of social appropriateness. First, the misuse of an emoji can change the code that means the language used in a conversation from formal to informal or sometimes vice versa. Second, it also changes the tone. For example, the receiver may try to congratulate through an emoji, but the misused emoji changes the message's tone, from congratulating to

something else. Third, the receiver's response to the sender's message should be socially appropriate, based on the rules of social etiquettes. Thus, the use of the emoji used by the addressee should not change the topic.

Based on the statistical analysis, it can be observed that 76 percent of the receivers liked the post. Using this emoji here is problematic because it creates an ambiguous and vague situation. The sender or other readers do not understand the reaction clearly. That means whether the receiver liked the ceremony, the post, the photos. The red heart emoji is also not appropriate here. For some close relatives it may be possible to use it to show their love to them after the achievement. The third one is the care emoji generally used for expressing empathy during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Pierce's theory of signs, this emoji is totally misused because it does not fit the topic of the post. In the light of the above discussion, the appropriate emoji for this event is using one of the emojis used for congratulating with an encouraging comment. In doing so, both the emoji and the comment function identically to give the same response to the sender's message. Since Facebook allows only seven emojis to react to a post, the Facebook users can use a selected emoji from the emoji keyboard in the comment with the text.


Pie Chart 2: Emoji used for a birthday event

Pie chart 2 demonstrates the percentage of emojis used for a birthday event. In this case, 90 percent of the receivers used 'thumb up,' 9 percent used the 'red heart,' and 1 percent used the 'care emoji.' Four emoji are not used by the receivers. The sender informs their friends about their birthday. For birthdays, there are some emojis to be used (🥳🎉🎂🥳🎈🎊🎁). Here, the receivers have used three emojis to react to the sender's message. When there is a birthday, people usually say 'happy birthday.' The addressee can use one of these emojis with a short text in the comment if necessary. The three emojis used here are not appropriate and relevant. The 'care emoji' is misused and does not fit the topic of the event. The 'red heart' emoji may be acceptable to use only by a limited number of relatives not all friends. The same is true about the 'thumb up' emoji. In this regard, the misuse of emojis means that the receivers have failed to interpret the emojis correctly. It seems that they do not understand that different emojis have different meanings and these should be used correctly based on the context. The purpose here is to say, 'happy birthday,' but the emojis used say something else. Part of the problem is from the technological facet of Facebook because it allows only seven emojis to be used in reacting to a post.
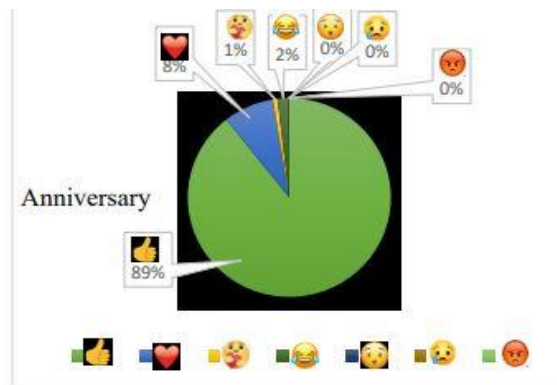
Pie Chart 3: Emoji used for an anniversary event

Pie chart 3 presents emojis used for an anniversary event. As for this case, 89 percent of the addressees used 'thumb up,' 8 percent used the 'red heart,' 2 percent used the 'laughing face,' and 1 percent used 'care emoji.' Three emojis are not used. Here, the addresser tries to inform their friends about their anniversary. As for the sender, they can use an emoji with a photo and the text. Of course, there are anniversary emojis to be used. The receiver's goal is to say happy anniversary with a short text in the comment box and they can use an emoji based on the topic and tone of their response. In the case of responding to the current event under consideration, the receivers used four emojis that are not appropriate based on their interpretations. What is so strange here is the use of 'laughing face' emoji by almost 2 percent of the receivers. Based on the social facet of the digital medium of communication, this emoji changes the purpose, topic, tone, code of the activity because it replies to the post in a way as if it is funny. This is also not acceptable depending on the norms of social appropriateness of the Kurdish context. The purpose behind the receiver's answer is to say 'happy anniversary' not making fun of the message. If a receiver does not like their friend's activity, it is better not to react and comment to be polite and respectful.
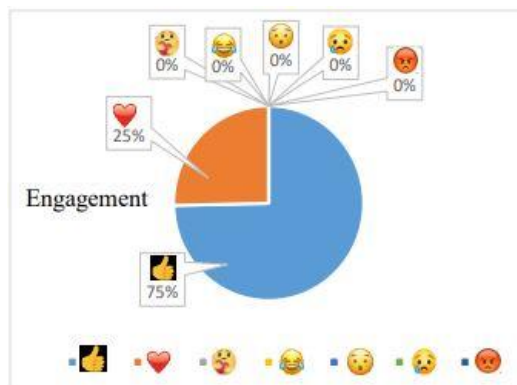
Pie Chart 4: Emoji used for an engagement event

