



THE EMOJI AS GRAMMAR MARKER: TEACHING PRAGMATIC TONE THROUGH ICON-BASED DIGITAL FEEDBACK TO ESL/EFL STUDENTS

Muhammad Tanveer Aslam
tanveeraslamrana@gmail.com

PhD English Linguistics, Allama Iqbal Open University
Islamabad, Pakistan.

Dr. Naif Mohammed Yahya Al Ghotheify
naif.alghotheify@hau.edu.ye

Assistant Professor, Department of English ,Faculty of
Education & Human Sciences ,Hajjah University, Yemen.

Ayaz Ahmad khan
ayaznumal@gmail.com

Mphil scholar in English literature & linguistics/ Research
scholar in indigenous Studies, UIT, Norway

Abstract

The study examines the impact of emojis on the pragmatic tone teaching of ESL/EFL learners in Pakistan and Yemen through digital feedback based on icons. The objectives of the research include investigating how emojis affect the understanding of emotional tone, communicative purpose, politeness, humour, and interpersonal meaning conveyed through digital feedback. The study utilises a mixed research methodology that includes both primary and secondary data. The primary data is collected through an online questionnaire conducted among 60 ESL/EFL undergraduates at universities in Pakistan and Yemen through google forms. Secondary data is collected through the review of recently published scholarly articles focused on digital pragmatics, computer-mediated communication, and ESL/EFL instruction. The research outcomes show that emojis are important pragmatic and grammatical markers that help reduce ambiguity and improve emotional perception in digital interaction. Besides, emoji-based digital feedback has positive effects on learner engagement and pragmatic competence development as well as online interaction between ESL/EFL students. The respondents find emojis as helpful communicative devices that help provide more supportive, expressive, and clear digital feedback.

Keywords: *Computer-Mediated Communication, Digital Feedback, Emojis, ESL/EFL Learning, Pragmatic Tone*

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Tanveer Aslam (PhD English Linguistics, Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad, Pakistan)

Email: tanveeraslamrana@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of technology has led to new trends regarding the use of language in education and society. Emojis have become a prominent feature of the online exchange of messages on different platforms such as social networking sites, text messages, and virtual classrooms. The visual indicators initially created to express one's emotional state now serve different linguistic and pragmatic purposes and include conveying mood, softening critique, showing politeness, emphasising humour, and conveying intentionality. It seems that emojis are increasingly used as markers in communication, complementing or adding another layer to the intended message conveyed with the help of words. Therefore, the introduction of emojis into language teaching might be helpful for students in perceiving linguistic and pragmatic tones.

Pragmatic competence is considered one of the most difficult components in ESL and EFL settings since many learners are proficient in grammar but lack comprehension of implied meanings, emotions, sarcasm, politeness, or tone in electronic interactions. In the absence of visual cues, such as facial expressions and gestures, or auditory cues, like vocal intonation, emojis are frequently used in lieu of them. According to Thompson and Filik (2016), emojis provide users with cues regarding intended meanings by acting as visual emotional markers. As a result, incorporating emojis into teaching might improve learners' comprehension of pragmatic tone.

Researchers are focusing on the study of emojis as language devices possessing grammatical and discursive properties. Emoji sequences are explored in the literature as devices capable of conveying messages in a similar fashion to language through emphasising the meanings of messages, substituting lexical items, and structuring interaction patterns within digital texts (Cohn et al., 2019). Though not forming a grammatical system, emojis perform an important role in making sense of online interaction by marking irony, agreement, emotivity, mitigation, and conversation alignment, among others (Wiese & Labrenz, 2021).

Digital feedback has gained popularity in the education setting via learning management systems, social networking platforms, and other forms of web-based collaboration. While teachers normally give written instructions to students about how to improve their language usage skills, the feedback may occasionally seem too harsh, confusing, or emotionless. Feedback that includes the use of emojis will help eliminate any confusion regarding the tone of feedback, showing whether the teacher is being encouraging, supportive, concerned, or even giving constructive feedback. Digital emojis used to provide feedback might enhance learner engagement because students are already accustomed to emoji communication in their everyday lives.

