FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF EMOJIS IN WHATSAPP INTERACTION AMONG OMANIS

A Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Linguistics

By

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Washington, DC
June 16, 2015
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the forms and functions of emojis as used by Omani men and women friends and relatives in messages exchanged on the Instant Messaging application called WhatsApp. Emojis, or “picture characters,” are a recent development, extending what before were just emoticons that use ASCII characters to represent facial expressions. The data consisted of naturally occurring WhatsApp conversations taken from one male-only and one-female only WhatsApp groups. The analysis shows that 121 emoji forms were used in both groups. Some of these emojis appeared only or predominantly in one group but not in the other, reflecting gender differences. In addition, similar to previous studies on emoticons, women were found to use more emojis than men.

Through the analysis of many excerpts including various emojis, the study demonstrates that emojis do not mainly serve as indicators of users’ emotions; rather they serve many other communicative functions. They can serve as indication of approval or
disapproval of others’ messages, responses to expressions of thanks and compliments, conversational openings and closings, indications of celebration and excitement, and indications of the fulfillment of a requested task, contextualization cues, substitutes for lexical items, and indexical signs. The study also examines the forms and functions of repetition of emojis, which was a ubiquitous phenomenon in the data. These forms were found to serve various functions such as indicating intensity of emotions, displaying enthusiasm and excitement, indicating insistence, showing solidarity, and adding emphasis or highlighting a certain part of an utterance. The analysis also shows how through repetition over a long period of time, a particular emoji takes on meanings that it might not have in any other contexts outside the WhatsApp group in which it was used.

This study contributes to the scholarly literature on computer-mediated discourse in general, on Arabic computer-mediated discourse in particular, and on the forms and functions of emojis, a recently introduced, increasingly common, and little-studied feature of computer-mediated discourse.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I owe my deepest gratitude to my mentor, Deborah Tannen, who devoted countless hours to discuss, advise, and offer comments on multiple drafts of each chapter and even proofread for my non-native speaker interference. She gave invaluable feedback and kept tabs on the progress I was making at every stage, and was always available to meet, answer questions, and provide immediate detailed feedback on drafts. I will always be grateful for her patience, her confidence in me (as shown when she invited me to guest lecture in her classes), and her caring (as when she concluded her emails by reminding me to step out under the sun and not to skip meals). Professor Tannen, I have been honored to be your student; you will always be a source of inspiration for me.

I am also very grateful to my readers, Professors Heidi Hamilton and Jennifer Sclafani, for their insightful comments on the pre-final draft of this study, and to Dr. Cynthia Gordon, who read and offered comments on a draft, even though she had no official role on my committee. I wish to thank Dr. Hamilton as well for having served as my advisor in prior years. Her teaching and advice have played an important role in shaping my thinking about language. She has always been available to respond to my questions and concerns about many things throughout my PhD journey. I am also indebted to every faculty member and to fellow graduate students in the Department of Linguistics at Georgetown, who have contributed in one way or another to making my past five years of graduate school an enjoyable and rewarding experience.
I would also like to offer special thanks to the participants in this study who so generously agreed to provide me with their WhatsApp conversations. I am particularly grateful to many members in the female group, who have kept encouraging and supporting me, even from afar.

A good support system is vital to surviving and staying sane in graduate school. I was fortunate to have great and caring friends without whom I would not have been able to survive the long and daunting journey toward a PhD. I am very grateful to Mashael Al Aloula, Hana Jan, and Hanan Al Kindi who have gone above and beyond the call of just being a friend by always being there when I needed them. I will forever cherish those shared moments of joy, laughter, and tears. I am also indebted to my friends: Rana Tabishat, Enas Al Zaghal, and Maryam Al Hinai.

Finally, I am indebted to my family for their persistent love and support. I am particularly grateful to my parents for their constant love, pride, and faith in me. I am also grateful to my sister Bahia without whom I would not have been able to be away from the family to pursue a PhD degree for five years. Thank you for everything you have done for me, for our parents and for our sisters. I could not ask for a better sister and friend.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1
  1.1 Introduction ..................................................................................... 1
  1.2 Background Information .................................................................. 3
    1.2.1 Emojis ...................................................................................... 3
    1.2.2 Oman ....................................................................................... 5
    1.2.3 WhatsApp Messenger .............................................................. 7
  1.3 The Study ......................................................................................... 10
    1.3.1 Participants .............................................................................. 11
    1.3.2 Data Collection ........................................................................ 12
    1.3.3 Data Analysis ........................................................................... 15
  1.4 Preview of the Chapters .................................................................... 17

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW ..................................................... 21
  2.1 Introduction ..................................................................................... 21
  2.2 Research on Nonlinguistic Features of Computer-Mediated Discourse ..... 24
  2.3 Research on Arabic Computer-Mediated Discourse ............................ 30
  2.4 Emoticons in Computer-Mediated Discourse .................................... 39
    2.4.1 Emoticons: Origin, Forms and Definitions .................................. 39
    2.4.2 Research on Emoticons ............................................................. 42
  2.5 Conclusion ....................................................................................... 52

## CHAPTER THREE: FORMS, FREQUENCY AND PLACEMENT OF EMOJIS .... 54
  3.1 Introduction ..................................................................................... 54
  3.2 The Forms and Frequency of Emojis .............................................. 55
    3.2.1 People ...................................................................................... 56
    3.2.2 Nature ....................................................................................... 76
    3.2.3 Objects ..................................................................................... 84
    3.2.4 Food and Drink ....................................................................... 92
    3.2.5 Symbols ................................................................................... 95
  3.3 Gender Differences and Emoji Use ................................................. 96
  3.4 Emoji Placement .......................................................................... 100
  3.5 Conclusion ....................................................................................... 103

## CHAPTER FOUR: COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS OF EMOJIS .............. 106
  4.1 Introduction ..................................................................................... 106
  4.2 The Functions ................................................................................ 108
    4.2.1 Indicating Emotions ................................................................. 108
    4.2.2 Indicating Approval or Disapproval .......................................... 113
    4.2.3 Emojis as a Response to Thanking and Compliments ............... 120
    4.2.4 Signaling Openings and Closings of Conversations ................. 123
    4.2.5 Indicating Celebration ............................................................. 133
    4.2.6 Emojis as Indicators of Fulfilling a Requested Task ................. 143
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study examines the forms and functions of emojis as used by Omani men and women friends and relatives in messages exchanged on the application called WhatsApp, an Instant Messaging application that is very popular in the Middle East. Emojis are colorful pictures representing many entities that exist around us in addition to facial expressions. Therefore, emojis are more complex and varied than their predecessors, emoticons, which are made of ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) characters to represent facial expressions.

In the last few decades, and with the prevalence of various computer-mediated communication technologies, emoticons have been widely used, especially by young generations in their daily online interactions. They are used in almost every online communication channel, such as forums, emails, Instant Messages (IM), Facebook, Twitter and countless other digital platforms. Their popularity among users makes them unique and has attracted scholarly attention (e.g., Rezabek and Cochenour 1998; Walther and D’Addario 2001; Dresner and Herring 2010). Many of these studies have been conducted in the field of social psychology and have focused on emoticons as indicators of emotional states; they have specifically examined the effect of emoticons on the interpretation of textual messages they accompanied in emails (e.g., ThompSEN and Foulger 1996; Rezabek and Cochenour 1998), online chat and Instant Messaging (e.g., Ip 2002; Garrison et al. 2011; Derks, Bos, and von Grumbkow 2007), website message
boards (Provine, Spencer, and Mandell 2007), and text messaging (Amaghlobeli 2012; Tossell et al. 2012). Others have focused on gender differences in emoticon use (e.g., Wolf 2000; Huffaker and Calvert 2005). Of all these studies, only a small number have focused on how emoticons are used in naturally occurring online interactions, and of those, very few are conducted by linguists such as Dresner and Herring (2010), Skovholt, Grønning and Kankaanranta (2014), and Vandergriff (2014).

In addition, the majority of these studies are on the English language although a few were conducted on the Japanese language (e.g., Katsuno and Yano 2007) and other European languages, such as Amaghlobeli (2012) on French, and Skovholt, Grønning and Kankaanranta (2014) on Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, and Finnish. This practice accords with Danet and Herring's (2007) assertion that most computer-mediated communication (CMC) literature has focused on CMC practices of English speakers and neglected the developments of online communication among other populations speaking other languages. There are some studies on the Arabic language, none of which has been conducted on emoticon use in CMC.

Emojis are a recent development, extending what before were just emoticons. They have been largely neglected in the literature and their usage and functions have not received attention. Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, no research has been conducted on the use of emojis on WhatsApp. Thus, this study proposes to fill these gaps by providing a linguistic understanding of how emojis are used in actual online conversations by examining interactions that took place in Arabic on WhatsApp. It will also extend the study of emoticons to include a wide range of emojis in addition to the
basic facial emojis (happy, sad and winky faces) that were the main focus of almost all the previous studies on emoticons.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will first discuss how emojis were developed and the differences between them and text-based emoticons. Then, I will present background information about Oman followed by a description of WhatsApp and its various features. After this, I will introduce the participants, and explain the data and the processes of data collection and analysis. Finally, I will present an overview of the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

1.2 Background Information

1.2.1 Emojis

The word emoji, according to Lebduska (2014), literally means, “picture character.” According to Blagdon (2013), emojis were first introduced in Japan through the mobile phone network DoCoMo’s i-mode by Shigeta Kurita to enable users to send pictographs between phones. Emojis then became very popular in Japan as many mobile companies installed them on their mobile devices. Later, they spread to other countries around the world. Garun (2015) states, “The trend took a sharp uprise after emoji keyboards were introduced on iOS and Android in 2011 and 2013, respectively.” In a recent study conducted by Thomas Dimson, the engineer who developed Instagram’s hyperlapse application, 50% of the comments and captions on Instagram contained emojis (Dimson 2015).
Emojis are different than emoticons. Emoticons came first as they were invented in 1982. They are text-based and are created by users using the ASCII characters and thus the possible combinations are infinite. Yet, the number of emoticons used in CMC interaction is often small. Most emoticons are made of at least two characters. The following table shows some examples of emoticons.

