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Exploring The Usage Of Emojis In Formal Settings: Testing Sapir Whorf Hypothesis Via Linguistics Relativity Lenz

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research is to investigate the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity by investigating the use of emojis in formal communication situations. Emojis, while commonly associated with informal or casual conversation, are increasingly being used in official circumstances (Rehman & Butt, 2024). This study examines their inclusion into formal communication to see whether their existence affects language perception and cognition, as proposed by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The suitable method of this study was qualitative in which an online survey with semi-structured closed-ended and open-ended questions was done with 10 volunteers who had been working in formal settings for at least 5 years. These individuals had an excellent notion regarding linguistic relativity. The data were analysed qualitatively by theme analysis. This study used linguistic analysis and experimental approaches to investigate the possible influence of emojis on language structure, semantics, and communication dynamics in formal settings (Abbasi et al., 2024). The findings add to our knowledge of how language features like emojis impact perception and expression in various communicative situations, influencing both linguistic theory and practical applications in formal communication settings. Future research can incorporate a robust longitudinal dataset offering valuable insights into the dynamic nature of digital communication and language.

| **KEYWORDS** | Emojis, Linguistics Relativity, Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis |

Introduction

The second aspect is that "emojis are part of the lexicon most of the students can recognize and use daily and are credited with showing the way in emoji development as we know it in visual communication used to articulate concepts and knowledge". For an emoji to express its exact meaning. For the last thirty years, the rise in the use of computer networks for communication has resulted in the commonplace "emoticons". By contrast, emojis, which are primarily used in manga art and Japanese Kanji patterns, are viewed as not just "conveying surrounding information and emotions" (Skiba, 2016). At the moment, material located in proximity to the experience of many of our students and some cases, such as in their online writing, are modernly seeded with emojis. The findings of the most current research reveal that 38 percent of users who send emojis more than once every day stated that they are students attending colleges and institutions. (Emogi Research Team, 2016 edition). Presently, in formal settings, many educators have indicated that colleges and universities officially promote student-centered constructivist instruction as the most common image of teaching in colleges (Krahenbuhl, 2016). A constructivist position assumes that the teacher must act as a guide or parent (Weimer, 2002; Wright, 2011) and thus be warm; be leading children to "try

hard and hang in" while providing them with useful feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).To achieve this level of rapport, the very tools for enabling teacher-student discourse must be of such a character to not only facilitate a warm, unstrained relationship based on trust but also make it easier to dispatch messages and communications.

In the 1930s, two linguists, Benjamin Whorf (1956) and Edward Sapir (1985), investigated the idea that the language people use impacts their mental processes. This theory, known as the Sapir- Whorf hypothesis, is based on a long-held belief that language is a predictor of cognition. Linguistic data significantly supports this notion, implying that language patterns shape how speakers see and conceptualize their surroundings. Furthermore, an emotional equivalent to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis posits that linguistic differences in emotional subtleties contribute just as much to cultural variances as differences in concepts. Emojis and their emoticon ancestors have spontaneously filled up this gap for decades now. It has only been in recent years, when people are allowed to negative feedback in a positive manner that there has been development. (Doiron, 2016; Dunlap et al., 2016; Jingqian, Sung & Jiarui, 2016). Social learning theory and constructivist pedagogy, however, urge that both new and existing emojis must be recognized, designed, and created to "make meaning together" by communicating online. Language and culture are inextricably linked, with language functioning as a conduit for communicating cultural values, ideas, and opinions. As a result, linguistic differences can be adopted within languages or exported within communities, emphasizing the fundamental relationship between language, culture, cognition, and worldview.

