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DECODING DIGITAL YOUTH: COMMUNICATION TRENDS IN THE INTERNET ERA

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The article focuses on increasing developments in the structure of the language of online communication. It is already common knowledge that online communication or otherwise, multimedia communication has set quite specific language rules, especially in the ways of encoding and, consequently, decoding messages. The so-called “new normal” has gradually crept into reality, even if virtual, unnoticed, and seems to have stayed. The “new normal” does not remain the same and changes with time and the new requirements of the users. The ever-growing striving of people to make things work faster has not left the sphere of human communication untouched, particularly, informal online communication. Thus, most of the changes in the means of encoding a message primarily aim at brevity and efficiency. It is noteworthy that changes are mainly implemented by young users of online space. It is usually they who set new trends in the ways and means of coding meaning in the text, often posing challenges and risks in balancing personal and professional boundaries.

Keywords: *encoding, decoding, communication process, emoji, emoticon, digital subculture.*

Introduction

The importance of human communication, as a process of understanding and sharing meaning, can never be overestimated. No development, advancement or change in the history of mankind could ever happen without communication, at the same time all development, advancement and change have modified in a certain way and to a certain extent communication itself, constantly adjusting it to the new reality and needs; society and communication have been growing symmetrically mutually affecting each other.

As we know, the general chronology of the development of communication culture encompasses the sequence of the following three forms: verbal (a form of communication culture in which all meanings are conveyed in time and social space orally), written (a cultural state in which most cultural meanings are transmitted via

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documented communication), multimedia (most meanings are conveyed via electronic communication). And it is the multimedia character of communication that differentiates and determines modern society at its current stage of development.

The form of communication under study being comparatively new is so comprehensive and far-reaching in its modes and means that still lacks precision in definition, hence, has various names: *electronic communication*, *online communication*, *multimedia communication*, *computer-mediated communication*, *digital communication*, *virtual communication*, etc. Like other forms of communication, digital communication, too, has quite regular components of the communication process: the sender, the encoding of the message, the message itself, the selection of the channel, receipt of the message and, correspondingly, its decoding.

The present study has been conducted by using one of the main methods of linguistic investigations, that is the method of observation and description, distinguishing certain linguistic phenomena and their consistent study from the perspective of their functioning. Everyday chat episodes of about 50 young users of digital space (both native and non-native speakers) have been considered.

Encoding meaning in a text

According to the theory of communication, one of the core elements in the process of communication is the encoding of the message, the way humans determine how the message must be received by the audience. In other words, it is the process of turning thoughts and feelings into communication. Interestingly, just less than half a century ago, encoding would have been described as the process of turning thoughts into words. However, recent technological advancements have significantly impacted the ways we turn thoughts into codes and transfer messages. Evidently, we can no longer limit the process to the choice of words alone.

The object of the investigation of the present article is the various ways of encoding a message used primarily by young people in informal online communication. Informal communication, like its formal counterpart, has always had the same goal: to exchange ideas, feelings, thoughts and information. In other words, to inform, instruct, control, motivate, etc. The present ways to code those ideas, feelings and emotions appear quite peculiar and quaint.

Not so long ago, users of online communication, both young and adult, had to address the challenges and concerns associated with youth encoding. One of the major difficulties was the encoding of non-verbal cues, such as facial expression, body language, and tone of voice, which, as we know, play an indispensable role in any type of human communication. Their unavailability in texting has made it specifically challenging to accurately interpret the intended meaning of the message which eventually made people learn and recognize multiple emojis in an attempt to make up for the lack of non-verbal cues in texts. Since then emojis have become a universal language that transcends linguistic barriers (Djentuh, 2023) However, originally meant

to be just positive additions to online communication, emojis have sometimes been misused in improper situations, by disguising the hurtful intent and contributing to online harassment and cyberbullying. With nearly the same frequency the misuse of emojis has been occurring due to the lack of awareness of their proper use especially in the interaction with the younger generation.

Emojis in texts

In the initial set of emojis there was an obvious lack of inclusivity to the extent that some people wondered about certain images being privileged over others. There were a growing number of emoji professionals, among them doctors, chefs, policemen, and they all appeared to be men and white (Pardes, 2018).

On the other hand, now that the Unicode Consortium welcomes design proposals for new emoji batches from anyone who can submit, the number of emojis is growing day by day.

While the initial number of emojis, one hundred seventy-six (176), designed by Shigetaka Kurita (Pardes 2018) was to a certain extent a manageable quantity to learn, the present-day three thousand two hundred (3200) emojis are merely impossible to encompass by those older than 35.