Pie chart 4 presents the percentage of emojis used for an engagement event. In this case, the receivers used two emojis. Seventy-five percent used the 'thumb up' emoji, and the other 25 percent used the 'red heart' emoji. The other five emojis are not used by them. For this event, the sender can use this emoji (✎) with their message and the receivers can use one of the emojis used for congratulations. When someone

is engaged, people usually say congratulations and wish them a happy life. Thus, the two emojis are misused and not relevant.
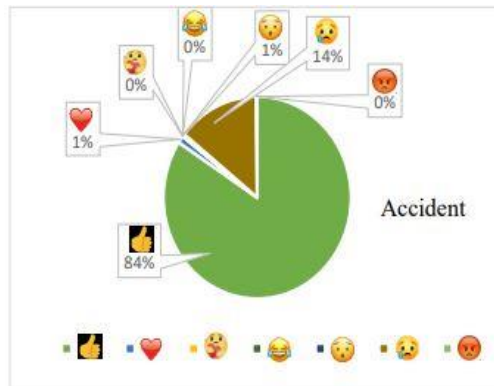
Pie Chart 5: Emoji used for an accident event

Pie chart 5 is about the percentage of emojis used for an accident event. The receivers use four emojis. The 'thumb up' is used by 84 percent and the 'crying face' emoji is used 14 percent. And the 'hushed face,' and the 'red heart' emojis are used by 1 percent. Fourteen percent of the receivers used the correct emoji for the event that is the emoji that shows sadness. People usually feel sad when there is an accident. This emoji is used correctly based on the social facet and Pierce's theory of signs. For such tragic events, the users should be very careful regarding the emoji selected because the misused emoji creates cold relations between the sender and the receiver.
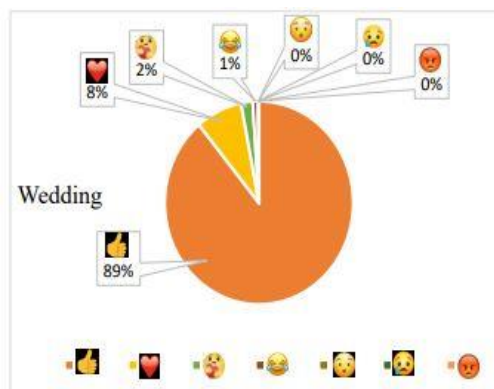
Pie Chart 6: Emoji used for a wedding event

Pie chart 6 is about the percentage of emojis used for a wedding event. The addressees used four emojis to respond to the sender's message. In this case, 89 percent used the 'thumb up' emoji. Eight percent used the 'red heart.' Two percent used the 'care emoji,' and one percent used the 'laughing face.' Three emojis are not used. The sender posted their wedding and the receivers reacted through four different emojis. The care and the laughing face emojis are totally misused. These are not polite and relevant to be used for the event. The 'thumb up' is also not appropriate. The 'red heart' emoji may be acceptable just for family members and close relatives of both sides not all friends. With the text, the sender can use one of these

emojis (🙇 🙇 🙇 💒 🙇 🙇 🙇) and the receivers can use one of the congratulations emojis, a suitable one, with a short text wishing them a happy life. The laughing face emoji changes the purpose, tone, topic, and code of the online socialization and is not accepted based on the norms of social appropriateness. According to Pierce's theory of signs, almost all users have misinterpreted the meanings of these and thus misused.
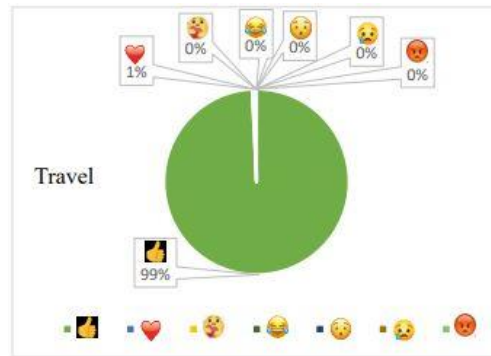