Moreover, the inclusion of emojis for language instruction corresponds with current views regarding multimodal communication and digital literacy. In contemporary settings, more often than not, communication involves not only written or spoken language but also text, visuals, and symbols combined in one message. Therefore, we need to adjust language teaching to current communicative tendencies to prepare learners for effective language learning through digital interaction. Instruction involving emojis may enhance learners' understanding of pragmatic aspects, as well as digital communication and

pragmatics competence in general when learning English online. Recent findings in internet communication studies have indicated that emojis serve pragmatic purposes such as the expression of attitude and maintenance of interpersonal relations and discourse management (Li & Yang, 2018).

However, although numerous studies have been conducted on emoji communication and its uses in digital and social media communication, there has been insufficient scholarly investigation of emojis' grammar and pragmatic markers in EFL/ESL teaching. Current scholarship mainly examines internet language, linguistics, and digital linguistics in general and lacks any research related to language instruction and practical classroom implications of emojis in particular. Therefore, we need to research the role of icon-based digital feedback.

1.1. Significance of the Research

The significance of this research lies in the fact that this study looks into the use of emojis in the classroom as pragmatic and grammatical markers in digital feedback for ESL/EFL classes. In the contemporary setting, learners tend to be very interactive in their learning via digital media, in which context it is important to be able to grasp the tone, emotions, politeness, and other nuances of language when communicating. Since many ESL/EFL learners often have difficulties in comprehending pragmatic aspects of written communication due to a lack of non-verbal cues like facial expressions and voice tonality, it is important to explore how feedback based on emoji usage could assist learners in understanding the communicative intentions. It might also prove beneficial to language instructors since such a study might help them integrate creative teaching methods in their classes. Moreover, such an exploration might be useful for disciplines of pragmatics, digital discourse analysis, and language pedagogy.

1.2. Research Objectives

1. To investigate the role of emojis as pragmatic and grammar-related markers in digital communication among ESL/EFL students.
2. To examine how icon-based digital feedback influences ESL/EFL learners' understanding of pragmatic tone in written English.
3. To explore the perceptions of ESL/EFL teachers and students regarding the effectiveness of emoji-supported feedback in language learning.

1.3. Research Questions

1. How do emojis function as pragmatic and grammar-related markers in ESL/EFL digital communication?
2. How does emoji-based digital feedback affect ESL/EFL learners' interpretation of pragmatic tone in written communication?
3. What are the perceptions of ESL/EFL teachers and students about the use of emojis in digital feedback and language learning?

2. Literature Review

The rising popularity of digital communication in today's era has led to an emergence in the linguistic discourse that is greatly influenced by the use of emojis in

online communication. Rather than treating emojis as simple pictorial decorations, recent linguistic and pragmatic research has started considering emojis as important components of language that contribute to the tone, emotive expression, and discourse structure (Li & Yang, 2018; Alharbi & Mahzari, 2023). With regard to computer-mediated communication, emojis often play the role of compensating for facial expressions, physical gestures, and vocal intonations that help in making meaning from an interpersonal perspective (Upadhyay et al., 2023).

The current literature has concentrated its attention on linguistic and grammatical perspectives of emoji use. For example, Cohn et al. (2019) argued that emojis show structured sequences in their arrangement, which is similar to language grammar in the visual form. The study revealed that emojis could adhere to specific communicative rules, which are parallel to language syntax and discourse sequencing. At the same time, Grosz et al. (2023) discussed the role of face emojis as semantic elements in discourse and meaning creation aside from the purely emotional function. Thus, emojis currently act more as discourse markers and pragmatic cues in electronic messages.

