

# ISP250H5S LEC0101: Emoji Rhetoric: A New Paradigm in Communications

## Winter 2025

### COURSE INFORMATION

Classroom location: MN2266

Meeting time: Tuesday, 9am to 12pm

Instructor Name: **Dr. Jordana Garbati**  
Instructor Email: jordana.garbati@utoronto.ca  
Pronouns: She/Her  
Office Location: MN3269  
Office Hours: Tuesday 12-1pm, in person (or by appointment)

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, students will critically examine the development and use of emoji in digital written communication. The course will begin with a historical view of emoji. Students will then explore how and why emoji are used in diverse digital writing genres (e.g., discipline-specific uses, mass communication), can communicate emotions, can lead to miscommunication, and can be used in persuasive communication. Students will also examine the impact of gender, age, and culture on emoji use. Students will explore the semantics of emoji and question whether emoji is a language in and of itself. The course will draw on rhetoric, theories of intercultural communication, as well as symbolic interactionism, positive, and politeness theories to inform students' exploration of emoji. Finally, this course will push students to consider the future uses and contributions of emoji in writing.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Throughout this course, students will:

- Critically analyze assigned topics through reading and discussion.
- Discuss and apply theories to reflect on their personal use of emoji and to better understand the impact of emoji on communication.
- Explore the development of emoji and the uses and applications of emoji in digital writing.
- Consider the cultural implications of emoji in communication.
- Conduct research about emoji and writing and connect this research to a disciplinary body of work.

## REQUIRED TEXTS & MATERIALS

All our course readings are available on Quercus.

## MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS & EVALUATION

| Assessment    | Details                                      | Due                                  | Weight |
|---------------|--|--------------------------------------|--------|
| Participation | In class contributions and tasks             | Ongoing                              | 15%    |
| Assignment 1  | Personal Blog Post                           | Jan. 21                              | 20%    |
| Assignment 2  | Emoji Proposal                               | Feb. 25                              | 25%    |
| Assignment 3  | Literature Review – Emoji in the Disciplines | Part 1 – March 4<br>Part 2 – April 1 | 40%    |

All assignments will be submitted on Quercus before class on the due date noted in our course schedule.

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### Participation (15%)

Class participation will be assessed according to your active engagement in the course throughout the semester. It is expected that you will attend each class prepared and participate actively in various ways (e.g., small and large group work, informal presentations, shared notetaking, low-stakes tasks).

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### Assignment 1: Personal Blog Post (20%)

Select three to five emoji that you use frequently in your digital writing. Why are these essential? What purposes do they serve? Connect your experiences with theories and readings from our course (e.g., pragmatic functions, sentiment analysis).

Use the following questions to brainstorm your ideas:

- Review your digital writing patterns. What emoji do you use most?
- In what context are you using emoji?
- What motivates you to write with emoji rather than with words?
- What functions do the emoji you use serve?

You will need to include at least one source from our course readings. The approximate word count of your blog post is 500-750 words. Format your proposal following APA conventions. More details and assessment criteria will be posted on Quercus and discussed in class.

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## **Assignment 2: New Emoji Proposal (25%)**

For many, emoji are used in daily communication in both personal and professional digital writing interactions. We have seen emoji use at the micro level (e.g., conversation between friends), meso level (e.g., communication within an organization), and at the macro level (e.g., world-wide marketing campaigns). We have also seen the evolution of emoji and commented on the gaps in the existing emoji list.

In this essay, you will propose a new emoji and argue for its development. You will connect your argument to topics addressed in course readings and discussions (e.g., Unicode Consortium; intercultural communication; linguistic features; equity, diversity, and inclusion).

Use the following questions to brainstorm your ideas:

- What topic/idea/item is not represented in the current emoji list?
- What is the need for your proposed emoji (at the individual, group, and society levels)?
- What problem will your proposed emoji solve?
- Why might someone disagree with your proposed emoji?