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>:-)</td>
<td>Smiley face</td>
<td>:-D</td>
<td>Big smile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:-(</td>
<td>The frown</td>
<td>:@</td>
<td>Screaming or shouting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>;-)</td>
<td>The wink</td>
<td>:P</td>
<td>A face with the tongue sticking out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:-o</td>
<td>Surprised face</td>
<td>&lt;3</td>
<td>Heart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1. Examples of text-based emoticons

Emojis are standardized computer codes which can be sent and transferred between computers and mobile devices and then are recognized and translated into predefined images that users can see on their devices. According to emojipedia website, they are limited in number approximately 722 emojis. In order for users to use emojis on their mobile phones, they need to download the application of emojis or enable the emoji keyboard that is already preinstalled on most mobile devices. Emojis can be seen to be more expressive than emoticons. They represent many things that might be difficult to depict using emoticons. Emojis represent colorful images of faces, people, nature, food, and symbols as illustrated in the following figure:
Next, brief background information about Oman will be presented followed by background about WhatsApp.

1.2.2 Oman

Oman, officially the Sultanate of Oman, is an Arab state located in the southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula. Oman is bordered by the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. As of April 2015, the estimated population of Oman, according to the Omani National Center for Statistics and Information, is 4,186,718. Non-Omanis constitute 44.2% of the total population (1,844,978). Standard Arabic is the official language in the country.

Figure 1. 1. Emojis available on Apple iOS\(^1\)

1 The figure was taken from http://www.thebolditalic.com/articles/6947-now-whyd-they-have-to-go-and-make-the-new-asian-emoji-yellow
The information and communications technology sector in Oman has undergone huge developments in the last decade. From July 1995 to 2004, Oman, according to Naqvi and Al Shihi (2009), had only one company, OmanTel, as the provider of both mobile and telecommunication services. In March 2005, the Omani Qatari Telecommunication Company Ooredoo, originally operating under the name Nawras, launched as another provider. Naqvi and Al Shihi (2009) assert that the multimedia message services MMS and wireless protocol (WAP) were introduced to the country at the end of 2004 while third generation (3G) mobile services were introduced at the end of 2007.

In the last four years, it is becoming more common for people to have data plans for their phones. As of the end of 2014, according to the report on the telecom sector published by the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority, the number of mobile service subscribers was 6,001,241. (There are more mobile phone subscriptions than the total number of the population due to the fact that many users tend to have more than one SIM card.) There were also 173,693 subscribers of fixed Internet service and 2,713,230 subscribers (of the total population 4,186,718) of mobile broadband. According to BuddeComm, a global independent telecommunication research and consultancy company, the use of mobile messaging in Oman has recently decreased due to the proliferation of smartphone applications like WhatsApp and Viber. Next, I will briefly present WhatsApp, its features and some of its uses in Oman.
1.2.3 WhatsApp Messenger

WhatsApp is a cross-platform instant messaging application for smartphones. It was developed in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum, both former employees of Yahoo. It has gained tremendous popularity among smartphone users around the world. WhatsApp announced that, as of January 21, 2015, they have half a billion regular and active users around the globe (blog.whatsapp.com retrieved May 19, 2015). According to the digital media correspondent of the Financial Times, WhatsApp “has done to SMS on mobile phones what Skype did to international calling on landlines” (Bradshaw, Tim [November 14, 2011]).

Once the application is downloaded on a smart phone, it automatically syncs to the address book showing all the contacts using WhatsApp. It enables users to exchange images, video, audio and text messages with individuals and groups of people across the internet (either via Wi-Fi or preexisting mobile data plans). Church and de Oliveira (2013) note, “WhatsApp presents IM chats as a series of threaded messages on a wall, using spatial position and color to differentiate sender and receiver messages.” When interaction in WhatsApp takes place, participants can see the text unfold on their screen. They are also able to scroll back up the text box on the screen to re-read previous parts of the interaction.

WhatsApp enables its users to see when their friends are online, or the last time they accessed the application (although many users disable this feature so no one knows when they last accessed Whatsapp, especially when they want to ignore certain messages). Recently, the application has introduced another notification feature indicating when a message is delivered and when it is read. A grey check mark next to
the message means that the message was sent from the sender’s phone but not received yet on the recipient’s phone, two grey check marks mean that the message has been delivered to the recipient’s phone but has not been read yet, and these check marks turn blue once the recipient reads the message. A time stamp appears next to these check marks indicating the time the message was received as illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 1.2. Meaning of the tick marks in WhatsApp

WhatsApp makes use of “one-way” rather than “two-way” transmission. That is, according to Herring (1999), “messages are sent in their entirety when the message originator presses ‘send’ or ‘return,’ rather than one keystroke at a time.” However, WhatsApp indicates when the user at the other end is typing by showing a notification at the top of the application (e.g., Fathiya is typing). The absence of visual and audio information found in face-to-face interaction has a direct effect on interaction management since no visual or auditory feedback can be provided. Therefore, messages can overlap, interaction can seem fragmented, and long gaps sometimes can occur.

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2 This figure was taken from http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/532383/WhatsApp-blue-ticks-what-does-it-mean-message-read-status
Herring (2001) notes that disrupted turn adjacency in computer-mediated communication occurred because messages are posted based on the time they are received from the system not on what they are responding to. Thus, physically adjacent messages are not necessarily relevant turns. Like instant messaging and other forms of textual computer-mediated communication, messages in WhatsApp remain displayed on the screen and users can refer back to previous messages by scrolling up on their mobile screens. This feature allows them to quote, refer to, and clarify previous messages.

Finally, one of the features that WhatsApp offers its users is the option to create groups and to communicate within their boundaries. The person who creates the group becomes its manager. S/he can add or remove members without the need for their approval. Any member, on the other hand, can leave the WhatsApp group any time but s/he cannot join the group by themselves. Instead, s/he would need to be added to the group by the manager. Many of the WhatsApp users in Oman are members of multiple groups such as family, university and/or school friends, co-workers, and so on.

The use of WhatsApp is prevalent among Omanis and is considered a social application. People use it as a main communication tool to connect with friends, relatives and colleagues. It has replaced the role of telephone calls and text messages in the lives of many Omanis. According to Al Zijdaly (2014), during their strike in 2013, Omani teachers shared multimodal images with the public in Oman via WhatsApp to “win their cause” (107). In addition people now send wedding and other invitations via WhatsApp. In my small village, people used to invite their neighbors and inform them about any happy or sad occasion in person. Now WhatsApp has replaced these face-to-face invitations; people get the invitation as a WhatsApp message. I have heard many people,
especially elderly people who don’t have Whatsapp, complain about feeling excluded because they do not know what is going on in the village anymore.

Al Shaaili (2013) used a survey to explore the prevalence of WhatsApp among 2053 participants (86% were students) in Oman. He found that 97 % of his participants used WhatsApp. 57% of them mentioned that they send between one to 50 WhatsApp messages a day while 22% sent from 50 to 100 a day. 53% of the participants stated that they are members of two to five WhatsApp groups and only 28% of them were members of one group. The survey also includes a question about whether the participants used emojis in their WhatsApp communication or not. 97% of them mentioned that they did while 3% stated they did not.

Below I introduce the study. I will introduce the participants first and then describe the data, and the processes of data collection and analysis.

1.3 The Study

My decision to focus on emojis as a unit of analysis in this study has been a result of my observation of the abundant use of emojis by family members and friends in their communication via WhatsApp. Some people I have talked to think that WhatsApp messages without emojis look rough and even rude sometimes. They rarely send a message without an emoji. This has motivated me to explore the forms and functions of emojis in WhatsApp interaction. As Coleman (2010: 487) states, “the fact that digital media culturally matters is undeniable but showing how, where, and why it matters is necessary to push against peculiarly narrow presumptions about the universality of digital
experience.” Next, I will introduce the participants first and then I will explain the data collection and data analysis.

1.3.1 Participants

The data for this study consists of naturally occurring WhatsApp conversations. These conversations were taken from one male-only and one female-only WhatsApp groups. These two groups can be described, using Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept, as two different communities of practice.

The female group consists of 30 members but only 20 members were active; they sent messages and interacted with other members in the group on a consistent basis. (The remaining 10 participants did not send or comment on other members’ messages. They just received and read messages.) These members know each other very well because they live in the same geographical location and are all from the same small village. They often meet and communicate off-line as well. In addition, they are all relatives; some are close while others are distant relatives to each other. They have known each other all their lives except six of them who moved to the village only after they got married there. The members’ ages range between 18 and 37 years of age. Eighteen of them are married and have children. Only 10 of them work outside the home; seven work as teachers and three work in other jobs in the government. The primary purpose for forming this group from the outset was to easily communicate and announce summer activities for the children by the organizers of the summer club in the village. The group was named (القرية المتميزة), “The distinguished village.” After the summer club, the group continued to
be a virtual meeting space for the group members in addition to its primary function as a medium for communicating any events or news taking place in the village for the whole group members. The topics discussed and shared in the group include trivial jokes, religious topics and invitations to weddings, just to list a few.

The male group consists of 15 members, who are all almost of the same age (average 26 years old). They were all active except for 3 members. They are from different places in Oman. They met and knew each other for the first time at the university. They were all classmates; they studied mechanical engineering at the same university. Some of them were also close friends in real life. After they graduated, they worked at different private and government institutions in different parts in and outside Oman. Therefore, they rarely could see or meet each other. They formed this virtual group primarily to keep in touch with each other. They named their group “The world of mechanical engineers.” In this group, they discuss various topics in politics, sports, religion and entertainment. In both groups, some members are more active than others; they are always part of any conversation and they always comment if someone forwards a message or a joke. I do not know the members of this group personally as I do with the female group. I was introduced to them through my brother who was a member of the group, as I explain in the next section.

