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Non-Verbal Means of Communication: Semantics of Extralinguistic And Paralinguistic Components of Text

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the semantics of extralinguistic and paralinguistic components in non-verbal communication, particularly focusing on their role in legal linguistics and digital discourse. The research aims to analyze how non-verbal elements, specifically emoticons and emojis, function as meaningful signs in legal contexts and digital communication. The study addresses several tasks: investigating the manipulation potential of non-verbal signs in media discourse, analyzing the legal implications of emoji use in digital communication, and examining the challenges of emoji interpretation in forensic linguistics. The methodology employs a comprehensive analysis combining traditional linguistic analysis with modern forensic linguistics techniques. The study utilizes a socio-semiotic approach to analyze court documents, legal proceedings, and forensic linguistic reports where emoji interpretation plays a crucial role. The research also includes cross-platform analysis of emoji verbalization and interpretation across different cultural and linguistic contexts. The results reveal several classes of variations in emoji interpretation, including platform-dependent variations, temporal changes, and cultural differences. The study identifies significant challenges in standardizing emoji interpretation for legal purposes, particularly in cases involving contract formation, evidence verification, and criminal intent. The research also demonstrates how platform-specific differences in emoji display can affect legal interpretation and evidence validity. The study concludes that non-verbal elements in digital communication require specialized approaches in legal linguistics, highlighting the emergence of “emoji forensics” as a distinct field. These findings contribute to the development of more robust methodologies for analyzing non-verbal components in digital communication within legal contexts.

Keywords: Non-verbal communication, legal linguistics, emoji forensics, digital manipulation, semiotics, linguistic expertise, media discourse, communication mediation, forensic linguistics, digital evidence.

INTRODUCTION

Semantic multiplicity, which is potentially inherent in the language system, is considered an important characteristic of media speech. Its linguistic and semiotic features are verbal signs of manipulation as a complex system of signs and symbols. They are used to control the perception and influence of public opinion through their pragmatic value, multifaceted nature, and multifaceted prism, in the interconnection of their informativeness and impact. This characteristic of mass media speech should be taken into account when conducting linguistic expertise of specific

information messages.

Mass media plays a central role in shaping our understanding of the world, controlling our perception of reality, and significantly influencing our beliefs and views. We are all daily consumers of news, articles, reports, podcasts, and other forms of media content. However, how we understand and interpret information is often determined not only by the facts but also by the way these facts are presented. One of the key aspects that significantly influences this perception process is

language. Language is not just a means of transmitting information; it is a complex system of signs and symbols with deep semiotic structures that can be used to control perception and influence opinions.

Theoretical and empirical research in the media field shows how relevant the participation of linguists who study media speech in various paradigms of scientific knowledge is. Media texts are a broad field of informational influence on modern society.

Praxeology, as the study of various actions from the perspective of their effectiveness, focuses on studying effective methods and techniques of speech influence (Redkina, 2015), since media texts clearly show the predominance of influential, emotional, and manipulative functions along with information. The strong potential of language's multidimensionality as a dynamic means of communication allows analysis of the pragmatic value, multidimensionality, and multifaceted nature of verbal representations in various manifestations of newly emerging meanings in a rapidly changing world, in the interconnection of their informativeness and impact. We use various linguistic and semiotic tools to study these phenomena, including discourse analysis, corpus analysis, critical speech analysis, and other methods of examining linguistic-semiotic features of media speech through manipulative techniques. Influence is one of the most important functions of language along with communication and message (Vinogradova, 2004). The manipulation function is expressed in close relation to the influential function of language. The virtuoso ability of language allows showing the same situation from different angles.

Manipulation can be presented as 'the process and result of manipulative influence of legal norms on the behavior of legal subjects' (Romashov, 2010). The study of the manipulation mechanism appears to be very important in various spheres of modern society life.

Depending on the circumstances, both linguistic and extralinguistic attention of linguists and legal experts is focused on various socio-political events, and they are given legal assessment while collecting socially significant information (Novikova, 2020).

Various linguistic manifestations describe manipulation as a complex and urgent problem in linguistics, manipulative functions of speech – potential hidden properties of

influence that are not easily separated from informational content.

