



Instructions for Teachers: Exploring Multimodality through Emojis in Digital Communication

This series of three interconnected lessons explores the concept of multimodality in digital communication, with a focus on the role of emojis. The lessons are structured to help students understand and analyse how different modes, particularly text and emojis, work together to convey meaning, emotion, and tone in digital platforms.

The lesson plans are designed to be used sequentially, with Lesson 1 introducing multimodality and the role of emojis in communication. Lessons 2 and 3 build on the foundation of Lesson 1, delving into the nuanced aspects of meaning-making and emotional expression through emojis. While following the sequence is ideal, Lessons 2 and 3 can also be taught independently after completing Lesson 1.

Each lesson plan includes engaging activities, examples, and discussions, complemented by PowerPoint slides that provide visual support. These slides share the same titles as the teaching activities and are designed to enrich the learning experience. Educators are encouraged to adapt the materials to suit their teaching style and classroom needs.

Key Objectives:

Lesson 1: The Importance of Emojis in Multimodal Digital Communication

Introduces the concept of multimodality, highlighting how emojis complement text to simulate emotional and tonal cues in digital communication.

Lesson 2: Inferring Meaning Through Emojis: Exploring Implicit Meaning in Multimodal Digital Communication

Focuses on how emojis act as contextual cues, aiding students in interpreting implied meanings that go beyond the literal text.

Lesson 3: The Affective Role of Emojis in Multimodal Communication

Explores emojis' emotional and disambiguating role, helping students understand their impact on the tone and clarity of digital messages.

Linguistic Framework: Understanding Multimodality from a Linguistic Perspective

To provide a foundation for these lesson plans, it is important to consider the linguistic concepts underlying multimodality and how they inform the teaching approach. From a linguistic perspective, multimodality refers to the use of multiple semiotic modes—such as text, visuals, gestures, and sounds—to create and interpret meaning. In digital communication, text and emojis are two key modes that work together to convey messages in a way that mimics face-to-face interactions.

For linguists, multimodality highlights how meaning is constructed and negotiated across different channels. Emojis, in particular, act as a visual and emotional extension of written text, offering cues that guide interpretation and enhance understanding. By increasing students' awareness of multimodality, educators can help them become more conscious of how communication operates across different channels, fostering a deeper appreciation for the complexities of meaning-making.

This framework encourages students to think critically about digital communication, examining how emojis contribute to implicit meaning, affect, and the overall interpretation of messages. It also emphasizes the importance of context in understanding multimodal messages, as the meaning of emojis often depends on the accompanying text and the social or cultural background of the communicators.



Through these lessons, students will develop digital literacy and become more adept at recognizing and interpreting the interplay between different modes of communication.

Lesson plan **The Importance of Emojis in multimodal digital communication – unit 1**

Hook activity:

Ask students to review their last online communication that involves at least one emoji (e.g., WhatsApp) and identify its components, such as text and emojis. Explain that this is an example of multimodal communication, combining different modes to achieve meaning. Highlight that while face-to-face communication relies on facial expressions and gestures, digital communication uses emojis to simulate these cues, helping convey emotions and clarify meaning. Ask the question: "How do you make people understand your emotions or tone when they can't see your face?" to prompt reflection on the role of emojis in digital interaction.

Refer to PPT activities unit 1 slides 1 - 3

Comprehension:

Show students an example of the same comment or a text message, once with and once without emojis.

Ask how the emoji impacts the meaning of each example.

Explain how different digital platforms use multimodal communication by combining text and emojis to enhance meaning and add tone and emotion to the digital text.

Refer to PPT activities unit 1 slides 4 + 5

Meaning in context:

Show students different examples of emojis (out of context) and then the same emojis in a message where they have a different meaning.

For example:

👤 (Skull)

- Referential meaning: "The science museum had a real 👤 on display!"
- Implicit meaning: "That video was so funny, I'm literally 👤!" (dying of laughter)

Explain that the meaning of emojis is context-related and that there is a difference between what is said and what is communicated.

Refer to PPT activities unit 1 slide 6

Hands-on activity:

Ask students to work in pairs to write a short message on a digital platform (Instagram/WhatsApp) using text + emoji (multimodal). After 2 minutes, students swap their message with their partner and paraphrase the emoji with its meaning using text only (monomodal).