Literature Review

Using emoticons might make senders look more friendly and happy in person, according to studies. Using emoticons in messages allows recipients to understand the sender's emotions. Emojis are ubiquitous digital pictograms used in text messages, emails, and social media platforms. Although they are recognized as a light-hearted and even funny statement, they have a significant social and economic impact (Butt et al., 2023). All of this happened many years ago, and studies like this one, which sometimes appear on our screens, are remarkably impervious to both jokes and moral standard administrations. Emojis have existed since the development of smiling faces in the 1960s, as one type of typographical habit, as polarizing quarrels across cultures online, or, for example, business planning disagreements over trademarks. Emojis are a popular way to simplify digital communication. Some users say that understanding the role of emotion in modern capitalism requires considering its face. According to Kelly et al. (2015), a survey was made using an interview to find out behavior whose conduct was motivated by emojis. In two channels, they think about how emojis may change what people can do for each type of communication. Pohl et al. (2017), developed a model that is conceivable for emoji connection representation, also enter texts, standard or emojis, are texting. When emojis become widely available, it will be important to keep track of how many users are using them. The survey investigates how the emojis are used and how the current entry designs can support them. Emojis were created to address the limitations of text-based conversations (Zhu, 2015). Emojis comprehensive research on emojis usage in text-based conversation. He also tried to answer four questions about the use of emojis in text- based conversation. In a GMS setting, where there are no language boundaries, emojis are a natural way for individuals to convey their emotions (Yuhui et al., 2016: "A cross- cultural environment of Feng people can be communicated if they follow good learning processes"). According to Chairunnisa, Sabrina, et al. (2017), "the analysis shows that the

use of emojis in communication can enrich the message" when it comes to interpersonal contact with BlackBerry Messenger and WhatsApp application users.

In 1998, Rezabek and Cochenour had something different to say. According to them, the history of social media such as email or Facebook also has downsides that may sometimes be overlooked by some people they came up with various reasons like this: "Whenever I send you an SMS without emojis it looks as if you are giving me a cold shoulder; this is not very friendly of you. That's why now when people send texts out to others like this, most of them must remember." Nowadays, emojis have gained great momentum. Research out of Australia Catholic University and the United Kingdom's Edge Hill University found that about 90% of the global population utilizes them in their email and text messages. But emojis show the issue; it's about who does what to whom. One thing that everyone is aware of is that they aren't always used in people's day-to-day conversations. In general, you won't see them very often in business or conservatively worded letters (Butt et al., 2021). Trends in Cognitive Sciences presented an article that demonstrates how emoji usage may be understood by looking at human nature and online interaction. As a kind of social approval signaling, emojis have a place. A person's emotional expression might vary greatly; in this case, the author recognizes a co-author. Emojis aren't a measure of a person's worth. Hence, much like verbal and non-verbal cues, emojis play a part in deciphering such a sign in communication. For instance, he uses more smileys when he's in a good mood, which has nothing to do with age:

In cultural contexts, the use of emojis carries significant implications, as culture encompasses shared meanings, interpretations, and beliefs cultivated through social interactions within a community or group. Symbols play a crucial role in communicating behavioral norms, linguistic conventions, and communal regulations. As Joel Sherzer (1987) aptly noted, language is inherently intertwined with both culture and social dynamics. Previous research suggests that language, as a tool, has evolved to articulate and express the intricacies of culture (Lindquist et al., 2015; Prins & Ulijin,1998). According to Sapir's (1929) theory, culture profoundly shapes communication patterns and group understanding. Human cognition relies heavily on language, which serves as a conduit for conveying shared experiences, thoughts, and perspectives. Language serves to bind individuals within a cultural milieu by reflecting common experiences, perceptions, and worldviews. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Sapir, 1929; Whorf, 1956) posits that language not only reflects but also shapes our perception and understanding of reality. Adolescence, in particular, serves as a critical period for the formation of shared cultural experiences across generations.

Prins and Ulijin (1998), provided extensive evidence supporting the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, illustrating a reciprocal relationship between culture and language. Additionally, Davies et al. (1998), demonstrated that perception can be molded by experience, which in turn can be shared through language. While there may be some debate regarding the extent to which language varies across cultures, the prevailing understanding suggests a profound interconnection between language and culture, shaping both individual and collective experiences.

