

## **A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF SMILEYS EMOTICON IN WHATSAPP**

***Sholihatul Hamidah Daulay\**, *Rahmadsyah Rangkuti*<sup>2</sup>, *Afanin Nabila*<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1,3</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Sumatera Utara

<sup>1</sup>*Email: sholihatulhamidah@uinsu.ac.id*

### **Abstract**

It is inevitable that all people around the world use WhatsApp nowadays. WhatsApp is the most popular app today in world wide. WhatsApp is the worldwide app that allows us to send message, voice notes, calls and video calls freely. It is available to make our journey in contacting and interacting with other people easy. WhatsApp has many features in its chat room, one of them is emoticon. Many emoticons in WhatsApp that appear to express our feelings and reactions toward something through chat. Those emoticons can also perform pragmatic function despite its function is to represent our feelings, thoughts, reaction or expression. This study was aimed to analyze the pragmatic value behind the smiley emoticons that people always use. This study was also aimed to investigate how people perceive the emoticon whether the way they use it is correct and related to the pragmatic function behind the emoticon. Because people tend to use the emoticon that is not suitable with the meaning behind it. This study is library research. The method used to conduct this study is descriptive qualitative. The result shows that many WhatsApp emoticon users do not perceive the emoticon they used properly based on pragmatic perspectives.

**Keywords:** *emoticon; pragmatic function; pragmatic meaning; smileys; WhatsApp*

### **INTRODUCTION**

WhatsApp is a worldwide application that allows us to send messages, voice notes, calls and video calls freely. It is available to make our journey in contacting and interacting with other people easy. WhatsApp was created in January 2009, 14 years ago. WhatsApp was first created by Brian Acton and Jan Koum, and was developed by Meta Platforms, which is the subsidiary of Facebook founded by Mark Zuckerberg. WhatsApp now has over two billion users worldwide.









WhatsApp has many features in its chat room, one of them is emoticon. Emoticon is used to represent the users' feelings, moods, reactions or expressions towards something through chat room. Emoticon usually comes in the form and shape such as yellow, circle and has no nose. Emoticon for smiley character is the most frequently used by users because it is placed in the top line of emoticons, unless other emoticons such as people, animals, family, vehicle and so on. They are all under the smiley emoticon, so technically smiley emoticon is more reachable and representable. WhatsApp has its own emoji designs which are displayed on all WhatsApp for Android and WhatsApp Web. One emoji supported by WhatsApp but no other platform is the Texas Flag emoji. This is a valid subdivision flag supported by Unicode, but not listed within any Unicode emoji release and as of 2019 is not supported by any other major vendors.

WhatsApp has grown to be a vital tool for communication for many of us. It consistently ranks among the top 5 most used apps for both Android and iOS in Europe and the US. Its cross-platform features and subsequent introduction of 'free' messaging, at a time when data use was less expensive than using up your SMS/message allowance, were undoubtedly contributing factors to its enormous popularity. WhatsApp had two billion users worldwide as of February 2022. Its over 50 million users in Germany make up about 80% of the German-speaking population of those ages 14 and older. The usage of WhatsApp has climbed by 65% in the last four years, which has significantly boosted its significance. Despite not being quite as common in the US as before Facebook's takeover in 2014, For a sizable section of the world's population, WhatsApp is still the go-to cross-platform, largely international (it's illegal in China, North Korea, Syria, and Qatar) communication tool.

Whether on WhatsApp or other messaging apps, emojis have become a crucial component of our communications. Without speaking a word, they are frequently utilized to express the sender's feelings. An emoji will perform the job of expressing your feelings without the need for many words. With so many emojis available, it can be challenging to keep track of which emoticons are used when. Consequently, we have provided you with a full guide in which we will discuss emojis and what they actually imply. Let's get started without further ado. Every version of WhatsApp for Android and WhatsApp Web features the company's unique emoji designs. One emoji that WhatsApp supports but which is unavailable on any other platform is the Texas Flag emoji. This is a legitimate subdivision flag that is permitted by Unicode, but it is not included in any Unicode emoji releases, and as of 2019, no other significant suppliers are supporting it either. A Refugee Nation Flag was made available as a ZWJ sequence by WhatsApp in 2021. No other significant manufacturers offer support for this flag, similar to the Texas Flag emoji.