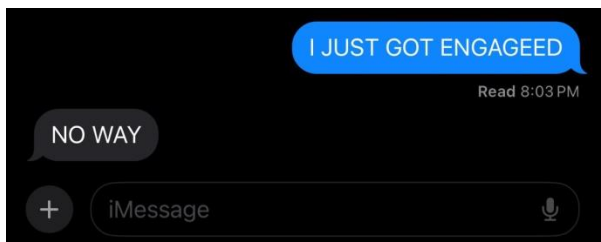
With the proliferation of digital communication, emojis at some point even gained the status of words, thus, in 2015, and for the first time ever, Oxford Dictionary deemed an emoji as “Word of the Year.” The “Face with Tears of Joy” emoji earned the title because it was the most frequently used emoji in the world. The dictionary noted, the word *emoji* saw a large increase in use that year (Anas, 2022).

Textual encoding strategies

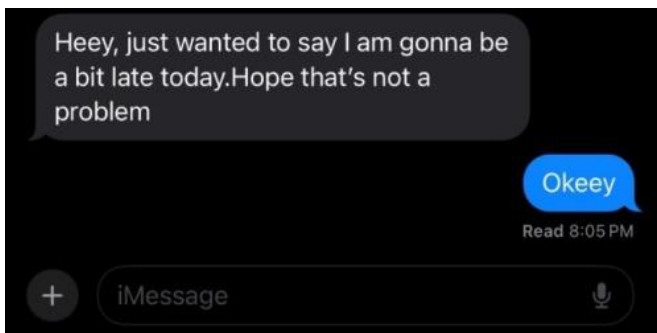
Gradually, means and modes of encoding a meaning in a text became more and more elaborate and sophisticated, influencing language evolution, cultural norms and even shaping digital subcultures. Not confining themselves to the use of emojis only to encode an idea or an emotion, young users of digital communication have gone even further, creating means of encoding meaning without emojis and employing various textual strategies:

Thus, for example:

1. Writing in all capital letters while texting might express a range of meanings: excitement, anger, shouting or saying something extremely important, for example, “YES”, “SHUT UP” are likely to be emphasized to convey strong agreement or a firm command. Sometimes, capitalizing words can mimic the way people speak. When someone emphasizes a word verbally, they might just stress it, and capitalizing it in a text can recreate the emphasis. The use of capitalization helps emphasize the intensity of the emotion.

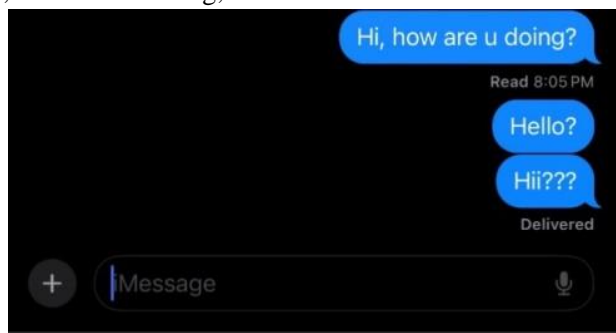


2. Elongating words by repeating letters may encode excitement and happiness, conveying enthusiasm or emphasis on a particular point. For example, “YESSS” with multiple “S” letters can express a stronger affirmation or excitement compared to simply “YES”. Elongating words can add a playful or expressive tone to the text. For example, “Hiii” with multiple “i” letters can convey a friendly or enthusiastic greeting. “Okeeeey” with extra “e” letters might express surprise, confusion, or a playful attitude, depending on the context.



3. In the same way, the repetition of punctuation marks can amplify the emotional impact of a message, allowing the sender to convey strong feelings more effectively. For example, “I’m so happy!!!” expresses greater joy than simply “I’m happy”, “Wow!!!” expresses greater excitement or astonishment compared to just “Wow!” The repetition of interrogative marks might indicate confusion or disbelief, while “!!!” might convey excitement or urgency.

In the example below, the repetition of the interrogative mark expresses confusion, anxiety, misunderstanding, etc.

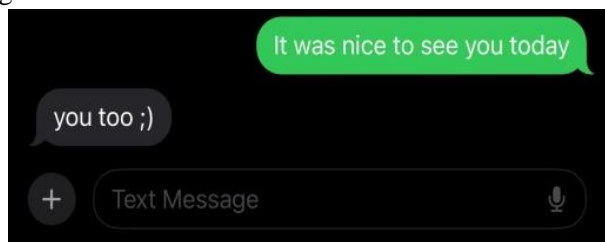


4. Ellipses (...) can create a sense of hesitation, anticipation or suspense, suggesting that there is more to come or that the sender is pausing the effect. For example, “Alright...” implies that there may be more to the conversation or that the speaker is hesitating before continuing. Ellipses might also contribute to a casual and conversational tone in text messages. On the other hand, they can also soften the potential impact of a statement, for example, “I gotta tell you something...” gives time to the receiver, thus preparing them for the impact. Generally, the pause created by the ellipses leaves room for various interpretations and adds depth to the emotional expression.