Material and Methods

The study used a qualitative micro case study technique. According to Neuman (2005), qualitative research provides valuable insights into social dynamics in specific situations. Creswell (2008) defines it as an in-depth exploration of an individual's program, activity, or process. According to Adams et al. (2015), qualitative research focuses on the intentions, motivations, emotions, and actions of individuals within a

program, providing more nuanced and specific insights into their lives and experiences than general information about large groups. A focus group interview was conducted with 10 participants from UMT, a private institution in Lahore, to study the impact of Emojis on their perspectives.

Participants

Two fundamental criteria were used to choose the participants, who were all females aged 25 to 40. Because females face many difficulties in their professional lives. To begin, this study seeks to identify individuals within a certain community of practice, particularly MPhils and Ph.D. academics who have at least 5 years of experience working in formal contexts. They needed to be part of the same community, which meant they were all from Lahore. Second, they possessed an understanding of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and its key differences. As a result of such strict criteria, the grouping turned out to be rather homogeneous was quite challenging to arrange a Focus Group with representatives from diverse social classes or lifestyles who would be willing to openly share, given the importance of participants' complete and unfettered disclosure of their emotions, stories, and even the contents of their mobile phones (Morgan, 1997).

Study Design

The Focus Group was semi-structured, which means it was focused on leading questions/key topics but enabled members to deviate as they saw fit. This strategy was purposefully designed to enable related and fascinating subjects to develop in the minds of participants. Being the moderator of the group, the researcher tried to "minimize participation because the participants deserve several opportunities to pursue matters of interest" (Morgan, 1997). In fact, "If you want to learn something from the participants, let them talk" (Morgan, 1997), as correctly asserted by Morgan. To create the most official atmosphere possible, the group met in the offices of these professors, and they also helped establish the group in a very professional setting. Lastly, the interviews were videotaped, typed, and then analyzed. False names were used for everyone to keep their identities hidden.

Three phases were to be covered:

1st Phase

At the beginning of the first phase, the participants were instructed to examine their mobile phones and identify specific instances in which emojis were either overused or underutilized in professional settings. In step one, an inquiry of an open-ended nature ascertained what the participants would find interesting based on how they viewed their content. They were then encouraged, if accepted, to show the others a chat from their mobile phones. Such excerpts served as a foundation for future discussion.

2nd Phase

In this study, a task was conducted to determine whether the number of Emojis affected the participant's perception of a message and/or a situation. The groups were exposed to three PDF slides containing a self-composed neutral message. The messages were vocally similar, but the Emoji content diverged substantially. The message was sent by a fake individual named Maleeha Malik (hence referred to as MM), and it was first placed in the official group. For this experiment, the messages were extracted from context and displayed in a PDF file. Posts, or slides, were shown sequentially; participants saw just the first slide at a time, and so on. On the first slide, participants

were presented with a message that had two emojis: one in the center and one after the message. During the course of the presentation, the participants were questioned with inquiries such as "What do you think this person is trying to say?", "Do you think these Emojis are important?", and "How does it make you feel?" However, there were no emojis on the second slide, which included identical content. The preceding slide was also the subject of questions that were quite similar to this one, such as "What is the most significant difference between this message and the one that came before it in terms of how it makes you feel?" Last but not least, the final slide included the same phrase, but it was accompanied by a large number of arbitrary emojis at the beginning, middle, and conclusion of the slide. A focus of the investigation was placed on the two slides that came before.

Figure 1: Stage 2 (experiment), slide 1 presents a message with a few Emojis.

Figure 2: Stage 2 (experiment), slide 2 presents a message with no Emojis.

Figure 3: Stage 2 (experiment), slide 3 presents a message with several Emojis.

3rd Phase

In phase three, the participants were encouraged to share their remarks about three types of screenshot messages sent by Miss Maleeha Malik in an official announcement group where several professors were added. "What influence do the Emojis have in these messages?" the participants were asked, and "How can these messages interpret your thinking?" Although message contents are the same, the sender is the same, the receivers are also the same, and the usage of emojis does not remain constant.