Manipulative influence is connected with the problems of linguistic and legal space. Assessment of the legal force of language actions, which is the object of legal linguistics – a new complex discipline at the intersection of sciences, should be relevant to the phenomenon of manipulation, correctly notes I.V. Belyaeva (Belyaeva, 2009). Important dimensions of the legal system – linguistic and argumentative – are closely interconnected and do not exist without each other, because since law is connected with language, it is objectified in language and becomes known through language (Golev, 2000). The pragmatic potential of a legal text is determined by the interaction of various components expressed by a certain set of linguistic means: informational, conceptual, and verbal (Novikova, 2020). The linguist deals with the content of words and phrases, words that have the property of negative evaluation in the form of confirmation of negative information about facts, words that have the property of negative evaluation in the form of opinion. They should not go beyond their competence, legal assessment is incorrect, the expert should clearly separate facts and opinions (Galyashina, 2022). The understanding of language's pragmatic potential as a basis for people's goal-setting activity is manifested in all its diversity in the information field of mass media.

METHODS

The research employs a comprehensive analysis of legal linguistics approaches to studying non-verbal means of communication, particularly in digital environments. The methodology combines traditional linguistic analysis with modern forensic linguistics techniques, focusing specifically on the examination of emoticons and emojis in legal contexts. The study analyzes court documents, legal proceedings, and forensic linguistic reports where emoji interpretation plays a significant role in legal decision-making.

The research methodology includes a comparative analysis of emoji interpretation across different platforms and cultural contexts. This involves examining variations in emoji representation across different devices and operating systems, as well as analyzing how these differences affect legal interpretation. The study particularly focuses on cases from U.S. and Chinese courts where emoji interpretation is crucial to the legal proceedings.

A socio-semiotic approach is utilized to analyze the multifunctional nature of emoticons in digital communication. This includes examining both the linguistic and extralinguistic features of digital messages, with particular attention to how emojis function as signs within legal and social contexts. The methodology incorporates analysis of real-world cases where emoji interpretation leads to specific legal outcomes, including cases of contract formation, harassment, and evidence tampering.

The research also employs cross-platform analysis of emoji verbalization and interpretation. This includes studying online translation tools and their effectiveness in conveying meaning through emoji, examining the challenges in standardizing emoji interpretation across different cultural and linguistic contexts, and analyzing the technical aspects of emoji display and representation across various digital platforms. This multi-faceted approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how non-verbal elements in digital communication are interpreted and applied in legal contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

New aspects of various issues of interaction between language and law are connected with the undoubted importance of their theoretical-linguistic and theoretical-legal research. The manipulation techniques and methods of manipulating meaning in media speech are diverse: use of ambiguous terms and phrases, false authority, false alternatives, distortion of information; hiding information, replacing neutral concepts with emotional-evaluative ones, misleading maneuvers, and others. An important feature of media text is verbal signs, information about the course of communication, 'in mass communication messages, not only what happened plays a big role, but also the reflection: who, what, when, why, for what purpose and how they spoke, wrote, reported about it. This information is important for influencing speech, forming attitudes toward reported facts' (Duskaeva, 2023).

The subtle, 'embedded' function of the word in relation to given reality, which is not obligatory and even unexpected, is an important expression of the modal quality of thought. This leads to a moving transition from one meaning to another, which, according to V.G. Kostomarov, creates a special aesthetic effect expressing the unified constructive principle of media speech as a dialectical combination of the leading features of 'expression' and 'standard',

originally contrasted as evaluation, influence, and information. From the perspective of this research, 'manipulation is a two-dimensional communicative act, in which opposition... is systematically opposed to mono-planned and functionally multi-interpreted and mono-translated integrally marked actions' (Karasik, 2015).

One of the main means of forming media speech is verbal signs of manipulation – words and phrases used to shape or change people's opinions through manipulation of clear, overt and indirect emotions, beliefs, or ideas (Pirogova, 2002). They are studied as a social phenomenon (from the perspective of interaction between different social groups), as a cognitive phenomenon affecting consciousness, and as a discursive-semiotic phenomenon of mass media that influences people's consciousness (Van Dijk, 2006). The classification of these signs and how they are used is an important aspect of research, and the problem of manipulative potential of each linguistic phenomenon 'can only be considered adequately described when examined at the intersection of cognitive and communication' (Kubryakova, 2004).

Semantic multiplicity, which is potentially inherent in the language system, is considered an important characteristic of media speech. The study of word meaning and its changes from a semantic perspective shows that it reflects a particular reality, organizing an information system of moving and intersecting planes. A word has not only objective meaning but also various variable meanings, multi-vectored developed evaluative meanings appear in its application, where the main 'elements' are combined: 1) semantic objectivity, 2) understanding it as a 'meeting field of two energies, objective – objectivity and subjective – human consciousness', 3) physical and physiological factuality, which includes the awareness of this objectivity (Losev, 2010).