1.3.2 Data Collection

WhatsApp messenger keeps an archive in the form of logs of all conversations that have occurred between two individuals (dyads) in a private chat or between multiple
members of a given group. It also has a technical feature that allows users to email these logs of WhatsApp conversations to their own email or others’ emails. This feature made the process of collecting data for this study very easy and convenient. As for the female group, I know all the members. At the beginning, I was a member in the group but I opted out to limit any distraction from WhatsApp during my study. I contacted the manager of the group and explained to her the purpose of my study in a WhatsApp message. I asked her to forward the message to the group and asked them if they would be willing to participate in my study. I also explained in the message that anyone has the right not to participate and that I will not use any conversation that they were part of if they decide to do so. I also assured them that their real names will not be used and that any information that might violate their anonymity or disclose their real identities will be disguised. After obtaining all members’ consents, the manager of the group emailed me a log of the group’s conversations in a rich text format file.

For the male group, first I asked many male relatives if they would be willing to share their WhatsApp conversations after explaining to them the nature of my study and my interest in studying emojis. A lot of them refused, because as they told me, they sometimes use profane and inappropriate language when they interact with their friends and hence they thought it was inappropriate to share their conversation with me, especially because I am a female. Then, one of my brothers suggested that his group might agree to participate because he was sure that this group did not use any inappropriate language. I sent him the same WhatsApp message I sent to the female group and asked him to forward it to his group. After all of the members of the group agreed to share their conversations, the manager of the group emailed me a log of their
WhatsApp conversations. None of the members in either group refused to be part of the study.

The logs from both groups included all conversations that had occurred between the group members from the beginning of the year or the day of forming the group, whichever came first, until the day of sending the email. The conversations are entirely authentic because none of the group members knew in advance that their WhatsApp conversations would be used for the study. The male group was formed before the female group and hence I got a 9 month period of data from the male group and just a 3 month period of data from the female group that occurred during the year of 2013. In addition to the conversations, the logs include the date, the timing and the name of the participant before each turn. I use the term “turn” in the following way. Every time a participant presses the “send” button to make his/her or utterance visible to the other, it is a turn. This means that each time the name of the sender appears in front of an utterance, it is a new turn. A turn can consist of one utterance (a phrase or a full sentence), multiple utterances, or even of an emoji or multiple emojis. I put numbers in front of each turn in the excerpts I analyzed to make it easy to refer to them in the analysis.

To anonymize the data, I changed and replaced the names of the participants, the names of the cities and any other information that might potentially lead to any of the participants being identified. This procedure has already been used to conceal participants’ real identities in studies of other communication modes. For example, Turkle (1995) wrote:

In reporting cases of people who have part of their identities on the internet, I follow the same policy as for other informants: I protect confidentiality by
disguising identities. This means that among other things, I change MUD names, character names, and city names (314).

1.3.3 Data Analysis

The next stage after data collection is data analysis. First, in order to count the number of words, I copied the data from each group to a Microsoft Word document. Then I removed the names, dates, and any information created by the system itself in order to obtain an accurate count of the number of words in each group. Emojis were also removed from these documents because Word could not identify them and also because I would be counting them separately.

Counting emojis was done manually since I could not find a program that is compatible with both the Arabic language and emojis. In order to identify emoji occurrences and frequencies, I identified and coded each instance of emojis by form (e.g., 😊, 😏, 😞, 😖, 😊😊😊, and so on). Then I created an Excel file for each group with all the emoji forms that appeared in it. After that, I counted the instances of each individual emoji. Creating PDF files of the data for each group helped me in counting the instances of occurrence of each emoji form. That is, by adding an emoji to the search box in the pdf files, I could get and count all the instances including that specific emoji. Two totals of emojis will be reported. First, multiple occurrences of the same emoji such as 😊😊😊 (😊😊😊) were counted as one; in the second total they were counted individually as three. The following table illustrates the total word number and emoji numbers obtained.
from each group. It also illustrates the total number of words and emojis in the whole corpus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Word count</th>
<th>Total number of emojis with duplicate emojis counted as one</th>
<th>Total number of emojis when duplicate emojis were counted individually</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male-only group</td>
<td>24047</td>
<td>2439</td>
<td>3871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-only group</td>
<td>17990</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>3648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>42037</strong></td>
<td><strong>4369</strong></td>
<td><strong>7519</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2. Number of words and emojis

The highlighted row in the table above shows the total number of words and emojis in the whole corpus. The total number of words was 42037. The total number of emojis was 4369 when duplicate emojis were counted as one and 7519 when duplicate emojis were counted individually. The frequency of every emoji type and the gender differences will be reported in Chapter 3.

The analysis presented in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 was carried out in two phases. I began my analysis (Chapter 3) by identifying and reporting the frequency of every emoji type that appeared in the corpus. I also examined emoji placement in the discourse and the difference between men and women in the use of emojis. In the second stage, illustrative data examples were chosen and analyzed (Chapters 4 and 5) to explore the communicative functions of emojis and the repetition of emojis in WhatsApp discourse. In some instances, playback was used with participants to verify the interpretation of how some emojis were used. Following is a preview of the chapters.
1.4 Preview of the Chapters

In the present chapter, I briefly introduce the topic of emoticon and emoji use in computer-mediated discourse and establish the motivations and contribution of this study to the scholarly literature on computer mediated-discourse. I also explain the differences between emojis and their antecedent text-based emoticons. Then I present a brief background about Oman followed by a background about the technical features of WhatsApp and some of its uses in Oman. Then I introduce the participants and the two WhatsApp groups before I describe the data and data collection.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature on computer-mediated discourse. I focus on studies that have examined the various distinctive features (such as letter repetition, capitalization, the use or the lack of punctuation, emoticons, and so on) of computer-mediated discourse and the approaches used to study them. The review shows that early research focused on comparing online language use to speech, writing or both. This body of research was criticized because it tended to generalize its findings and tended to only list the linguistic and non-linguistic features used in various modes of computer-mediated communication. Later, there were calls to take various technological and situational factors into consideration when analyzing computer-mediated discourse. Based on this approach, the discourse features were looked at as resources that users employ to perform various communicative functions. The chapter then discusses a representative sample of studies that were conducted on Arabic computer-mediated discourse. The review of these studies establishes that many of these studies focused on examining the use of Romanized Arabic by Arabic speakers in various parts of the Arab World. There were
some studies that focused on the use of code-switching while the last group of studies
focused on gender differences in the use of these strategies. Finally, the chapter reviews
studies specifically focusing on the use of emoticons in various modes of computer-
mediated communication. The early studies were descriptive in nature. Some of these
studies only reported the frequency of emoticons that appeared in their data. Others were
experimental in nature; they used simulated data to explore the effect of emoticons on the
interpretation of the associated text or on the informants’ perception of the text. Recent
studies have used discourse analytical approaches to examine the communicative
functions of emoticons as they are used in context. However, few of these studies
examined the functions of emojis and none of them focused on exploring the use of
emojis in WhatsApp interaction. Thus, this study will contribute to the literature on
computer-mediated discourse by focusing on the use of emojis in WhatsApp. Also, to the
best of my knowledge, this is the only study that looks at this phenomenon in Arabic
CMC. Review of relevant literature also is presented at the beginning of the analysis
chapters.

Chapter 3 identifies and describes all the emoji types that appeared in the data and
their frequencies. It identifies 121 emoji types. The chapter also discusses gender
differences in the use of emojis and found, as in many previous studies, that women tend
to use emojis more than men. In addition, gender differences were reflected in the
exclusive or the predominant use of some emojis in one group but not the other. Men
exclusively used emojis representing a thumb-down (👎), a cross mark (❌), a check
mark (✔), and a policeman (👮). Women exclusively used an emoji representing an
ear ( Hearth ) and predominantly used an emoji representing a kissing face ( 😘 ). Finally, the chapter identifies and explains the placement of emojis in WhatsApp discourse. Five frequent positions were identified: at the beginning, at the middle, at the end of utterances, alone or alone but connected to previous or later turns.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of many excerpts from the data, which illustrate that emojis can be used to serve various functions in WhatsApp. Emojis can be used as indication of emotions, indication of approval or disapproval, responses to expressions of thanks and compliments, conversational openings and closings, indication of celebration, indication of the fulfillment of a requested task, contextualization cues, substitutes for lexical items, and indexical signs. The functions of emojis as contextualization cues, substitutes for lexical items, and as indexical signs can be classified under one category as they relate to expressing propositional meaning while all the remaining functions can be classified under another category as they relate to expressing interpersonal meaning.

Chapter 5 begins by reviewing some studies that have examined repetition in face-to-face interaction and in computer-mediated communication. To the best of my knowledge, none of the previous studies have focused on the repetition of emoticons or emojis in computer-mediated discourse. This study examines the forms and function of the repetition of emojis in WhatsApp discourse. It identifies five forms of emoji repetition. They are: (1) the repetition of the same emoji by the same user in the same turn; (2) the repetition of the same emoji by the same user but in different turns; (3) the use of an emoji along with its lexical equivalent in the same turn; (4) the repetition of the same emoji by different users across turns; (5) the repetition of the same emoji over a long period of time. These forms of repetition were found to serve various functions,
which include: indicating intensity of emotions, displaying enthusiasm and excitement, indicating insistence, showing solidarity, and adding emphasis or highlighting a certain part of an utterance. Finally, the chapter traces the repetition of a single emoji over a long period of time and shows how through repetition, the emoji takes on meanings that it might not have in any other contexts outside the group in which it was used.

Chapter 6 is the conclusion. It presents a brief discussion and summary of the main findings of this study. It also discusses the significance of these findings.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The last few decades have witnessed dramatic developments in communication technologies that have enabled a vast array of new communication modes via the Internet, including audio and visual communication, voice-over protocols, and real-time text-based interactions. Some scholars, such as Simpson (2004), argue that users of new online communicative modes need to acquire new skills in order to be able to use these modes successfully and effectively. Drawing on Hymes’ (1972) concept of communicative competence, Simpson used “electronic communicative competence” to describe the knowledge users have and employ when communicating online. This competence consists of a set of components which users need to acquire in order to be able to communicate online effectively; they are: *the linguistic system, the discourse patterns, the technology, and the sociocultural rules of the particular virtual community* (13). The linguistic system component encompasses knowledge of “e-grammar,” “a set of features that characterize the grammar of electronic language” (Herring 2012: 1) such as the typographic and orthographic devices used in computer-mediated discourse to overcome the constraints imposed by communication technologies, and to serve various interactional functions.

