Emojis in the Digital Writings of Young Danes

Hougaard, Tina Thode; Rathje, Marianne

Go to publication entry in University of Southern Denmark's Research Portal

Tina Thode Hougaard, Marianne Rathje
Emojis in the Digital Writings of Young Danes

Abstract: This article focuses on the use of emojis by young Danes. We argue that emojis have at least three functions: as a form of guidance to understand posts and avoid misunderstandings (markers of modality and mood), as a form of guidance to help navigation (interactional markers), and as a form of embellishment expressing a sense of fun and feelings (an expressive and aesthetic function). Based on a survey (710 participants including both adolescents (N=297) and adults) and qualitative analyses of naturally occurring emojis on Facebook and Instagram, we found that young Danes aged between 10 and 19 regard emojis as belonging to the domestic/intimate sphere, promoting important features of communication such as emotions, mutual understanding, atmosphere, aesthetics and entertainment. Compared to the answers given by the adults, the young informants perceive emojis as a natural way of showing and expressing their mood, while the adults regard emojis as a secondary language, as compensation for the lack of nonverbal features in written online interaction. 86% of all the informants report that they use emojis at least once a day.

1   Introduction

In the Danish press, emojis and smileys have been called "a language of adolescents".[1] In public discourse, the use of these signs and expressive forms of spelling and punctuation contributes to the overall impression that the literacy and linguistic competence of young Danes in particular has declined. The complaint often heard is that this way of communicating lacks nuances, but in this article, we argue that emojis give users the opportunity to communicate modal

Tina Thode Hougaard, Aarhus University, School of Communication and Culture, Denmark
Marianne Rathje, University of Southern Denmark
1 http://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/danmark/offentlige-myndigheder-bruger-teenagesprog

and interactional aspects of their posts, thereby reducing misunderstandings. Emojis are the latest communicational playground for both young people and adults because emojis are also used just for fun and embellishment.

In the paper we present the results of a quantitative inquiry alongside a qualitative analysis of different interactions. We examine the following questions: 1) How often do Danish adolescents use emojis (self-reported)? 2) For what purposes do they use emojis in their own opinion? 3) Do young people and adults use emojis for different reasons? These questions are answered by a quantitative analysis based on an online survey. In the qualitative analysis, we examine the following questions: 4) How do adolescents actually use emojis? 5) Are their own answers consistent with those found in raw data? In this part of the paper, our data is a combination of different online data written by young people using Facebook and Instagram.

In both the quantitative and the qualitative analyses, we do not distinguish between emojis and smileys because they have similar functions and appearances. Even though the total number of emojis includes many different pictographs representing animals, hands, buildings, foods and so on, 86% of the informants report that they use faces and hearts the most, which are exactly the same emoticons that can be made by ASCII signs, namely :-) and <3. Also, emojis are described as the successor of emoticons (e.g. Novak et al. 2015) and as replacing, not complementing, emoticons (Pavalanathan/Eisenstein 2016). For these reasons, the general questions in the survey are about the informants' opinions and habits concerning all types of emojis and smileys, while the questionnaire ends with seven questions concerning specific depicted emojis. We are aware that this may lead the informants to continue making an unclear distinction between smileys and emojis, but since we observed that both types occur in the qualitatively researched data, we note that so far both types are a part of the informants' active language.

2 Data

The data used in the investigation consists of an online survey (the program *SurveyMonkey*). 710 Danes participated, 297 of whom were adolescents aged between 10 and 19. The online survey included 16 questions, but for the purpose of this article we only took account of five of these: "How often do you use emojis?", "Do you use emojis more now compared to last year?", "Which types of emojis do you use the most?", "Explain why you use emojis" (an open-ended question), and "Why do you use emojis – what is important?" (multiple choice).

The online questionnaire was distributed on Facebook on our own walls, in two town forums (one in Western Denmark and one in Eastern Denmark) and in two schools in those towns (via *School Intra*). The qualitative data was collected on Facebook and Instagram using several open profiles, supplemented by a small collection of dialogues between two 19-year-old girls using the Facebook Messenger intensively for a period of nine days (234 posts).

3 A new field of research

During the last 30 years, the investigation of computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been characterised by an ongoing attempt to encapsulate the latest communicational trends and innovations. It began with the preoccupations of the 1980s with the representation of socio-emotional cues, continuing to the discussions of the 1990s of communication, community and gender, followed by the focus of the 2000s on networks and social media, and now to the concerns and enthusiasm of the 2010s for innovations such as likes, hashtags and emojis.

The research on emojis is a growing branch on the tree of CMC research, but it is only growing sporadically and not always discerning itself from research done on emoticons. Perhaps seeking to solve this conceptual overlap, Herring and Dainas introduce the term "graphicons" as a shorthand for emojis, emoticons, stickers, GIFs, images and videos used in social media (Herring/Dainas 2017). In their comparison of those six different types of signs, they draw attention to the emoji as the most frequent and multifunctional sign that apparently has "hit a sweet spot – they are neither too large nor too detailed" (ibid.: 8). Besides the most prevalent functions as a way of showing reactions or "tone modification" – including the clarifying of intent and hedging the illocutionary force of the utterance (Herring/Dainas 2017), which Herring has outlined earlier (Dresner/Herring 2012) – they point to the "function as conversational turns in and of themselves, conveying propositional content" (Herring/Dainas 2017: 6), and thereby they concurrently underline the linguistic importance of emojis as research objects.

A fact often mentioned is the inherent semantic diversity (Stark/Crawford 2015; Miller et al. 2015) and ambiguity of emojis. The semantic diversity has a potential for misunderstanding, e.g. Miller et al. found that only 4,5% of the examined emojis had low variance in sentiment interpretation (cf. Miller et al. 2015: 260), but to some extent the semantic diversity "is not necessarily undesirable" (Herring/Dainas 2017: 9). Stark/Crawford even argue that a "message

created with emoji prompt a hermeneutic impulse" (2015: 3) since the complexity of the meaning resembles the rebus that "has a checkered history of both delight and repulsion" (ibid.: 4). In relation to affect and emotion, the emoji is often seen as crystallising the force of a feeling in an icon, pointing to the fact that visual and paralinguistic components in communication are vital for the mutual understanding of the fact that communication in the "production of writing is not a disembodied activity of pure cognitive processes but is instead a physical activity" (Lebduska 2014: 4).

However, the display of emotions is not the only function that emojis have. Based on interview data, Kelly/Watts found that emojis have the following extra interactional functions: 1) maintaining conversational connection, i.e. a type of phatic communication that shows connection and prevents the user from feeling ignored because of a lack of response (cf. 2015: 4), 2) enable play, i.e. creative and playful interaction which shows that the interactants have a close relationship because they have the courage to play (cf. ibid.: 4f.), and 3) create shared and secret uniqueness, i.e. creating shared new meanings that are only understood within a certain relation (cf. ibid.: 5). Kelly/Watts' findings show that emojis can serve different relational purposes and that the function does not have to be an expression of emotions.

When it comes to the results of our investigation concerning the modality of the message, i.e. the marking of positive attitude or irony and the use of emojis as hedges, our findings could be compared to those concerning emoticons and their communicative functions in emails (Skovholt/Grønning/Kankaaranta 2014). Our analysis of both the quantitative and the qualitative data will reveal new approaches and important details. This paper seeks answers to the questions of why and how adolescents use emojis, thereby adding a few new perspectives to this growing field of research.