The study of different types of verbal signs of manipulation is an important step towards conscious perception of information and critical analysis of the content of various mass media (Kara-Murza, 2002).

Let us turn to the analysis of these signs and their use in various contexts, taking into account some of their manifestations.

Words with strong expressive meaning and emotional connotation are one of the most important signs of manipulation. For example, using 'terrorist' instead of

‘militant’ or ‘refugee’ instead of ‘migrant’ can affect our perception of these people and the situations they face. Linguistic means have a general denotative meaning, as well as connotative meaning that includes emotional, stylistic, evaluative, and expressive semiotic nuances: conflict, aggression, boycott, danger, manipulation, propaganda, suppression, deception, repression, threat, danger, denial, contradiction, rebels, uprising, separatists, catastrophe, escalation, confrontation, and others.

Through generalization and simplification, it is used dynamically to create a certain image or mood as a process of creating new information, new meanings, forming it and implementing it in media speech. Such signs have a multifaceted, often negative impact on modern humans, their speech behavior, value system, and linguistic consciousness. For example, phrases like ‘all politicians are corrupt’ or ‘all young people do not want to work’ create crude generalizations aimed at manipulating audience perception by simplifying complex issues. Speech about refugees often tends toward generalization, describing all refugees as a security threat despite the diversity of their personal stories and circumstances.

Evaluative vocabulary determines the specific historical characteristic of perception and existence of media speech. These are explicit or implicit evaluative words and phrases. A distinctive feature of value concepts is the existence of opposing value methods, offering personal choice and a hierarchy of positive and negative preferences. The inducement to action is the ultimate goal of influence, which is associated with long-term pragmatics and value orientation (Tretyakova, 2013). For example, using the word ‘brave’ instead of ‘careless’ in a news article can control our perception of people's actions. Evaluative vocabulary plays a crucial role in informational speech. In reporting on Middle East conflicts, words chosen to describe the actions of parties can significantly influence the perception of the situation, where a usual ‘defender’ can become an ‘aggressor’ in one context, and depending on the evaluative position, a ‘terrorist’ can become a ‘freedom fighter’. Also see: destructive, aggressive, illegal, dangerous, evil, friendly, conflict, disastrous, enemy, guilty, cruel, dangerous, unprecedented, amazing, and so on. Words and phrases that deliberately evoke strong emotional responses enhance the impact of the message.

Framing, as a style that can present the same information differently depending on the chosen ‘frame structure’, is a type of cognitive distortion that helps influence how the

receiver perceives it through the form of information presentation. For example, employee dismissal can be described as ‘staff reduction’ or ‘process optimization’. The same actions can have different meanings depending on the chosen frame. Framing practices or ‘frame modeling’ are widespread in mass media. Economic crisis can be considered as an example. If we apply a ‘disaster frame’, the crisis is described as an inevitable catastrophe leading to disaster. If we use a ‘opportunities frame’, then it can be shown as a period of difficulty that ultimately leads to necessary reforms and economic improvement.

Metaphors and analogies are powerful tools of manipulation because they help form images and establish connections between different concepts. Axiological guidelines are manifested in value meanings. For example, using the phrase ‘war on drugs’ can be associated with actual war, which might intensify the perception of drugs as a threat to national security.

Media text is a multidimensional textual phenomenon, whose actualization is determined by the interaction of heterogeneous connections and relationships of linguistic and extralinguistic nature. Repetition of various figurative and expressive means is another method widely used in mass media to reinforce a certain point of view. Constant repetition of certain statements, even if they are not supported by facts, can lead people to believe in their truth. Contextualization as presenting information against the background of certain circumstances, justification or rationale for specific actions changes the perception of this action. For example, an act of violence can be presented as ‘revenge’ or ‘self-defense’. Using synonyms to express the same phenomenon, especially negative meaning, is also a method of manipulation. For example, describing a politician as ‘untrustworthy’, ‘suspicious’, ‘paranoid’ can intensify negative perception, as clearly negatively evaluated texts (especially evaluation markers) inevitably create a special ‘conflictogenic’ speech environment (Kotyurova, 2009). Thus, affirmative and negative signs describe positive or negative aspects of events or people. For example, using the word ‘responsible’ can emphasize their positive aspects, while using ‘irresponsible’ can emphasize negative ones.