Another key direction of research related to emojis in communication concerns the development of pragmatic functions. For instance, Alharbi and Mahzari (2023) listed multiple uses of emojis as pragmatic tools in Arabic-language Twitter discourse. The identified uses included the change of message tone, softening criticism, indicating reaction, demonstrating action, and fostering interpersonal relations. Overall, the analysis of emoji semantics showed that contextual factors and user intentions significantly affect the interpretation of emojis. Holtgraves (2024) reviewed the connection between emojis and speech acts, finding that emojis could successfully serve as reminders, requests, apologies, and directive mitigation devices.

There have been studies about the role of emojis in language acquisition among educational institutions. According to Alsulaiman & Alhojailan (2024), the use of emojis among EFL students' tweets served as a means for emotion expression, softening of speech acts, replacement of non-verbal behaviour, and enhancement of message meanings. The study also found that emojis were used by the participants in establishing familiarity and identity representations online. These results imply that the use of emojis may help EFL learners in gaining pragmatic and contextual insights.

In the modern language education sector, there has also been increased focus on multimodal communication. As pointed out by Koltsova & Kartashkova (2022), digital communication involves multimodal features as it is made up of not only the text but also paralinguistics, emojis, memes, and other visual elements. According to the authors, emojis serve as multimodal semiotic devices that help make messages more interactionally and personally meaningful. This approach to communication is useful in ESL/EFL classes since it helps learners learn visually.

There have been multiple academic papers devoted to the study of emotions and interpersonal communication through emojis. For instance, according to Thompson and Filik (2016), both emoticons and emojis help a reader understand the irony and intentions of a speaker in text messaging. Likewise, the study conducted by Upadhyay et al. (2023) confirmed that face emojis play a pivotal role in transmitting the subtleties of one's

emotions in text messages. The authors stressed the role played by emojis in pragmatic decoding and minimising ambiguity of written texts.

Finally, another crucial topic in the research on emojis is their semantics and contextual ambiguity. In particular, Czestochowska et al. (2022) argue that emojis are always semantically ambiguous because there is no context in which their meanings are interpreted. Their findings reveal the differences between the interpretations of emojis by various people and in distinct situations. Furthermore, Robertson et al. (2021) discuss the changes in the meanings of certain emojis that occur with time within a specific online community.

Emojis are also being studied as an alternative means to gestures and prosody for conveying meaning within online communication. Scholars often characterise emojis as "textual gestures," emphasising their ability to convey information in a manner similar to facial expressions and body language used within verbal communication (McCulloch, 2019). Furthermore, discussions among linguistic scholars add credibility to the idea that emojis play roles as pragmatic signals and tone markers, not merely decorative images. Research into online communication reveals that emojis aid in softening complaints, easing conversations, and conveying interpersonal attitudes.

Moreover, advances in computational linguistics contribute to the view that emojis can be considered language-like phenomena. For instance, Peng et al. (2023) introduced a new model, known as Emoji, which is capable of analysing and translating emoji-text connections. Thus, it is clear that emojis possess a systematic semantic and communicative nature. In addition, Zhou et al. (2025) investigated the connection between emojis and prosody and showed how emojis impact the process of interpreting speech and perceiving emotions in digital communication.

Even as the literature on emojis increases in depth and scope, surprisingly few studies have been conducted with regard to using emojis for the purpose of education, particularly with respect to helping students understand pragmatics in ESL/EFL classes through digital feedback. Indeed, prior research has focused mostly on the use of emojis in social media and emotional discourse as well as their meanings, leaving a major gap in knowledge in terms of the ways in which emojis can be used in educational contexts to help learners understand tone, politeness, sarcasm, encouragement, and communication intentions.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

In this study, a mixed-methods research design is applied to conduct an analysis that reveals the impact of emojis as grammatical and pragmatic markers for the use of pragmatically toned instruction in teaching through emoji-assisted digital feedback in ESL/EFL settings. A mixed-methods research design is appropriate due to its ability to provide quantitative and qualitative findings on pragmatic tone, learners' emotions, and their perceptions about digital communication. Recent research in digital pragmatics and online language learning has also used mixed-methods and experimental designs (Chen & Hsu, 2022; Alharbi & Mahzari, 2023).