Since the early stages of computer-mediated communication, computer-mediated discourse has intrigued scholars from different disciplines such as communication,
linguistics, and psychology. The linguist Naomi Baron was among the first scholars to discuss computer-mediated communication from a linguistic perspective. In 1984, she published an article discussing the potential effects of “computer-mediated communication as a force in language change.” In this paper, Baron attempts to create a framework for understanding “computers as conduits of natural language” (119) by placing CMC on a spectrum with face-to-face speech at one end and writing at the other end. However, according to Herring (2001), the publication of Ferrara, Brunner, and Whittemore’s paper on “Interactive written discourse as an emergent genre” in 1991 marked the period when linguists and language scholars started to pay serious attention to computer-mediated discourse. Since then, the linguistic research examining computer-mediated discourse has grown exponentially. In this chapter I will focus on the literature addressing the linguistic and nonlinguistic features of computer-mediated discourse to establish what is currently known about these features in general and about emoticon use in particular. The review, in this section, also discusses how the changing of the main theoretical concerns of computer-mediated discourse research has affected the academic approach to these features. Next, I will review what has been done on computer-mediated discourse in the Arabic language. Most studies I could access on Arabic computer discourse predominately focus on the use of Roman script to represent Arabic letters and on code-switching. Finally, I will discuss studies that specifically examined the use of emoticons in various computer-mediated communication modes. But, before discussing the literature, I will discuss first the terms used in the literature to refer to ‘language use’ in computer-mediated communication and justify my choice of the term “computer-mediated discourse.”
The most popular and widely used term in the literature of language-focused research is computer-mediated communication (CMC). However, the last few decades have witnessed the emergence and rapid development of many new communication technologies, other than computers, such as web 2.0 platforms and smartphones. This has led some scholars to use terms other than “computer-mediated communication.” Baron (2004) proposes the term “Electronically mediated communication” (EMC), while Thurlow and Mroczek (2011) suggest the term “Digital Discourse.” For Crystal (2011) however these terms are still too broad since the distinction between language and other forms of communication is not made clear. He suggests the term “Internet Linguistics” to cover the scientific study of all language uses in the electronic medium. Jucker and Dürscheid (2012), on the other hand, put forward the term “keyboard-to-screen communication,” which, according to Herring, Stein, and Virtanen (2013), is too narrow as it excludes communication done via other technologies such as audio and video calls.

Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015) defined computer-mediated discourse (CMD) as “the communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked or mobile computers, where ‘computers’ are defined broadly to include any digital communication device” (127). They emphasize that the study of computer-mediated discourse is distinguished from the general interdisciplinary study of computer-mediated communication (CMC) by “its focus on language and language use.” Since this study focuses on WhatsApp interaction mediated by mobile phones, which according to the previous definition can be considered computers, I will use, following Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015), the term CMD throughout this study.
2.2 Research on Nonlinguistic Features of Computer-Mediated Discourse

One of the issues that have attracted great attention in linguistic studies of computer-mediated discourse is the relation of language used online to the already existing modes of communication: speech and writing, i.e., should computer-mediated discourse be classified as speech, writing, or a hybrid of the two? The underlying assumption of this strand of research is that language used online is unique and it constitutes a “new variety” (Collot and Belmore 1996) “which exists on a continuum between the context-dependent interaction of oral conversation and the contextually abstracted composition of written text” (Foertsch 1995: 301). The main method used in this strand of research is comparing the linguistic and structural features of computer-mediated discourse with writing, speech, or both.

In contrast, some scholars, such as Ferrara, Brunner, and Whittemore (1991) and Crystal (2001), viewed computer-mediated discourse as a single language variety. Viewing language used online as “interactive written discourse,” Ferrara, Brunner, and Whittemore (1991) analyzed the syntactic and stylistic features of an extended dyadic simultaneous computer-mediated interaction produced by 23 participants. They found that participants tended to omit articles, copulas, and subject pronouns, and use abbreviation and symbols. They concluded that “interactive written discourse” cannot be characterized as belonging to either end of the continuum but rather is a new verity since it exhibits characteristics of both oral and written language. Similarly, David Crystal (2001) in his book, “Language and the Internet,” investigated a variety of computer-mediated discourse, including emails, chat, virtual worlds (MUD and MOOs), and World
Wide Web, by comparing them against his analysis of spoken and written language. He invented the term “Netspeak” to refer to language used in all these modes, and he argued that “Netspeak has far more properties linking it to writing than to speech…Netspeak is better seen as written language which has been pulled some way in the direction of speech than as spoken language which has been written down” (47). On the other hand, other scholars, who view speech and writing as situated along a continuum rather than two different entities, attempted to identify the position of computer-mediated discourse within this continuum. This is because it blends features that are typically associated with face-to-face interactions (such as informality and immediacy of style, relatively rapid exchange, etc.) with features of written discourse (such as typing and reading messages on screen, absence of visual and paralinguistic cues, as well as the physical absence of the addressee). For instance, Yates (1996) compares a corpus of messages exchanged on a computer conferencing system at the Open University in the United Kingdom with two other corpora of spoken and written materials. The results of the study showed that computer-mediated discourse is closer to written language in terms of vocabulary use, and closer to spoken language in terms of personal pronoun use, but makes greater use of modal auxiliaries than either speech or writing.

The focus on identifying the relationship of computer-mediated discourse to spoken and written language has consequently led researchers, at the beginning, to focus predominantly on describing the distinctive linguistic features, which were thought to be used to compensate for the lack of non-verbal and paralinguistic cues available in face-to-face interaction and to overcome the constraints imposed by the medium. These features include: acronyms (e.g. LOL for ‘laugh out loud’), letter/number homophones (e.g. U for
‘you’ and 4 for ‘for’), letter and punctuation mark repetition (e.g. I’m soooooo happy, ‘???????????’), emoticons (such as :)), and elliptical style (e.g. going home). Carey (1980) analyzed transcripts from two computer conferencing systems to identify “the ways in which expressive communication is encoded by users of the medium” (67). He identified a list of five distinctive features that were used to compensate for nonverbal cues. They are: (1) “vocal spelling,” which refers to nonstandard spellings of words; (2) “lexical surrogates”—using words to describe the tone of the message; (3) “spatial arrays”—using letters and symbols to create graphic representation; (4) “manipulation of grammatical markers,” such as capitalization, periods, and punctuation marks; and (5) “minus features,” which refer to the lack of capital letters and punctuation marks. However, Carey did not follow a systematic method to identify these cues. On the other hand, Rintel and Pittman (1997) examined 10 logs of synchronous IRC, Internet Relay Chat. They found that shortening, such as lack of capital letters, and emoticons were employed to imitate nonverbal behavior in face-to-face interaction but also to keep up with the fast pace of multiparty IRC interaction.

Hass et al (2011) analyzed a corpus of Instant Messages exchanged by college students. They identified 15 features that regularly occurred across the corpus and which they claim were serving functions as paralinguistic cues. These features include: punctuation (such as using capitalization, ellipses) letters (such as omitted letters, repeated letters, replaced letters), words (such as replacing words with numbers [2 for two], replacing words with letters [u for you], replacing words with symbols [@ for at]), abbreviations (wat’sup), slang (yeah dude), dialect (such as “get outttttta here” and “hahahahaha”), emoticons (:P), and meta-markings.
The previous studies tend to overgeneralize their findings implying that these features are “static and predictable conventions across all CMC” (Barton and Lee 2013: 5). Their description of these features was often limited to listing them. In addition, the description of their functions has been simplified. For instance, Crystal (2001:35) postulated:

The features are indeed capable of a certain expressiveness, but the range of meanings they signal is small, and restricted to gross notions such as extra emphasis, surprise, and puzzlement. Less exaggerated nuances are not capable of being handled in this way.

Moreover, most of the earlier studies treated the features as a natural result of the affordances of the new technologies. Georgakopoulou (2003) noted that there was no acknowledgment of any social or contextual factors that might have also contributed to the emergence of such features. Darics (2012: 26) also maintained that most of these studies failed to “consider the closer and wider context of use and address important questions such as when exactly these linguistic devises are used, and what interactional and discursive functions are assigned to them.”

The criticism of this homogenizing approach to “language use in CMC” has led to the development of new perspectives of computer-mediated discourse. Thurlow (2001) asserted that “there is no homogenous speech community on the internet: equally there is no single language of the internet” (287). There are many contextual and social factors that should be taken into consideration when analyzing computer-mediated discourse. Georgakopoulou and Goutsos (2004) pointed out that in CMC research there is a need for “contextual analyses that shed light on how different context parameters shape and are invoked in the discourse of various types of CMC” (186).
In 2007, Herring developed a “faceted classification scheme” for analyzing computer-mediated discourse. This scheme is based on the assumption that there are two main factors influencing computer-mediated discourse: medium and situation. Medium factors encompass many technological aspects, such as “synchronicity, message transmission (1-way vs. 2-way), persistent of transcript, size of message buffer, channels of communication, anonymous messaging, private messaging, filtering, quoting, and message format,” while the situation factors encompass many social aspects such as details about the participants, their relationship, topics and purpose of communication, the language variety and the writing system used, tone of interaction (serious/playful, formal, formal, casual), and the conventional practices within the communication medium (Herring 2007).

The focus of research on computer-mediated discourse has shifted “from medium related to user-related patterns of language use, and brings the ‘variety of group practices’ to the center of attention” (Androutsopoulos 2006: 421). Instead of relying on descriptive approaches, researchers have started to use an ethnographically informed approach based on real computer-mediated discourse. Based on this approach, “characteristic features of computer-mediated discourse are now understood as resources that particular (groups of) users might draw on in the construction of discourse styles in particular contexts” (Androutsopoulos 2006: 421). For instance, Waseleski (2006) examined the usage of exclamation points in 200 messages posted to two electronic discussion groups, serving people specializing in library and information science. The analysis showed that exclamation points were rarely used as signs of excitability; they were instead used as indicators of friendly interaction. In another study, Darics (2012)
analyzed logs of naturally occurring Instant Messages collected from a virtual team of a global consultancy company based in London. She used a multi-perspectival approach, based on the theoretical frameworks of interactional sociolinguistics, communities of practice, politeness theory and conversation analysis, to examine the functions of a group of orthographic and typographic and typographical features. Orthographic features encompass non-lexical tokens, e.g., ah, um, etc., interjections and laughter, e.g., phew, hahaha, etc., comic strip sounds, e.g., boom, zzz, grrr, capitalization, and nonstandard spelling. The typographical features include repeated punctuation and emoticons. The findings suggest that these features serve as contextualization cues. Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright, and Rosenbaum-Tamari (1997) examined naturally occurring interaction, “a virtual party,” in Internet Relay Chat. They found that users creatively employed typographical devices, such as emoticons, and orthographical symbols, such as capital letters to perform and simulate smoking marijuana.