In this case, this study only focuses on the smiley emoticon in WhatsApp. The smiley emoticon in Whatsapp that analyze any other messaging platform can provide valuable insights into user sentiment, emotions, and communication patterns. According to Hu, X., Downey, D., Ehgoetz, K., & Dharma, A. (2017), Smileys can serve as non-verbal cues, enhancing communication and conveying meaning beyond plain text. Analyzing smiley usage patterns can help researchers and social scientists understand how individuals or groups communicate in digital environments. For example, they can examine which emoticons are used more frequently, how they are combined with other text or symbols, and how their usage varies across different demographics or cultural groups.

Meanwhile, according to Derks, D., Fischer, A. H., & Bos, A. E. (2008). Emoticons and emojis are culturally influenced, and their interpretations can vary across different regions or demographic groups. Analyzing smiley usage helps researchers understand how cultural factors influence the choice and meaning of emoticons. It can also shed light on cross-cultural communication challenges and inform the development of more inclusive and culturally sensitive digital communication tools.

-  : Slightly Smiling Face
-  : Rolling on the Floor, Laughing
-  : Face with Hand over the Mouth
-  : Smiling Face
-  : Hugging Face
-  : Smiling face with smiling eyes and three hearts
-  : Smiling Face with Open Mouth and Closed Eyes
-  : Smiling Face with Open Mouth & Cold Sweat

The researcher convinced that sometimes people use the emoticon with no correlation to the pragmatic meaning and function. Researchers found the users, even herself, sometimes interpret the emoticon in different way than it should be and use it without knowing the true pragmatic meaning and function behind it. Researcher conducted this study with purpose to provide the explanation on the analysis of the emoticons above in pragmatic function. This study also wanted to investigate how people perceive the emoticon whether the way they use it is correct and related to the pragmatic function behind the emoticon. Because people are tending to use emoticon that is not suitable with the meaning behind it. The correlation between emoticon usage and pragmatic meaning can vary based on different factors, including the context, culture, and individuals involved in the communication. Emoticons are often used to convey or enhance the emotional tone or intent of a message. However, their specific pragmatic meaning may not always be universally agreed upon or fixed. Derks, D., Fischer, A. H., & Bos, A. E. (2008).

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

An emoticon, short from emotion icon, is the character that has function to represent the users' feelings, moods, reaction or expression towards something though chat room. Usually, the character of emoticons is shaped in many forms. Whether it is smiley face, love face, people face, animals, family, vehicle, flags and so on. Emoji, smileys, emoticons, and stickers all have diverse forms and contents and have been popular among users throughout history. Smiley, which is frequently used in commercials and product packaging, can boost morale and promote good feelings (Stark and Crawford, 2015). Smiley is a single symbol that is infrequently used in communication, in contrast to emoji, emoticons, and stickers that include a whole set of characters. Emoticons, which can be used in CMC, display face expressions through different punctuation mark combinations. According to studies, smileys and emoticons have the same effect on how information is interpreted, but smileys have a bigger effect on how people feel than emoticons that are smiling (Ganster et al., 2012). Emoji are now viewed as a more sophisticated kind of emoticons (Aull, 2019).

There is also similar study of how emoticon smiley is the most frequently used by users. It is from Provine, Spender and Mandell (2007). They conducted their research by examining the use of smiley emoticon through website. The result showed us that the smiley and laugh emoticons are the most frequently used. This is not exception for WhatsApp users. Nowadays, WhatsApp has upgraded their emoticon to be more light, clear and they added many characters in every kind of emoticons exist. The emoticons hopefully make the conversation in chat room become more joyful, creative, and fun. But, besides the fun and joyful side of emoticons, the users sometimes still use the emoticons without awareness of what is the meaning behind those emoticons. Because they feel like using the emoticon that suits their personal style and feelings that they do not concern of the real function and meaning of the emoticons. In this case, the researcher would like to elaborate the meaning and function behind the smiley emoticons based on pragmatic perspectives.

Pragmatics actually involves considering both the physical and social worlds when understanding the meaning of a discussion. Social language skill we use in daily interactions with other people such as communication techniques, understanding of nonliteral language, problem-solving skills, and the capacity to recognize and communicate emotions are all referred to as pragmatics language. Pragmatics is the study of how a speaker's or writer's meaning are received and interpret by a listener or reader. In other words, pragmatic analysis focuses more on the speaker's meaning than the meaning of the words or sentences. Since pragmatic works with intended meaning, and how we interact is not always in verbal communication. The communication also can be done by using emoticons that can make our daily interaction easier and funnier. By using the emoticons, the researcher would like to investigate the meaning and

function behind the smiley emoticons that the users are most frequently used in pragmatic perspectives. By those explanation from the previous related study, the researcher have come up with the research question. The research question for this article is what is the pragmatic meaning behind the smiley emoticons in WhatsApp?