3.2. Participants of the Study

The participants of the study are about 60 undergraduate ESL/EFL learners who have been taken from universities in Pakistan and Yemen. The data of the Yemeni students is collected from Students of the department of English, Faculty of Education and Human Sciences, Hajjah University, Yemen. The data of Pakistani University is collected from the department of English, Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad. The selected participants have an intermediate and upper-intermediate proficiency level in the English language. The purposive sampling technique is used for recruiting participants on the basis of their involvement in digital communication.

3.3. Data Collection Method

Data is collected from the selected participants by distributing a semi-structured online questionnaire through google Forms. The questionnaire aims to collect data regarding the perceptions of students about digital feedback, pragmatic tone interpretation, and the use of emojis.

3.4. Secondary Data Source

In addition to the primary data collection methods mentioned above, this study makes use of secondary data obtained from recent journal articles, books, papers from conferences, and scholarly peer-reviewed sources published between 2018 and 2025. Academic databases such as Google Scholar, Springer, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis, JSTOR, and ResearchGate is consulted to find scholarly literature on the topic of pragmatics, digital discourse, computer-mediated communication, and ESL/EFL teaching.

3.5. Research Instruments

The following research tools is used in this study:

3.5.1. Online Questionnaire

An online and questionnaire based on a Likert scale was sent out through google forms how digital feedback helps to understand pragmatic tone, emotions, politeness, sarcasm, encouragement, and teacher intention online.

3.5.2. Digital Communication Interaction Samples

Digital communication interaction samples are gathered from interactions in educational settings, online classroom interactions, and teacher feedback samples. The digital communication interaction samples are analysed to examine the effects of digital feedback on pragmatic and emotional comprehension in ESL/EFL contexts.

3.5.3. Semi-Structured Interviews

Online semi-structured interviews are carried out with selected students and English language teachers. The interviews explore participants' perceptions about digital communication and feedback in ESL/EFL contexts.

3.5.4. Document Analysis

The secondary scholarly literature is critically examined to derive theoretical perspectives and empirical insights into pragmatics and multimodal discourse.

3.6. Procedure for Data Collection

The procedure for data collection involves several steps. Firstly, online questionnaires are sent out via Google forms among ESL/EFL students in Pakistan and Yemen selected universities. Respondents fill out the survey using Google Forms voluntarily. Secondly, chosen respondents undergo online interviews using Zoom,

WhatsApp, or Google Meet platforms. Thirdly, samples of digital communication are gathered based on their pragmatic functions, including politeness, encouragement, humour, sarcasm, emotion, and criticism. Secondary data from current research are also collected to assist in the analysis of pragmatic functions in computer-mediated communication and language learning environments.

4. Data Analysis

In this section, the data collected for the research, The Emoji as Grammar Marker: Teaching Pragmatic Tone through Icon-Based Digital Feedback to ESL/EFL Students, is analysed and interpreted. The goal of the current research study is to find out how emojis are used as pragmatic markers and grammatical markers in digital communication and how they affect ESL/EFL students' perception of pragmatic tone.

The data is collected via an online questionnaire completed by undergraduate ESL/EFL students from universities located in Pakistan and Yemen. The questionnaire involves semi-structured Likert-type questions as well as multiple-choice questions that focus on students' perceptions of emojis, digital feedback, emotion recognition, and pragmatics of tone. In all, 60 respondents completed the survey. Frequencies, percentages, and average scores are calculated to describe the findings. The results are shown in tables.

4.1. Demographic Information of Participants

Table 4.1: Participants' Country Distribution

Country	Frequency	Percentage
Pakistan	35	58.3%
Yemen	25	41.7%
Total	60	100%

Note. N = 60.