Barton and Lee (2013) noted that the shift to the sociocultural approach has acknowledged that patterns of similarities and differences appear within and beyond a single mode of CMC. Thus, language and identity online, especially gender differences, have become the focus of a growing body of research. For instance, Herring and Zelenkauskaite (2009) analyzed short-message system (SMS) messages posted to a public Italian interactive TV website to explore gender differences in the use of nonstandard typography. The analysis showed that females used more and longer SMS messages, and more shortening (e.g., omission of letters, homophones) and insertion (e.g., repeated punctuation and letters). Relatedly, Parkins (2012) analyzed data including tweets and comments posted on Twitter and Facebook by Australian men and women. It
was found that women are more expressive than men. They used punctuation marks, capital letters, laughter, repetition of letters and emoticons more frequently than men. Emoticons were found to be the most frequently used feature; they were used by female participants more than male participants (285 emoticons by women compared to 129 emoticons by men).

In addition, the interest in sociocultural aspects of computer-mediated discourse has motivated another group of researchers to investigate features of computer-mediated discourse in other languages. That is, instead of focusing on English-language computer-mediated discourse only, scholars have started to explore and examine structural and linguistics features of computer-mediated discourse employed by speakers of other languages and cultures (e.g., chapters in Danet and Herring 2007). In the next section, I will review research on Arabic computer-mediated discourse.

2.3 Research on Arabic Computer-Mediated Discourse

Research on Arabic computer-mediated discourse is recent and new. Similar to the early research on English computer-mediated discourse, the identification and description of the language used in computer-mediated communication and its relation to speech or writing has been a focal issue in research on Arabic computer-mediated discourse. However, Arabic is different than English in that it is a diglossic and non-Roman language (see Ferguson 1959). The diglossic situation “arises from the gap between the language of orality (ammia), or everyday spoken Arabic dialect (SA), and the language of literacy (fuṣḥa), more commonly referred to as literary Arabic (LA) or
modern standard Arabic (MSA)” (Ibrahim 2009: 93). Modern standard Arabic, the modern form of classical Arabic or Quranic Arabic, is mainly a written language and it is only spoken in formal settings (e.g., in courts, religious sermons, etc.). It is also the language of education. In other words, students at schools learn to read and write in modern standard Arabic, “although verbal communication in the classroom is usually conducted in the local vernacular” (Palfreyman and al Khalil 2003). In terms of the spoken Arabic, known as ammia or vernaculars, Palfreyman and al Khalil (2003) note that there are different Arabic varieties or vernaculars spoken in different regions in the Arab World (e.g., Egyptian Arabic in Egypt; Levantine Arabic in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine; Gulf Arabic in Southern Iraq and the Gulf region; etc). These vernaculars are acquired as native languages and are used in everyday conversations inside and outside homes. In addition, while modern standard Arabic has a single version of speech and writing, vernaculars differ widely in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, accent, etc., and do not have an official written version or even a single written script. Palfreyman and al Khalil (2003) comment that writing in Arabic vernacular is always avoided because it is viewed as undermining the prestigious status of Modern Standard Arabic and corrupting its image. However, Warschauer, El Said, and Zohary (2007: 304) pointed out that text-based computer-mediated communication “fosters written communication” in dialects that are used mainly for oral communication.

The lack of software support for non-Roman languages in the early days of the Internet motivated speakers of the Arabic language to develop a new form of writing using the Roman script. That is, Arabic-speaking Internet users used Roman or English letters to represent Arabic letters. In the cases of the alphabet letters that do not exist in
English, numbers, which match their shapes, were used to represent them. The following table, which is adopted from Haggan (2007: 441), illustrates a list of numerals commonly used to substitute for these letters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Arabic letter</th>
<th>Phonetic symbol</th>
<th>Phonetic description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>أ</td>
<td>'</td>
<td>Glottal stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ع</td>
<td>غ</td>
<td>Voiced pharyngeal fricative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>غ</td>
<td>ɣ</td>
<td>Voiced velar fricative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>خ</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Voiceless velar fricative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>ط</td>
<td>ت</td>
<td>Voiceless emphatic interdental fricative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>ظ</td>
<td>ظ</td>
<td>Voiced emphatic interdental fricative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ح</td>
<td>ḥ</td>
<td>Voiceless pharyngeal fricative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>خ</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Voiceless velar fricative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>ق</td>
<td>q</td>
<td>Voiceless uvular stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>ص</td>
<td>ş</td>
<td>Voiceless emphatic alveolar fricative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>ض</td>
<td>ة</td>
<td>Voiced emphatic alveolar stop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: List of numbers used to substitute for Arabic letters that do not have equivalents in English.

Different terms have been used in the literature to refer to this phenomenon of writing Arabic in Roman or Latin characters. “Romanization” and “Latinization” are the most common terms. However, Palfreyman and al Khalil (2003) called it “ASCIIization,” while Yaghani (2008) called it “Aarbizi,” a combination of the term Arabi, “Arabic” and Englizi, “English.” Even after the introduction of the Unicode standard, which allows Internet users to type using their own native script, and the introduction of Arabic keyboards, many Arabic speaking users are still using this form of language in their online communication. As a result, many studies, which will be reviewed in this section, have focused on identifying the features of this form of language used in different
countries of the Arab world. Other studies have explored code-switching since most Arabic speakers have Standard Arabic, local Arabic vernacular, Romanized Arabic and English at their disposal and they can choose or mix between these languages. Some other studies have also focused on examining gender differences in the usage of these strategies.

One of the earliest papers written on Romanized Arabic is Palfreyman and al Khalil (2003); it is entitled, “A funky language for teenz to use: Representing gulf Arabic in instant messaging.” This study examined the usage of “ASCII-ized Arabic,” in instant messages and other computer-mediated communication modes among female university students in the United Arab Emirates. It drew on data from a small corpus of instant messaging chat, and from an email survey of the users experiences with this form of language. The findings suggested that Romanized Arabic was used mostly to circumvent the lack of Arabic scripts in some online platforms. In addition, informants mentioned other social motivations for using this form of language such as maintaining privacy, mainly from parents, and the desire to write in an unusual script.

Al-Tamimi and Gorgis (2007) examined the usage of Romanized Arabic in 1400 chat turns and in 1098 e-mail messages sent by Jordanian graduate and undergraduate students. They found that 60% of the messages include switching from English into Romanized Jordanian Arabic. They also found that while some of the Arabic characters have a single Roman character equivalent, there are other characters that could have up to five variants of Roman characters. The authors characterized Romanized Jordanian Arabic as “a newly emerging code” that can be described as “a hybrid lingua franca or even a pidgin.”
In Saudi Arabia, Alabdulqader et al. (2013) explored the texting practices and language use by a group of Saudi male and female school and university students. The participants were asked to keep logs of their texting practices, and the language they use in their texting. The results showed that participants used Modern Standard Arabic, local dialect and Romanized Arabic. They used the local dialect when writing casual and informal messages while they used Modern Standard Arabic when writing or exchanging religious quotations and prayers. Although not prevalent, messages written only in Roman characters were also observed in the data. Male students were found to use this form of language more than female students.

Jaashan (2014) also examined the linguistic and structural strategies used in instant messaging conversations by university students from Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The study drew on data from a sample of text-based instant messages, and from a questionnaire distributed among students. The findings indicated that students used Romanized alphabets to write Arabic words, but they also used “Arabization,” which means using Arabic script or alphabets to write English words and sentences. In addition, participants also used other strategies such as abbreviation and acronyms, reduplication of words, and emoticons. Although the author reported here the use of emoticons, he just listed them, :) , ( ; ), :P, :D, :$, @@, *-* , and assumed that they were used to substitute for facial expressions.

Instead of examining the Latinized Arabic used by speakers of a single Arabic vernacular, Abu Elhija (2014) compared the representation of consonants in the Latinized Arabic vernacular used by Facebook users in Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco. She specifically examined the similarities
and differences in the representation of some of the consonants, which do not have equivalents in the Latin writing system or have several written forms such as the voiceless uvular stop, qaf /q/, the voiceless pharyngeal fricative, haa’ /h/, voiceless velar fricative, khaa /Χ/, the voiced pharyngeal fricative, ayin /ʕ/, and the voiced velar fricative, ghain [γ]. The results showed that users of Latinized Arabic vernacular write as they speak. In other words, the way the participants represent the various consonants online reflects how they pronounce the consonants in their local vernaculars. For instance, the letter qaf /q/ is mostly pronounced as [g] in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, and thus was represented mainly as <g> by the participants from these two countries. It is mostly pronounced as a glottal stop in Lebanon, Palestine/Israel and Egypt and thus represented as <2>, which stands for glottal stop in Latinized Arabic vernacular. In Jordan, <g> and <2> both were used to represent the letter, while in Morocco, <9> is used, which stands for how the qaf is represented in Latinized Arabic.

Code-switching between the different languages and varieties in Arabic computer-mediated discourse is another topic that attract the attention of scholars. For instance, Warschauer, El Said, and Zohary (2007) examined code-switching between English, modern standard Arabic (MSA), and Egyptian vernacular Arabic used in various computer-mediated communication modes by 43 young Egyptian professionals. The authors found that Modern Standard Arabic, the language used for writing in formal settings in Egypt, was seldom used by the informants in their online communication. Instead, Egyptian vernacular Arabic was used extensively in informal emails and online chat and English was predominately used in professional emails. However, participants code-switched to Egyptian vernacular Arabic when they wanted to express highly
personal thoughts and feelings or talk about cultural things (e.g., expressions related to food and holidays, and religious expressions).

Al-Khatib and Sabbah (2008) is another study that investigated code-switching but in a different Arabic setting and in a different communication mode. This study examined code-switching in text messages as used by a group of Jordanian students. The findings revealed that more than 95% of the Arabic/English text messages (i.e. texts written in both languages) used Roman scripts for the Arabic scripts and that Arabic/English texts were more frequent than purely English and purely Arabic texts. Like the Egyptians in the previous study, the participants switched from English to Arabic when writing or talking about socio-cultural or religious topics, while they switched from Arabic to English when using academic and technical terms or when discussing taboo or offensive topics.

Alfaifi (2013) examined “intrasentential” code-switching, which occurs in the middle of a sentence, on 1000 Facebook comments posted by 10 Saudi female friends, who are bilingual in Arabic and English. She used statistical and content analysis to analyze the data. She found that her participants used intrasentential code-switching frequently. However, she also examined code-switching in relation to ten topics, “gossip, humor, technology, compliments and thanking, achievements, movies and songs, family and intimacy, makeup, travelling, and religion.” She found that the participants used code-switching more frequently in gossiping and humor. She also found that the most frequent Arabic words used within English sentences were religious words and expressions, whereas the most frequent English words used within Arabic sentences were academic and technical terms.
Other studies have focused on examining differences between men and women in the use of various linguistic and nonlinguistic features. For instance, Al Rousan, Abdul Aziz, and Christopher (2011) reported a study analyzing gender differences in the use of typographical features, such as letter and number homophones, phonetic spelling, and emoticons, in 1,612 text messages constructed by Jordanian University students. The data was collected through questionnaire, diaries, and semi-structured interviews. The results showed that male students tend to use letter and number homophones and phonetic spelling more than female students, while female students tend to use emoticons and punctuation more than male students.

In addition, Jarbou and al-Share (2012) examined the effect of gender specifically on the representation of the phoneme /q/ in a corpus of online chat messages collected from three Jordanian chat rooms. In spoken Jordanian Arabic, /q/ has two main variants [’], glottal stop, or [g]. The variant [’] is more socially appropriate for women because it is stereotypically associated with modernity, prestige and femininity, whereas the [g] variant is more appropriate for men since it is stereotypically associated with masculinity and roughness. Jarbou and al-Share showed that these variations in spoken Jordanian Arabic were reflected in the Romanized Jordanian Arabic used in their corpus. That is, /q/ was represented as [2], which stands for the glottal stop in Romanized Jordanian Arabic, in all female conversations whether the chat partner is male or female, while it was represented as [g] in 81% of its occurrences in male-male chat. However, when chatting with females, males were found to accommodate to their female chat partners by using the glottal stop representation, [2], more than [g].
When it comes to Oman, there are few studies on Omani Arabic computer-mediated discourse. Najma Al Zidjaly is an Omani linguist who has focused on computer-mediated discourse in different communication modes. For example, in 2010, she published a chapter entitled, “Intertextuality and constructing Islamic identities online.” In this chapter, she examined how an Omani man used repetition to construct an identity of an enlightener in his online chat with Muslims and non-Muslims. In 2014, she published an essay examining how Omani teachers, during a strike in 2013, creatively “design and share multimodal images with the general public in Oman” via WhatsApp to “win their cause” and “incite social change” (130). Al Zidjaly and Gordon (2012) also discussed how Omanis use mobile phones as cultural tools to serve different functions such as circumventing some cultural restrictions regarding interactions with members of the opposite gender, “asserting individuality” and “strengthening group identity.”

In summary, the studies reviewed above establish that spoken Arabic vernaculars, which are not written varieties, have been used in computer-mediated communication, especially in informal communication, in the form of Romanized language. In addition, code-switching between modern standard Arabic, vernacular Arabic, Romanized Arabic and English has been employed by Arabic speakers using various modes of computer-mediated communication in different countries of the Arab World. However, other features, characteristic of computer-mediated discourse, such as emoticons have not received much attention. Some studies mentioned them in passing without really focusing on them. For instance, Al Rousan, Abdul Aziz, and Christopher (2011) compared the frequency of use of some features including emoticons between men and women. They found that women used emoticons more than men. Jaashan (2014), on the other hand, just
listed the emoticons that appeared in his data.

None of the above studies has examined the features of Omani Arabic or the use of emoticons or emojis in WhatsApp communication. Thus, by focusing on the use of emojis by speakers of Omani Arabic, this study will contribute to the literature on Arabic computer-mediated discourse and to the multilingual research on computer-mediated discourse. Next, I will discuss how emoticons were introduced into computer-mediated discourse, their forms and their definitions. I will also review studies that focused specifically on the use and functions of emoticons in various computer-mediated communication modes.

2.4 Emoticons in Computer-Mediated Discourse

2.4.1 Emoticons: Origin, Forms and Definitions

In the last two decades emoticons in computer-mediated discourse have been the focus of many studies in various disciplines. They are present in almost all textual modes of computer-mediated communication. Danet and Herring (2007) consider emoticons to be a feature that is “shared across modes” (12) and that “recur[s] in languages besides English.” They are considered to be “characteristic” of language use in computer-mediated communication. Many scholars consider the lack of paralinguistic and linguistic cues in computer-mediated discourse to be the main reason that led to the development of emoticons (Crystal 2001; Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright, and Rosenbaum-Tamari 1997; Witmer and Katzman 1997). In other words, emoticons in computer-mediated discourse
have been thought of as substitutes for non-verbal cues and facial expressions available in face-to-face communication.

Scott Fahlman, a computer scientist at Carnegie Mellon University, was the first to propose the use of the smiley :-) in computer-mediated discourse. On September 19 1982, he sent the following message to an online bulletin board at Carnegie Mellon University:

19-Sep-82 11:44 Scott E Fahlman :-) From: Scott E Fahlman <Fahlman at Cmu-20c>

I propose that[sic]the following character sequence for joke markers:

:-)

Read it sideways. Actually, it is probably more economical to mark things that are NOT jokes, given current trends. For this, use :-(

When asked about his motivation for this proposal, Fahlman (2002) noted that sometimes when someone posted a joke or a sarcastic comment, “a few readers would fail to get the joke and each of them would post a lengthy diatribe.” He added, “This problem caused some of us to suggest (only half seriously) that maybe it would be a good idea to explicitly mark posts that were not to be taken seriously […] Various “joke markers” were suggested, and in the midst of that discussion it occurred to me that the character sequence :-) would be an elegant solution.” Soon these characters spread to other universities across the United States and then to the general public using computers in the US and different parts of the worlds. During this process, many new symbols were added. Currently, CMC software often automatically changes ASCII symbols such as :)

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3 This excerpt is taken from: <http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~sef/Orig-Smiley.htm>, where the thread of the message or the original board thread in which :-) was proposed can be found.
and :(into graphical symbols, :) and (") respectively. Within the last 3 decades, emoticons have developed various graphic forms and meanings, and a growing number of signs have been developed to render objects of all kinds in black and white such as as a star (☆). Other cultures such as Japanese developed their own versions of emoticons or smileys, such as (^_^) and (^o^). Katsuno and Yano (2007) refer to this version of emoticons as “Japanese Kaomoji” or “Japanese-style emoticons.” The difference between the Japanese emoticons and Western ones is that the former are read top to bottom or vertically and the later left to right or sideways.

Although Fahlman’s original smiley :-) and frowny :-( were designed to be used as “markers of jokes” to help readers interpret preceding posts correctly and thus prevent any potential misunderstanding, they later came to be viewed mainly as emotion indicators by many scholars of computer-mediated discourse. In fact, the term ‘emoticon,’ a combination of the words ‘emotion’ and ‘icon,’ reflects how these symbols are conceived in the literature; they are construed as non-verbal indicators of emotional states. Thus, most definitions of emoticons in CMC literature highlight this view. For instance, Rezabek and Cochenour (1998) define emoticons as “visual cues formed from ordinary typographic symbols that when read sideways represent feelings or emotions” (201). Wolf (2000) states that emoticons “exemplify a minimalist approach to ASCII art-and attempt, in as few characters as possible, to display one’s true feeling” (828). Even in the field of linguistics, Baron (2000: 242) defined emoticons as “emotion markers.”
2.4.2 Research on Emoticons

Previous research on emoticons can be classified, according to their methodological approaches, as descriptive, experimental, or discourse analytical. Most of the descriptive and experimental studies have taken the meaning of emoticons as emotional icons for granted. Descriptive studies aimed at examining the frequencies and patterns of emoticon use and placement, or the differences between men and women in the use of emoticons. Experimental studies used simulated materials to examine the effect of emoticons on the meaning of the associated text or on the informants’ perception and also the effect of context on emoticon use. Discourse analytical studies examined the communicative and interactional functions of emoticons as they occurred in contexts. Next, I will first review some of the descriptive studies. Second, I will review some of the experimental and finally the discourse analytical studies.

Rezabek and Cochenour (1998) examined the frequency, variety and usage patterns of emoticons in four academic listservs. They found that the frequency of emoticons varied within the four listservs and that the smiley face :-) was the most frequent followed by the smiley face without a nose :) followed by the winking face ;). The authors concluded that individual preferences and contexts could influence the use of emoticons. However, no further explanation was provided on how these factors may influence the usage of emoticons.

Park, Kim and Lee (2014) explored the use of “graphical emoticons” (or as I call them in this study “emojis”), text-based and animated emoticons in instant messaging in smart phones. The data were collected from 53 participants through a survey. It was
found that participants preferred text-based emoticons (39.6%), compared to the
graphical (34.0%), and animated emoticons (26.4%).

Provine, Spencer, and Mandell (2007) explored the frequency and placement of
1000 emoticons that were contributed by 226 users in four asynchronous website
message boards. They reported that “smile” and “laugh” emoticons were the most
frequent in the corpus (32% and 20% respectively). They also found that emoticons
appeared “at highly predictable and linguistically significant positions” (302) in the
messages. That is, they occurred either alone or “naked,” before, or after, complete
sentences or questions. They concluded that emoticons, like laughter in spoken
interaction, have punctuation effects because the linguistic production surpasses and
takes precedence over emotional expression.