## **METHOD**

This study used descriptive qualitative as the method to gain and elaborate the data. This study is a library research that enables the researcher to collect the data by analyzing and reviewing from the sources such as articles, journals, books and websites. The data were collected in several steps. First, the data were obtained by searching the emoticons from the sources. Second, the data were analyzed based on the pragmatic function. The research that was conducted in this study is qualitative research type using a descriptive approach. Descriptive qualitative study is used to analyze the pragmatic analysis of smileys emoticon in WhatsApp. This study was aimed to analyze the pragmatic value behind the smiley emoticons that people always use. This study was also aimed to investigate how people perceive the emoticon whether the way they use it is correct and related to the pragmatic function behind the emoticon. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) claim that qualitative methods focus on gathering, analyzing, and interpreting extensive, narrative, and visual data to shed light on a variety of intriguing occurrences. Then Sugiyono (2015) adds that descriptive qualitative methods are employed to observe the condition of the object being researched amongst normal circumstances, with the researcher holding the primary instrument. Without modifying or introducing additional field-specific circumstances, qualitative descriptive research thoroughly characterizes an event or phenomena. This qualitative descriptive study aims to provide insight into the problems with using Google forms in English exams that were found in students, and then consider student perspectives to determine how to address these problems. The researcher collected the data by analyzing and examining some articles related to emoticon with pragmatic meaning from the year of 2008-2019. The researcher then will collect the data and make the conclusion out of it based on the analysis. The sources taken as the data are 6 articles.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

WhatsApp, the messaging platform, is the application that can help us to interact with others through phone. WhatsApp has designed its own emoticon in the shape and form of yellow, circle and has no nose. The character looks so funny that it can be the representation for emoticon users to express how they feels, thoughts and reactions. But, the reality of emoticon users hits different. Somehow, the users do not concern of the function and the real meaning behind the emoticon they frequently used. They just used the emoticons because they think that the emoticons, they chose represented what they were thinking, feeling, mood, expression and reaction better. Derks, D., Fischer, A. H., & Bos, A. E. (2008) had argued that Emotions are as common online as they are offline. Evidently, people have discovered ways to deal with the limitations of CMC, such as using emoticons or verbalizing feelings in a more direct manner. Due to the fact they may draw the conclusion that people not only express, discuss, and convey their feelings, but also do it in a way that makes them feel good because numerous studies have demonstrated that people are extremely satisfied with online communication. We have the capacity to offer assistance, voice displeasure, reveal our concerns, and demonstrate our affection to others, whether they be close friends or complete strangers.

Dresner, E., & Herring, S. C. (2010), in their study, argued that emoticons play several important roles in CMC. They highlight that emoticons can convey affective states, such as emotions or attitudes, by visually representing facial expressions or gestures. Emoticons provide a way to compensate for the lack of nonverbal cues, such as tone of voice and facial expressions, which are present in face-to-face communication. According to the authors, emoticons serve

various functions in CMC. They can be used to express emotions, such as happiness, sadness, or sarcasm, and to clarify the intended tone or meaning of a message. Emoticons can also help convey politeness, sincerity, or humor, as well as manage social interactions by signaling friendliness or establishing rapport. Additionally, emoticons can aid in disambiguating potentially ambiguous messages and reducing the risk of misinterpretation.

Kaye, L. K., Malone, S. A., & Wall, H. J. (2016) argue that emojis, which are pictorial representations used in digital communication, have significant relevance in the realm of psychological science. They likely delve into the affordances and possibilities that emojis offer for studying emotions, cognition, and social interactions. The authors may discuss how emojis provide a visual means to convey emotions and attitudes in text-based communication. They might explore how the use of emojis can enhance emotional expression, increase the richness of communication, and facilitate the interpretation of messages. Emoji can be used to convey emotions and to assist people comprehend what is being said in a text, but they can also create ambiguity in communication and make it ineffective. Despite their visual similarities, emoji interpretation is influenced by cultural context, technological variations, and their own visual traits (Bich-Carriere, 2019).