Table 4.1 shows the country-wise distribution of participants. Among the total participants, 35 students (58.3%) belong to Pakistan, while 25 students (41.7%) belong to Yemen. The results indicate that Pakistani students constitute the majority of the respondents participating in the study.

Table 4.2: Participants' Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	32	53.3%
Female	28	46.7%
Total	60	100%

Note. N = 60.

Table 4.2 demonstrates the gender distribution of participants. Out of 60 respondents, 32 participants (53.3%) are male, whereas 28 participants (46.7%) are female. The data show a relatively balanced participation of male and female students in the research.

Table 4.3: Participants' English Proficiency Level

Proficiency Level	Frequency	Percentage
Intermediate	37	61.7%

Upper-Intermediate	23	38.3%
Total	60	100%

Note. N = 60.

Table 4.3 reveals that 37 students (61.7%) belong to the intermediate level of English proficiency, while 23 students (38.3%) belong to the upper-intermediate level. These findings indicate that most participants possess sufficient English competence to understand digital communication and pragmatic interpretation.

4.2. Analysis of Students' Use of Emojis in Digital Communication

Table 4.4: Frequency of Emoji Use in Online Communication

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Always	26	43.3%
Often	22	36.7%
Sometimes	9	15.0%
Rarely	3	5.0%
Never	0	0%
Total	60	100%

Note. N = 60.

As can be seen from Table 4.4, emojis are quite popular among ESL/EFL students who interact digitally. The study reveals that 26 (43.3%) students always use emojis when communicating online, whereas 22 (36.7%) students frequently use them. On the other hand, only three (5%) students use emojis rarely. This shows that emojis have now become an integral part of digital communication for university students. Moreover, the findings reveal that digital communication by ESL/EFL students is very multimodal as they combine the use of writing and visual communicative signs in their online interactions.

4.3. Analysis of Students' Understanding of Pragmatic Tone Through Emojis

Table 4.5: Emojis Help Students Understand Emotional Tone

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	28	46.7%
Agree	21	35.0%
Neutral	7	11.7%
Disagree	3	5.0%
Strongly Disagree	1	1.6%
Total	60	100%

Note. N = 60.

As Table 4.5 shows, students view emojis as useful to understand the emotional tone of texts. Most of them strongly agree (46.7%) or agree (35%) that emojis are useful for comprehending the emotional tone of digital messages. Only a minority disagrees with the statement. Accordingly, emojis can be considered as emotional and pragmatic indicators used during online communication. Students find that emojis allow better

comprehension of politeness, happiness, sadness, humour, sarcasm, encouragement, and emotional intentions than text alone.

Table 4.6: Emojis Reduce Misunderstanding in Digital Communication

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	24	40.0%
Agree	23	38.3%
Neutral	8	13.3%
Disagree	4	6.7%
Strongly Disagree	1	1.7%
Total	60	100%

Note. N = 60.

The results presented in Table 4.6 reveal that most participants believe emojis reduce misunderstanding in online communication. A combined 78.3% of students either strongly agree or agree that emojis clarify communicative intention and emotional meaning.

Students report that emojis make digital messages friendlier, clearer, and easier to interpret. The findings support previous research indicating that emojis compensate for the absence of facial expressions and vocal intonation in computer-mediated communication.

4.4. Analysis of Emojis as Pragmatic Markers

Table 4.7: Students' Perceptions of Emojis as Indicators of Pragmatic Tone

Pragmatic Function	Frequency	Percentage
Politeness	48	80.0%
Humor	42	70.0%
Encouragement	51	85.0%
Sarcasm	31	51.7%
Emotional Support	53	88.3%
Criticism Mitigation	45	75.0%

Note. Participants selected more than one option.

