

## Book Review

*Emoji and social media paralinguage*, by **Michele Zappavigna and Lorenzo Logi**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2024, xiv+251 pp., \$ 34.99 (paperback), ISBN: 978-1-009-17980-5.

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Emojis, widely used in social media interactions and considered a crucial semiotic mode, have emerged as a focal point in digital communication, and there has been a proliferation of studies on emojis. *Emoji and Social Media Paralinguage* is another compelling addition to this body of work. Different from most of the previous studies on emojis, which mainly focus on emoji characteristics, meanings, functions, platform variations, and their universality and cultural specificity as well (e.g., Danesi 2017; Kiaer 2023; Leonardi 2022; Parkwell 2019; Siever 2020), this monograph offers a social semiotic model of emoji-language semiosis, presenting a thorough exploration of how emojis, in coordination with language, convey meaning in social media discourse. It consists of ten chapters.

Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive overview of emojis, outlining the book's objective, showcasing their semiotic flexibility and intricacy, identifying them as a form of paralinguage, examining their relationship with texts from a social semiotic perspective, elucidating the corpora used in emoji analysis, and laying out the structure of the book.

Chapter 2 delves into the technical dimensions of emoji as Unicode. It begins by explaining the uniqueness of emojis as paralinguage and their technological affordances. Subsequently, it explicates the inclusion of emojis in Unicode and the criteria used for their selection. It then probes into the technical intricacies of emoji encoding, elucidating key terms such as Unicode characters, emoji code points, modifiers, and sequences. Moreover, it presents how emojis are rendered as glyphs across diverse operating systems, devices, platforms, and software. It further illustrates how emojis are organized by developers as a designed character set and how the meaning-making of emojis is impacted by semiotic technologies such as devices and social media platforms. The chapter also expounds on the mechanism of emoji aesthetics. Finally, it provides a detailed illustration of how emoji corpus is constructed and annotated utilizing tools or software like the Python library, WebAnno, and Qualtrics. It also highlights the importance of communicative context for emoji

interpretation and demonstrates how the interview descriptions are used in the data annotation.

Chapter 3 establishes the framework for exploring the relationship between emojis and text in the current study. It begins with a detailed discussion of the discourse semantic system, drawing on the three metafunctions of language (i.e., ideational, interpersonal, and textual) and the three register variables (i.e., field, tenor, and mode) within Systemic Functional Linguistics. This discussion elaborates on the components of the discourse semantic system and illustrates how ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings can be achieved through semiotic resources, including emojis. It then delves explicitly into how emojis converge with meaning made in linguistic cotext and enact the tenor of a text. Additionally, the theoretical underpinning of meaning-making through intermodal convergence is explored, followed by a detailed elucidation of the principles used to determine emoji-language convergence: proximity, minimum mapping, and prosodic correspondence. Based on these discussions, the chapter subsequently introduces a system network of emoji-text convergence, encompassing ideational concurrence, interpersonal resonance, and textual synchrony, which serves as an analytical framework for investigating the semiotic convergence of emoji-language in social media posts.

Chapters 4–6 expound on the role of emojis in concert with language for realizing textual, ideational, and interpersonal meanings in social media posts based on the Hot Beverage Emoji Corpus. Chapter 4 depicts how emojis synchronize with language to realize textual meaning. It describes the system network for emoji-text synchronicity, encompassing “inset” and “punctuate.” The latter is further divided into “escort” (including “isolate” and “cluster”) and “partition” (including “interperse” and “bracket”). This chapter then thoroughly examines the roles played by emojis coordinating with their cotext to achieve coherent texts. Chapter 5 investigates how emojis concur with language to realize ideational meaning. It emphasizes the significance of considering emojis more than a catalog of types and presents a detailed analysis of the prevalent collocates of the Hot Beverage emojis. The chapter also outlines a system network for emoji-text concurrence, which includes “depict” and “embellish.” The former consists of “illustrate” and “integrate,” while the latter is realized by “metaphorise” and “emblematisé.” It then conducts a fine-grained analysis of the roles played by emojis in accordance with language in communicating ideational meaning. Furthermore, it examines the organization of emoji meme sequences in social media posts. Chapter 6 explores how emojis resonate with language to realize interpersonal meaning. It discusses the attitudinal polarity of emojis and presents the most frequent collocates of the Hot Beverage emojis potentially conveying interpersonal meaning. The chapter also delineates a system network for emoji-text resonance, consisting of “imbue” and “enmesh.” The latter encompasses “harmonise” (including “echo” and “coalesce”) and “rebound”

(including “complicate” and “multiply,” which is further realized by “subvert” and “position”). Within this system network, the chapter provides a detailed illustration of these various roles played by emojis coordinating with their linguistic cotext to achieve interpersonal meaning. Furthermore, it elaborates on how interpersonal meaning is intensified through up-scaling attitudes by emoji repetition and radiated through the iconization of emojis.