Similarly, Garrison et al. (2011) analyzed a corpus of 59 transcripts of naturally
occurring instant messaging sessions to identify the frequency and placement of
emoticons. They found 301 instances of emoticons. The emoticons :-), :-P, and ;-)
constitute 73% of all emoticons used in the corpus. In terms of emoticon placement, the
results revealed that 49% of the emoticons occurred at the end of an utterance, 20%
“alone” but coupled with an utterance either in a previous or a later turn, 16% at the
middle between two clauses in a sentence, and 6 % alone or “naked.” The authors
asserted that, “not only do users tap into a shared body of knowledge about the types of
emoticons, they also appear to rely on that body of knowledge to determine where they
place emoticons within an utterance” (120), and that emoticons serve as enhancers of
punctuation rather than serving as punctuation devices themselves. They concluded that
“if researchers begin to recognize emoticons as important semiotic units within a
discourse structure, researchers will approach emoticons not as compensatory to language but as contributory to the conversation itself” (123).

Because emoticons are mostly linked to expression of emotion and because women are thought of as using more emotional language than men, a number of studies have empirically examined gender differences in the use of emoticons in CMC. For instance, Witmer and Katzman (1997) studied the use of emoticon by males and females in public newsgroups. The results showed that women used emoticons more than men although the overall use of emoticon in the data was fairly low. Similarly, Wolf (2000) examined the variety and frequency of emoticons used in two female newsgroups and two male newsgroups and one mixed gender newsgroup. She found that women used emoticons more than men, but men used them more in mixed gender groups. She also found that women and men used emoticons for different purposes. Women tended to use emoticons to express humor, while men used emoticons to express teasing and sarcasm. Baron (2004) found that women produced the majority of emoticons in her corpus of private Instant Messaging, and Herring (2003) reported that women used three times as many representations of smiling and laughter (including emoticons) as men in the public Internet Relay Chat channels she was observing. Lee (2003) noticed that men rarely use emoticons in conversation with other men, but they use more emoticons when interacting with women using instant messaging. For women, the gender of their conversation partner seems to have no effect on their use of emoticons.

Tossel et al. (2012) examined the role of gender on emoticon usage in text messages. The data were collected over six months from 11 male and 10 female students. Female students were found to send text messages with emoticons more frequently than
the male students. The authors claimed that males, on the other hand, tended to use a wider range of emoticons than females but it was not clear what these emoticons were since they did not provide any statistics or examples of the emoticons used in each group. In contrast to the result reported in previous studies, Huffaker and Calvert (2005) found in their study of language use among male and female bloggers that male bloggers used more ‘flirty’ and ‘sad’ emoticons than female bloggers, and used slightly more emoticons, although the difference was not significant. The authors commented that “the use of flirty emoticons by males fits well within the literature where males more so than females actively search for online sexual interactions.”

The second strand of research on emoticons was experimental focusing on determining the effect of emoticons on the meaning of accompanying texts and on the informants’ perception. Starting with hypotheses drawn from the literature on nonverbal communication, Walther and D’Addario (2001) conducted an experiment to examine the effect of emoticons on the interpretation of email messages. Each of 226 university student participants was presented with a simulated email associated either with a smiley face :), sad face :(, winking face ;), or without any emoticon. The findings suggested the emoticons had a minimal impact on the interpretation of the emails. That is, the interpretations of the messages containing emoticons were not different from the interpretations of the control messages without emoticons. Walther and D’Addario concluded that the meaning contributed by the message content surpasses any meaning contributed by emoticons accompanying the messages and that emoticons’ “actual communicative effects are minimal in the context of the language cues they may accompany” (344).
Ip (2002) conducted an experiment to explore the effects of emoticon, upper case letters and exclamation marks on the meaning of simulated instant messages either positively or negatively. The participants were asked to rate 36 short messages, which included either upper case letters, punctuation marks, or both, in a scale ranging from 1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive). These messages were presented to the participants either with or without a graphic emoticon consistent with these messages. The author found that emoticons influenced the valence of messages and made them more extreme. She also found that emoticons had the highest impact in the absence of exclamation marks. Exclamation marks, on the other hand, increased the negativity of negative messages but had no impact in the presence of emoticons. The author concluded, “Emoticons and punctuation marks can make a significant difference in how people interpret the message.”

Thompsen and Foulger (1996), on the other hand, examined the effect of emoticon use on the participants’ perception of flaming. 164 participants were presented with 11 email messages including an episode of flaming, some of which were associated with emoticons and some of which were not. They were asked to assess the extent to which a message is a flame. It was found that emoticons can modify the perception of flaming. In other words, emoticons alert readers that the message should not be taken seriously and thus they work as a strategy to prevent any outbreak of flaming.

All the studies discussed above treated emoticons primarily as indicators of affective states and assumed that they were used to compensate for the lack of non-verbal cues found in face-to-face interaction. This conception has been challenged by some researchers such as Dresner and Herring (2010). They argue,
this conception of emoticons is incomplete, at best, because it leaves out of the picture important aspects of their use. For one thing, as a quick look at any emoticon dictionary shows, many facial emoticons do not seem to express a single emotion, or indeed any emotion at all. Is a face with the tongue sticking out—for example ;-p—a sign of a specific emotion? Various sources attribute to it the meanings of teasing, flirting, and sarcasm, all of which may be associated with emotional states, but are not emotions per se. Or consider the familiar winking face ;-) : Conventionally, it indicates that the writer is joking, but surely jokes are not associated with a single emotive state. People may joke when they are happy or sad (252).

Dresner and Herring (2010) was the first study to look at emoticons using a discourse analysis approach. They specifically employed speech act theory to analyze naturally occurring data, collected from Herring’s 10 year archive, which included private emails, private IM messages, public chat (AOL chat; Internet Relay Chat), and postings on public discussion forums. They concluded that emoticons do not only indicate emotions, but they function as indicators of illocutionary force (the intended meaning of an utterance). They divided emoticons according to their functions into three categories: (1) emoticons indicating emotions, mapped directly onto facial expression (e.g., smiley face :) to indicate happiness); (2) emoticons indicating non-emotional meanings, mapped conventionally into facial expressions (e.g., a winking face ;) to indicate a joke); (3) emoticons indicating illocutionary force, not mapping conventionally onto facial expressions (e.g., a smiley face :) after a series of complaints).

Skovholt, Grønning and Kankaanranta (2014) examined how emoticons were used in 1606 authentic workplace emails, collected from three different Nordic companies. The analysis of the data was informed by speech act and politeness theories. Skovholt and her colleagues concluded that emoticons in their data served three
communicative functions: (1) indicators of positive attitudes when they are placed after signatures; (2) markers of jokes or irony when they are placed after an utterance intended to be humorous; and (3) hedges when they follow speech acts such as thanks and greetings and as mitigators when following speech acts such as requests and corrections. Along the same lines, Vandergriff (2014) examined how native and nonnative speakers of English use emoticons, specifically smileys, frownys, and winkys, and what functions these emoticons serve. She analyzed a pre-existing corpus of dyadic text-only chat between students who speak English as a native language and nonnative speakers of English (advanced learners of English). She found that emoticons are “highly context-sensitive” and that they serve multiple functions such as indicating emotion, and signaling illocutionary force and/ or humor. The results also revealed that nonnative speakers used more emoticons than their native chat partners, and that smiley emoticons were the most frequently used type of emoticons, which is in accordance with the results of previous studies.

In Japan, Miyake (2008) explored how young Japanese used various visual orthographic features in their mobile text messages. Among these features was the use of graphic signs, which were divided into symbols (icons that are culturally recognizable such as hearts and stars), emoticons (characters representing facial expressions), and pictorial signs (phone-specific signs representing different objects). Miyake pointed out that, “emoticons and symbols are text-based, while pictorial signs are graphic objects that cannot be used in handsets operated by different companies” (65). (Though the author called these pictorial signs emojis, they are black and white unlike the colorful emojis used currently in mobile communication.) These graphic signs were found to serve
various roles and functions such as indicating an object; expressing emotions; compensating for the lack of prosody; indicating topic shift, questions and surprise; and replacing letters.

In another study, Sakai (2013) examined the use of various symbols to close sentences in Japanese mobile phone emails (“Keitai-mail”). The data consisted of 43,295 mails from 60 Japanese young people. The results showed that emoticons were the most frequent devices used to close sentences in Keitai-mails. According to the author emoticons encompass Kaomoji (representation of facial expressions to indicate emotions), emoji (“pre-installed picture emoticons”), and Decome emojis (which “can be downloaded from Internet sites”). Also there were other devices that were used less frequently to close sentences such as pre-installed symbols (stars and music notes), pre-installed question and exclamation marks, and Kanji based expressions. The author concludes that “the place of sentence closing is effectively used to add extra messages such as writers’ feelings or implications” (154).

Some scholars also have compared the use of Western emoticons and the Japanese emotions or kaomoji. For instance, Markman and Oshima (2007) compared the emoticon usage in English with the usage of Kaomoji, the Japanese version. The data containing emoticons were collected from English internet public forums, blog comments, chat rooms, and email discussion lists, and the kaomoji examples were collected from the second author’s personal emails. They found that that emoticons and kaomoji act as punctuation devices that helped users mark how they wanted their texts to be read and helped them to clarify their mood. They concluded that kaomoji have more variations and are more complex in their construction than their western counterparts.
Kaomoji can embody gestures and acts. For example, the kaomoji (^^ >”) embodies “an emblematic gesture—the hand movement of scratching one’s head, which many Japanese people do or at least have an understanding of. When used, it displays a sense of being embarrassed and/or despising oneself.” The kaomoji (*^3^)/~☆ represents the act of blowing a kiss and is usually used in association with farewell texts.