In this regard, it seems interesting to contrast different types of behavior in E.Shostrom's concept: manipulative (based on seeing oneself and other people as things, means to achieve goals) and actualizing (expressed in evaluating others as valuable persons) (Shostrom, 2008). Often

manipulation is carried out due to the absence of a thinking style in 'general semantic statements', frequently aphoristic generalized phrases that do not lend themselves to critical analysis and are accepted as axioms or proven truths. Such statements provide questionable information due to incorrect generalization or lack of specific evidence: 'income level rarely exceeds the level of personal development', 'I am not rich enough to buy cheap things'. Such sentences use additions that are signs of cognitive style: clearly, naturally, obviously, and so on (Shelestyuk, 2014).

Verbal representations as units of verbal expression of deep meanings are implemented based on text syntagmatics, paradigmatics, and variability, which are components of media speech that form as a result of the interaction of its components and produce special meanings. The mastery of discursive technologies and influencing in the vector of achieving 'consensus omnium' (I.Kant) as an 'information weapon' of speech helps create various representations of truth.

The process of verbal representations influencing personality and their way of thinking is multifaceted. The transmission of certain information, whose value (its pragmatic level) depends on the systemic force that condenses the most relevant meanings, develops in the multi-vector and multi-directional communicative interaction of verbal signs of manipulation in media speech. In the multifaceted manifestation of the word, subjective and evaluative attitudes toward socially significant phenomena are expressed directly or indirectly, multiple viewpoints are presented – 'internal', 'external' in relation to the media text, the information space is determined by creative transformation of truth using various manipulation methods in understanding value.

Modern society is developing rapidly and intensively due to changes in technological structure, acceleration of life rhythms, and transformation of communication. Communication that is being carried out in modern conditions through the connection of various digital quick access devices and the use of the global Internet gradually becomes modified, mediated, and asynchronous. Communication mediation is the result of using 'hardware and software complex for transmitting and receiving messages (desktop computer, tablet, smartphone, mobile phone)' (Sonin, 2016); asynchronicity is the non-simultaneity of subjects' virtual communication, and this primarily relates to the written form of communication,

which gives a person additional time to create message text, edit it, or even completely delete it. In general, modern forensic tools allow considering actions committed in the Internet speech space as intentional.

Every day, new portals open in the information field of the Internet for interaction between people located in different parts of the world. With the emergence of 'free' Internet communication, people engaged in criminal activities have the opportunity to distribute texts containing illegal information, attract and intimidate other users. In recent years, law enforcement officers have increasingly encountered cases of criminal distribution of prohibited texts and materials on the Internet. To more accurately identify information in texts, investigators seek help from specialists who conduct forensic linguistic examination.

Currently, linguists have not created a definitive list of Internet communication genres. Examples of such genres include: emails; all types of blogs, by the way, linguistic experts often not only check information in published texts but also view and listen to video and audio recordings, even if they do not hold particular interest for the specialist; Also, examples of special genres are forums, social network messages, statuses, wall posts, and others. One of the recently emerged methods of information exchange is reposting. Reposting allows you to transfer a post from a group, community page, or other social network user pages to yourself. Reading interesting comics, instructive quotes, resonant slogans, people get absorbed in beautiful words and rush to share them with friends. Often users do not see the original essence of the origin of a particular text. A specific feature of examining Internet communications is the analysis of non-verbal graphic, phonoscopic, and video components of text in various genres.

In recent years, courts have begun issuing verdicts on articles containing provisions that provide punishment for degrading human honor and dignity, calling for extremist activities, organizing extremist societies, and so on. The number of those accused of distributing illegal materials on the Internet has reached 658 ("Official statistics", 2019). In conducting linguistic expertise, specialists use comprehensive language analysis, in particular: syntactic, morphological, stylistic analysis of written text. When talking about voice recording, specialists are guided by instrumental and auditory analyses. In both cases, correctly identifying a person's speech culture plays an important role. As part of linguistic expertise, specialists can determine what state a person was in when writing the text,

their cultural and moral level (“Who conducts linguistic”, n.d.). When checking reposts, comments, and messages on the Internet, comparing the original text and comments added to it can take a very long time.

