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Book Review of:

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Francisco Yus, professor at the University of Alicante, Spain, is one of the founders of cyberpragmatics (Yus 2010, 2011) and a leading scholar in media pragmatics (Yus 2017a). His constant research interests revolve around the Theory of Relevance (Sperber, Wilson 1995, and subsequent studies), which he applied to various conversational phenomena such as irony and humour (Yus 2023, 2024), multimodality (Yus 2018), misunderstandings (Yus 1999), and to various online discourse (sub)genres generated in chat rooms (Yus 2005), on Facebook (Yus 2014a), WhatsApp (Yus 2017b), and smartphones (Yus 2021), among others. In his recent book, the author puts at work his extensive readings, intuitions, expertise, and creative interpretations, his keen sense of observation and analytic skills to provide the reader with a deep understanding of the functioning of emojis in cyberspace.

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Emoji pragmatics does not introduce a new topic in Internet linguistics, but the approach it proposes yields outstanding results. This is the first book which addresses the functioning of emojis in a pragma-cognitive perspective. Although various aspects of emoji usage have previously been explored by scholars – including the author himself (Yus 2014b) –, the present volume takes a step forward: it offers a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon by integrating the theoretical approach with consistent interpretations within the framework of Relevance Theory and with earlier empirical findings. At the same time, the author contrasts online and offline verbal interactions with visual modes of communication. The in-depth analyses move beyond the semiotic aspects of emojis and their visual dimensions examined so far, focusing instead on their intricate relationships to the text, context, inferential processes, and interpretative mechanisms that link explicatures to implicatures; they highlight the connections between the default referents of emojis, their context-sensitive meanings and non-propositional effects, such as humour, irony, emotional states, pictograms, and ideograms; they explore the transition from static interpretations to dynamic meaning-making as shaped by demographic factors, technical interfaces, communicative situations and scenarios. The argument progresses coherently: each concept is briefly defined and explained, illustrated with examples from oral interactions, subsequently transposed to visual communication – particularly emojis; differences are carefully delineated, the terminology is adjusted, and the innovative interpretations are discussed in the context of earlier studies. Last but not least, the volume maintains an effective balance between academic rigor and broad accessibility for professionals across various disciplines in humanities.

The book includes an Introduction, two main parts comprising eight chapters in total, a chapter of concluding remarks, and a combined index of authors and key concepts. While the first part is mostly theoretical in nature and aims to outline the principles underlying emoji usage, the second part is primarily concerned with the variables that influence emoji use as found in previous corpus-based analyses.

Chapter 1, the *Introduction* (pp. 1-11), provides an overview of the volume, sketches a brief history of emojis, introduces the author's proposed interpretations, and presents the research questions that guide the subsequent

chapters. The author also describes the corpus under analysis: 971,000 words of WhatsApp conversations among male and female Spanish users aged 40 to 60, collected between 2017 and 2023, supplemented with plausible, constructed conversations where necessary to support the analysis or to illustrate specific points.

Chapter 2 (pp. 15-48) opens Part One of the book by briefly presenting the theoretical background: the research scope of pragmatics, the cognitive Theory of Relevance, the aims of cyberpragmatics. The author deliberately selects only those tenets that he applies to the theory of emojis, which he develops progressively throughout the chapter. Given the asymmetry between coded meaning and intended meaning, the contextual information available to interlocutors is essential for the (mis)understanding of messages. The author thoroughly explains the processes that link explicatures with implicatures adapting them to the specific case of emojis: context accessibility guides the interpretation of *visual explicatures*, while salient contextual assumptions and cues prompt the derivation of intended *visual implicatures*. Yus revisits the foundations of Relevance Theory: positive cognitive effects, ostensive behaviour, the cognitive and the communicative principle of relevance, the showing – meaning continuum, underdeterminacy, the relevance-driven comprehension heuristics, ad hoc concepts, mutual parallel adjustment, and higher-level explicatures. In this framework, the author explains (a) how users convey more than an emoji's default visual referent, and to what extent addressees interpret this emoji (non)literally; (b) why addressee users interpret an emoji in one way rather than another; and (c) how users manage contextual information when they interpret emojis in everyday virtual interactions (p. 22). These explanations are further developed by examining how features of internet-mediated communication impact visual expression broadly, with particular emphasis on emojis.

Chapter 3 (pp. 49-126) discusses the functions of emojis, based on users' observations and existing categorizations proposed by scholars. Hence, the discussion begins with three major functions as a starting point: (i) the disambiguation function, (ii) the emotion adding function, and (iii) the nonverbal cue function. Building on these insights, Yus introduces a novel perspective by proposing a threefold classification: *emoji within (the text)*, *emoji without (the text)*, and *emoji beyond (the text)*.

Emojis *within the text* interact with the verbal content by clarifying, qualifying, or altering its meaning; emojis *without the text* refer to 'naked' occurrences that operate independently to convey information; emojis *beyond the text* target the communicative act as a whole, regulating interaction or shaping politeness, among other functions. The fine-grained analysis is supported by numerous examples, featuring a wide array of emojis across diverse contexts of use.

In Chapter 4 (pp. 126-171) the author compares the pragmatics of verbal content with that of emojis. In verbal communication, interlocutors exchange information explicitly or implicitly by enriching the propositional content and they apply heuristic processes to connect implicated premises to relevant pragmatic effects. Yus argues that *visual explicatures* and *visual implicatures* rely on the same mechanisms to convey meaning and he provides evidence to support his hypothesis. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the significant differences between language and emojis, while also highlighting similarities. Numerous case studies included in the chapter support the author's position.