Pie Chart 7: Emoji used for a travel event

Pie chart 7 shows the emojis used for a travel event. As for this case, two emojis are used. The 'thumb up' is used by 99 percent of the receivers, and the 'red heart' is used by one percent. The sender can use one from these emojis (🎆 ✈️ 🎆 🚀 🚗 🗿 🚗) with a text to send their message to their friends. In this case, the receivers must reply positively and wish them a safe trip. Here, the addressees used two emojis that are not relevant and suitable for the topic of the event.
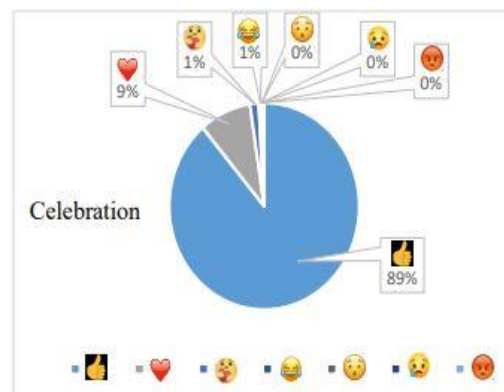

Pie Chart 8: Emoji used for a celebration event

Pie chart 8 is about emojis used for a celebration event. In this case, four emojis are used. Eighty-nine percent used the 'thumb up,' and nine percent used the 'red heart.' The 'care emoji,' and the 'laughing face' are used by one percent. Of course, there are specific emojis to be used for celebrations including these 🎉 😸 👏 🎈 🎊 🎁 🙌 . 'Care and laughing face' are misused and they have

changed the purpose of the activity, tone, topic, and code and broken the rules of social etiquettes. The other two are not relevant as well.
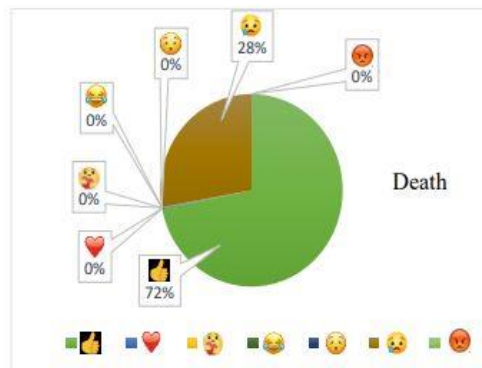
Pie Chart 9: Emoji used for a death event

Pie chart 9 is about the percentage of emojis used for a death event. Seventy-two percent of the addressees used 'thumb up' emoji, and the other 28 percent used the 'crying face' emoji. Five emojis are not used. As we all know, death is one of the most sensitive topics. In this case, the sad face with a tear means that the receivers were sad, so it is the correct one. Using 'thumb up' means 'I like it' is not appropriate and it is misused. The use of 'like' emoji may create cold relations between the sender and the receiver because death is sensitive, so the sender may block or unfriend one of their receivers if they use the 'thumb up' emoji. In the emoji keyboard, there are some emojis to be used for death like these . The most common one that addressees can use here is the 'crying face' that expresses sadness or one of the emojis that express crying. Any misuse of emojis creates linguistic and social problems. In the case of death, the effects, and powers of emojis can be observed better.
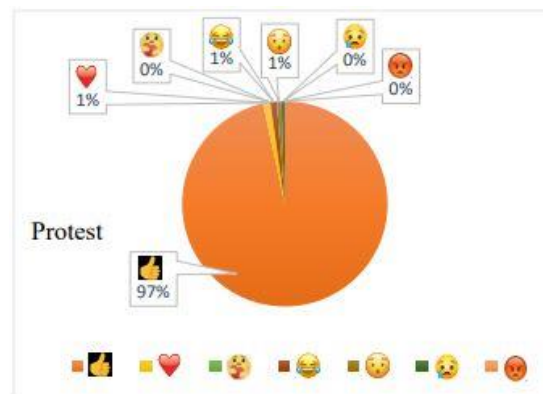
Pie Chart 10: Emoji used for a protest event

Pie chart 10 presents the percentage of emojis used for a protest event. In this case, four emojis are used. Ninety-seven percent of the receivers used the 'thumb up' emoji. The 'red heart' is used by one percent. The 'laughing face' and the 'shushing face' are also used by one percent. The sender can use this emoji

with the text that is used to show protest. As for this case, 97 percent of receivers used 'like' that means they liked the idea of the protest. It can be said that they used the emoji with that meaning in mind. 'Red heart' is used to show love and romance so it may not be appropriate here. The laughing face and surprised face are misused and not appropriate for that context as well.