Pavalanathan, U., & Eisenstein, J. (2015). likely argue that emoticons and emojis have distinct characteristics and functions in online communication. They may discuss the historical development and usage patterns of both emoticons and emojis, highlighting the differences in their visual representation and usage conventions. The authors may explore the potential effects of using emoticons versus emojis in Twitter communication. They might analyze how the choice of emoticons or emojis affects the perception, interpretation, and engagement with tweets. They may also discuss the role of emoticons and emojis in expressing emotions, attitudes, or other social cues within the limited character constraints of Twitter. A study by Luor et al. (2010), who split emoji into three categories—positive, negative, and neutral—a negative impact could be produced by negative emoji in both simplex (such as scheduling meetings or greeting) and complex (such as discussing or coordinating tasks) task-oriented communication (i.e., at work), whereas a positive effect could be produced by positive emoji only in complex communication and for female employees in simplex communication.

These are the analysis on the smiley emoticons proposed by the researcher.

1. 😊

This emoticon is drawn as a yellow smiling guy with big doe eyes and a thin smile. This emoticon represents the feeling of positive mood and friendly vibes. The reality of this emoticon is that it is used by users to express the feeling of disappointment or just as simple as ‘ok fine then’. For instance, if we just found out something that hurt us and the reaction is going to be ‘disappointed but not surprised’ moment, this emoticon is suitable. This emoticon is called ‘Slightly Happy’ or ‘This is fine’.

2. 🤣

This emoticon as it looks, represents the feeling of happiness and laugh. The laugh is really hysterical that the emoticon is drawn as a yellow guy laughing with tears in his eyes while rolling on the floor. The name of the emoticon is ROFL (Rolling on the Floor Laughing). But usually, this emoticon is used by users to give a sarcasm or to react to someone’s insult. This emoticon is used by users to give off the attitude ‘your point is ridiculous and I do not care what you are saying’.

3. 🙄

This emoticon is drawn as a yellow guy covering its mouth with his cheeks blushing red. As it may look, the emoticon is expressing the feeling of embarrassment after doing or saying

something. The name of this emoticon is ‘Ooopss’. but the reality is somehow users use this emoticon to express their big laugh that they should cover their mouth.

4. 😊

This emoticon gives off the vibe of genuine happiness, positive, and warm vibes. This emoticon also gives the nuance of welcoming gesture. The name of this emoticon is ‘Happy Face’. Usually, the users use this emoticon to show the feeling of blushing because of compliments or express that they have a crush on someone.

5. 🤗

The name of this emoticon is ‘Hugging’. This emoticon has function is to express the warm welcoming while giving a hug. But in reality, the users use this emoticon to give off fake enthusiasm (sarcasm).

6. 😍

This emoticon is drawn as a yellow guy smiling with love floating in the air. As it may seem, this emoticon can represent the feeling of lots of love, falling in love, or anything that love related. The name of this emoticon is ‘In Love Face’. But in reality, users use this emoticon to express the feeling of gratitude or wants to say thank you to someone.

7. 😄

This grinning squinting face emoticon. The name of this emoticon is ‘Big Grin’. This emoticon has function to express the feeling of excitement and laughter. The users use this emoticon to express the feeling of laughing of something ridiculous.

8. 😅

This emoticon is drawn as a yellow guy laughing awkwardly with sweat over his head. The name of this emoticon is ‘Happy Sweat’. Like the name, this emoticon has function to express the feeling of relief after doing difficult task. But in reality, sometimes the users use this emoticon to express sarcastic or critical towards something in humorous way.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the explanation above, the researcher would like to draw a conclusion that not every emoticon used by WhatsApp users are intended to use based on the function and meaning based on pragmatic perspectives. The smiley emoticons that the researcher has been analyzed are

😊 : Slightly Smiling Face

🤣 : Rolling on The Floor, Laughing

🤔 : Face with Hand Over the Mouth

😊 : Smiling Face

🤗 : Hugging Face

😍 : Smiling face with smiling eyes and three hearts

😄 : Smiling Face with Open Mouth and Closed Eyes

😅 : Smiling Face with Open Mouth & Cold Sweat

Sometimes, the emoticon is used based on how the users perceive the emoticon itself. The researcher has elaborated the meaning and function of the smiley emoticon of WhatsApp, but in reality, the users use the emoticon with different intention than it should be. This shows that many WhatsApp emoticon users do not perceive the emoticon they used properly based on pragmatic perspectives.

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