Discussion:

Recapitulate that most digital communication is multimodal, where more than one mode is used, like in the case of text + emoji. Emojis are useful because they facilitate the comprehension process. However, their meaning is not fixed but derived using contextual cues.

Ask students to explain the difference between the multimodal and monomodal versions.

Refer to PPT activities unit 1, slide 7



Lesson plan **Inferring Meaning Through Emojis: Exploring Implicit Meaning in Multimodal Digital Communication - unit 2**

Hook activity:

Present the students with the example on the slide, then ask them to paraphrase the meaning conveyed:¹

- (7) A: How are the exams going? 😞😞
B: Ufff... Really well!!! 😂
- (8) A: Feel like starting [the new academic year]?
B: Yes, a little, to be honest
A: Me too, but only for the gossip 😂

Ask them if the meaning of the utterance is the same if we omitted the Emojis.

Refer to ppt activities unit 2 slides 1-3

Comprehension:

Show students a message or refer to the example provide by emphasising the role of emojis as a contextual cue in multimodal communication to infer implicit meaning.

Explain that meaning is often inferred, requiring them to use contextual cues (like emojis) and prior knowledge, to interpret what is implicit beyond the text.

Refer to PPT activities unit 2 slides 4 - 6

Hands-on-activity:

Divide students into pairs, then ask them to write a short message without emojis and exchange it with a partner. The partner will add emojis to modify, clarify, or add a layer of meaning. Then, discuss how the emojis changed the message's interpretation.

Ask students to analyse how emojis add meaning to ambiguous messages, identifying what is said (literal meaning) from what is implicitly communicated (inferred).

Discussion:

Discuss how emojis are a part of multimodal communication, combining text and visual information to convey meaning. They help derive implicit meaning by adding context, tone, or emotions, making it easier to understand what is to be inferred beyond the words.

Refer to PPT activities unit 2 slide 7

¹ Yus, Francisco. 2019. "Emoji: A Full Cyberpragmatic Approach." Paper presented at the 16th China Pragmatics Conference, Nanchang, China.



Lesson Plan **The Affective Role of Emojis in Multimodal Communication_Unit 3**

Hook activity

Ask students whether they have ever misunderstood the emotion conveyed by a text message or a comment on Instagram because of the absence of emojis.

Comprehension

Introduce the notion of affective content in face-to-face interaction using the definition.

Use the prototypical facial expressions to explore how the same sentence acquires a different affective emotion with different facial expressions. Discuss how the implicit meaning of the sentence is modified.

Explain how Instagram posts use multimodal communication by combining text and emojis to clarify the intended meaning and emotions in the same way.²

Refer to PPT activities unit 3 Slide 1-3

Gestural vs. Digital emotions

Introduce how emojis disambiguate the intended meaning by clarifying or reinforcing the emotion associated with a comment.

Show students sentences with and without emojis. Ask them to comment on the affective content added to the meaning.

Discuss how facial expressions and emojis compare as cues to derive the speaker's emotion. Evaluate the affective range covered by both. Which is richer? Why?³

See PPT activities unit 3 Slide 4

Hands-on activity

Divide students into pairs or small groups and distribute a list of Instagram comments and a set of emojis (see Worksheet).

Ask them to select and stick emojis (alternatively to identify which emoji in the list should appear where in the comment and to report their choices using letters) to clarify the emotional content of each comment.

After 5 minutes, they exchange their work with another pair or group, who then paraphrase the emotion conveyed by the emojis using appropriate adjectives.⁴

² Refer to lesson plan 2 for intended meaning

³ The chapter on **Emoji Pragmatics** in Marcel Danesi's *The Semiotics of Emoji* (2017, London: Bloomsbury Academic) is useful for discussing the connection between emojis and feelings or emotions.

⁴ Examples from Merten, Marie-Luis. 2022. "Ritualisierte Anschlusskommunikation auf Instagram." *Deutsche Sprache* November. <https://doi.org/10.37307/j.1868-775X.2022.04.03>.



Worksheet: refer to worksheet [Multi_unit3_WorksheetAct_Word](#)

Discussion

Ask students if they noticed any difference in the meaning of the comment when the other person/group used different emojis for the same comment.

Worksheet: refer to worksheet under [Multi_unit3_WorksheetAct_Word](#)