

Emoji in WhatsApp Group Conversation: *Study on Barthes Theory of Semiotics*

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the use of emoji in WhatsApp group conversation to reveal the types and meaning of emojis used in the setting where members from groups communicate online. The participants were 21 students of English Applied Linguistics year 2019. The data were collected from since the WhatsApp group conversation made, surely since August 2019 to September 2021 of interaction in the WhatsApp group. The methodology of the research is qualitative descriptive using technical analysis of Roland Barthes semiology. The technique of collecting data is based on two resources. The primary data are collections of screenshot chat that contains of emojis in WhatsApp. The secondary data are references supporting the topic of the research. In validity technique, the primary data are collected based on the topic of the discussion. After that, the data are processed descriptively by explaining, and comparing the information gained from many resources. Then, the data are reduced and presented. The findings showed that all members of WhatsApp group used the following emojis, namely face with tears of joy, rolling on the floor laughing, loudly crying face, grinning face with smiling eyes, frowning face, thumbs up, folded hands, hugging face, smiling face smiling face with halo and woman facepalming, in the WhatsApp group communication. In terms of real meaning of emoji used by the sender is not entirely accurate with the context of the message, while the researcher could conclude that the meaning of the emoji is constantly shifting based on the real context or situation within the conversation at the group conversations. The findings contribute to research on the use of emojis relatively scarce in WhatsApp corpus. The findings also suggest how to communicate using emojis in forums with members from various group conversations.

Keywords: *Emoji, WhatsApp, Barthes theory of Semiotics.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Emoji is from the Japanese characters “e” (絵) means “picture” + “moji” (文字) means “character”. Emoji are the small pictographs that are commonly used in instant messages on social media, websites, and apps. They were first designed in Japan in the early 1990s (Burge 2019), and since Apple included them in their iOS devices in 2009, they have grown in popularity worldwide. The Unicode Consortium has currently standardized emoji, and they are now available in all major operating systems and social networks around the world. Alternatively, Crystal (2001) described that emoji is as the combination of keyboard characters conveyed along with a text message that expresses emotions of the writer. The existence of emoji use in communication is mainly due to the nature of language responsive to changes in social, culture, needs, and tools of communication. Danesi (2016) also mentioned that the use of emoji

enhances the efficacy of a conversation message and highlights the conversation's meaning.

In this day, emojis are available on all types of smartphones, allowing users to express themselves without having to send text messages. On smartphones people can find many social media applications especially applications for building communication with others. People who use social media are increasingly using emoji to communicate with one another through short messages. It refers to a change in the content of text message. When someone sends a short message, it is always accompanied by an emoji that represents the message. Users of instant messaging applications have become more interested in using emoji to send short messages since the introduction of emoji. They believe that inserting an emoji will make it easier to express an emotion or expression, but emoji also have a fun, cute and intriguing form.

Social media applications that have provided emojis are Twitter, Facebook Messenger, Blackberry

Messenger, and WhatsApp. Emoji is a type of chat feature that appears in instant messaging applications like WhatsApp as an icon or image that depicts emotions such as sadness, happiness, surprise, admiration, fear, and so on. WhatsApp is an instant messaging app that allows you to send text messages, record voice calls, make video calls, and view a map (helped by Google Maps). It is possible for an application to have all of the necessary communication functions. You can still connect with your friends even use different phone like an iPhone, Android, Nokia, or Blackberry (Jubilee Enterprise, 2012). WhatsApp application users are encouraged to increase their use of emojis and smileys because they go a long way to reveal what is unsaid by the speaker to the interactant (Adebola, 2017).

In this research, the researcher use Semiotics to reveal the meaning of emoji found in WhatsApp group conversations that used by English Applied Linguistics Students year 2019. Semiotics is a branch of linguistics that concern and learn about how meaning is created and communicated. Its origins can be found in the academic study of how signs and symbols (both visual and linguistic) create meaning. Chandlers (2014) defined semiotics is not only study about sciences but of anything with stand for somethings. Semiotics also was a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life. Signs can take from symbols, icons, images, objects, words, gestures, etc. While, Barthes (2012) states that semiotics is semiology, is a science or method analysis signs. It mean that semiotics is focused on giving meaning to sign rather than language, and is especially used in structural activity based on process.