Written Internet communication has a number of characteristic features that bring it closer to the verbal form of oral speech: ellipticity; reduction of significant metatext components (disregard for speech norms); expressiveness; involvement in apologetic and ironic communication methods; tendency toward language games based on the use of word play, paradoxes, allogisms, oxymorons, paronymic abstractions and other linguistic means (Toshovich, 2018), which is primarily characteristic of the conversational style of oral speech.

In modern conditions, the use of keyboard in computer-mediated communication devices for text creation primarily employs a written form of speech activity that has the above characteristics and gradually transforms from a purely written form to a synthetic verbal form. Therefore, semiotic linguistic expertise considers language in comparison with two types of symbolic objects – articular-phonetic and graphic (Volkov, 1966), for the interpretation of which the extralinguistic and paralinguistic features of the text are of great importance.

For creating extralinguistic and paralinguistic features of virtual computer-mediated communication, emoticons and emojis – non-verbal components in the form of ideograms, pictograms, and smileys – are increasingly being used. They are designed to supplement the meaning of the statement in a richer and more diverse way, to clarify its expressive-intonational coloring, are used in conjunction with Cyrillic graphics or Latin alphabet, can be directly incorporated into the statement structure, separated from statement units by spaces or commas. Their creation became possible due to creativity enabled by the interactivity of hypertext and computer-mediated communication in general, where all participants strive to implement the same communication capabilities that they use in live, face-to-face communication.

The nature of emoticons and emojis is connected with the linguistic theory of signs. A sign, in turn, is ‘any material-ideal formation that serves to transmit certain information’ (Girutsky, 2017). Signs as elements can be words, images, sounds, smells, tastes, actions, phenomena that traditionally express in linguistics a synthesis of form (plane of expression) and content (plane of content). None

of these phenomena becomes a sign until it is interpreted (Tokarev, 2013). The interpretation of signs is the science of semiotics (from Greek σημειον - sign, attribute), whose subject is the study of signs and sign systems as a means of storing, transmitting, and processing information in human society, nature, and in humans themselves.

Among information carriers, semiotics is considered in a broad sense as a modeling system and ‘represents a certain model (image, analogue) of the corresponding part of the world’ (Mechkovskaya, 2008) in consciousness, through which the subject of communication creates relevant information about surrounding reality. The task of semiotics in linguistic expertise is to study context, which is ‘understood as the unity of semantic information and conscious human attitude to it’ (Ageev, 2002). The context and communicative situation in which the text is placed in Internet speech is established, among other things, with the help of non-verbal components of communication.

The development of modern communication naturally leads to text containing various emoticons increasingly becoming material for linguistic expertise. In our research, we use the concept of emoticons in a broad sense, understanding through emoticons various pictograms operating in electronic communication, ‘including... complex drawings with artistic elements for graphic representation of emotion (emoji), its textual expression, expressing a concept or idea without using words’ (Galyashina, 2022). Emoticons have significantly expanded their scope of operation beyond what developers initially imagined. Currently, they are used not only as backup signs or amplifiers to express the emotional and psychological state of the communication participant (Pigina, 2013), and not only as pictograms that allow ‘saving time and resources in the process of virtual communication’ (Krylov, 2017), but also in ‘communicative internet technology that allows accelerating political information exchange and encouraging citizens to participate in political events’ (Voinov, 2016). Emoticons can also be a signal of citizens’ criminal intentions, and therefore researchers unanimously believe that modern pictograms require special attention both from a scientific point of view and in judicial and investigative practice. The authors of the methodological manual devoted to semantic research in forensic linguistic expertise identified many functions of emotional signs, including ‘leveling the meaning expressed by verbal signs’, ‘managing the communication process’, and others (Plotnikova et al., 2018). Y.I. Galyashina supplemented the

above list of emoticon functions by 'including functions of enhancing the influencing effect of the verbal component of the text; semantic addition, increasing the meaning of the verbal component of the text; text convolutions; imitation and/or camouflage of the emotional state of the message's author; 'provocations' (excitation) impact on a certain reaction of the addressee; impact on the emotional state of the recipient, and others (Galyashina, 2022), which also indicates the ability of emoticons to be a means of implementing criminal intentions.