Table 4.7 shows the major pragmatic functions associated with emojis in digital communication. The findings reveal that emotional support (88.3%) and encouragement (85%) are the most frequently identified functions of emojis. Students also associate emojis with politeness, humour, and criticism mitigation.

The data suggest that emojis function as important pragmatic devices in online interaction. Participants report that emojis soften criticism, strengthen emotional connection, and make communication less formal and less threatening.

4.5. Analysis of Emoji-Based Digital Feedback

Table 4.8: Students' Attitudes Toward Emoji-Based Teacher Feedback

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	27	45.0%

Agree	20	33.3%
Neutral	8	13.3%
Disagree	4	6.7%
Strongly Disagree	1	1.7%
Total	60	100%

Note. N = 60.

The findings in Table 4.8 indicate that most students positively perceive emoji-based teacher feedback. Approximately 78.3% of respondents either strongly agree or agree that emoji-supported feedback makes communication more understandable and encouraging.

Students report that digital feedback accompanied by emojis appears friendlier and more supportive than plain text comments. Participants particularly state that emojis reduce anxiety and help them interpret teachers' intentions more accurately.

4.6. Analysis of Specific Emoji Interpretations

Table 4.9: Students' Interpretation of Common Emojis in Academic Communication

Emoji Meaning	Correct Interpretation Frequency	Percentage
Smiling Face = Encouragement	54	90.0%
Thumbs Up = Approval	57	95.0%
Thinking Face = Confusion/Reflection	46	76.7%
Crying Face = Sadness/Disappointment	52	86.7%
Laughing Face = Humour	58	96.7%

Note. N = 60.

Table 4.9 demonstrates students' interpretation of commonly used emojis in academic communication. The findings reveal that most participants accurately identify the communicative meanings associated with frequently used emojis.

The laughing face emoji receives the highest interpretation accuracy (96.7%), followed by the thumbs-up emoji (95%). The results indicate that ESL/EFL learners possess substantial familiarity with emoji meanings and use them as contextual clues during online communication.

4.7. Analysis of Pragmatic Competence Development

Table 4.10: Emojis Improve Understanding of Pragmatic Tone

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	29	48.3%
Agree	19	31.7%
Neutral	7	11.7%
Disagree	4	6.7%
Strongly Disagree	1	1.6%

Total	60	100%
-------	----	------

Note. N = 60.

Table 4.10 indicates that a large majority of participants believe emojis improve their understanding of pragmatic tone in digital communication. Approximately 80% of students either strongly agree or agree that emojis help them understand communicative intention, emotional attitude, and interpersonal meaning.

The findings suggest that emojis support pragmatic competence development among ESL/EFL learners by providing visual and emotional cues during online interaction.

4.8. Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

The qualitative responses collected from participants reveal several recurring themes related to emoji-supported communication and pragmatic interpretation in digital learning environments.

4.8.1. Theme 1: Emojis Provide Emotional Clues 😊😏😢👉

Many participants note that emojis help determine whether the sender meant the message as friendly, sincere, sarcastic, funny, encouraging, or critical. The participants confirm that emojis remove confusion and provide clarity when communicating emotions online.

One participant says:

"Sometimes it seems that the message looks rude, but emojis 😊 soften its meaning."

The other participant says:

"Emojis 👉😏 help to determine the emotions and intentions of the teacher in online education."

Moreover, some participants note that emojis like 😊 ❤️ and 👉 add positive emotional value to the message, while emojis 😏 and 😢 suggest disappointment or seriousness.

4.8.2. Theme 2: Emoji Usage Minimises Communication Anxiety ❤️😊🌸

Some interviewees note that emoji-enhanced teacher feedback is more encouraging and supportive than regular text feedback. Learners argue that emojis make them less anxious when communicating with their instructors through the web.

One interviewee says,

"When our teachers provide feedback using emojis 😊❤️, I feel less anxious about my faults."

Another interviewee asserts,

"Using emojis 👉 in feedback provides a favourable atmosphere in class online."