Results and Discussion

By providing a concise description of the participants' broad motivations for using emojis in general, and by briefly addressing what this involves in terms of practice and culture, we will establish a foundation for future research. Because the influence that people's comprehension has is directly correlated to the language that they use. The subsequent discussion of the participants' comprehension was centered on the meanings that emojis convey depending on the circumstances in which they are used. In turn, how Emojis create the cultural environment within the community is caused by the fact that

these symbols affect the participants' comprehension of circumstances and their identities.

The results were compiled based on interview questions from the participants. In stage 2, there was a minor experiment that helped understand the logic of linguistic relativity of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. Sapir (1929) suggested that culture influences communication patterns and common understanding within a community. Humans need language to think. The language they create and use will represent their common experiences, thoughts, and views. Language brings individuals together within a cultural group, reflecting their shared exposure to events, interpretations, and perspectives. This viewpoint is popularly known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Sapir, 1929; Whorf, 1956). Prins & Ulijin (1998) provided substantial evidence for the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and demonstrated the reciprocal relationship between culture and language.

Focus Groups revealed a strong correlation between Emojis and personality and identity. Participants' perceptions and use of Emojis revealed this. The first slide in stage 2 elicited a neutral reaction from participants, with the broad idea that MM (Maleeha Malik) wished to convey indicators of happiness. During the discussion, some participants stated that the usage of emojis made the message appear more informal. Emojis might create misinterpretation of the message's genuine meaning. In 2nd slide of stage 2, every participant exclaimed that although the message content was the same there was no actual usage of emojis so the message became more formal. On 3rd slide of stage 2, the impact of Emojis on participants' interpretation of Maleeha Malik's message is unclear. However, during the discussion, many participants expressed that the message was insipid and "kind of impersonal" due to the use of Emojis. Although the language was constant these face symbols altered the actual impact of the message.

Previous experts have suggested that language was merely created as a means for civilization to express itself. According to Joel Sherzer (1987), "Language is both cultural and social". Emotional expressiveness has been proven to vary between cultures. Culture is a collection of shared meanings, interpretations, perceptions, and beliefs that emerge from social engagement and interaction in a community or social group (Abbasi et al., 2023). It is the use of symbols such as Emojis to indicate behavior, speech standards, and regulations among members of a certain group. The emphasis is on the idea that emotional language, or how people vocally express their feelings, is culturally determined. Previous studies have found that cultural and linguistic distinctions between civilizations are associated with emotions.

The results of this study demonstrated that the vast majority of participants consider themselves to be "Emoji-users", which means that all participants have learned to use Emojis more or less daily for different purposes, however, some of them identified that they were significantly more frugal with Emojis than the others. What is more, a few of the participants from all three groups claimed that on those rare occasions when they, in recent years, did not have access to Emojis they felt limited in their expression.

Findings

The findings of the research were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a useful method in qualitative research used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) found in the data. Therefore, this section conducted a qualitative, thematic analysis of the questionnaire data on emoji usage in digital communication to discover recurring themes. The qualitative data from the interviewed questions offer