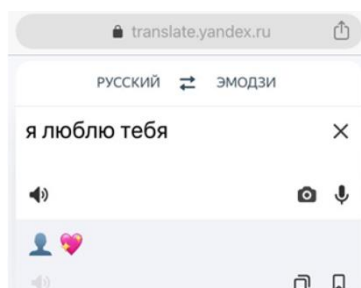
The multifunctionality of emoticons, their operation as a sign capable of conveying, supplementing, modifying, or significantly altering a text message leads Y.I. Galyashina to consider the theory of emoticon semiotics in forensic linguistics specialization, and University of Toronto researcher M.Danesi to consider distinguishing a new research direction of 'emoji forensics' (Danesi, 2021). Since the field of legal linguistics includes various categories of cases, scientific research devoted to the study of emotional signs significantly enriches the theory and methodology of forensic linguistics and authorship studies.

Thus, scientific works devoted to considering emoticons as 'authorship markers' are very promising. Based on studying smileys used by men and women of different ages on the social network Instagram, C.Marko convincingly showed that emoji analysis 'is a valuable addition to authorship analysis methods' (Marko, 2020), as emoticons can identify age, gender, personal characteristics, and the

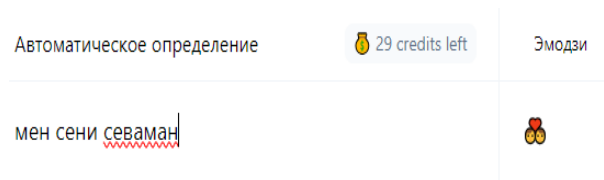
person's area of residence. Also, one of the relevant aspects of legal linguistic study of emotions is considering them as signs of aggressiveness in electronic speech. As shown in the research by A.Matulewska and D.Gwiazdowicz, cyberattacks can initially use both emoticons expressing negative and dangerous emotions and ideas (such as weapons or an angry face). Furthermore, those that were positive but somehow fell into an evaluated context can turn into signs of support for aggressive users (Matulewska & Gwiazdowicz, 2020).

Gestures as new research material raise problems of verbalization, interpretation, and lexicography for linguists. While discussing the difficulties in interpreting emoticons, M.A. Crystal emphasizes that online communication text can be ambiguous, and it is precisely the emoticon that can bring clarity to understanding the message. In this regard, the researcher believes that 'lawyers were too quick to consider text and emojis as a whole when they should be considered separately'. The problem of verbalizing emotional signs interests not only linguists themselves but also online translators, including programming specialists who have developed everything from natural language to emoji language. However, for now, in linguistic research, such translation cannot be relied upon due to serious discrepancies in translation. For experiment, we offered a simple and common phrase in two languages to two online emoji translators.

Yandex offered this translation variant from Russian:



the same phrase was translated into Uzbek by another translator as follows:



As we can see, the obtained result does not fully

correspond to the proposed structure of the sentence: In the first case, there is a pictogram-subject experiencing

emotion; there is an expression of the action 'to love' in the form of a 'heart' pictogram; there is no pictogram expressing the loved subject. Back translation, that is, in the direction from the resulting emoji combination to its verbalization, logically corresponds when considering the two signs that translated the phrase 'I like it', but the sentence obtained during back translation of the phrase 'I love you' does not correspond to the original. The pronoun 'you', which was initially intended and lost during emoji translation, did not appear as a result of back translation. In the second case of translation, both pronouns are not indicated.

In this regard, we must acknowledge that currently online verbalization does not always deal with correctly expressing the proposed meaning of sentences. However, we note that collaboration between linguists and programmers can yield good results, and therefore the achievements of translation linguistics emphasized by N.D. Golev will be in demand for legal linguistics.

In legal linguistics, accurate transmission of word and style is particularly important when verbalizing emoji. Since communication is a creative process of expressing and understanding thoughts, the most difficult problem for linguistic expertise is determining the semantic meaning of occasional (non-traditional) emotions and other visual means that complement or accompany the verbal content of the text. Internet communication; Understanding hidden meanings expressed in the author's occasional emoticons and other pictograms is a particular problem. Along with the problem of adequate verbalization of gestures, we also note the problem of determining the similarity between text containing emoticons and text consisting only of verbal signs.

Pictogram texts actively operate in modern internet communications. Various riddles and texts composed using only emoticons are very widespread for representatives of foreign languages. Besides entertainment or educational purposes, combinations of emoticons can be used to express criminal intent non-verbally. Media has covered cases of insults, contract negotiations, and threats involving the use of emoticons.