You will need to include at least one source from our course readings and two external sources (i.e., peer-reviewed journal articles). The approximate word count of your proposal is 750-1000 words. Format your proposal following APA conventions. More details and assessment criteria will be posted on Quercus and discussed in class.

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## **Assignment 3: Research Paper (40%)**

In this course, we have explored emoji in regards to language development, miscommunication, gender representation, cultural tendencies, and discipline-specific trends. What discipline-specific question continues to pique your interest? In this assignment, you will write a literature review that critically explores disciplinary uses of emoji (e.g., emoji use in Anthropology, emoji use in Business, emoji use in Science communication).

Use the following questions to brainstorm your ideas:

- What observations have you made about emoji use in (insert discipline)?
- How are emojis used in (insert discipline)?
- What is beneficial with emoji used in (insert discipline)?
- What is problematic about emoji used in (insert discipline)?
- What gaps do you identify with research about emoji use in (insert discipline)?

This assignment has two parts:

1. Identification of discipline, potential themes, research question, and four peer-reviewed sources. (10%)

2. Comprehensive literature review exploring at least three themes. A minimum of eight peer-reviewed sources should be used. (30%)

Your final literature review should include a minimum of eight peer-reviewed journal articles. The approximate word count of your literature review is 1500-2000 words. Format your literature review following APA conventions. More details and assessment criteria will be posted on Quercus and discussed in class.

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## RESOURCES, POLICIES, & GUIDELINES

**Accessibility Services.** I am available to discuss ways to ensure your full participation in the course. If you determine that accessibility accommodations are necessary, it is very important that you be registered with [Accessibility Services](#) (physically located in DV 2037). Once they notify me of your eligibility for accommodations, we can then plan how best to coordinate your participation in this course. Accessibility Services staff are available by appointment to assess specific disability related needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations. They also have consultation appointments available if you would like more information about the services they provide. Please call 905-569-4699 or email [access.utm@utoronto.ca](mailto:access.utm@utoronto.ca) to set up an appointment.

**Equity and Academic Rights.** The University of Toronto is committed to equity and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect. As a course instructor, I will neither condone nor tolerate behaviour that undermines the dignity or self-esteem of any individual in this course and wish to be alerted to any attempt to create an intimidating or hostile environment. It is our collective responsibility to create a space that is inclusive and welcomes discussion. Discrimination and harassment will not be tolerated. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns you may contact the UTM Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Office at [edio.utm@utoronto.ca](mailto:edio.utm@utoronto.ca).

**Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre.** The Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre (RGASC) is located in Room 3251 on the third floor of the Maanjiwe nendamowinan Building. The RGASC offers individual appointments, workshops, and a wide range of programs (many CCR-accredited) to help students identify and develop the academic skills they need for success in their studies. Visit the RGASC [website](#) to explore their online resources, book an in-person or online appointment, or learn about other programming such as drop-in Writing Studio, the Program for Accessing Research Training (PART), Mathematics and Numeracy Support, and resources for English Language Learners.

### **Communication Policy.**

You can call me Dr. Garbati, Professor Garbati, or Professor.

The best way to communicate with me is during my Student Drop-In Hours (my office is MN3269 in the RGASC MN3251) or by Quercus email.

Please use the Quercus email function to email me. Use these guidelines when composing your email:

- 1) Use a **subject line** that includes both the name of the course and the nature of the question being asked AND the course name or number. For example, "ISP250 Assignment #1 Question"
- 2) Include your name and student number at the end of the email (as a kind of signature).
- 3) Send the email in Quercus. If you're emailing me outside of Quercus, use your University of Toronto email account. Do NOT use another email account such as Gmail.

Additional things to consider when using email:

- If you send an attachment with your email, explain its contents in the body of the email.
- Please write clearly and concisely. Write in complete sentences and in a professional tone. Avoid spelling mistakes and slang expressions.

I will attempt to respond to emails within 48 hours between Monday and Friday.