4 Quantitative results

297[2] young people aged between 10 and 19 answered the questionnaire, comprising 36%[3] boys and 64% girls and 16% (N=48) aged between 10 and 12, 39%

---

2 This number has been provided by SurveyMonkey, but in some of the answers, there are 299 participants. It is unclear what this difference is caused by, but it may be that two of the respondents did not answer the question about gender.

3 The figures have been rounded up/down to the nearest integer throughout the entire article.

(N=115) aged between 13 and 15 and 45% (N=134) aged between 16 and 19 (see table 1).

Tab. 1: Total overview of age and gender of the respondents

Answer options	Age 10-12	Age 13-15	Age 16-19	Response percent	Response count
Boys	23	45	38	35.7%	106
Girls	25	70	96	64.3%	191
				100%	**297**

4.1 Reported frequency

86% of the young people use emojis "in almost everything I write digitally (Facebook, text messages, Snapchat etc.)", 22% use emojis "several times a day" and 30% write that they use emojis daily. Only 15% use emojis "rarely" or "never". As the majority of the young respondents report that they use emojis at least once a day, it can be concluded that the emoji is a significant part of the young people's digital everyday life. It may also be true that the use of emojis has found its natural level, because 29% of the young people use the same number of emojis as they did last year (see table 2):

Tab. 2: Data regarding whether the use of emojis has become more or less frequent within the last year

Do you use emojis more now compared to last year?

Answer options	Age 10-12	Age 13-15	Age 16-19	All young people	Response count
No, less	6% (3)	26% (30)	35% (47)	27% (80)	
Yes, a little more	42% (20)	30% (35)	21% (29)	28% (84)	
Yes, a lot more	24% (12)	12% (14)	7% (9)	12% (35)	
The same as last year	22% (11)	27% (31)	33% (44)	29% (86)	
I never/rarely use emojis	6% (3)	4% (5)	4% (6)	5% (14)	
	49.00	**115.00**	**135.00**	**299.00**	**299**

28% of the respondents use emojis a little more than last year, but 27% use them less. These figures cover great differences in the three young age groups. For instance, the use of emojis has increased among the youngest age group (10-12-year-olds) in particular, with 42% of this group using them a little more, and 24% using them a lot more and only 6% using them less than last year. By contrast, among the oldest group (16-19-year-olds), only 21% use emojis a little more than last year, and only 7% use them a lot more, with no fewer than 35% using them less. So, the use of emojis is becoming more popular among the youngest respondents and less popular among the oldest adolescent respondents. This may be connected to the fact that the youngest respondents have only just started using emojis, and that they therefore find them increasingly fascinating, whereas the oldest respondents have reached a point of saturation when it comes to emojis.

4.2 Reported functions

There were two questions in the questionnaire whose purpose was to clarify the young people's views on the functions of the emojis. Partly an open question at the beginning of the questionnaire inviting a free-text response ("Explain why you use emojis") and partly a closed question at the end of the questionnaire ("Why do you use emojis – what is important?" with response options such as "They make it more fun", which needed to be categorised as "important", "not very important" or "not important at all" (multiple choice)).

The meanings of the answers to the open question have been condensed (Kvale/Brinkmann 2008: 227ff.) and divided between a number of categories, which were generated on the basis of the incoming answers: they were not fabricated in advance. Each answer may contain several statements (1-4 statements per answer). A complete quantitative outline of the functions that the young people reported is listed in table 3:

Tab. 3: Reported functions amongst the young respondents (open question)

Reported functions	All young people	Age 10-12	Age 13-15	Age 16-19
Express feelings	28% (n=93)[4]	32% (n=18)	34% (n=45)	21% (n=30)
Help in understanding	22% (n=73)	13% (n=7)	18% (n=23)	29% (n=43)
Fun	14% (n=45)	27% (n=15)	13% (n=17)	9% (n=13)
Create a nice atmosphere/cute/cosy/ not cold or empty/less formal[5]	13% (n=42)	11% (n=6)	11% (n=14)	15% (n=22)
Make exciting/more spirited/cool/colourful/ decorative/not boring	7% (n=23)	13% (n=7)	5% (n=7)	6% (n=9)
Easy/fast	3% (n=11)	-	2% (n=3)	5% (n=8)
To compensate for body language/facial expressions/tone of voice	2% (n=5)	-	2% (n=3)	1% (n=2)
Punctuation	1% (n=2)	-	2% (n=2)	-
Others	12% (n=39)	5% (n=3)	13% (n=17)	13% (n=19)
Total	102 (n=333)	101%[6] (n=56)	100 (n=131)	99 (n=146)

The most significant function of the emojis is expressing feelings (28%), which according to Kelly/Watts (2015) and Negishi (2014) was also the designer's original intent. For example:

---

4 We are dealing with numbers of statements, not numbers of answers. Each answer contains between one and four statements.

5 These two last characteristics are not mentioned by the group containing the 10-12-year-olds.

6 Rounded up/down to the nearest integer.

- *For at vise hvad jeg føler* (10-12-årig)
  To show how I feel (age 10-12)

- *Du kan udtrykke dine følelser ved at bruge, forskellige emoji´er (glad, trist, hyber osv.* (13-15-årig)
  You can express your feelings by using different emojis (happy, sad, hyper etc.) (age 13-15)

- *For at udtrykke mine følelser* (16-19-årig)
  To express my feelings (age 16-19)

However, the oldest age group (16-19) did not evaluate 'expressing feelings' as significantly (21%) as the younger respondents (respectively 32% and 34%), or in other words, there are other categories amongst the oldest respondents, which are more frequently mentioned.

The next most important function to young people is that emojis support and help the process of understanding, so that misunderstandings do not occur (22%), for example:

- *For at man bedre kan forstå hvad jeg mener* (10-12-årig)
  To help people understand what I mean (age 10-12)

- *Det er så folk forstår i hvilken tone beskeden skal forstås* (16-19-årig)
  So people understand the tone in which the message should be understood (age 16-19)

- *For at man forstår mening med ordene da det er let at misforstå på skrift* (16-19-årig)
  So people understand the meaning of the words, because it is easy to misunderstand things expressed in writing (age 16-19)

The oldest age group (age 16-19), in particular, uses emojis to avoid misunderstandings. This group most frequently gives answers which can be categorised as "Help the understanding" (29% compared with the frequency for the younger age groups: 13% and 18%, respectively). For the oldest adolescents, successful communication is an important function for which they feel responsible. Though, it has been demonstrated by Miller et al. (2016) that emojis are not a guarantee for the prevention of misunderstandings.

The young people also use emojis because they are 'fun':

- *Det er sjovt* (10-12-årig)
  They are good fun (age 10-12)

- *Fordi en besked, eller andet bliver lidt sjovere med emojis*😁 (13-15-årig)
  Because messages or other forms of communication are a bit more fun with emojis😁 (age 13-15)

- *Det er bare sjovt og det virker for seriøst uden* (16-19-årig)
  They are simply fun to use, and it seems too serious without them (age 16-19)

Again, there is a difference between the three age groups: it is especially the youngest respondents (age 10-12) who regard emojis as having an entertaining function (27%), whereas the two older age groups mention this function in respectively 13% and 9% of their statements. The playful element is therefore most important for the youngest respondents; emojis as permitting playful interaction was also a function demonstrated by Kelly/Watts (2015).