This research use Barthes theory of semiotics that has developed the level of meaning, known as the order of signification, which consists of denotation and connotation.

Barthes (2012) explained that denotation is a signifier that explains how a signifier and a signified relate in reality, that is, about specific meaning in a sign that is called a signified picture (real). While connotation is a signifier that explains how the signifier and signified relate to inexplicit, indirect, and uncertain meaning, or it can be called meaning aspect one or some texts based on feeling in the scope of the speaker and listener. In denotation uses clear and objective language to give meaning. And connotation has subjective meaning that is related to someone's emotion.

The researchers will describe the meanings of emoji in WhatsApp group conversation used by English Applied Students year 2019. The meaning interpretations are based on semiotics theory of Barthes including sign, connotation, and denotation. Additionally, the researcher uses the all members interpreting the meaning of emoji.

Although the existence of emoji, especially study about semiotics of emoji is a popular phenomenon since 2016. There have been some research about this topic, one them which conducted by Talukdar (2021)

that aimed to highlight and present emoji used in social media from the perspective of semiotics by Pierce. His study found that emoji with their universal characteristics, help to connect people from various cultures and national languages through social media interactions. Peirce was a pioneer in institutionalizing non-linguistic signs, and emojis are one of the most effective non-linguistic signs for exchanging discourses. Despite minor variations across different social media platforms, its acceptability and universality propelled it forward as an artificial language of net speak of social media, at least until new technological developments emerge.

Another research concerned with the linguistic function of emoji in social media, this research used WhatsApp also as a corpus of the data. Arafah and Hasyim (2019) found that Emoji is a language (syntax, grammar, semantics, and pragmatics) that is used in social media communication. As a language, emoji is part of the sentence, punctuation, expression, expressing feelings and thoughts to the opponent talk. The language of emoji expression indicates that the emoji can represent thoughts and feelings rather than using verbal language. Thus, emoji is made up of two components: language and parole. The emoji language is the social institution of emoji (syntax, grammar, semantics, and pragmatics) in social media, and the individual is the parole act, an actualized manifestation of the emoji function.

Sampietro (2020) have done a research with a survey of students and faculty at a large Spanish university (63 percent female) on the use and interpretation of emoticons and emoji in Electronic-Mediated Communication. From the survey, the researcher found that the preference for emoji over emoticons. In addition, the responses revealed emerging norms for the use and functions of these pictographs in EMC: Emoji are regarded as more "expressive" than emoticons, and messages lacking these cues are regarded as "rude." In terms of emoji interpretation, the survey reveals that it heavily relies on pre-existing iconography, even though new visual conventions are emerging.

Based on previous research, the researcher concludes that many researchers have previously studied emoji, emoticons, linguistic function, and semiotic theories used to find the marks; however, in the current study, the researchers combined this concept and examined emoji. The research continued to use the instant messaging applications, WhatsApp, where we know the phenomenon of development at this day, and the researchers used semiotics in the use of emoji in social media, WhatsApp. The researcher applied Roland Barthes' (1964) semiotics theory, which states that denotation is a sign that refers to objects based on direct and definite truth shared by them. The researcher used this theory to analyse the meaning of emoji on WhatsApp group conversations used by English Applied Linguistics Students in 2019. Connotation, on the other hand, is a meaning that refers to an indirect

meaning or a meaning that is not in accordance with the contest. Emoji, like other symbols, have both direct and indirect meanings. It all depends on the context, how we use emoji in messages, and how we respond.

2. METHDOLOGY

This research paper has collected data from WhatsApp group conversations with the screenshot of conversations. The participants were all members of English Applied Linguistics Students year 2019 with numbers 21 participants. The types of emojis are categorized based on Emojipedia (2019) accessed on <https://emojipedia.org/whatsapp/>. The emojis analysed are those used in 2019- 2021 group interaction. All emojis during that period are counted whether their occurrence is standalone or after written words. Then, the meaning of emojis will be interpreted based on Semiotics theory of Barthes that included in denotation meaning and connotation meaning.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Emoji use in WhatsApp group conversation used by English Applied Linguistics Students year 2019

The analysis of WhatsApp group conversation in to August 2019 to September 2021 found that there are 544 emojis used by all members of the group. In this research, the ten most frequently of emoji found are: face with tears of joy 😂, rolling on the floor laughing 🤣, loudly crying face 😭, grinning face with smiling eyes 😄, frowning face ☹️ thumbs up 👍, folded hands 🙏, hugging face 🤗, smiling face with halo 🙌 and woman facepalming 🤦.