Abdalrahman (2021) inserts that reading and writing are inseparable acts. When it comes to the discussion of emojis, this fact plays a vital role in their interpretation and use. That means the Facebook addressees should read the addresser's message carefully then try to respond. Based on the findings mentioned above, more than 70 % of people have failed to use an appropriate emoji for the event under consideration. The Kurdish Facebook users fail to use and interpret emojis correctly. The current literature also stated that 'people use emoji randomly.' The 'random' use of emojis create hostile, cold, ambiguous, and vague relationships among people. Indeed, there are cases where people block or unfriend each other due to a misused emoji. This is where one side regards the emojis used as disrespecting or not being polite. These problems happen due to misinterpretation and misuse of emojis. There are four factors behind the misuse of emojis. First, Kurdish people lack emoji literacy. Second, the curriculum of schools does not include the study of signs and symbols or semiotics. Third, some emojis have multiple meanings and people may misuse them. For instance, there is one appropriate and relevant emoji for each event discussed above. Fourth, Facebook allows only seven emojis to be used to react to a post. Using different emojis mean that the Kurdish users are not aware about their meanings and uses. Finally, emojis should be used based on their meanings and appropriateness for the context.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The invention of emojis was to make online communication better and to help people express their feelings and emotions. Emojis should be seen as an alternative to body language, gestures, and facial expressions. Emojis assist people to have a meaningful and effective communication because they connect people internally. Emojis might deliver wrong messages and cause problems and misinterpretations to addressers and addressees if used inappropriately. As for Kurdish Facebook users, they should learn their meanings and uses otherwise they should avoid using them. These are some recommendations:

- There is a need to learn and understand the meaning of emojis,
- learning the correct and appropriate usage of emojis by people is a great strategy and technique to overcome the misuses of emojis,
- realizing the connection between the events and the emojis that are relevant and fits the idea and the message of the event should be considered by its users.
- As for universities, Including Emoji Literacy as a main course in the education system would be one of the ways for learning emoji meanings and utilizing them appropriately in online interaction.
- The language of internet and netiquettes are highly valued and recommended.
- Red heart emoji is not appropriate to be used in every circumstance, especially in online communication between students and lecturers.
- As for the Facebook company, it should allow people to react to the posts with an emoji of their choice, not just letting them use seven emojis.

References

Abdalrahman, K. K. (2021). Teaching and learning writing skills through literature. *Canadian Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, *1*(2), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.53103/cjlls.v1i2.11

Abdalrahman, K. K. (2022). Teaching and learning vocabulary through short stories. *Canadian Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, *2*(2), 7–15. https://doi.org/10.53103/cjlls.v2i2.35

Arafah, B., & Hasyim, M. (2019). *The language of emoji in social media*. *KnE Social Sciences*, 494-504. Chandler, D. (2022). *Semiotics: The basics*.

Crystal, D. (2011). *Internet linguistics: A student guide*. London: Routledge. Top of Form Bottom of Form

Danesi, M. (2017). *The semiotics of emoji: The rise of visual language in the age of the internet*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Dürscheid, C., & Haralambous, Y. (2021). *Emojis are everywhere. How emojis conquer new contexts*. *Grapholinguistics and its applications*, (4), 501-512.

Facebook. emoji-edit. (2020, May). Retrieved on June 5, 2022, from https://emojipedia.org/facebook/

Gammoh, I. (2021). *Emoji Syntax* -Isar Gammoh. 10.13140/RG.2.2.28452.60801.

Haji, H. H., & Bakir, S. N. (2019). The use of emoticons among university students: A pragmatic study. *Zanco Journal of Humanity Sciences*, *23*(1), 278-290.

Hasyim, M. (2019). Linguistic functions of emoji in social media communication. *Opcion*, *35*.

Herring, S. (2004). Computer-mediated discourse analysis: an approach to researching online communities. *Designing for Virtual Communities in the Service of Learning*. 316-338. 10.1017/CBO9780511805080.016.

Maryam, F., Mushtaq, F., & Shahzadi, H. (2020). Culturally ostracized emoji: A semiotic analysis of emojis and emoticons. *Review of Education, Administration & LAW*, *3*(3), 457-469.

McCulloch, G. (2019). *Because internet: Understanding how language is changing*. Random House.

Rezabek, L., & Cochenour, J. (1998). Visual cues in computer-mediated communication: Supplementing text with emoticons. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, *18*(2), 201-215.

Riordan, M. A. (2017). Emojis as tools for emotion work: Communicating affect in text messages. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *36*(5), 549-567.

Tandyonomanu, D. (2018). Emoji: representations of nonverbal symbols in communication technology. In *IOP Conference series: materials science and engineering* (Vol. 288, No. 1, p. 012052). IOP Publishing.

Talukdar, A. J. (2021). Analysing emoji used in social media as signs on the basis of peirce theory of semiotics. Retrieved on June 5, 2022, from https://www.xajzkjdx.cn/gallery/18-jan2021.pdf