13% of all the young people's answers can be placed in the category "using emojis to create a nice atmosphere". This may be because emojis are regarded as *cute* or *cosy*, which were particularly frequent comments among the youngest respondents, or because the use of emojis can create a more informal atmosphere. The atmosphere would otherwise seem *empty/cold* without emojis, something that was identified by the oldest respondents in particular:

- *De er søde og man kan udtrykke sig på sin egen måde* (10-12-årig)
  They are cute and you can express yourself in your own way (age 10-12)

- *for at vise følser og det hyggeligt* (10-12-årig)
  to show emotions and it's cosy (age 10-12)

- *Syntes det er lidt mere sødt at sende et hjerte til min veninde f.eks., end bare at skrive koldt uden nogle emojis.* (13-15-årig)
  I think it is a bit more friendly to send a heart to my friend, for example, than just to write coldly without any emojis (age 13-15)

- *Hvis du ikke bruger en emoji, virker det som om du er ret kold* (13-15-årig)
  If you do not use an emoji, you seem pretty cold (age 13-15)

- *Det virker tomt uden.* (13-15-årig)
  It seems empty without them (age 13-15)

There is no notable difference between the youngest and oldest when it comes to this function. We have not come across other research results that have demonstrated this function.

7% of the young people, collectively, believe that emojis make messages more exciting as opposed to boring. They make messages more spirited and colourful, or can be used to decorate messages and make them cooler:

- *Det er bare for at, så ser beskeden ikke så kedelig ud.* (13-15 år)
  It is just to prevent your message from looking so boring (age 13-15)

- *Det er ofte for at føje lidt farve og humør til en kedelig tekst* (16-19-årig)
  It is often to add a little colour and spirit to a boring text (age 16-19)

- *fordi det giver lige et pift* (13-15 år)
  because they just pep things up a bit (age 13-15)

- *For at pynte min besked* (13-15 år)
  To decorate my message (age 13-15)

- *De ER mega seje!* (10-12-årig)
  They ARE super cool (age 10-12)

The youngest respondents mention this function in particular (13%), as opposed to the two oldest age groups (5% and 6%, respectively). The aesthetic function (embellishment) and the view on emojis as cool are thereby an essential function for especially the youngest. We have not come across other research results that have demonstrated this function.

Emojis are only described as a fast and effective communication tool by the two oldest age groups, and only to a limited extent (2% and 5%, respectively):

- *Fordi man kan sætte dem ind. Og man ikke skal skrive, fordi de taler for sig slev* (13-15-årig)
  Because you can put them in. And you do not have to write anything because they speak for themselves (age 13-15)

- *Metoden er god hurtigt til at beskrive hvad med tænker/følger, istedet for at man skal skrive det hele.* (16-19-årig)
  The method is useful to quickly describe what you think/feel, instead of you having to write it all (age 16-19)

- *Sådan hvis det lige skal gå hurtigt, eller sådan noget* (16-19-årig)
  Like if things just have to be quick or something like that (age 16-19)

We have not come across other research results that have demonstrated this function. The function "compensation for body language" is not significant for

the young people either: only 2% and 1% (in the age groups 13-15 and 16-19, respectively) of the statements can be linked to this function:

- *Fordi det kan fungere i stedet for kropssprog i beskeder* (13-15-årig)
  Because they can be used instead of body language in messages (age 13-15)

We have not come across other research results that have demonstrated this function.

Finally, the function of the emojis as a punctuation marker is mentioned. This function is demonstrated by Provine/Spencer/Mandell (2007) but in our study, this function is only mentioned in 2% of all the young people's answers, and only by the middle age group:

- *Det er bare godt at slukke sætningen med*☺ (13-15-årig)
  They are just useful for closing sentences☺ (age 13-15)

- *Det kan nemlig tit være svært at tyde hva folkst humør er omkring et emne når der kun står 5 ord og ingen tegnsætning.* (13-15-årig)
  It is often hard to work out what people feel about something when all you've got to go on is five words and no punctuation (age 13-15)

Many of the young people's statements are placed in the category "Others" (12%). Most of these answers do not respond to the questions, for example "I just do it, and don't think too much" (age 13-15). Instead of reporting their beliefs about why they use emojis, several young people talk about in which situations they use emojis. Some mention the groups of people to whom they send emojis:

- *Når jeg chatter med mine venner* (10-12-årig)
  When I chat with my friends (age 10-12)

- *I en besked til mine venner* (13-15-årig)
  In messages to my friends (age 13-15)

- *hvis det er noget til en sød person eller veninde* (13-15-årig)
  if I am writing to someone nice or a girlfriend (age 13-15)

- *hvis man måske skriver med en pige kan jeg F.eks. sende et hjerte eller til mine venner.* (13-15-årig)
  if I am writing to a girl or my friends, I sometimes send a heart (age 13-15)

- *jeg bruger det kun når jeg skriver med min familie fordi mine kusiner og fætre er små* (13-15-årig)
  I only use them when I write to my family because my cousins are very young (age 13-15)

Friends, people who are *nice* and girls – in sum people from the domestic/intimate sphere – are mentioned as receivers of emojis. On the other hand, some of the young respondents mention that in order to prevent themselves from being misunderstood and labelled *cold*, they use emojis when communicating with people that they do not know very well in particular. They report that you do not need to use emojis with people you know:

- *men ved dem jeg holder af behøver jeg ikke og de behøver ikke sende emojies, fordi jeg/de ved vi elsker hinanden* (13-15-årig)
  but I do not send emojis to people I like and they do not have to send any to me because we know we love each other (age 13-15)

- *hvis det er en person jeg ikke rigtig kender, og jeg ikke vil virke "kold"* (16-19-årig)
  if it is someone I do not really know, and I do not want to seem "cold" (age 16-19)

According to the young people, emojis can be both a signal of intimacy amongst close friends and family, and a way of preventing any misunderstandings with people you do not know very well.

Some of the young people point out that they only send emojis to specific people because this is what is expected. Consequently, they report that they are somewhat reluctant to do this:

- *Mine forældre synes det er sjovt, så jeg gør det.* (16-19-årig)
  My parents think it is fun, so I do it (age 16-19)

- *Bruger det stort set kun til min mor, far og chef.* (16-19-årig)
  Use them generally speaking only with my mum, dad and boss (age 16-19)

The expectations for the use of emojis are thematised by several young people:

- *fordi den person jeg skriver med bruger dem så der for sender jeg den igen* (13-15-årig)
  because the person I am writing to uses them, so that is why I send them back (age 13-15)

- *Dels socialt bestemt; jeg følger den retorik som er populære i min sociale omgangskreds.* (16-19-årig)
  Partly socially determined; I follow the rhetoric that is popular in my social circle (age 16-19)

- *Fordi min kæreste mener det er vigtigt* (16-19-årig)
  Because my girlfriend thinks it is important (age 16-19)

The above-mentioned examples demonstrate that the young people link a social norm and social considerations to the use of emojis: one reflects what other people do, and do what they believe to be important.

In summary, the open text question has revealed that young people believe in particular that the function of emojis is to express feelings and help in understanding, thereby avoiding misunderstandings. They report that emojis are used just for fun, to create a nice atmosphere and to make the message less boring. The communicative purposes like aiding understanding, creating a nice atmosphere and avoiding misunderstandings were mentioned by the oldest participants in particular, while the youngest informants seemed to emphasise the more entertaining and aesthetic elements of emojis.

