

## **A semio-cognitive and pragmatic analysis of speech acts in WhatsApp affinity communities**

Austin's seminal work (1962) brought into the limelight the fact that one could be doing something just by saying it. Since then, how people relate through discourse has been a central element in discourse-pragmatic research (Austin and Searle). Yet, until the emergence of the contemporary digital culture and social media discourse, pragmatic researchers have typically investigated 'acting through speaking' on the basis of face-to-face conversation (Levinson 2017:202). The bulk of work in the domain of pragmatics has not fully explored the sociosemiotic perspective of GIFs and pictures used by interactants as response to a text or another picture. Beside the use of emojis and emoticons, members of online communities are increasingly combining text, graphical images and GIFs to express thoughts, and more specifically some speech acts.

This paper explores the emerging forms and functions of digital communication using verbal, graphical (stickers, GIFs and images) and multimodal devices with sociocultural connotations in affinity communities on whatsapp to perform various social acts such as complimenting, welcoming, threatening, bullying, and expressing discontent. The analysis of the data shows that, in the enterprise of meaning making, and emotions expression, participants do not only seek to achieve sociopragmatic efficacy of language use (Leech 1983), but they draw from a web of sociocultural shared cognitive imageries.

This study shows that studies in digital pragmatics needs to employ a multidisciplinary and multidimensional analysis of meaning making and emotion expression in discourse and interaction. It contributes to the development of theoretical and empirical issues which have not been deeply addressed by research in digital pragmatics.

**Keywords:** semiocognitive, pragmatics, stickers, emojis, speech acts