**Late Penalties for Writing Assignments.** Late work will receive a penalty of one letter grade per day. For example, if an A essay is turned in one day late, the grade would become an A-. Similarly, if that essay was submitted two days late, the grade would become a B+. That said, I do understand that life is sometimes unpredictable. Because of this, you may request a 48-hour extension on any one assignment, no questions asked. Please do, however, keep in mind that this extension can only be used once.

**Academic Integrity.** This is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university and to ensuring that a degree from the University of Toronto Mississauga is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. As a result, UTM treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. [The University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) outlines behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the process for addressing academic offences. Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement.
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
- Making up sources or facts.
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment.
- Using or possessing unauthorized aids during an exam or test.
- Looking at someone else's answers during an exam or test.
- Misrepresenting your identity.

Happily, there are many [institutional resources on academic integrity](#) to help you understand the UTM community's expectations. If you have questions or are ever confused, please never hesitate to ask!

**Generative Artificial Intelligence Policy.** Technology is an exciting part of life, and it has a long history in the fields of writing and education.. We will discuss productive and ethical ways to use technology to help you compose effective writing. That said, please be aware that using a technological tool such as an AI to produce writing that you submit as your own work will be treated in the same way as would hiring a human to write work that you submit as your own. In other words, this is a serious academic offense.

**Turnitin.** To cultivate academic integrity, we will be using Turnitin. Normally, students will be required to submit their course assignments to the University's plagiarism detection tool website for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their material to be included as source documents in the University's plagiarism detection tool reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the plagiarism detection tool service are described on the company web site. That said, students are permitted to opt-out. Those who choose to opt out of Turnitin will be required to submit all their rough work for an assignment and have a short meeting with me to discuss their writing process.

### **Copyright in Instructional Settings**

Copies of all learning materials including PowerPoint Presentations will be posted on Quercus after class. Students are NOT permitted to record lectures and/or distribute files from this course. Any unauthorized recording or distribution of course material or activities may constitute a violation of copyright law and/or privacy legislation.

### **Library**

UTM Library librarians and reference staff are available to answer your questions and to provide research assistance and instruction in the use of information resources. The Reference & Research Desk is located on the main floor of the Library and the Research desk can be reached at 905-828-5237. Most of the library's online resources can be accessed [here](#)

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

| Week  | Topic                       | Assigned Readings   | Assignment Due          |
|---|-----------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| <b>UNIT 1: Emoji History and Function</b>               |                             |   |                         |
| <b>Week 1</b><br><b>January 7</b>                       | History of Emoji            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prisco, J. (2018). Shigetaka Kurita: The man who invented emoji.</li> <li>• Bai et al. (2019). A systematic review of emoji: Current research and future perspectives</li> </ul>   |                         |
| <b>Week 2</b><br><b>January 14</b>                      | Pragmatic Function of Emoji | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yus, F. (2014). Not all emoticons are created equal.</li> <li>• Herring, S., &amp; Dainas, A. R. (2017). "Nice picture comment!" Graphicons in Facebook comment threads.</li> <li>• Beiswenger &amp; Pappert. (2019). How to be polite with emojis: A pragmatic analysis of face work strategies in an online learning environment.</li> </ul> |                         |
| <b>Week 3</b><br><b>January 21</b>                      | Sentiment Analysis          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Godard &amp; Holtzman. (2022). The multidimensional lexicon of emojis: A new tool to assess the emotional content of emojis.</li> </ul>  | Assignment 1: Blog Post |
| <b>UNIT 2: Language and Intercultural Communication</b> |                             |   |                         |
| <b>Week 4</b><br><b>January 28</b>                      | Language and Emoji – Part 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Danesi (2019). Emojis: Langue or parole?</li> <li>• Cohn et al. (2018). Are emoji a poor substitute for words? Sentence processing with emoji substitutions.</li> </ul>  |                         |