Below we will see if these results from the open text questions are also confirmed in the closed answers, where we introduced the young people to specific functions that we defined ourselves. The advantage of the open answer option was gaining insight into what the respondents themselves believed were the most significant functions. In comparison, the closed answer option has the advantage that all of the respondents had to relate to the functions that are mentioned and evaluate their importance (see figure 4):

Tab. 4: The most important functions of emojis (closed answer categories)

Why do you use emojis – what is important					
Answer options	Age 10-12	Age 13-15	Age 16-19	Rating average	Response count
They are easy to understand					
Important	34 (69%)	70 (62%)	81 (60%)		
Not very important	13 (26%)	37 (33%)	40 (30%)		
Not important at all	2 (4%)	6 (5%)	13 (10%)		
	49.00	**113.00**	**134.00**	**1.45**	**296**
They make it more fun					
Important	82% (40)	61% (69)	58% (78)		
Not very important	16% (8)	35% (40)	33% (45)		
Not important at all	2% (1)	4% (5)	9% (12)		
	49.00	**114.00**	**135.00**	**1.43**	**298**
They are better at expressing my mood					
Important	83% (40)	83% (95)	82% (110)		
Not very important	15% (7)	14% (16)	12% (16)		
Not important at all	2% (1)	3% (3)	6% (8)		
	48.00	**114.00**	**134.00**	**1.21**	**296**
They can be written faster than words					
Important	35% (17)	33% (38)	21% (28)		
Not very important	47% (23)	39% (44)	43% (57)		
Not important at all	18% (9)	28% (32)	37% (49)		
	49.00	**114.00**	**134.00**	**2.02**	**297**

It seems impolite to leave them out					
Important	15% (7)	19% (22)	22% (29)		
Not very important	35% (17)	42% (47)	29% (39)		
Not important at all	50% (24)	39% (44)	49% (65)		
	48.00	113.00	133.00	2.26	294
They are a useful way of ending a sentence					
Important	65% (32)	54% (60)	35% (46)		
Not very important	29% (14)	36% (40)	48% (64)		
Not important at all	6% (3)	11% (12)	17% (22)		
	49.00	112.00	132.00	1.66	293
They explain how to understand what I have written					
Important	77% (37)	74% (84)	79% (105)		
Not very important	17% (8)	19% (22)	17% (22)		
Not important at all	6% (3)	6% (7)	5% (6)		
	48.00	113.00	133.00	1.29	294

The results from the closed answer options in table 4 confirm the overall result from the open answer option: the function *express feelings* (here "They are better at expressing my mood") and the function *help understanding* (here "They explain how to understand what I have written") are most important for the young respondents. In addition, these two functions are equally important for all three age categories: 82-83% in all three age groups find that "They are better at expressing my mood" is an important function of emojis, and 77%, 74% and 79%, respectively, find that "They explain how to understand what I have written" is an important function of emojis. The entertaining element ("They make it more fun"), which as we saw above was an important function for the young people, is regarded as important in the closed answer options, but once more it is confirmed that this function is especially important for the youngest respondents (82%, 61% and 58%, respectively). In the closed answer options it is likewise confirmed that the function *easy/fast*, here phrased as "They can be written faster than words", does not play an important part for the young people, although this function is more important for the youngest respondents (35%,

33% and 21%, respectively). The same thing applies with regard to the function "It seems impolite without". This function is mentioned in the open question ("empty/cold without"), but it is not mentioned very often, being regarded as the least important function in the closed question (respectively 15%, 19% and 22% find it important).

On the other hand, there are certain contradistinctions between the open and the closed answers regarding the function of emojis. We saw above that only 2% of the young people, all in the age group 13-15, mentioned punctuation as one of the functions of emojis. However, in the closed question, where the respondents are asked about the function "They are a useful way of ending a sentence", a relatively large number of respondents state that this function is important, especially the youngest respondents (respectively 65%, 54% and 35%). Some young people may be unaware of this function, unless they are directly asked, which may constitute this discrepancy. The same reason may apply to the function "They are easy to understand", which respectively 69%, 62% and 60% consider as an important quality of emojis, whereas none of the respondents mentioned this function in the open question.

To summarise these findings on the attitudes of young people to emojis, we can conclude that the answers to the open questions are confirmed by the answers to the closed questions – although two extra functions are revealed as significant in the closed questions ("They are a useful way of ending a sentence" and "They are easy to understand").

4.3 The functions of emojis: young people vs. adults

In addition to the 297 young respondents, we have the answers from 413 adult respondents aged 20 or more (the two oldest were older than 70). In figure 5 the responses of the young respondents are compared with those of the adults.

Tab. 5: The reported functions of emojis – young people and adults

Reported function	All young people	All adults
Express feelings	28% (n=93)	23% (n=140)
Help the understanding	22% (n=73)	30% (n=186)
Fun	14% (n=45)	10% (n=64)
Create a nice atmosphere/cute/cosy/not cold or empty/less formal	13% (n=42)	13% (n=79)

Reported function	All young people	All adults
Make exciting/more spirit-ed/cool/colourful/decorative/not boring	7% (n=23)	6% (n=38)
Easy/fast	3% (n=11)	9% (n=55)
To compensate for body lan-guage/facial expressions/tone of voice	2% (n=5)	6% (n=36)
Punctuation	1% (n=2)	1% (n=1)
Others	12% (n=39)	3% (n=21)
Total	102 (n=333)	101 (n=620)

Overall, there were no major differences between the functions reported by the young people and the adults; in other words, there are no specific functions that only young people associate with emojis. However, the two age groups do attach different weight to these functions. In terms of percentages, there are more adults (30% compared with the young people's 22%) who mention the function *Help the understanding*, which emphasises that emojis help the receiver to understand how a statement is to be understood and thereby prevent misunderstandings. On the other hand, more young people mention the function *express feelings*. One significant difference in the way the two age groups refer to this function is that the young people emphasise that emojis *show* or *express feelings*, whereas the adult respondents tend to emphasise that emojis *underline* their feelings instead.

Young people:
- *fordi så kan man se hvad man føler* (16-19-årig)
  because then people can see what you feel (age 16-19)

- *Det beskriver hvordan man har det bedre* (10-12-årig)
  They better describe how you feel (age 10-12)

Adults:
- *Det er en måde at understrege følelser på* (51-60-årig)
  They are a way of highlighting emotions (age 51-60)

- *De understøtter min holdning/mening/følelse* (51-60-årig)
  They underline my attitude/opinion/feelings (age 51-60)

For the young people, emojis are in themselves an expression of feelings, whereas the adults' choice of words reveals that they perceive the text message itself as the primary issue and the emojis as the secondary, supplementary expression of emotions. The function "compensation for body language/facial expressions/tone of voice" is also more relevant for the adults than for the young people, revealing once again that the adults find emojis to be a supplement, a compensation for the 'real' communication, i.e. the paraverbal and nonverbal part of face-to-face communication. For the adults, emojis are of secondary importance, while for the young people they are the primary issue.

Added to this, there is a function, which is more significant for the adults than for the young people, namely that emojis are effective and fast (the category "easy/fast"). Once again, emojis are seen by the adults as something that replaces a more elaborate text. The adults say that emojis replace and compress text when this has to be done quickly:

- *For at reagere kort hvis jeg ikke har tid til længere meddelelse.* (51-60-årig)
  To react briefly if I do not have the time for a longer message (age 51-60)

- *Det er hurtigt. Udtrykker med et klik noget der ellers ville kræve en hel sætning.* (41-50-årig)
  They are quick. They express with a click something that otherwise would require an entire sentence (age 41-50)

As seen in table 5, the young people do not attach much significance to the use of emojis as an effective way to replace words. Finally, another difference between the young people and the adults is that the young people mention the function *fun* more often.

A comparison of the responses between the young people and adults reveals that the young people think of emojis neither as a replacement for 'real' communication in body language, nor as a secondary supplement to the primary text in the messages, or as a compromised compensation of text, i.e. easy and effective communication. In other words, the young people regard emojis as text. They also associate emojis with fun and the expression of feelings, and they are less inclined compared to the adults to regard emojis as a communicative tool for use in eliminating misunderstandings.

It is furthermore the case that the functions mentioned mostly by the adults are also mentioned more often by the oldest of the young age groups (age 16-19, *help the understanding* and *easy/fast*), while the functions which are not mentioned very much by the adults are also the functions that are mentioned most

often by the youngest age group (age 10-12, *fun* and *express feelings*). It is therefore possible to observe some kind of socialisation connected to age, or perhaps the difference between the youngest and the oldest respondents reflects the fact that emojis have become a part of their digital communication at different stages in life. After all, communicating with emojis has always been part of the young people's lives, whereas they are a relatively new phenomenon for the adults.

5 Forms and functions of emojis

Since this paper addresses written online interaction only, a natural point of focus is the mutual negotiation between the interacting parties, involving the progression of this interaction and the mutual understanding of meaning and intention of each post. Taking this interactional approach and combining it with an analysis of the answers given by the 297 young Danes confronted with the questions of how and why they use emojis, we have found that emojis used in interactional settings appear to have at least three functional features: one concerning the modality aspects of the post in question, another related to the facilitation of interactional navigation, and a third with a more expressive and aesthetic-poetic focus. These functions resemble, but do not fully cover the functions found by Herring/Dainas (2017). Accordingly, this simplification into three functions does not necessarily cover all emoji habits, but our review embraces the practices, which are most frequent in the data, and most often mentioned by the informants, even though our terminology and the terms used by the informants are naturally not identical.

5.1 Modality aspects of posts

The function most obviously recognised has to do with the modality aspects of the post. Linguistically speaking, modality is often expressed through adverbs and modal verbs[7] in which the sender embeds an attitude and some kind of modification with regard to the more factual part of the text. Modality can be seen as the sender marking the extent to which she sees herself as responsible for the propositional meaning of the text. "Modality could [...] be defined as the

---

7 Modality is also realised through modus, conjunctions and word order (cf. Jensen 1997: 15).

grammaticalization of speakers' (subjective) attitudes and opinions" (Palmer 1986: 16).

Working beyond the more detailed discussion between the Roman and the Anglo-Saxon linguists on modality (Jensen 1997), we choose to focus on modality as a reflection of the sender and the sender's attitude towards the text. In this paper, emojis used as modality markers are regarded as evidence of the sender deliberately signalling to the receiver her intentions in terms of the level of honesty and intensity that is implied in a post, thereby disambiguating the message even though emojis do not necessarily prevent misunderstandings (Miller et al. 2016). Since written online interaction is often a social and informal form of communication, each sender will be concerned with the receiver's reception of both the interaction in general and each post in particular. The relationship between the sender and the receiver in a social setting such as social media is crucial and depends on the participants' fluency and sensitivity in both expressing and understanding. This ability and concern are legible and evident in the modal use of emojis.

Increasing the perception of emojis as modality markers, the understanding of modality must be supplemented with a focus on the role of the nonverbal and paraverbal expressions. "It could be claimed that punctuation, including emoticons, is the digitised equivalent of paralinguistic aspects of talk. However, this seems to be an oversimplification" (Giles et al. 2015). The fact that tone of voice and certain facial expressions and gestures in face-to-face interactions convey significant hints of how to understand the words that are said, thereby transcending and clarifying the message, is decisive to this kind of data because they represent written online interaction as placed in a conversation-like setting. In trying to avoid the discussion of whether the status of written online interaction should be related to written or oral discourse, we suggest that some of the interactional features in the data could be analysed as some kind of compensation for the missing tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures, applied to convey modal aspects of posts and information concerning the progression of the interaction. We will return to the interactional points later in the paper.

When asked what they think if they receive a blinking emoji, a lot of the young informants answer that it means *joking*, *making fun*, *being flippant* or *flirting*. Only a few of the informants state that something is said *with a wink of the eye,* thereby referring to the actual facial expression represented by this specific emoji. This could be seen as an argument for not making a comparison between the emoji and the actual face. This is not only simplistic, but it is also wrong, since irony and making a joke are not always marked by a wink of the eye, but are conveyed by the tone of voice or in some kind of interplay between

facial expressions and voice. Nevertheless, most of the young informants connect this modality with this exact emoji. It is difficult to say whether this is due to the iconicity between the emoji and exaggerated facial expressions or due to some kind of conventionalisation.

The most prevalent types of emojis, that express modality, function as indicators of the degree of honesty or intensity in the foregoing messages. In relation to honesty, an emoji can provide an indication of irony or some other kind of distance to the propositional meaning of the foregoing messages. As an illustration, consider example 1, where T comments on the fact that C has put a photo of herself on Facebook in a somewhat striking pose. C reacts to this comment by thanking T for the compliment and writing *Awe thaaaanx* followed by the 'see no evil monkey' emoji and a heart:

(1)

The heart probably mirrors T's declaration of love (*love you too!* ♥), but it is more likely that the 'see no evil monkey' emoji is used to underline the modality of the *Awe thaaaanx* instead. In other words, the emoji reflects her attitude towards such a huge compliment (she feels embarrassed and coy, also because the photo in question has generated a lot of such compliments (23) from her friends on Facebook). In the survey, a girl of almost the same age (16-19 years) explains this emoji as follows:

- *Kan måske betyde at man er generet eller vil gemme sig, folk bruger den tit hvis se lægger et lækkert billede u af sig selv -> så de ikke fremstår selvviske.*
   Maybe it means that you are shy or want to hide, often people use it if they put out an appealing photo of themselves -> so they do not seem selfish.

In this case, the emoji is probably an indication of attitude towards the whole situation. An example of the use of a winking emoji as a self-reflective comment is seen in example 2 from the Messenger dialogue, in which C distances herself slightly when asking a friend where a certain café is without reply. Since the act of asking a question counts as a first pair part in what conversation analysts call

an adjacency pair (Sacks 1987), the second pair part, the answer, is noticeably absent, which makes the situation slightly awkward for C, who actually waits almost three hours before continuing the interaction. The fact that she does not receive an answer, and the fact that she is the one who revives the interaction, probably lead her to distance herself from a somewhat compromising situation by showing self-awareness and supremacy.

(2)

22-10-2016 13:00	
C:	C:
Hvor ligger cafeen?	Where is the café?
22-10-2016 15:53	
C:	C:
Fandt den 😏☺	Found it (...)
Og jeg hilste	And they sent theirs to you
Skulle hilse igen 🖤❤	(...)

The informants describe the meaning of the winking emoji as follows: *lidt kekt* ('a bit cocky'), *fræk* ('bold'), *flabet* ('flippant'), *det er lidt for sjov* ('mostly for fun'), *Den gør beskeden goofy, jeg bruger den selv ofte, da jeg joker meget* ('it makes the message goofy, I often use it myself because I often make jokes'). These descriptions coincide with the interpretation of example 2, supporting the conclusion that emojis are an important means of expressing one's attitude to utterances, consciousness of the context and self-awareness.

Another parameter which is undoubtedly important in online written interaction in social settings is the intensity of the message. In example 3, the 12-year-old girls use many heart emojis as "a low-cost phatic" (Kelly/Watts 2015: 4) way to emphasise and demonstrate the love and affection between them. They show their cordiality in writing *love you* and using superlatives like *most beautiful* and *best* as an epideictic way of consolidating their mutual understanding of and tribute to friendship. As if this is not enough, they further extend their interaction by the use of a great number of heart emojis:

(3)

	E: Yes but again what should I do without you my most beautiful (...) damn I love you
	S: Ahah
	Wouldn't know what to do without you either
	Love you babe
	You the best
	C: Thanking and loving you
	S: Love you too babe
	M: But you too, and love you too
	C: Thanks sweetie (...) loving you too
	R: Ohh baby

The confirmation of their relationship is so important to them that they add heart emojis to their words in order to stress the fervency and intensity of their emotions and likely to add synonyms to the word *love*. The iteration of this sign is an easy way to intensify your message, since the principle of iconicity (Peirce 1955) lets one assume that the number of emojis corresponds with the strength of the feeling.