5. Emoticons (punctuation marks to depict facial expressions), originally created by typographers back in the 19th century to convey emotions, became popularized in the digital era. In 1982 a computer scientist suggested using :-)) and :-(in emails to distinguish between jokes and serious content (Sack, 2018). Over time new symbols and combinations were invented, which were later standardized by the Unicode Consortium, ensuring compatibility across different platforms.

Emoticons being different from emojis, are still utilized by users of online communication, both young and adult. These very simple, text-based representations of facial expressions (:-) or ;-)) or <3 serve as nonverbal cues, adding warmth, friendliness or humor to messages.



6. Abbreviations and acronyms have also undergone fascinating development from humble OMG and LOL to relatively recent BTW (by the way) and SMH (shaking my head), BRB (be right back). Some abbreviations can indicate belonging to a particular social group. Generally, abbreviations help users to communicate quickly which can be really helpful on some platforms such as Twitter, because of the limit of

the characters. Also, the choice of abbreviations may appear an attempt to avoid cumbersome typing on mobile phone devices. It is noteworthy that young users no longer use abbreviations with capital letters.



7. Full stops are no longer used in informal conversations as they are associated with the formal style of writing. Their omission makes the conversation casual and relaxed. However, it might be used for a specific purpose, to express passive aggression. We can see that in the example below:



8. There is another tendency among young users of online communication to skip the usual greeting sentences like “Hallo. How are you?”, because they may appear artificial and even funny.

These are just part of those peculiar means of encoding used by active users of informal online communication. It would be nearly impossible to foresee how emerging technologies, platforms, or societal changes might further impact the way young people might encode messages in the digital realm in future.

Conclusion

The evolution of encoding strategies in digital communication among the youth embodies a peculiar intersection of technology, language, and culture. As this article

explores, from the initial simplicity of emoticons to the complex patchwork of emojis, abbreviations, and textual modifications, young people have continuously adapted and reinvented the ways we communicate emotions, feelings, intentions, and overtones in the virtual realm. These innovations are not mere whims of a technologically savvy generation but reflect deeper shifts in societal communication norms, indicating a move towards more nuanced and efficient forms of expression. The future of encoding in multimedia communication, driven by the persistent development of technological innovation and the boundless creativity of its users, promises further transformation. Artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and emerging platforms are more likely to introduce new dimensions to digital encoding, offering even richer ways to convey meaning. As these technologies evolve, so will the language of online communication, blurring the lines between text, visual expression, and perhaps even thought.

In conclusion, the study of youth encoding in multimedia communication offers invaluable insights into the ever-evolving landscape of human communication. It serves as a reminder of the adaptive power of language and the enduring need to express ourselves fully and creatively. As we look forward, it is clear that the journey of encoding in digital communication is far from complete. It will continue to challenge, enrich, and finally redefine our understanding of what it means to connect with one another in a digital age.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflict of interests in this research.

Ethical standards

The author affirms this research does not involve human subjects.

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**ԹՎԱՅԻՆ ԴԱՐԱՇՐՋԱՆՈՒՄ ԵՐԻՏԱՍԱՐԴ ՕԳՏԱՏԵՐԵՐԻ
ՀԱՂՈՐԴԱԿՑՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԱՊԱՎՈՂԱՎՈՐՈՒՄԸ**

Կարինե Քոչունց

Արագության հասնելու անընդհատ ձգտումը անմասն չի թողել նաև հաղորդակցության ոլորտը, հատկապես զանազան սոցիալական հարթակներում իրականացվող ոչ պաշտոնական նամակագրությունը: Երիտասարդ

օգտատերերի շրջանում թվային հաղորդակցության մեջ կոդավորման ռազմավարության զարգացումը տեխնոլոգիայի, լեզվի և մշակույթի յուրօրինակ փոխհատում է: Երիտասարդ օգտատերերի մտքերի, զգացմունքների, հույզերի, մտադրությունների տեքստային և ոչ տեքստային կոդավորման միջոցների մեջ տեղի ունեցող փոփոխությունները հավելյալ դժվարություն են ստեղծում տարիքով ավելի մեծ օգտատերերի համար:

Հոդվածում ուսումնասիրվել են կոդավորման հետևյալ միջոցները՝ էմոջիներ, էմոտիկոններ, գլխատառերի կիրառություն, տառերի կրկնություն, հարցական և բացականչական նշանների կրկնություն, բազմակետեր, հապավումներ, վերջակետի բացթողում, ողջույնի խոսքի բացակայություն և այլն:

Բանալի բառեր՝ կոդավորում, ապակոդավորում, հաղորդակցության գործընթաց, էմոջի, էմոտիկոն, թվային ենթամշակույթ: