Emoticons as the 21ˢᵗ Century Lingua Franca

Abstract:

Imagining a world without the ability to communicate has never been possible as of yet, which makes communication one of the most important aspects of our lives. Later comes the debate of effectivity of speech and writing or communication through something beyond this binary, since communication does not necessarily involve just speech. Communication can be through writing, through gestures, through signs and symbols and through the deconstruction of each of them we find a language residing within them that helps us communicate. Although communication becomes a barrier when the speakers are not affluent in each other's language. Out of this necessity was born lingua franca. Lingua Franca is a common language or a middle ground formed out of necessity between speakers of different native languages who are incapable of communicating via each other's language. The evolution of Technology is probably the only thing that has taken refuge in all sectors. Language is no exceptions. Language is adaptive of technology. Emoticons or the emojis, which are primarily a set of combinations of symbols coming together to form a meaning and are the new generation language for communication via a text message is a combination of symbols and through a structuralist formation emoticon has developed into a lingua franca.

In this study I would like to explore the deconstructive method of unraveling the "core" elemental meaning of an emoticon in order to understand them as lingua franca and its establishment as a means of a communicating language.

Keywords:

Emoticon, communication, Technology, Literature

Communication requires a language for the purpose transfer of thought, a cognitive process of letting one or more individual know the insights of one's own mind. As rightly put by Noam Chomsky –

"*A language is not just words, it's a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is. It's all embodied in a language.*"

A language can develop itself only if it has access to free creation and intermingling of human experience. In spite of having a fixed set of laws and principles for the creation of a language, the interpretation of it must be free in form in order to generate a meaning. Communication being one of the most significant aspects of language it also cannot be denied that language is most purposeful also to give out information. (Ronat and Chomsky, 1979).

Evolution of Technology is the greatest and the most significant innovation taking place on a daily basis. Communication, modes of transforming information has also become adaptive to the technology in today's scenario where most of it takes place through digital methods, viz. Emails, texts messages etc. Noam Chomsky stated that as a child one possesses an innate capability to learn a language in his Model of Language Acquisition

which boils down to a rested conclusion that adapting a new language is a natural factor for any human being if it caters to their need. Therefore, if need be, we as human beings will suffice the idea of accepting a new language. In this case a language that aligns with our daily technology usage. In this elevated mode of communications "Emoticons" play a huge role. By definition Emoticons or the emojis are a representation of facial expression such as a smile or a frown, formed by various combination of keyboard characters used to convey the writer's feeling or their intended tone. It is almost unbelievable as well as undeniable how emoticons have taken up a massive part of our text messages in a time when text messages are the most used and most reliable way to communicate in the shortest time possible.

To understand how emoticons are the newest *lingua franca* of the present century, a brief description of the etymology of lingua franca is necessary as well as its development and necessity.

Lingua franca for an easier understanding has several names, it is called as a bridge language, a common language, trade language, auxiliary language or a link language. It is an adaptive language that is taken up and spoken by speakers having different tongue of native languages which makes communication between them an impossibility or a major barrier. In a multi-ethnic culture due to the existence of multilingualism there arises a need among speakers to use a common language for the purpose of social and inter-community communication. The term Lingua franca is derived from Latin that literally means "Frankish Language". For various reasons, groups of people speaking diverse languages are often thrown into social contact. When this occurs, a common language must be formed to suffice the means of communication. At times by a common agreement, a given language, not necessarily a native language of any of the participants is used. A language of this fashion is a Lingua Franca. (Kamadjeu, 2019). In the contemporary times English as a language presents the characteristics of being a Lingua Franca.

However, in order to fit the Emoticons into the map of lingua franca and establish itself as a language it must fit into the structures of a language. Therefore, in order to be a meaningful attribute of a language an emoticon must fulfill the criterion of being what Ferdinand De Sassure calls a "*sign*". The philosophy of Structuralism is such that it fits the world into structures. Made from the specific arrangements of units put together and is developed into structures. Structuralism is interested in the relationship between elements of a structure that results in meaning. Breaking the structure of a text, we end up with three different elements- The *signifier*, the *signified* and both of them together forming a *sign*, where the signifier is the word and signified is the meaning attached to it through repeated attribution and finally their arbitrary relationship forming a sign.

This compiled structure when applied for an emoticon, it can be seen that the symbols such as ":", "- ", ")" together signify a "smiling face". The symbols are put together in a certain form that satisfy our preconceived idea of a smiling face thus making a particular emoticon a sign as well representative of a language that generates a meaning.

According to Jacques Derrida "writing" is an extra addition to speech. Writing is subordinate in the hierarchy of speech/writing. This is termed as the logic of "*supplement*" by Derrida. The supplement is a difference. As Derrida proposes that the signs do not refer

to the things themselves and there is no connection between the thing and the word used to describe the thing, the relation established is arbitrary and through convention. Since signs are incomplete, supplement is necessary for the completion. He argues that the signifier is extra but also necessary for the completion. A sign is a substitute for the actual living presence of the speaker. A signifier is necessary to assume the presence of the signified which is not present. (Nayar, 2010)

"A sign is an indictive of an absent presence because it shows something that is not here but makes us alert to the fact that something is not here."

Therefore, the symbols that constitute into a sign and generating the meaning of a smiling face is the *presence* of the *Absent* smiling face of the speaker. The purpose of an Emoticon as a lingua franca is solved when the preconceived signified establishes the arbitrary relationship with the signifier or in this case the Emoticon.

Following all the criterion of structural linguistics and generating meaning through the methods of Deconstruction, an emoticon is a text that generates meaning and elevates the modes of digital communication. Born out of a necessity and following the parameters of a text that gives meaning while making a valid form of communication, an emoticon is a lingua franca of this century. The emoticons share a partial replication with the Egyptian Hieroglyphic system that were used in the ancient Egyptian writing system. The hieroglyphics use a combination of a specific number of characters according to their logographic, syllabic and alphabetic use which is to some extent has a resemblance with the emoticons that are a combination of keyboard characters used according to the need of a meaning that is to be generated. Like a language of an ancient civilization shows partial rekindling in this digital age it can thus be concluded that language and its generation is an open-ended code that keeps forming according to the need of humankind and its evolution.

Work Cited

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