The next example of emojis used as modality markers to increase the intensity of the emotions involved contains 17 emojis in a row, reflecting the sender's feelings about being on the way to a campsite:
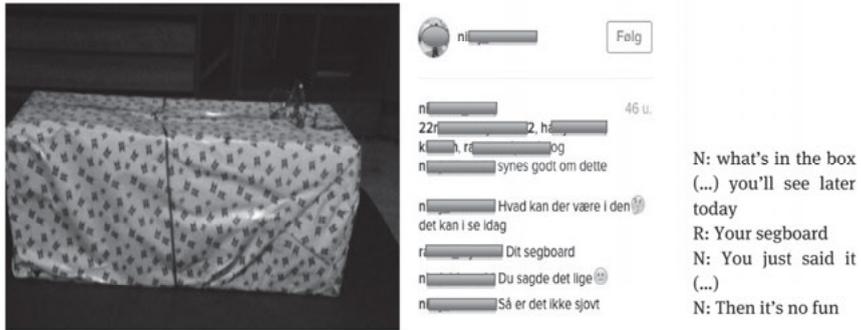
(4)

f: on our way to the campsite (..........)

This row of emojis reflects the positive emotions of the sender (balloon, heart, happy faces and OK hands), and the iteration of several of the emojis illustrates the intensity of those particular emotions.

Modality also plays a role when it comes to punctuation, with the question mark and the exclamation mark in particular, providing the propositional content with a certain modality and marking whether the sentence should count as a question, a command or just a declaration (cf. Elbro/Fanø 2013: 17). Unlike the comma and the full stop, the question mark and exclamation mark are frequent

in online written interaction (cf. Androutsopoulos 2018), but in example 5 the sender omits the orthographically correct question mark and pastes a questioning or wondering emoji after his remark instead.

(5)

In this way, he transforms his post from being just a question which requires an answer into a puzzle, so he reacts with a sad emoji when R ruins the game. The modality at stake here is not intensity, but perhaps some kind of honesty because N only pretends to pose a sincere question. N uses an excessively contemplative emoji to indicate that this is a rhetorical question.

As shown in the analysis of example 5, this characterising of some emojis as modality markers or operators is still in its early stages. Further steps must be taken in order to determine whether there are more subtypes, such as markers of irony like emoticons (Skovholt/Grønning/Kankaaranta 2014).

5.2 Facilitation of interactional navigation

Although our claim is that emojis are essentially interactional, they are often used as a way of allocating certain interpretations (modality), or for the purpose of embellishment, as we will briefly touch upon later. However, there are still some practices in which the core interactional features of emojis are salient, for instance when they help to determine whether the interaction is coming to an end (we refer to this as 'closing') or when they help to indicate that the topic is changing in the middle of a post (we refer to this as 'a switch'). Both practices could be seen as an imitation of the fine-tuned actions in conversations, monitoring the turn taking and progression of the conversation and the changing of topic.

The accuracy of the adjusted fine mechanics of turn taking, containing prosodic, syntactic and lexical systematics for the organisation and negotiation of the interactional shifts (Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974), are disabled in written online interaction, or at least differ from the conventions of oral conversation (cf. Garcia/Jacobs 1999: 360). "There is no 'competition' for the right to be the next to construct a message. There is also no competition for the right to post a message: All messages sent will be posted" (ibid.: 347). But the need for sequential organisation remains, even though the lack of synchronicity in the interaction makes this organisation less smooth than oral conversation. Here procedures for projecting transition-relevant places are not relevant, and interactional tokens such as minimal responses are not possible. However, the inclination towards progression still exists, and in some situations such as the chat situation, the participants are "concerned with advancing in-progress activities through sequences" (Stivers/Robinson 2006: 386). Conversational progression is evident in our data because the breaks between the posts are in general very short (1-3 minutes in many of the conversations between the two 19-year-old girls). Often the interaction is characterised by a very quick changeover of very short posts. Slightly less than half of the posts consist of only one message, and there are several instances of sequences where the girls complete more than four posts (two each) within a minute.

In relation to the navigational part of the interaction, several text messaging systems have equipped their application with a facility, a "typing awareness indicator" (Bennet 2014), i.e. three jumping dots within a bubble that only appears when the other participant is typing. Such online written interaction is characterised by responsivity, i.e. the preference for reacting to earlier posts, and progressivity, i.e. the act of "getting some activity accomplished" (Schegloff 2007: 59).

In the following interaction between the two 19-year-old girls, the rocket emoji is used as a way of signalling that the conversation is coming to an end, as a *closing* – at least for now, because C is coming to visit S very soon:

(6)

19-10-2016 21:47	
C:	C:
Jeg kommer ud til dig om en halv time ok?	I'll come out to you in half an hour ok?
☐No joke	No joke
19-10-2016 21:48	
S:	S:
JAA	YEEES
19-10-2016 22:04	
C:	C:
Er på vej !	On my way !
19-10-2016 22:04	
S:	S:
🚀🚀	(...)
20-10-2016 00:39	
C:	C:
🚀🚀	(...)

The one of the two girls explains their use of the rocket emoji as follows:

> *Tit mener vi at det er fordi vi har fart på, noget er fedt eller noget i den stil hehe (...) Raketten kan også bruges til at afslutte samtalen*
> Often we think it shows that we're moving fast, that something is awesome or something like that hehe (...) The rocket can also end the conversation.

They also describe the rocket as a substitute for the thumbs-up symbol[8], which explains its rather arbitrary concluding role.

In our data, 1.5-5 hours normally pass after a rocket emoji before a new post is sent, and the interaction only continues immediately after a rocket emoji in two instances. In example 7, S and C have been chatting for half an hour about whether S should visit the sick C or not (this happens before the extract). After another half an hour of silence, C sends a rocket emoji to S as some kind of acknowledgement of the fact that she at least wants to visit C, and perhaps because C was the one to close the interaction and the topic. Thirteen minutes later, she revives the interaction and elaborates on her uncertainties – thereby indicating that she did not mean to end the interaction even though she sent a rocket emoji. The interaction continues until S closes it with a rocket emoji 12 minutes later:

---

8 Facebook allows you to change the thumbs up to any other emoji.

(7)

19-10-2016 14:24	
S:	S:
Har ikke lavet mat, øøøøjjj	Haven't done maths, oooohhh
Og har ikke andet end tid og lyst	And I definitely have the time and would love
19-10-2016 14:56	to see you
C:	C:
🚀 🏃	(...)
19-10-2016 15:09	
C:	C:
S. du behøver ikke at komme...Jeg er virkelig ikke	S. you don't have to come...I am really worth
noget værd	nothing

In our view, the fact that the person who closes the interaction is the one who opens it again after only 13 minutes supports the conclusion that the primary function of the rocket emoji is to close the interaction. In the other example[9] of deviation from this norm, C (who has just revived the interaction) is clearly not ready to end it right away and therefore ignores the rocket emoji and continues even though S's answers are very short and delayed.[10] The limited nature of this data does not permit us to draw any firm conclusions about the nature of closing in such cases; however, these girls clearly use the rocket emoji as a closing or pre-closing signal, clearly accepting the convention of progression in interaction and feeling the need for interactional work to make the transitions smooth and interpretable.

