



Social Meaning

- Inferences about the speaker/sender drawn from language use in a particular context [11].
- Ex.: using *-in* in “Gone fishin”
 - **-in**: Southern → casual, unpretentious, easy-going, insincere, condescending [1-2].
 - **-ing**: Formal (also unmarked) [1-2, 12-13].
 - But the semantic meaning of “Gone fishin(g)” does not change [1-2].
- Similar to pragmatic inference → can be based on using one form *instead of* another [11].

Emoji

- **Why Emoji?**: The social meaning of emoji has been understudied in comparison to semantic meaning.
 - The social meaning of emoji can influence the understanding of semantic meaning.
- Emoji are rendered symbols (e.g., 😂) placed in a text-based message.
- Face emoji (the most common emoji) are used to express emotion and gesture lost from face-to-face conversation [3-8].
- Emoji have been theorized to also have a semantic meaning similar to expressives [8].
- Emoji are often perceived as conveying social information, such as personality, of the sender, providing a look at how semantic and social meaning can interact.

Examined Emoji

1. 😄, *Grinning Face with Smiling Eyes*, U+1F601
2. 😊, *Grinning Face*, U+1F600
3. 😊, *Slightly Smiling Face*, U+1F642

- The emoji to the left all share the same semantic meaning; they all can signal approval or happiness [8].
- Where they differ, however, is their intensity; 1 > 2 > 3 in intensity level [14].

Question: How does the social meaning of the smiley emoji map onto their conventional meaning as an expression of happiness?

Hypotheses

Hypothesis A: the social meanings of the emoji mirror the semantic intensity of the feeling of happiness.

Hypothesis B: the differences in social perception between these emoji extend beyond the semantic intensity cline, resulting in patterns of social perception that are qualitatively different from one another.

- Informal interviews support **Hypothesis B**
 - Using 😊 may even be seen as passive aggressive rather than happy;
 - This may stem from alternative-based pragmatic reasoning — because the sender is using a less intense emoji, there is an implication that they are not as happy as they could be, laying the groundwork for additional sociolinguistic inferences.

Proposed Methods

- **Format:** An online survey showing a series of text message threads
- **Task:** Participants will rate the sender along a series of relevant scales.
 - These evaluation scales will be chosen by informal interview, brainstorming, and norming surveys.
- **Measurement:** The evaluation of a sentence with vs. without an emoji will be compared to gauge the effect of a specific emoji on social perception.
- **Closing Task:** Participants will then be asked to provide information about their own emoji/text usage.

Implications

- This will extend our knowledge of social meaning beyond the verbal domain where it is typically studied [e.g., F] .
- This study will expand our understanding of emoji and their ability to convey social meaning.

References

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