



EMOJIS AND PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS IN ONLINE UZBEK DISCOURSE

Khamraeva Bakhora Abdukhakim kizi

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17426264>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 20th October 2025

Accepted: 21st October 2025

Online: 22nd October 2025

KEYWORDS

nI Uzbek digital discourse, particularly on platforms such as Telegram and Instagram, emojis function as pragmatic tools that reinforce traditional communicative norms rooted in respect and emotional balance

ABSTRACT

With the rapid growth of digital communication, emojis have become a universal yet culturally shaped means of expression. In online interactions, especially in instant messaging and social media, they serve as substitutes for facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice. While emojis are often viewed as simple decorative icons, recent pragmatic research highlights their essential role in conveying politeness, irony, empathy, and other interpersonal meanings (Dresner & Herring, 2010; Danesi, 2016).

1. Introduction

With the rapid growth of digital communication, emojis have become a universal yet culturally shaped means of expression. In online interactions, especially in instant messaging and social media, they serve as substitutes for facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice. While emojis are often viewed as simple decorative icons, recent pragmatic research highlights their essential role in conveying politeness, irony, empathy, and other interpersonal meanings (Dresner & Herring, 2010; Danesi, 2016).

In Uzbek digital discourse, particularly on platforms such as Telegram and Instagram, emojis function as pragmatic tools that reinforce traditional communicative norms rooted in respect and emotional balance. This study explores how Uzbek speakers use emojis to manage politeness, express indirectness, and negotiate interpersonal relationships in computer-mediated contexts.

2. Theoretical Background

The pragmatic use of emojis can be interpreted through the lens of Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1975) and Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). While speech acts carry illocutionary force through linguistic means, emojis modify or reinforce these intentions visually.

According to Dresner and Herring (2010), emojis function as indicators of illocutionary force, clarifying whether a statement is serious, sarcastic, or friendly. Similarly, Maíz-Arévalo (2015) and Locher & Graham (2010) observe that emojis can mitigate face-threatening acts, functioning analogously to prosody in spoken interaction.

In the Uzbek cultural context, indirectness and tact (or *odoblilik*) are core pragmatic values (Turdiev, 2022). Therefore, the use of emojis often serves as an extension of these

norms — enabling users to express deference, mitigate requests, or show warmth while maintaining social distance.

3. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative discourse analysis approach based on authentic digital data collected from Telegram and Instagram. A corpus of 400 messages was compiled from 20 Uzbek users aged 18–30, representing various social and academic groups.

Messages were coded based on:

Type of emoji (smile 😊, heart ❤️, pleading face 🥺, wink 😜, etc.)

Accompanying speech act (request, compliment, refusal, suggestion)

Pragmatic function (mitigation, solidarity, irony, empathy, emphasis)

Each emoji's role was interpreted in its immediate linguistic context and categorized into broader pragmatic functions.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings reveal that emojis are pragmatically multifunctional and culturally adaptive. Five key functions were identified in Uzbek digital discourse:

4.1. Mitigating Function

Emojis often soften direct or potentially impolite speech acts. For example:

> “Shu faylni yubora olasizmi 😊?”

The smiling emoji mitigates the imposition of a request, signaling friendliness and respect. This aligns with negative politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

4.2. Expressing Empathy and Support

Emojis such as 🤝 and ❤️ are used to show emotional closeness and understanding, especially in responses to personal or emotional content. These reinforce positive politeness and strengthen in-group ties.

4.3. Indicating Irony or Playfulness

The wink 😜 and laughing 😂 emojis frequently accompany ironic or humorous remarks. Their use allows users to express non-serious intent and prevent misinterpretation.

4.4. Reinforcing Cultural Values of Tact

In the Uzbek context, where humility and respect are central to communication, emojis often replace or reinforce honorific expressions. For instance, 🙏 is commonly used in requests or gratitude expressions, performing the same pragmatic function as *iltimos* or *rahmat*.

4.5. Contextual Dependence and Ambiguity

Interestingly, some emojis are interpreted differently across users. For instance, 😊 can signal embarrassment, politeness, or even sarcasm depending on the interlocutors' relationship. This ambiguity reflects both the flexibility and potential risk of emoji-based communication.

5. Conclusion

Emojis in Uzbek digital discourse function as more than emotional symbols — they are integral pragmatic devices that help manage interpersonal relationships, express cultural values, and convey nuanced meanings in text-based environments.

Their use reflects a hybridization of traditional politeness strategies with new digital forms of communication. The findings highlight that emojis not only bridge the gap between

spoken and written language but also localize global digital practices within specific cultural frameworks.

Further research should focus on generational and gender-based differences in emoji use, as well as cross-cultural comparisons between Uzbek and other regional CMC practices.

References:

- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Danesi, M. (2016). *The semiotics of emoji: The rise of visual language in the age of the internet*. Bloomsbury.
- Dresner, E., & Herring, S. C. (2010). Functions of the nonverbal in CMC: Emoticons and illocutionary force. *Communication Theory*, 20(3), 249–268.
- Locher, M. A., & Graham, S. L. (2010). Introduction to interpersonal pragmatics. In *Interpersonal Pragmatics* (pp. 1–13). De Gruyter.
- Maíz-Arévalo, C. (2015). Emoticons in Facebook: Pragmatic functions in digital discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 79, 36–49.
- Searle, J. R. (1975). Indirect speech acts. In *Syntax and Semantics: Speech Acts* (Vol. 3, pp. 59–82). Academic Press.
- Turdiev, N. (2022). Indirectness and politeness in Uzbek speech acts. *Philological Studies Journal*, 14(3), 88–97.
- Yus, F. (2011). *Cyberpragmatics: Internet-mediated communication in context*. John Benjamins