Transitions also appear within posts, and sometimes the sender uses a 'shift emoji' to indicate that one topic or focus of the interaction can now be considered closed, leaving the mind open to move in another direction. Usually the change of topic in face-to-face interactions is "a seamless 'stepwise' progression [...] Hence the precise points of topic shifts or changes, and how such shifts were managed, are often analytically opaque" (Drew/Holt 1998: 509). The distinction between on-topic and off-topic talk is not discrete, and topic change can involve both collaborative and status-related behaviour (cf. Okamoto/Smith-Lovin 2001: 855), just as pauses in conversation eventually may lead to a change of topic. In written online interaction, seamlessness is not a dominant principle and sometimes the conversation gets out of sync, giving the participants two different conversations on different topics at the same time. Because of this, and because the 'turns' in written online interaction often contain more

---

9 This example is omitted due to the length of the article.

10 S answers after respectively 23 minutes, 13 minutes and in the end not at all.

than just one message or one action (cf. Hougaard 2004: 155), some kind of marker of this transition from one topic to another may be needed.

Despite the general uncertainties about topic development and organisation, the participants sometimes make a clear cut from one topic to another. In example 8, C's post contains two different actions separated by an emoji. The first line functions as a response to S's statement about her having a peculiar dream the night before, and the next two messages have to do with C sitting in a bus entering the town where someone called *bongo* lives. The emoji with the closed eyes and natural smiling mouth indicates some kind of acceptance, another way of saying 'never mind', thereby closing this subject and making room for another:

(8)

22-10-2016 12:26	S:
S:	It wasn't that interesting
Så interessant var det heller ikke	
22-10-2016 12:26	C:
C:	Well okay
Nårh okay	(...)
😌🙂	I'm entering bongo's territory
Jeg begiver mig ind på bongos territorium	And I'm damn nervous
Og jeg er skidenervøs	

In the data, no particular standard for marking topic shifts can be found. These shifts are not all distinct or marked, and they are certainly not all marked by an emoji. Even so, this example points to the fact that an emoji can provide the interaction with a small break that makes a shift of topic possible. The emoji is not a warning that the topic will shift, but could more likely be interpreted as a way of rounding off the previous topic, making the shift less abrupt and unexpected, like a full stop in ordinary writings. This function, however, is not frequent in the data, which might have to do with the participants having such a close relationship that some words and explicit intentions are omitted or only insinuated. The need to constantly convey information about both the modality and the interaction is not particularly evident in this part of the data.

5.3 An expressive and aesthetic-poetic interest

The last function of emojis is the most tricky and complex. Why does a Christmas tree emoji appear together with the words "Christmas tree" and a picture of a Christmas tree, and why are birthday greetings and congratulations often

followed by emojis representing birthday cakes, flags, presents and bottles of wine? This use of emojis is not unsuitable or devoid of meaning, but it does seem somewhat redundant and superfluous. One reason for their use may be because they add intensity. When the greeting in example 9 is followed by emojis showing a face with tears of joy, a strong arm and a birthday cake, it should be understood as confirming and emphasising the greeting, and perhaps conveying the supplementary information *fun*, *strong/tough* and *cake*, representing the things that the sender associates with the receiver and her birthday.

(9)

Some of our respondents offered the following explanations of why they used so many emojis in a single post:

> *fordi at det kan være kærligt og så bliver ens besked lidt farverig* (pige, 10-12-årig)
> because they make your message more affectionate and colourful (girl, age 10-12).

And as an explanation of the opaque use of relatively random emojis:

> *(...) Udover det er det super hyggeligt at der lige dukker en raket op en gang imellem* 😊 (C. 19 år)
> It is also really nice if a rocket turns up every now and then 😊 (C. 19 years old).

As reported in the first part of this study, the young informants basically explain their use of emojis with words like *cosy, colourful, fun, cool, sweet* and *cold and empty without them*. The majority of the young informants (83%) report that they feel a need and desire to use emojis to express their feelings and mood, and 67% of them focus on the fact that emojis make the interaction more fun. The expressivity that is often, but not exclusively, used as a description of youth culture and youth language derives from Jakobson's emotive/expressive language function, which according to Jakobson dominates when the language

"aims a direct expression of the speaker's attitude toward what he is speaking about. It tends to produce an impression of a certain emotion whether true or feigned" (Jakobson 1960: 354). One young man in our study explained that the word *feeling* is a bit too profound (and intense). In his opinion emojis were more about conveying your immediate mood and temper – which we understand as a need for showing one's attitude towards the communication and the person you are communicating with.

There seems to be a certain overlap between the expressive use of emojis and a more aesthetic-poetic experimentation with the great variety of emojis. The poetic function of language is "(t)he set [...] toward the message as such, focus on the message for its own sake" (Jakobson 1960: 356), it "foregrounds the acoustic or material nature of words rather than seeing them as merely transparent windows onto the world" (Furniss/Bath 1996: 87). The foregrounding of the materiality of the communication tools is noticeable. The informants stress that exploring the huge variety of emojis (May 2017 there were 2623)[11] is great fun, but the choice of emoji should not be degraded or regarded as mere coincidence or an expression of instant joy. In an interview informant C explains the depth of the interpretation of the facial expression of a single emoji:

> *The emoji 😐 is some kind of a middle stage between the very happy laughing mouth with open eyes and the not so happy emoji with a straight line as mouth. This emoji means "never mind".[12]*

Just like the ancient rhetoricians who highlighted the importance of style, including the virtue of beauty, called ornatus, the informants feel the need for a stylistic factor adding beauty and emotion to the message, since ornatus is "a certain kind of figured use of language which adds something that was not there beforehand"[13] (Lund 2014: 168). We therefore suggest that emojis should be understood as a stylistic variation that adds an ornamental as well as a clarifying factor to interactions.

---

11 https://unicode.org/emoji/charts/full-emoji-list.html
12 Written down from memory afterwards.
13 Translated from: "en særlig form for figureret sprogbrug, der tilføjer noget, som ikke var der i forvejen" (Lund 2014: 168).

6   Conclusion

In this paper we have shown how important emojis are for adolescents; 85% of them report that they use emojis at least once a day, proving that emojis are a significant part of the daily life of adolescents – with a rising popularity for the youngest (age 10-12), and a reduced interest as they grow older.

The adolescents report that they use emojis most frequently to express their feelings and help their receivers to understand what they are saying. It is important to avoid misunderstandings and prevent their receivers from perceiving them as cold. The older the adolescents get, the more important this aid to understanding becomes – a function we call the "modality aspect", involving showing how the message should be understood. In addition, "fun" and "embellishment" are important functions of emojis for adolescents, in particular within the youngest group to prevent their messages from being boring. We called this function "expressive and aesthetic-poetic interest".

The functions *punctuation*, *compensation for body language* and *effective/easy* are not important according to the adolescents. The adults, however, regard the last two categories as important, which reveals their understanding of text as being superior to emojis, while emojis replace body language and are a quick shortcut. This makes the adolescents' view of emojis as communication in its own right with the same importance as text so much more convincing. We believe that this reflects the fact that emojis have always been a part of the life of adolescents, which is not true for adults.

In analyses of naturally occurring emojis, we found three different functions: *modality aspects of the post*, *an expressive and aesthetic-poetic interest* and *facilitation of the interactional navigation*. The function *modality aspects of the post* comprises the use of emojis as indicators of attitude, as a way of signalling how a message should be understood and as a replacement for more conventional signs like question marks and exclamation marks. This corresponds with the self-reported function of helping receivers to understand what is meant. An expressive and aesthetic-poetic interest is a function that was found in the adolescent's use of emojis to express feelings, and as fun and embellishment. In this way, the dominating self-reported functions of emojis found via the survey largely correspond with the adolescents' actual use of emojis found in the data of naturally occurring interaction.