Chapters 7 and 8 extend from the discussion of the interpersonal meaning of emojis with the linguistic cotext to their roles in negotiating social bonds (i.e., “dialogic affiliation”) and communing around bonds (i.e., “communing affiliation”). Chapter 7 focuses on the utilization of emojis by social media users to foster “dialogic affiliation” within their interactions based on the Quarantine Hotel Food Review TikTok Corpus. It discusses the ideation-attitude couplings for negotiating social bonds through emoji and language in social media interactions and provides an overview of the frequent emojis in the corpus. This chapter then introduces a framework of strategies for achieving dialogic affiliation, which includes “table” and “respond” that is realized by “manage” and “ignore.” The strategy of “manage” is subcategorized into “support” and “reject.” The former encompasses “defer” and “warrant,” which is further divided into “rally” and “adjust,” while the latter encompasses “dismiss” and “oppose,” which is further realized by “censure” and “ridicule.” Within this framework, the chapter provides detailed instances of how emojis correspond with their linguistic cotext to rally around shared bonds between interactants, generate humor through invoking laughter, and navigate gendered bonds concerning appearance. Finally, the chapter discusses how emojis can be employed to reject bonds using the strategies of “dismiss,” “ridicule,” and “censure.” Chapter 8 examines the role of emojis along with their linguistic cotext in realizing “communing affiliation” based on the #Domicron Corpus. This chapter contextualizes the communicative setting in which communing affiliation is actualized, emphasizing that bonds are presented to an audience who may not necessarily respond directly. It also outlines the specifics of the #Domicron Corpus and presents the prevalent use of emojis within the dataset. Furthermore, the chapter introduces a comprehensive framework of strategies for achieving communing affiliation, which encompasses “convoke,” “finesse,” and “promote.” The “convoke” strategy is further categorized into “marshal” and “designate,” “finesse” is delineated into “distill” and “embellish,” which is realized by “buttress” and “spurn,” and “promote” is divided into “modulate” and “foster,” which includes “boost” and “enrich.” In terms of the framework, the chapter offers detailed illustrations of how emojis, in coordination with linguistic affiliation resources, bolster specific bonds through the “boosting” and “buttress” strategies, align around particular bonds through the “convoking” strategy, and direct attention to bonds critical of the COVID response through the “promoting” strategy.

Chapter 9 probes into the relationship between emojis and other visual semiotic resources in addition to their interaction with language in social media posts. The chapter begins by outlining the diverse visual semiotic resources in social media interactions, such as GIFs, images, memes, avatars, and stickers. It then focuses on graphicon, a term encompassing visual resources like GIFs and digital stickers. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the customization and personalization aspects of graphicon usage, the platform-specific features, and the functions they serve in digital communication. Additionally, it lays the theoretical groundwork for further exploration of the graphicon's roles in social media posts through the lens of Visual Grammar. Finally, the chapter conducts a detailed analysis of how GIFs and digital stickers, as representative graphicons, contribute to ideational and interpersonal meanings, and foreground bonds enacted in posts in conjunction with emojis and language, based on the greeting posts from the Hot Beverage Emoji Corpus.

Chapter 10 serves as a comprehensive summary of the study. It amalgamates the specific analytical frameworks outlined in Chapters 3–6 and succinctly outlines the framework for analyzing emoji-text convergence. The chapter distinguishes between two types of contexts for affiliation, namely interactive and broadcast, which are, respectively, pertinent to dialogic and communing affiliation. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of the mixed methods of corpus and discourse analysis employed in the study, as well as the social semiotic theoretical framework for analyzing emoji-text convergence. Moreover, the chapter elucidates, based on an excerpt of a Twitter employee's farewell message posts and a sequence of users' posts in a broader context of Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter, how textual, ideational, and interpersonal meanings are achieved through three forms of emoji-text convergence. It also demonstrates how communing affiliation is realized by emojis coordinating with language in the employee's posts and how dialogic affiliation is achieved through emojis in conjunction with language in users' posts. Additionally, it endeavors to reveal the ideological and cultural factors underlying the opposing bonds negotiated by interactants in the posts.