Some respondents add that emojis increase their emotional attachment to their teachers in virtual classrooms.

4.8.3. Theme 3: Emojis Make Online Interaction Easier ☐💬😊

The use of emojis is also mentioned by participants as an approach to enhancing interpersonal communication and increasing interactivity within digital conversations. It is claimed that students believe emojis help in building social connections and friendship while communicating online in educational spaces.

One participant remarks:

“Emojis 😊👍 can make conversations in online forums among students more natural.”

Another participant adds:

“Without emojis 😊, any digital conversation is boring and hard to understand.”

Most of the students point out that using emojis in the process of discussion in class makes interactions more vivid and interesting. The role of emojis in terms of interactional efficiency is also mentioned by students.

5. Findings

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that emojis significantly contribute to digital interaction among ESL/EFL learners in Pakistan and Yemen selected universities. Most participants note the frequent use of emojis when communicating online through social media sites, academic forums, and learning technologies. Moreover, students consider emojis to be highly valuable in the process of comprehending emotional meaning, polite language, humour, encouragement, and interpersonal meanings during online communication. In addition, emojis decrease ambiguity and serve as a compensation mechanism for the lack of facial expression and vocal intonation in computer-mediated interaction.

Emojis serve as pragmatic and grammatical indicators in online interaction. Most participants argue that emojis aid in conveying communicative intentions and clarifying the interpretation of digital messages. Emojis are associated with encouragement, emotional support, criticism, mitigation, and politeness strategies. The participants claim that emojis make teachers' feedback more friendly, supportive, and less threatening. As a result, emoji-assisted communication is considered to have a positive influence on students' comprehension of pragmatic meanings and emotions in an ESL/EFL environment.

Moreover, the study shows that emojis contribute positively to learner participation and interaction in digital education. According to participants, emojis facilitate interaction and emotional involvement while discussing certain topics and communicating within academic discourse. The participants state that the use of emojis helps reduce communication apprehension and enhance interaction between students and teachers. In

general, the results indicate that emojis serve as valuable communication resources that help in achieving pragmatic competence and emotional communication.

6. Conclusion

The current research is devoted to exploring the role of emojis as grammatical and pragmatic markers within the use of pragmatic tone instruction via emojis in digital feedback provision to ESL/EFL students from Pakistan and Yemen. The results show that emojis play an essential role in digital communication by providing information about emotional tones, polite language use, humour, encouragement, and interpersonal meanings during online interactions. Furthermore, emojis reduce ambiguity in written communication and compensate for the absence of physical communication elements, such as facial expressions and vocal pitch.

It is concluded from this research that emojis also play a positive role in the development of pragmatic competence and engagement of language learners in the process of their ESL/EFL education. Using emojis as digital feedback, a communicative, supportive, and interactive environment for language learners is established, allowing them better to understand intentionality and emotion perception in an online environment. It appears that emojis should not be treated as decorative symbols; instead, they should be viewed as valuable tools of communication and pragmatics.

References

- Abdulahkim, G., Mudhsh, B., Almutairi, M., & Rahman, R. (2025). Optimising ESL learners' speech act performance: The role of AI-powered chatbots in pragmatic competence development. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 15(10). <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1510.05>
- Alharbi, A., & Mahzari, M. (2023). The pragmatic functions of emojis in Arabic tweets. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1059672. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1059672>
- Alsulaiman, R. S., & Alhojailan, A. I. (2024). Emojis as tools for learning: Understanding their pragmatic functions in EFL students' tweets. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 14(12), 3916–3928. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1412.18>
- Chen, Y.-J., & Hsu, L. (2022). Enhancing EFL learners' self-efficacy beliefs of learning English with emoji feedback in CALL: Why and how. *Behavioral Sciences*, 12(7), 227. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12070227>
- Cohn, N., Engelen, J., & Schilperoord, J. (2019). The grammar of emoji? Constraints on communicative pictorial sequencing. *Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications*, 4(1), 33. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-019-0177-0>