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|  |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Al Qunayeer et al. (2019). Using emoji to improve female students' coherence in writing at Qassim University.</li> <li>• Sexten &amp; Beegle (2020). Academic language in an emoji world.</li> </ul>  |  |
| <b>Week 5<br/>February 4<sup>th</sup></b>  | Language and Emoji – Part 2   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Guest speaker: Fred Benenson,</b> <a href="https://fredbenenson.com/">https://fredbenenson.com/</a> &amp; <a href="https://www.emojidick.com/">https://www.emojidick.com/</a></li> <li>• Cohn et al. (2019). The grammar of emoji? Constraints on communicative pictorial sequencing.</li> <li>• Leonardi (2022). Communication challenges and transformations in the digital era: Emoji language and emoji translation.</li> <li>• Logi &amp; Zappavigna (2023). A social semiotic perspective: How emoji and language interact to make meaning in digital messages.</li> </ul>   |  |
| <b>Week 6<br/>February 11<sup>th</sup></b> | Intercultural Communication – Part 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generational and cross-cultural considerations</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Togans et al. (2021). Digitally saving face: An experimental investigation of cross-cultural differences in the use of emoticons and emoji.</li> <li>• Garcia et al. (2022). Emoji as a tool to aid the comprehension of written sarcasm: Evidence from younger and older adults.</li> <li>• Veytia-Bucheli et al. (2020). Presence of new forms of intercultural communication in higher education: Emojis and social interactions through WhatsApp among graduate students</li> <li>• Sampietro et al. (2022). Do you kiss when you text? Cross-cultural differences in the use of the kissing emojis in three WhatsApp corpora.</li> </ul> |  |



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|   |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gao &amp; VanderLaan (2020). Cultural Influences on perceptions of emotions depicted in emojis.</li> </ul>   |  |
| <b>READING WEEK - Feb. 18-21</b>        |   |   |  |
| <b>Week 7<br/>February 25</b>           | <p>Intercultural Communication – Part 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indigenous considerations</li> </ul>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sun et al. (2023). Understanding emojis: Cultural Influences on interpretation and choice of emojis.</li> <li>Hiang Goh &amp; Kulathuramaiyer. (2020). Developing an Indigenous cultural values based emoji messaging system: A socio-technical systems innovation approach</li> <li>Johnson, R. (2018). Anishinaabe artist designs Twitter Turtle Island emoji for Indigenous history month.</li> </ul>   | Assignment 2: Proposal                 |
| <b>Week 8<br/>March 4</b>               | <p>Equity, Diversity, Inclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Representation</li> <li>Accessibility</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coats (2018). Skin tone emoji and sentiment on Twitter.</li> <li>Robertson et al. (2018). Self-representation of Twitter using emoji skin color modifiers.</li> <li>Sweeney &amp; Whaley. (2020). Technicall white: Emoji skin-tone modifiers as American technoculture.</li> <li>Griggio et al. (2024). Party face congratulations! Exploring design ideas to help sighted users with emoji accessibility when messaging with screen reader users.</li> <li>Tigwell et al. (2020). Emoji accessibility for visually impaired people.</li> </ul> | Assignment 3: Literature Review Part 1 |
| <b>UNIT 3: Emoji in the Disciplines</b> |   |   |  |

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|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Week 9</b><br><b>March 11</b>  | TBD                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul>   |  |
| <b>Week 10</b><br><b>March 18</b> | Emoji and Business Communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Guest Speaker: ROP Team</b></li> <li>• Readings to be assigned</li> </ul>   |  |
| <b>Week 11</b><br><b>March 25</b> | Emoji and Arts and Culture       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Guest Speaker: Karie Liao, Blackwood Gallery Tour</b></li> <li>• Readings to be assigned</li> </ul>   |  |
| <b>Week 12</b><br><b>April 1</b>  | Digital Writing Communities      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graham (2019). Digital Writing Communities</li> <li>• Ge &amp; Gretzel (2018). Emoji rhetoric a social media influencer perspective</li> </ul> | Assignment 3: Literature Review Part 2 |