Chapter 5 (pp. 173-280) begins with a summary of the previous one: words and emojis entail different coding systems; both the literal meanings of coded utterances and emoji referents often underdetermine their intended and inferred interpretation; many emoji functions have similar counterparts in everyday face-to-face interactions; although emojis exhibit some language-like properties, they do not have the complex grammar of language. On the showing – meaning continuum, ostensive communication can display nine possible combinations, as discussed by Sperber and Wilson, which can be mirrored in emoji use. The author stipulates a dual-phase process, both for words and emojis: (1) a context-free stage when both the coded meaning of words and the default visual referent of emojis is identified; (2) a context-dependent stage when the literal meaning is enriched through inferences leading to fully relevant interpretations. The ad hoc concept adjustment that emerges in verbal communication is mirrored by *emoji adjustment*. In Relevance Theory, words are considered clues to meaning, and so are emojis interpreted in visual communication. Examples from verbal face-to-face interactions are compared to emoji communication, yielding the specifics of the latter: emojis are adjusted with the aid of the attached text; in the hybrid writing

mode, when an emoji replaces a word in a text, *the assimilation effect* arises, *i.e.*, emojis assimilate some of the attributes of the replaced word(s) together with the associated inferential strategies. The author proposes a *unified theory for emoji interpretation*. The diagram on page 213 presents the mechanisms that associate the encoded concept with the corresponding implicatures via *features adjustment* and *features selection*. Although emojis often help disambiguate meaning, there are cases where misunderstandings also occur. Yus devotes several pages to comments and examples illustrating this phenomenon. The final part of the chapter presents “five scenarios for the derivation of non-propositional effects and the possible application to emojis”, which capture the complex relationships between sender-users, receiver-users, and the transferred meaning: (1) feelings intended by the sender-user and inferred by the audience; (2) feelings intended by the addresser for their audience to generate in himself/ herself; (3) feelings intended by the sender-user to be generated among the audience; (4) feelings not intended by the sender-user but triggered among the audience; (5) feelings not intended by the sender-user which, however, end up “leaking” to the audience.

Part II of the book examines the extralinguistic constraints affecting emoji use, meaning, and interpretation. Chapter 6 (pp. 281-332) reviews earlier studies that documented how intertwining demographic variables influence the use of emojis and contribute both to mutual understanding and to potential (mis)understandings. The variables explored are age, gender roles, personality traits (*i.e.*, extroversion/introversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness), cultural variables, ethnicity, and the extralinguistic context (professional context vs. close relationship vs. dating context). They appear to correlate with various aspects: users’ preferences for particular interfaces/platforms and, consequently, the available emoji galleries, which may at times produce unwanted effects; users’ familiarity with emojis or their preferred selections; the intended meaning of an emoji and its interpretation by the receiver; culture-specific meanings that enrich the assumed universal meanings of emojis, etc.

Chapter 7 (pp. 333-378) addresses the impact of interfaces/platforms (apps and sites) on emoji use. In terms of Relevance Theory, users’ cognitive effort to infer the intended meaning correlates with the satisfaction they derive from engaging with the emojis available in the galleries. At the

same time, the way emojis are rendered across platforms may confuse users and lead to interpretations other than the intended ones. The mediums analysed are messaging apps (WhatsApp, Snapchat, WeChat), social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter/X), and streaming services (Twitch) which combine video-mediated communication with text-based chat interactions. The former two use emojis, while the latter uses emotes (*i.e.*, the emojis specifically found on Twitch, visible in the chat area of the interface). Interestingly, emotes seem to have a different function compared to emojis: they are aimed “to stand out visually from the chatting crowd” (p. 370) and they are sometimes deliberately puzzling and tend to become in-group markers, difficult for out-group users to decode.

Chapter 8 (pp. 379-428) explores the “topics of emojis and areas of use”: humorous (messaging) interactions, marketing and advertising, law/forensic linguistics, politics, health-related communication. The analysis reveals the strategic use of emojis which varies across discourse genres, such as relationship building, drawing attention to specific messages, fostering comfort, etc., and reflects situational differences in interpretation systems and users’ attitudes.

Chapter 9 (pp. 429-433) presents the concluding remarks and summarizes the main claims demonstrated throughout the book. (1) The basic concepts of pragmatics, specifically in Relevance Theory, can convincingly account for how emojis function in cyberdiscourse, in a variety of contexts, whether complementing or substituting the verbal text. (2) Although emoji communication does not display the complexity of verbal communication, it exhibits several language-like properties. (3) The ad hoc concept adjustment in Relevance Theory has a clear counterpart in emoji referent adjustment. (4) Although emojis are typically intended to clarify verbal meaning, there are many cases where they can lead to misunderstandings or unintended/unwanted effects. (5) Emoji-based communication can be understood through five interpretative scenarios. (6) The quantity and quality of emoji utilisation depend on several extralinguistic factors – demographic and technical ones (*i.e.*, interfaces/platforms). (7) The use of emojis in various discourse genres (humorous discourse, marketing and advertising, legal contexts, politics, and health care) further illustrates their communicative versatility.

At the end of the book, the reader has the feeling that there is nothing else to add about emojis; everything has been said. The book stands out through its theoretically coherent and multifaceted analyses, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Despite its density, the book reads smoothly, because the concepts are clearly defined, explained, and applied to a large number of relevant examples and illustrations. Tables and diagrams highlight key information. The clarity of exposition and the depth of analysis merge into an intellectually stimulating and methodologically inspiring book. The bibliography at the end of each chapter is particularly useful, reflecting the solid foundation of the volume. In fact, there are three works in one: an original research study, an excellent resource for scholars and students, and a practical guide of emoji utilisation in cyberdiscourse.

Francisco Yus makes yet another significant academic contribution to the field of cyberpragmatics: he successfully integrates emoji use in the framework of Relevance Theory, whose explicative power is thus extended and enhanced.

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