extensive insights into how the respondents perceive and experience the utilization of emojis in formal communication contexts. There are three steps of thematic analysis:
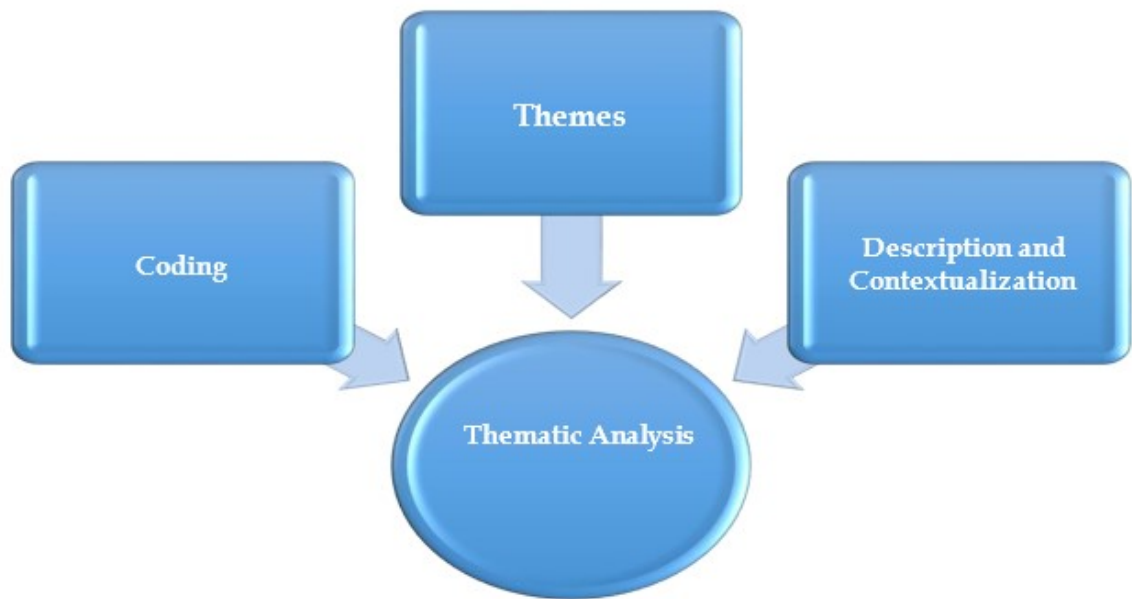

Figure 4 Thematic Analysis

Firstly, coding is the process of breaking down the text, by dividing text up into short meaningful chunks and creating a label to go with each one, typically 1 to 3 words, which represents that chunk.

Table 1
Sample Data Coding

Response Excerpt	Code
"I use smileys to lighten the tone..."	Tone Softening
"Emojis can be misinterpreted..."	Misinterpretation Risk
"In formal emails, I avoid emojis..."	Formality Adherence
"Different generations view emojis differently"	Generational Differences

Secondly, for the initial codes that were developed, there were broad themes developed. The developed themes would begin to provide larger patterns and reflect more depth of the respondent's experiences and perceptions.

Table 2
Theme Development

Tone Softening	Emoji as Tone Modifiers
Misinterpretation Risk	Communication Challenges
Formality Adherence	Contextual Emoji Usage
Generational Differences	Perceptions Across Age Groups

Thirdly, each theme in depth and included details from the participants' responses. This description includes how the theme presents itself in the data and its relevance to the research questions.

Table 3
Theme Description and Contextualization

Theme	Description and Contextualization
Emoji as Tone	Many respondents indicated using emojis to modify the tone of their messages,

Modifiers	suggesting a nuanced approach to digital communication. For instance, one respondent noted, "Using a smiley can make a request seem friendlier."
Communication Challenges	A significant concern among respondents was the risk of emojis being misinterpreted, especially across cultural or generational divides. "Older colleagues often misunderstand Emojis that are commonplace for me," shared the participant.
Contextual Emoji Usage	There was a prevalent theme of adapting emoji usage to fit the formality of the communication context. Responses indicated careful consideration of when using emojis is appropriate, particularly in professional settings.
Perceptions Across Age Groups	Responses highlighted that different age groups have varying perceptions and uses of emojis. The younger demographic tended to view emojis as an integral part of communication, while older respondents were more cautious in their usage.

Conclusion

- In formal settings, several Emojis can cause chaos in communication because they can misinterpret the actual meaning of the conversation.
- Emojis can improve communication among people from comparable cultural backgrounds, but individuals who don't utilize them may still transmit the same information, emotion, and intent.
- Emojis are an effective method to communicate. Emojis are an excellent tool for better expression in today's fast-paced world and dynamic technologies.
- Emojis may be adequate for social media communication in certain cases. Nevertheless, there are exceptions to this rule.
- Emojis are an essential aspect of today's communication. Emojis have permeated our culture.
- Emojis can be used by participants to communicate when words are limited.

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