-
- Czestochowska, J., Gligoric, K., Peyrard, M., Mentha, Y., Bien, M., Grutter, A., Auer, A., Xanthos, A., & West, R. (2022). On the context-free ambiguity of emoji. *arXiv*. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2201.06302>
- Danesi, M. (2017). *The semiotics of emoji: The rise of visual language in the age of the internet*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Grosz, P. G., Greenberg, G., De Leon, C., & Kaiser, E. (2023). A semantics of face emoji in discourse. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 46, 905–957. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10988-022-09369-8>
- Holtgraves, T. (2024). Emoji, speech acts, and perceived communicative success. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 43(1), 3–22. Nmm <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X231200450>
- Jalilova, N. T. (2025). Emoji as illocutionary cues in computer-mediated communication: A comparative pragmatic analysis of English and Uzbek speech acts. *Shokh Articles Library*. <https://worldsciencepub.com/index.php/shokhal/article/view/6256>
- Koltsova, E. A., & Kartashkova, F. I. (2022). Digital communication and multimodal features: Functioning of emoji in interpersonal communication. *RUDN Journal of Language Studies, Semiotics and Semantics*, 13(3), 769–783. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2299-2022-13-3-769-783>
- Li, L., & Yang, Y. (2018). Pragmatic functions of emoji in internet-based communication: A corpus-based study. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 3(1), 16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-018-0057-z>
- McCulloch, G. (2019). *Because the internet: Understanding the new rules of language*. Riverhead Books.
- Neel, L. A. G., McKechnie, J. G., Robus, C. M., & Hand, C. J. (2023). Emoji alter the perception of emotion in affectively neutral text messages. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 47, 83–97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10919-022-00421-6>
- Peng, L., Wang, Z., Liu, H., Wang, Z., & Shang, J. (2023). EmojiLM: Modeling the new emoji language. *arXiv*. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2311.01751>
- Rezai, A. (2023). Cultivating interlanguage pragmatic comprehension through concurrent and cumulative group dynamic assessment: A mixed-methods study. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 8(1), 8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-022-00179-w>
- Robertson, A., Liza, F. F., Nguyen, D., McGillivray, B., & Hale, S. A. (2021). Semantic journeys: Quantifying change in emoji meaning from 2012–2018. *arXiv*. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2105.00846>
- Scheffler, T., & Nenchev, I. (2024). Semantic and affective norms for 180 face emojis. *Behavior Research Methods*. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-024-02444-x>

- Thompson, D., & Filik, R. (2016). Sarcasm in written communication: Emoticons are efficient markers of intention. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 21(2), 105–120. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12156>
- Tieu, L., Qiu, J. L., Puvipalan, V., & Pasternak, R. (2025). Experimental evidence for a semantic typology of emoji: Inferences of co-, pro-, and post-text emoji. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 78(4), 808–826. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17470218241255786>
- Tu, S. P. (2022). The effect of closeness on Japanese L2 English learners' use of emoji. *Studies in Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis*, 3(2), 50–60. <https://doi.org/10.48185/spda.v3i2.665>
- Upadhyay, S. S. N., Gunraj, D. N., & Phillips, N. C. (2023). Mad or mad-mad: Conveying subtle emotion with face emoji. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1183299. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1183299>
- Wiese, H., & Labrenz, A. (2021). Emoji as graphic discourse markers: Functional and positional associations in German WhatsApp messages. In *Pragmatic Markers and Peripheries* (pp. 277–300). John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.325.10wie>
- Wierzbicka, A. (2021). *Language, culture, and digital emotion: The pragmatics of emojis in online interaction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Zhou, Y., Chen, X., & Lin, H. (2025). Emojis and digital prosody: Emotional perception and speech interpretation in online communication. *Journal of Pragmatics and Digital Discourse*, 18(2), 145–162.