Court practice shows that the same pictograms can be interpreted differently by the sender and receiver of the message, meaning the same sign can have different proposals, the existence of which is associated with the homonymy of the sign. This may be due to intercultural differences. For example, in many countries, the thumbs-up sign is an expression of approval, showing that everything is fine, but in some other countries, the same sign is considered offensive. Describing this sign, G.Khasanova notes; 'actually, for the Uzbek people, showing a thumb is enough to express the meanings "everything is in place", "good". The inclusion of the "OK" gesture as a non-verbal means in circulation is certainly explained by the penetration of the European way of life into our lives' (Khasanova, 2023).

Both the sender and receiver of the message may emphasize different aspects of the communication situation, resulting in the same graphic sign having different verbal content for each party. Let us simulate a situation: in response to a request to send a contract, a citizen receives a document from the manager and sends them a 'thumbs up' sign in response. Taking into account the general communicative context, the pictogram used could be a graphic equivalent of verbal constructions such as 'received the contract', 'accepted', 'thank you'. The same sign, if indicated in previous communication, could mean agreement to contract terms, its signing.

Thus, U.S. courts, when considering controversial situations, concluded that the pictograms of 'thumbs up', 'handshake', and even the 'glasses' sign were expressions of intent to conclude contracts. According to Johannes du Plessis, legal consultant specializing in insurance and risks at Risk Benefit Solutions, 'if you discuss an employment contract via SMS or instant message and indicate a positive or accepted impression, you could be liable for the employer's loss of income if you breach this contract. Communication through gestures facilitates liability for damage caused to instant message users, so do not put yourself at risk by sending messages that could leave the wrong impression on the recipient' (Govender, 2017).

In this case, pictograms perform a modifying function, reinforcing the modal component of the message: besides the general evaluation method, manifested at the verbal level and associated with the expression of interest in property, there is an emotional evaluation method of great joy, which encouraged the homeowner and ultimately led to financial losses for the potential tenant.

The research results prove the relevance of verbalization, interpretation, and lexicography problems of NVC (Non-Verbal Communication) for modern legal linguistics. Analysis of texts that are fragments of online dialogues gives us grounds to conclude that similarity between text containing NVC and text not containing NVC can manifest at different levels:

- 1) complete similarity (identity), which is possible in cases of unambiguous verbalization and interpretation of text with emoticons;
- 2) presence of partial similarity in multiple but similar, synonymous verbalization and interpretation with emoticons by sender and receiver;
- 3) absence of similarity in multiple but fundamentally different verbalization and interpretation with emoticons by sender and receiver. The degree of similarity between texts is determined, on one hand, by relationships of polysemy, homonymy, and synonymy of signs, and on the other hand, by socio-psycholinguistic characteristics of the addresser and receiver participating in communication.

Linguistic examination of emojis whose interpretation became the basis in U.S. and Chinese courts became the subject of research by two Chinese authors, a linguist and a lawyer (Jiamin Pei, Le Cheng). They wrote an article about the practice of applying such experience in the judicial sphere. The article was titled: 'Deciphering emoji variation in courts: a social semiotic perspective' and its main conclusion was the following statement:

'From a social semiotic perspective, emoji as dynamic signs have great potential for conveying meaning, making their meanings dependent on context and interpreter. ... Studying the contextual configuration of emojis helps understand the interpretation of texts containing emoji in judicial decision-making, as well as determining the admissibility of evidence and evaluating evidence in courts' (Pei & Cheng, 2022).

As is known, semiotics is the theory of signs and communication using signs. A 'sign' is understood as any object that is sensually perceived by the subject and used in communication to represent another object, which is called the 'meaning' of the given sign (Electronic Library, n.d.).

The term 'semiotics', derived from the ancient Greek word

(σημείον) meaning 'sign', was introduced by the English philosopher J.Locke in the 17th century. In his fundamental work 'An Essay Concerning Human Understanding', which laid the foundation for semiotics, J.Locke connected the ability to understand 'general signs' with the subject's legal capacity (By 'general signs' we understand signs that denote whole categories of various objects – for example, the word 'tools' means shovel, rake, hoe, and others). If a monkey or other creature possesses intelligence to the degree that it understands general signs and draws conclusions based on general ideas, it undoubtedly submits to law and in this sense will be human, regardless of how it differs in appearance from other creatures bearing this name (Locke, 1836).

When J.Locke spoke about 'signs', he primarily meant words and sentences of natural language used to express ideas and thoughts. At the same time, it is clear that non-verbal means of communication, including emoji, can play a similar role.

