

プロジェクト報告

Creating a Game Exploring Varied Emoji Understandings Among Asian and European Students¹⁾

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During this project, universities in Germany, Taiwan, and Japan jointly conducted research on communication using emojis. In the future, a cross-cultural pictogram card game will be developed based on these results. Local interview surveys were conducted with university students in Germany, Taiwan, and Japan regarding the differences in the use and interpretation of pictograms. The results were presented at the SIETR Europa Congress in May, 2022.

Overview of Emojis

Emojis were invented in Japan by Shigetaka Kurita (2017) of the Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation in 1998. The telecommunications company Softbank unified emojis so that people worldwide could use the same ones. Softbank was the first importer of the iPhone to Japan, and the original iPhone did not have an emoji function (Kurita, 2017). To meet customers' demands and to spread and increase the use of emojis worldwide, Softbank enabled the worldwide use of unified emojis.

Emojis enable senders to convey emotions and meanings more precisely, although it is difficult to convey a uniform concept of emojis across different countries and

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cultures. Because emojis were originally created in Japan, their original meanings are likely based on Japanese sensitivities. English is a low-context culture in which communication consists of verbal rather than nonverbal messages (Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967). In contrast, Japanese is a high-context culture, and messages are sent through nonverbal rather than verbal communication. Japanese people send messages using emojis (pictograms) to express such nonverbal messages.

Online communicators can express themselves effectively and build relationships or friendships using emoticons (Peña & Hancock, 2006), which strengthen receivers' positive emotions (Gacey & Richard, 2013). The emoji function of augmenting textual interactions, similar to nonverbal communication, helps to enhance communication (Derks et al., 2008; Rezabek & Cochenour, 1998).

Excessive use of emojis can be non-sensical (Yoo, 2007). Studies show that people most dislike a sender when an email includes four emoticons and most like a sender who uses two emoticons. In addition, some emojis are interpreted differently in Japanese and English (Naito & Yabuki, 2020). Emojis can also reinforce stereotypes. For example, Apple's emoji keyboard associates "Africa" with the hut emoji and "Chinese take-out" with the dog emoji (Deck, 2021).

Collaborative Online International Learning Project

The virtual cultural exchange project includes pre-, in-, and post-Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) projects involving German, Taiwanese, and Japanese university students. This project took place in the fall 2021 semester. Before the COIL, each team introduced itself to Padlets with information about their culture, country and city, university, and the COVID-19 situation. In the COIL, all the students asked questions about the other Padlets and answered pre-survey items. During the online meetings, students were divided into small mixed groups with students from all three countries in which they presented their assignments. During the assignments, culture-specific emojis and stickers were introduced. The second COIL meeting involved a presentation and illustration of a frequently used emoji or sticker that was not common in the other two countries. Each group presented and discussed the assignments online. Post-COIL, students from each country were debriefed and answered post-survey items.

Finding Cultural Differences in Emojis

After comparing the three countries, results (Figure 1) show three types of emojis. First are common emojis, which have the same meanings among the three countries. One such example is the silence emoji. Second, there are emojis whose meanings are used differently. For example, the Japanese Dogeza emoji in Japan and Taiwan refers to an apology, but it means “exhausted” in Germany. The last type is culturally unique emojis that people from other countries could understand after the project. For example, 484 in Taiwan means “isn’t it?” because the Chinese pronunciation of the number is similar to the pronunciation of “isn’t it?” This term is used to mean, “didn’t I say so?” or “I told you so.” The students were fascinated with learning about the emojis and stickers.

Figure 1

List of Emoji Meanings

Emoji	Japan	Taiwan	Germany
	Silence	Silence	Silence
	Apology	Apology	Exhausted.
	?	Is it? Isn't it?	?

Summary of the Project

The process of creating an emoji-based flashcard pictogram game for Asian and European countries included the following characteristics. In the COIL project interactions, students often used emojis to interact with each other on social networking sites. The participants found it interesting and entertaining to learn about pictograms from different cultures that could have practical applications, and they found them useful in practice. Future work involves creating flashcards of pictograms that can be used for “breaking the ice” in cross-cultural communication. These can also be used by a wide range of people from children to adults.

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