This monograph has numerous merits compared with the other studies on emojis within the larger context of semiotics and digital communication. In addition to a clear structure, which helps readers easily grasp the main ideas and understand the analytical framework, this monograph also makes the following contributions.

Firstly, it expands the scope of semiotic studies by succinctly examining emojis, a typical visual mode in digital communication. It no doubt enriches the studies on multimodal semiotics (Hawreliak 2019), digital semiotics (Bernsau 2024), and visual semiotics (Lagopoulos et al. 2024), which has been established as a critical research area in modern semiotics.

Secondly, this study constructs a comprehensive framework to analyze the emoji-text relations. Instead of focusing on emojis only, this monograph pays special

attention to the dynamic convergence of different semiotic modes in social media interactions. It highlights the three types of relations between emoji and text, which provides a beneficial analytical framework for further investigation into the coordination between linguistic and nonlinguistic resources in digital communication. The system networks of emoji-text synchronicity, concurrence, and resonance in Chapters 4–6 are undoubtedly of great significance to foster the studies on other semiotic resources. The effectiveness of the analytical framework for emoji-text relations has been further evidenced by the authors of this monograph (Zappavigna and Logi 2024). The intermodal relation between emojis and language can be “applied to relations between emoji and other nonlinguistic modes” (Zappavigna and Logi 2024, 18).

Thirdly, this monograph enhances the studies on “ambient affiliation,” which takes a new look at the negotiation of bonds in social media interactions (Zappavigna 2011, 2021, 2022; Zappavigna and Martin 2018). Compared with the previous studies on ambient affiliation, the system networks of dialogic and communing affiliation presented in Chapters 7 and 8 provide more details for the analytical framework of ambient affiliation, thus making it more systematic and practical.

Fourthly, the study demonstrates how the corpus approach can be effectively adopted to analyze emojis as visual resources. Using the corpus approach to visual resources is usually a significant challenge due to their technological affordances. However, this study considerably boosts the corpus application in investigating visual semiotic resources. In Chapter 1, four corpora used in the study are presented in detail, and in Chapter 2, the construction and annotation of emoji corpora are meticulously illustrated based on an in-depth discussion of their technical foundations. Chapters 5–8 provide the frequencies of emojis and their collocates based on the statistical analysis of the datasets. These shed new light on adopting the corpus approach to the exploration of visual characters and modalities in digital communication and social media interactions.

Finally, this study conducts interviews with the authors about the tenor, field, and mode of their texts to ensure the validity of data annotation. The combination of the researcher’s analysis and the user’s interview offers a more comprehensive interpretation of emojis, thus guaranteeing the reliability of the study. From an emic perspective, interview data could help decipher the meaning conveyed by linguistic and nonlinguistic modalities. It thus provides methodological implications for further studies on multimodal analysis, social semiotics, and digital communication.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. One limitation is that the interview data are mainly used in emoji annotation concerning their communicative contexts. If these data had also been employed in analyzing functions of emojis in specific posts where the meaning communicated by emojis is highly indeterminate, the interpretation of emoji use would have been more robust. Another limitation is

the neglect of inappropriate use of emojis. It is expected that due to users' limited knowledge of emojis or weak "emoji competence" (Danesi 2017, 35), they may heavily rely on certain emojis in their social media interactions, leading to the inappropriate use of these emojis. Consequently, it is hardly likely to guarantee that "the intended meaning will be grasped" (Siever 2020, 134), and the relevant analysis might be misleading. Additionally, in spite of the high flexibility of emojis and their constantly changing nature (Kiaer 2023), the meanings of some emojis tend to be conventionalized, which has not received enough attention in the book. For example, in Chinese WeChat communication, both 😊 and 😏 are emblems of a smile. However, the former indicates a sincere smile, while the latter indicates a false or skin-deep smile, conveying a negative meaning, especially for young people. The usage of the two emojis has been conventionalized to some extent, and without relevant knowledge, the inappropriate use of the two emojis would occur in interaction.

Overall, this monograph has considerably enhanced our understanding of how emojis contribute to meaning-making and bond-enacting in social media posts and has provided a practical analytical framework for further studies on varying social semiotic resources. It is essential reading for scholars and students interested in semiotics, multimodal analysis, and digital communication.

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## Bionote

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