In the case we are considering, although the authors were interdisciplinary in social semiotics, they meant a more specific direction of research: studying the actual practice of using certain signs by people in various social and cultural conditions. The term 'social semiotics' was coined by English-Australian linguist M.Halliday. In their article, the authors try to understand how courts determine the meaning of emoji. For this purpose, the authors analyzed all court documents from two countries where emoji or emoticons were mentioned.

Using sociosemiotic methods to study court documents, the authors try to resolve two questions: (1) what variations exist in the use and interpretation of emojis; and (2) what are the causes of variability from the perspective of specific social, cultural, and legal contexts.

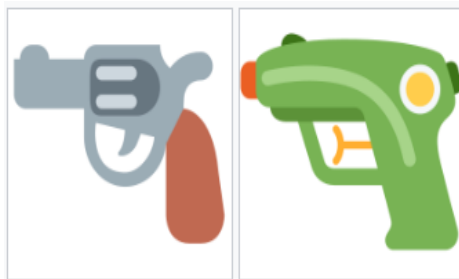
The study identified several classes of such variations:

- variations depending on platform;
- variations over time;
- variations in court cases depending on different rules of evidence;
- differences depending on individual interpreter;
- variations depending on social group;

- linguistic-cultural variations.

Regarding variations depending on platform (device, operating system, software), it is known that the same emoticons have both small and significant differences across different smartphones and programs. In some cases,

emojis can even differ in different versions of the same platform! For example, one of the popular emojis was the ‘pistol’, which initially depicted a real pistol. However, by around 2018, all major platforms, while maintaining the computer codes for the emoji, changed the image to that of a toy water gun:



Picture 1. Original and modified appearance of the ‘weapon’ emoji on Twitter (source - Wikipedia article on ‘emoji’).

It should be added that emoji may appear differently on sender and receiver devices. Depending on the time of output, the recipient's device may not support the display of later-appearing emojis. In such cases, instead of the emoji sent to them, the message recipient sees a set of meaningless characters, i.e., an empty square or just a placeholder in the line. Such meaningless reflection of transmitted information during linguistic expertise can lead to the message being given a completely different meaning than what the sender intended. In our opinion, when studying information presented in internet communication format, care should be taken so that specialists analyzing correspondence provided by interested parties can clearly see the images seen by the information recipient, their variants (for example, a pistol rather than a water pistol). The difference in reflecting information in different versions can both hinder and help detect falsification of evidence during linguistic expertise. This cannot be said to have a particular relation to semiotics, but the possibility of drawing conclusions based on the technical side of the matter may interest a lawyer. There are precedents in court cases where a dispute participant submitted screenshots to the court claiming they were old messages, but in fact, the appearance of the emoticon corresponds to later versions of the program. For example, in 2021 in the USA, there was a reference to a workplace sexual harassment case where the plaintiff was accused of evidence tampering (Rossbach v. Montefiore Medical Center, 2023). As evidence, they offered text messages allegedly photographed from the screen of an old iPhone 5 which,

according to the plaintiff, had already broken down by the beginning of the court process. However, linguistic expertise revealed that the text and photo were fake. Among other things, the expert opinion noted that the ‘heart-shaped eyes’ emoji (presumably 😍) in the photo did not correspond to the software version of the old smartphone. As a result, the judge not only dismissed the claim but also ordered the plaintiff, as well as their lawyers, to pay the defendants' court costs for deliberately falsifying the claim.

CONCLUSION

The study of non-verbal means of communication, particularly emoticons and emojis, in legal linguistics reveals significant challenges in interpretation and forensic analysis. The research demonstrates that these pictographic elements serve multiple functions beyond mere emotional expression, acting as potential markers of authorship, indicators of criminal intent, and even legally binding elements in digital contracts. The variations in emoji interpretation across different platforms, time periods, and cultural contexts present substantial challenges for legal experts and linguists conducting forensic analysis.

The findings emphasize the crucial need for developing standardized approaches to analyzing and interpreting non-verbal communication elements in legal contexts. The emergence of “emoji forensics” as a specialized field, along with the growing body of court precedents involving

emoji interpretation, highlights the increasing importance of understanding these communication tools in modern legal practice. This research contributes to the broader understanding of how digital communication elements influence legal proceedings and underscores the necessity for continued collaboration between linguists, legal experts, and technology specialists in developing more robust methodologies for analyzing non-verbal components in digital communication.

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