, loudly crying face 😭, grinning face with smiling eyes 😄, frowning face ☹️ thumbs up 👍, folded hands 🙏, hugging face 🤗, smiling face with halo 🙌 and woman facepalming 🤦.

3.2 Meaning of Emoji in WhatsApp group conversation used by English Applied Linguistics Students year 2019



Figure 1. The Screenshot picture of Data

From the screenshot picture above, it can be seen that the kinds of emoji used by the WhatsApp group participants were 🙏🤲🙌❤️. The transcript of conversation is:

Evi :Barokallohu pi umrik Nurul.
Semoga semua keinginan tercapai dan sukses selalu.
Amin.
Nurul : Makasih Kk

The translation of the conversation above is:

Evi : May Allah bless your life.
Hopefully your wishes can be achieved and success.
Amen.
Nurul : Thank you sis.

The findings of the interview between the sender and the respondent reveal that they interpreted the lexicon of emoji in both similar and different ways:



- 🙏 : for affection feeling and happy
- 🤲❤️ : wishes every dua are fulfilled
- 🙌 : for praying
- ❤️ : Thankfully

The sender uses emoji 🙏🤲🙌 it was interpreted that is show feeling happy and hopefully.

After the researcher interviewed Kak Evi, based on the context of the message and emoji which Kak Evi used in the sending the message, she said that she felt happy and hope all dua of her friend are fulfilled then Kak Nurul LTBI responded with the emoji ❤️, after the researcher interview Kak Nurul about emoji she said that thankfully for Kak Evi.

According to denotation meaning:

🤲 Smiling Face with Hearts, is a yellow face with smiling eyes, a closed smile, rosy cheeks, and several hearts floating around its head. This emoji used to express a range of happy, affectionate feelings, especially being in love. The number of hearts (three or more) varies by platform. 🙏 Folded Hands, is two hands placed firmly together, meaning *please* or *thank you* in Japanese culture. A common alternative use for this emoji is for prayer, using the same gesture as praying hands.

 Smiling Face with Halo, is a yellow face with smiling eyes, closed smile, and halo, usually blue, overhead. Often represents angels, prayers, and blessings. May also convey *angelic* behavior, e.g., doing good deeds.  Red Heart, is a classic red love heart emoji, used for expressions of love and romance. And the connotative meanings (meaning by suggest of mind), all of the emoji from the senders is how to say congratulation for her born day and the respondent give love for saying thank you.

In this discussion, the researcher only presents the analysis meaning of emoji with one data only, because the steps seemed same with another data. Although the interpretation each meaning is different from the context of conversation itself.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the types and meaning of emojis in WhatsApp group conversation used by English Applied Linguistics Students year 2019. This study found that the ten most frequently used emojis by them are; face with tears of joy, rolling on the floor laughing, loudly crying face, grinning face with smiling eyes, frowning face, thumbs up, folded hands, hugging face, smiling face smiling face with hallo and woman facepalming .

Based on the findings of the interview as well as the context of the message used by the researcher, it is possible to conclude that not all emoji used on a daily basis have the same meaning as the context of the message. Sometimes, the real meaning of the emoji used by the sender is not entirely accurate with the context of the message, while the researcher could conclude that the meaning of the emoji is constantly shifting based on the real context or situation within the conversation at the group chat, whether it is happy or sad.

However, the future research should include more participants, as having more participants and WhatsApp groups analyzed will help reveal the pattern, meaning and function of emoji usage. Comparing how participants in different groups use emojis can also shed light on what variables encourage more emoji use.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

EMOJI IN WHATSAPP GROU CONVERSATION: A STUDY ON BARTHES THEORY OF SEMIOTICS 'RAHMA YULIA SYAHFITRI'

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