However, the function facilitation of the interactional navigation was only detected in the actual use of emojis, i.e. emojis as sequential organisation concerning closing interactions and switching topics; this function was not found

in the self-reportings in the survey. Adolescents may be unaware of this function of emojis.

On the basis of our findings, we conclude that emojis are a multi-faceted way for adolescents to express their competence as language users, and that emojis have many interactional functions for adolescents. They also know when to use them – and with whom. Consequently, we cannot confirm the theory that the literacy and linguistic competence of young Danes is degraded owing to their use of emojis. On the contrary, emojis constitute a relevant interactional tool which aids in mutual understanding.

References

Androutsopoulos, Jannis. 2018. Digitale Interpunktion: Stilistische Ressourcen und soziolinguistischer Wandel in der informellen digitalen Schriftlichkeit von Jugendlichen. In Arne Ziegler (ed.), *Jugendsprachen/Youth Languages. Aktuelle Perspektiven internationaler Forschung/Current perspectives of international research. 2 Bde./ 2 Vol.*, 721-748. Berlin & Boston: de Gruyter Mouton.

Bennett, Jessica. 2014. Bubbles Carry a Lot of Weight. Texting Anxiety Caused by Little Bubbles. In *The New York Times* from the 29th of August 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/31/fashion/texting-anxiety-caused-by-little-bubbles.html?_r=0> (29 June 2017).

Dresner, Elisabeth & Susan Herring (2012). Emoticons and illocutionary force. In Dana Riesenfeld & Giovanni Scarafile (eds.), *Philosophical dialogue: Writings in honor of Marcelo Dascal*, 59-70. London: College Publication.

Drew, Paul & Elizabeth Holt. 1998. Figures of speech: Figurative expressions and the management of topic transition in conversation. *Language in Society* 27(4), 495–522.

Elbro, Carsten & Ken Farø. 2013. Tegnsætning med mening. *Mål og mæle* 36(1), 17-23.

Evans, Vyvyan. 2015. Beyond words: how language-like is emoji?, <http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2015/11/emoji-language/> (27 February 2018).

Furniss, Tom & Michael Bath. 1996. Roman Jakobson: The Poetic Function. In Tom Furniss & Michael Bath (eds.), *Reading poetry: an introduction*, 86-89. London: Prentice Hall.

Garcia, Angela Cora & Jennifer Baker Jacobs. 1999. The Eyes of the Beholder: Understanding the Turn-Taking System in Quasi-Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 32(4), 337-367.

Giles, David et al. 2015. Microanalysis of online data: The methodological development of "digital CA". *Discourse, Context & Media* 7, 45-51.

Herring, Susan & Ashley Dainas. 2017. "Nice picture comment!" Graphicons in Facebook comment threads. *Proceedings of the Fiftieth Hawai'i International Conference on System Sciences* (HICSS-50), 2185-2194. Los Alamitos: IEEE. <http://aisel.aisnet.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1268&context=hicss-50> (29 June 2017).

Hougaard, Tina Thode. 2004. *Nærmest en leg. En undersøgelse af sprog og interaktion i dansk webchat*. Doctoral thesis. Aarhus: Aarhus Universitet.

Jakobson, Roman. 1960. Closing Statements: Linguistics and Poetics. In Thomas Sebeok (ed.), *Style in Language*, 350-377. Cambridge & Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press.

Jensen, Eva Skafte. 1997. Modalitet og dansk. *NyS – Nydanske Studier & Almen kommunikationsteori* 23, 9-24.

Kelly, Ryan & Leon Watts. 2015. Characterising the Inventive Appropriation of Emoji as Relationally Meaningful in Mediated Close Personal Relationships. *Experiences of Technology Appropriation: Unanticipated Users, Usage, Circumstances, and Design*, <http://opus.bath.ac.uk/46780/1/emoji_relational_value.pdf> (29 June 2017).

Kvale, Steinar & Svend Brinkmann. 2008. *InterView. Introduktion til et håndværk*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Lebduska, Lisa. 2014. Emoji, Emoji, What for Art Thou? *Harlot 12*, <http://harlotofthearts.org/index.php/harlot/article/view/186/157> (29 June 2017).

Lund, Marie. 2014. Retorisk stil. In Marie Lund & Hanne Roer (eds.), *Retorikkens aktualitet. Grundbog i retorisk kritik* (Sprog I praksis 1), 3rd edition, 165-190. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Lyng, Jens From. 2013. Offentlige myndigheder bruger teenagesprog, Kristeligt Dagblad from the 13th September 2013. <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/danmark/offentligemyndigheder-bruger-teenagesprog> (29 June 2017).

Miller, Hannah et al. 2016. "Blissfully happy" or "ready to fight": Varying Interpretations of Emoji. *Proceedings of the 10th International Conference on Web and Social Media* (ICWSM 2016), 259-268. Köln: AAAI Press.

Negishi, Mayumi 2014: Meet Shigetaka Kurita, the Father of Emoji. In The Wall Street Journal/Japan, March 26 [on- line]. <http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2014/03/26/meet-shigetaka-kurita-the-father-of-emoji/> (27 February 2018)

Novak, Petra Kralj, Jasmina Smailović, Borut Sluban, and Igor Mozetič. 2015. "Sentiment of Emojis." PloS One 10 (12).

Okamoto, Dina & Lynn Smith-Lovin. 2001. Changing the subject: gender, status, and the dynamics of topic change. *American Sociological Review* 66(6), 852-873.

Palmer, Frank Robert. 1986. *Mood and Modality*. Cambridge: CUP.

Pavalanathan, Umashanthi, and Jacob Eisenstein. 2016. "Emoticons vs. Emojis on Twitter: A Causal   Inference Approach". AAAI 2016 Spring Symposium on Observational Studies through Social   Media and Other Human-Generated Content.

Peirce, Charles. 1955 [1902]. Logic and semiotic: Theory of signs. In Justus Buchler (ed.), *Philosophical writings of Peirce*, 98-119. New York: Dover.

Provine, Robert, Robert Spencer & Darcy Mandell. 2007. Emotional Expression Online. Emoticons Punctuate Website Text Messages. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 26(3), 299-307.

Sacks, Harvey. 1987. On the preferences for agreement and contiguity in sequences in conversation. In Graham Button & John Lee (eds.), *Talk and social organization* (Intercommunication 1), 54-69. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Sacks, Harvey, Emanuel Schegloff & Gail Jefferson. 1974. A simplest systematics for the organization of turn taking for conversation. In Jim Schenkein (ed.), *Studies in the organization of conversational interaction*, 7-55. New York: Academic Press.

Schegloff, Emanuel. 2007. *Sequence organization in interaction. A primer in conversation analysis*. Volume 1. Cambridge et al.: CUP.

Schnoebelen, Tyler. 2012. Do You Smile with Your Nose? Stylistic Variation in Twitter Emoticons. *University Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics* 18(2), 117-125.

Skovholt, Karianne, Anette Grønning & Anne Kankaanranta. 2014. The Communicative Functions of Emoticons in Workplace E-Mails: :-). *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 19, 780–797.

Stark, Luke & Kate Crawford. 2015. The Conservatism of Emoji: Work, Affect, and Communication. *Social Media + Society* 1(2), 1-11.

Stivers, Tanya & Jeffrey Robinson. 2006. A preference for progressivity in interaction. *Language in Society* 35(3), 367-392.