

THE EMOJI IS THE BIRTH OF A NEW TYPE OF LANGUAGE (NO JOKE)

Tyler Schnoebelen has discovered something curious about why people use the skull emoji. Schnoebelen is a linguist and the chief analyst for Idibon, a firm that interprets linguistic data. Recently he got interested in emoji. He analyzed a million social media posts containing those familiar little pictograms and found that when people talk about their phone, they're 11 times more likely to use the skull. Weird, right? But to Schnoebelen, it makes sense. Our phones, he points out, are social lifelines, and when they malfunction—a weak signal, short battery life—we're upset. "When you don't have access to your phone, or when nobody's texting you, you're socially dead," he says. So we reach for a metaphorical emoji: the skull.

Fully 92 percent of all people online use emoji now, and one-third of them do so daily. On Instagram, nearly half of the posts contain emoji, a trend that began in 2011 when Apple's iOS added an emoji keyboard. Rates increased when Android did the same two years later. Emoji are so popular they're killing off **netspeak**. The more we use emoji, the less we use LOL and OMG.

In essence, we're watching the birth of a new type of language. Emoji assist in a peculiarly modern task: conveying emotions in short, online texts. "They're trying to solve one of the big problems of writing online, which is that you have the words but you don't have the tone of voice," as Gretchen McCulloch, a linguist, says.

Purists are not so convinced. What have we become, children with **crayons**? Surely words alone can convey emotional tone. Maybe—if you're a novelist with years of experience. But most of us write speedily and conversationally on Instagram or WhatsApp. Of the 20 most frequently used emoji, nearly all are hearts, smilies, or hand gestures—the ones that express feelings. In an age of rapid chatter, emoji aid communication by adding an emotional meaning to the message.

We also use emoji to express a sort of ambient presence, when words alone aren't enough. Ryan Kelly, a computer scientist at the University of Bath, has found that texters often exchange a few emoji as nonverbal conclusion to a conversation. "You might not have anything else left to say," Kelly says, "but you want the person to know that you're thinking of them." So you send a couple of pandas. Or telescopes! Or some other symbol that seems **witty**. This is another aspect of emoji—many are open-ended. In fact, it is known that friends use that flexibility to assign their own private meanings to specific emoji. (My wife and I use the Easter Island head to connote absurdity.)

People are even developing syntax and rules of use for emoji. Schnoebelen found that when face emoji are used, they tend to occur before other objects. If you text about a late flight, you'll put an unhappy face followed by a plane, not the reverse. In linguistic terms, this is called conveying "**stance**." Just as with face-to-face talk, our expression illustrates our stance before we've spoken a word.

Social pessimists can stop worrying; no linguist thinks that this means the end of writing. Natural language is our most powerful communication tool. For most people, these ideograms represent an upgrade. Language always changes: slang is born, develops and becomes obsolete, for example. But it's exceedingly rare—maybe unprecedented—for languages with phonetic alphabets to suddenly acquire a big expansion pack of ideograms. In an age when we write more than ever, emoji are the new language of the heart.

Text adapted from an article by
Clive THOMPSON. *Wired* [online] (April 19, 2016)

netspeak: llenguatge del ciberespai / lenguaje del ciberespacio

crayon: llapis de cera / lápiz de cera

witty: enginyós / ingenioso

stance: actitud

Part 1: Reading comprehension

Choose the best answer according to the text. Only ONE answer is correct.

[3 points: 0.375 points for each correct answer. Wrong answers will be penalized by deducting 0.125 points. There is no penalty for unanswered questions.]

1. Many people use the skull emoji when talking about their phone
 - ☐ to tell friends that they don't feel well.
 - ☐ to explain that it is not working well.
 - ☐ to complain that nobody's sending them text messages.
 - ☐ because they like using metaphorical language.
2. Which of the following sentences is NOT true?
 - ☐ Instagram incorporated emoji in 2011.
 - ☐ Emoji usage increased after Android included them.
 - ☐ Since we have emoji, we use netspeak less.
 - ☐ Emoji in Instagram posts are very frequent.
3. The author believes that we are watching the birth of a new type of language because
 - ☐ writing online presents big problems.
 - ☐ emoji replace voice messages.
 - ☐ emoji have stable meanings.
 - ☐ emoji help us transmit our feelings in writing.
4. Emoji have become so popular so quickly because
 - ☐ people no longer know how to spell.
 - ☐ we want to convey emotional tone.
 - ☐ alphabet keyboards are difficult to use online.
 - ☐ we need new words to express our feelings.
5. According to the author, smiley, hand and heart emoji
 - ☐ seldom occur in online messages.
 - ☐ are the only way to communicate our feelings online.
 - ☐ have become effective tools of communication.
 - ☐ often result in miscommunication.
6. Many emoji are open-ended. This means that
 - ☐ different people may assign them different meanings.
 - ☐ they are sometimes used to end a conversation.
 - ☐ you can use them when you don't know what to say.
 - ☐ some people use them to express absurd things.
7. We tend to put an emoji face before an object because
 - ☐ it's impossible to convey stance in a message.
 - ☐ we don't need to speak words in an online conversation.
 - ☐ when we speak, we see the person's facial expression first.
 - ☐ that's what the new syntax rule for emoji use tells us to do.
8. According to the writer,
 - ☐ we write so much today because language always changes.
 - ☐ emoji do not represent a threat to writing.
 - ☐ emoji are a form of slang.
 - ☐ emoji communicate more powerfully than text.

Espai per al corrector/a

Correcta Incorrecta No contestada

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Part 2: Writing

Choose ONE topic. Your answer should be 125-150 words in length. There is no specific penalty for exceeding 150 words in length. Extra points are not given for exceeding 150 words. [4 points]

1. "Emoji is the new language of the heart." Do you agree with the author's statement? Write an opinion essay.

2. Although friendships can last a lifetime, it is also true that sometimes our relationship with a friend or someone in our family can take a turn for the worse. Write a narrative essay explaining what led to the breakup of a friendship.

Correctes Incorrectes No contestades

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Recompte de les respostes

Nota de comprensió escrita



SÈRIE 1

Reading Comprehension

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 - ☐ **to explain that it is not working well.**
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 - ☐ because they like using metaphorical language.
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 - ☐ **emoji do not represent a threat to writing.**
 - ☐ emoji are a form of slang.
 - ☐ emoji communicate more powerfully than text.