
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

The rise of the emoji



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Dan

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English – the show that brings you an interesting topic, authentic listening practice and six new items of vocabulary. I'm Dan...

Neil

And I'm Neil. We'll be discussing the rise of those little graphics we call emojis and emoticons.

Dan

You know, I think emojis are a vital tool for communication. And actually, they're not that new, either.

Neil

Oh really?

Dan

Well, that's the perfect opportunity to ask this week's question. When was the first emoticon used? Was it?

- a) 1606
- b) 1862
- c) 1982

Neil

It must be 1982. I'll go with c).

Dan

We'll find out if you're right or wrong later in the programme.

Neil

You know, I think we should clear one thing up before we go any further: what's the difference between an emoticon and an emoji?

Dan

Good point. Emoticons came first. They're the images made using normal keys on a keyboard – usually punctuation, letters and numbers. For example a colon – two dots - followed by the curved line of a close brackets is a...

Neil

A smiley face. Something you use in way too many of your emails!

Dan

Well, thanks! Whereas an emoji is something completely different. It's an actual image. It could be a simple, yellow, smiley face; or something like a dancing lady; or even a bowl of noodles...

Neil

Ah yes, all those little images we have in our phones. But you'll have to convince me – why do people use them so much?

Dan

Well, let's listen to Professor Vyv Evans. He wrote a book called The Emoji Code:

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Professor Vyv Evans, Author of 'The Emoji Code'

They enable us to express emotion and **empathy** in digital communication. Increasingly, what we're finding is that digital communication is taking over from certain aspects of face-to-face **interaction**. In the UK today, for example, adults spend 22 hours online on average each week. One of the reasons emojis are so interesting is that they really do enable us to express our emotional selves much more effectively.

Neil

Ok so he used a very useful word - **empathy**. It means 'the ability to show you understand someone else's feelings'. Ok – tell me more Dan.

Dan

Yes – adding an emoticon can show you understand and express emotion, and show **empathy** – more clearly. In digital communication we lack the visual signals we have in face-to-face **interaction** – as he says.

Neil

Interaction, meaning 'when people or things communicate with each other'. We can also **interact** with things like machines, computers and social media.

Dan

Yes, Professor Evans says 60% of information when we're talking to each other comes from **non-verbal cues**.

Neil

Wow, that's a lot. A **cue** is a signal that you need to do something.

Dan

For example, an actor goes on stage after their **cue**.

Neil

And **non-verbal** means 'without using spoken language'. So, here in the studio there are lots of other **non-verbal** signals about how we're feeling - **non-verbal cues**. For example my facial expression, my body language, the look in my eyes, Dan

Dan

There's a glint of rage in there somewhere, Neil. Ok, so let's apply this to digital communication. Imagine I sent you a text saying I hit my finger with a hammer – how would you respond?

Neil

Well, it depends. Did you hurt yourself badly?

Dan

If I followed it with a sad face emoji, then...?

Neil

Then I guess I'd know you hurt yourself. Poor you.

Dan

But if I followed it with a laughing emoji – the one with the tears coming out because I'm laughing so much?

Neil

Then I'd probably reply saying how stupid and **clumsy** you are!

Dan

Exactly – without adding the emoji – it's hard to know my emotional state. The emoji is the **non-verbal cue** – like my facial expression.

Neil

By the way, is there an emoji meaning **clumsy**? **Clumsy**, means 'physically awkward' – someone who's **clumsy** falls over a lot and drops things. Anyway, you were saying emoticons aren't as new as I think?

Dan

Yes, I asked when they were invented. Is it a) 1606, b) 1862 or c) 1982?

Neil

I said 1982.

Dan

Well, in fact, a witty speech Abraham Lincoln reprinted in a newspaper as far back as 1862 included a semi colon with a close brackets.

Neil

Like a winking face?

Dan

Exactly. Though people think this was sadly just a typographical error – or what we normally call a **typo**.

Neil

A **typo** – a spelling mistake made when typing too fast or carelessly.

Dan

The official birth of emoticons is usually given as 1982, when a US professor instructed his students to use smiley faces to indicate jokes - in digital a communication.

Neil

Wow, so they're over 30 years old. Maybe I should start using them. Let's round up with another look at today's words.

Dan

Sure. The first word we had was **empathy**. Do you have a lot of **empathy**, Neil?

Neil

Yes, I think I'm quite good at understanding other people's feelings. My friends tell me that, anyway! It's important to **empathise** with your colleagues too.

Dan

That's not what I saw in your eyes! Yes, **empathy** is an important part of all human **interaction**.

Neil

Nicely done. If two people **interact**, it means they 'communicate with each other and react to each other'. It's a pretty broad term.

Dan

We could also talk about how the way children **interact** with the internet.

Neil

Way too much! Next up, we had **non-verbal**, meaning 'without spoken language'. When I first travelled to Poland, I used a lot of **non-verbal** communication to get my message across. Hand movements, counting with fingers, things like that. Next word, Dan?

Dan

Next word... that is my **cue** to say the next word – which is in fact – **cue**. A cue is a signal to do something. A commander could give his officer a **cue** to attack. Or I could give you a **cue** to... sing a song?

Neil

No thanks. I'll stick with defining words, thank you. Like **clumsy** – meaning 'physically awkward'. I'd have to say Dan, you're a sporty guy, a talented footballer - you're not **clumsy** at all.

Dan

That's what I thought until I broke my leg – after a **clumsy** opponent ran into me...

Neil

Ouch. Finally – we had type. No hang on, that's not right. It should say **typo**. A **typo** is a mistake in a written document, or a digital file or message.

Dan

Always check your scripts for **typos** before reading them, Neil. And, that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. Please join us again soon!

Neil

And we are on social media too - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. See you there.

Both

Bye!