Kavanagh (2010) is another study that compared the use and functions of emoticons used by Americans and Japanese. It specifically examined the usage of text-based emoticons (the Western and Japanese styles) and graphic emoticons, which include emojis, in 40 American and 40 Japanese blogs (the topics of the blogs included sport, family, travel and general). The results revealed that there were only 17 occurrences of emoticons in the English corpus (13 character-based emoticons and 4 graphic emoticons), while they were 500 occurrences in the Japanese corpus (278 character based emoticons and 222 graphic emoticons). Emoticons were found to serve various functions such as: softening requests, establishing rapport, creating humor and indicating emotion. Japanese also used graphic emoticons (or emojis) before equivalent lexical words as in the following example, in which an image depicting a cup of rice is placed before the word “rice”:

1. 単に、夕食の「白ご飯」 を控えてるだけです
   *Tan ni, yuusyoku no (shirogo han) wo hikaeteru dake desu ga,*
   *I just simply abstained myself from rice.*

In the next example, images representing a door, a running man, and a car were used to substitute for the phrase, “came home”:
To summarize, we have seen from the review above that many studies on emoticons have viewed them as compensating for nonverbal cues found in face-to-face interaction used to express emotions. These studies employed quantitative approach to find out the frequency and variations of emoticons used in various computer-mediated modes. They also focused on identifying differences between men and women in the use of emoticons and consistently reported, with few exceptions, that women used emoticons more than men.

The second group of researchers used experimental methods to identify the effect of emoticons on the meaning of accompanying texts and on informants’ perception of these texts. The third group of studies examined emoticons as they occur in contexts employing discourse analytical methods. The result of these studies showed that in addition to displaying emotions, emoticons can serve various pragmatic and interactional functions. Most of these studies, however, focused on analyzing a small set of emoticons such as smiling, frowning, and winking emoticons. Other studies such as Markman and Oshima (2007) have compared the use of the Western style and Japanese style emoticons and found that the latter are more complex in their construction and functions than the former because kaomoji can embody gestures and acts.

Today too, I went to work, got my work sorted out and came home.
2.5 Conclusion

This chapter starts by reviewing research that has focused on the characteristic features of language used in computer-mediated communication. It discusses how research has changed from viewing these features as substitutes for nonverbal cues found in spoken language to viewing them as resources used by internet users to achieve various communicative goals in different sociocultural contexts. Then, it discusses the research conducted on Arabic computer-mediated discourse. The majority of the studies reviewed focused on the use of Romanized Arabic in various modes of computer-mediated communication in different countries in the Arab world. There were other studies that focused on code-switching between the various Arabic language varieties available for the Arabic speakers communicating online. Other studies examined the difference between men and women in the usage of Romanized Arabic and code switching. Finally, the chapter reviews many studies that have specifically examined emoticons. Some of these studies were descriptive in nature. They reported frequencies of emoticons used in various computer-mediated modes. They also focused on exploring the difference between men and women in terms of emoticon use. The second type of research was experimental and focused on determining the effect of emoticons on the associated texts and on the informants’ perception of the texts containing emoticons. Both descriptive and experimental studies viewed emoticons as emotional icons used to compensate for the lack of nonverbal cues found in face-to-face communication. It is only recently that scholars have started to move beyond this conception and started to examine emoticons as they occur in context using discourse analytical approaches. The
results of these studies have established that emoticons can be used to serve other pragmatic and interactional functions. However, the majority of these studies looked at emoticons and only very few looked at the use of emojis. Also, none of these studies have examined the usage of emojis in WhatsApp interaction. Thus, this study will expand and build on this body of research by specifically focusing on the use of emojis in WhatsApp, which is a relatively new medium, by two groups of Omani users. The next chapter will be descriptive in nature. It will identify and describe the forms and frequency of all the emoji types and variants that appeared in the corpus. It will also discuss some gender differences in the emoji use and frequencies between the two participating groups. Finally, it will discuss emoji placement and the most frequent positions where emojis are placed in WhatsApp discourse.
CHAPTER THREE: FORMS, FREQUENCY AND PLACEMENT OF EMOJIS

3.1 Introduction

Despite the popular view that emoticons are the most popular feature of computer-mediated discourse, some studies reported a relatively low frequency of emoticon occurrence (see e.g., Hass et al. 2011; Ling and Baron 2007). For instance, Ling and Baron (2007) found that only 2 emoticons (both smileys) occurred in their texting corpus of 1473, and only 5 emoticons (4 smileys and 1 frowny) in their instant messaging corpus of 1146 words. In comparison, emojis are ubiquitous in the WhatsApp communication among friends of the two groups participating in this study. The data from both groups yielded 4369 instances (when repetitions of the same emoji are counted as one) of various emoji out of 42037 words. There were 104 emojis per 1000 words. In addition to the smiling and frowning emojis, WhatsApp users in this study employed a wide range of emoji types. They used 121 different emoji types. This chapter aims at identifying and providing descriptions of these types, the frequencies of their occurrence and their placement. It will also discuss gender differences in the use of emojis.

In what follows, I will first describe and report frequencies of all emoji types used in the corpus. In addition, I will explain how these emojis are used (as it is necessary for describing the forms of emojis) but I will look closely at the functions in Chapter 4. Then, I will discuss the effect of gender on the use of emojis in each group. Finally, I will
discuss emoji placement within the WhatsApp discourse and compare it to the findings of previous studies.

3.2 The Forms and Frequency of Emojis

As I mentioned above, I have identified 121 emoji types, representing various things, in the corpus. (Some of these emoji types were used only in one group; that is, either in the male or in the female group.) I divide these types into five categories: (1) people; (2) nature, (3) objects; (4) food and drink; and (5) symbols. (These categories are adopted from the emojipedia.org website.) The category of people includes emojis representing people, facial expressions, and various body parts. The nature category includes emojis depicting animals, plants and water. The object category encompasses those depicting objects such as transportation, cloth, materials used in celebration, etc. The food and drink category includes emojis representing different kinds of food and drink. The last category includes emojis representing symbols such as check marks.

Under each category, emojis are arranged according to the frequency of occurrence (from the most to the least frequent). Some emojis also are grouped together because they shared the same salient feature and thus were used interchangeably to serve the same functions. For example, 😊, 😊, 😊, are grouped together because they all have the smile as a salient feature and they are used interchangeably in the data, and 😛, 😛, 😛, are grouped together because they all have the stuck-out tongue as a salient feature.
and they are all used to serve the same function, teasing. The frequency reported for each emoji, in the next section, will be the total frequency of emojis in both groups. However, sometimes one participant only or predominantly, in one group, used a particular emoji. I will highlight these cases because they reflect individual differences in the use of emojis. That is, although the majority of participants drew on relatively similar types of emojis, some participants tend to use some emojis that are not used frequently in their group. This occurred mostly in the male group.

Next, I will start by describing the emojis under the category of people, under which there are 53 emoji types. They constitute 3475 instances out of the total number of emojis (4369) in the whole corpus.

3.2.1 People

First, I will describe the forms, functions, and frequency of occurrence of emojis representing people, faces, and body parts.

😂

This emoji depicts a face with a smiling mouth, and a tear coming down from each eye. The tears should not be mistaken for crying; they are tears of joy and overwhelming laughter. This emoji was the most frequently used emoji in the dataset. It occurred 510 times (out of the total instances of emojis, 4369). It seems that this emoji, when used once in a turn, works similarly to the linguistic representations of laughter in English
online communication such as LOL (laughing out loud), and ROFL (rolling on the floor laughing). However, this emoji was frequently used two times or more consecutively (i.e., 😅😅) probably as a visual equivalent to the orthographic representation of continuous bursts of laughter (e.g., hehehe, hahahaha, etc.), especially since such textual forms were rarely used in the data.

These two emojis were used interchangeably in the dataset (depending on individual preferences). They both represent a face with an open mouth and bared teeth, which seems to be the most salient feature. They differ in the shape of the eyes; the first has curved eyes while the second has small round eyes. They could represent an awkward grin. Depending on the context, they could be used to serve various functions. For instance, they were sometimes used when the user thinks s/he has said something inappropriate to display embarrassment associated with apology. In addition, they were used sometimes to indicate that what someone had said is not meant literally or seriously. In terms of frequency, they appeared 376 times in both groups.

These emojis constitute different variants of a smiling face. I put them together because they are used interchangeably in the dataset. It seems that the smiling mouth is the salient feature in the way these emojis were used. The use of these various smiling emojis reflects individual users’ preferences. Some users chose one of these smiling variants and used it consistently, whereas others used two or three of these variants interchangeably.
Altogether, these variants occurred 300 times (out of the total 4369 instances of emojis in the corpus). They ranked third most frequent in the current dataset. This result is inconsistent with the findings of previous studies, which report that smiling emoticons :) and :-) are always the most frequent (for example, Vandergriff 2014; Garrison et al. 2011; Provine, Spencer, and Mandell 2007; Wolf 2000). This is because the smiling emoticon can be used to serve more functions than the smiling emoji and its variants used in this study. It could be used to indicate happiness (emotion), and to indicate that the user is not serious or is teasing his interlocutor. The smiling emoji and its variants are used only to indicate happiness or to project that the person is smiling, like in face-to-face interaction.

They are distinguished from a laughing emoji (😂) or the awkward grin emoji (🔄), which were used to indicate that the associated text is not meant seriously. In other words, the smiling emoticon is in someway equivalent to all three emoji faces: laughing, awkward grin, and smiling. This shows that while serving similar functions, emojis are much more expressive than emoticons. Next, I will discuss each of the smiling emojis individually starting with the most frequent among them and ending with the least frequent.

😊

This smiling emoji has curved eyes and a smiling closed mouth. It was often used to display happiness. However, this is not always the case; it was sometimes used to stand in for the user’s face as if smiling in face-to-face interaction, especially in conversation openings, closings, or when responding to a compliment. (This function will be discussed
further in the next chapter). This variant was the most frequently used among the various variants of the smiling face (164 out of 300 occurrences of all smiling face variants).

This second variant of a smiling face represents a face with a big open smiling mouth, with the teeth showing, and large oval eyes. It appeared 71 times (out of the 300).

This variant has a big open smiling mouth, curved or smiling eyes and a drop of sweat. It is also used mostly as a smiling face and it seems that the drop of sweat adds no meaning to the basic meaning of smiling because it was used interchangeably with the other variants of the smiling face. It appeared 58 times (of the 300 variants of a smiling emoji).

This last version resembles the variant ( Educação) except that it has smaller round eyes. This emoji was only used in the male group (41 instances). Nasser, the manager of the group, used it 38 times (out of the 41 times). Yet, this does not mean that he only used this variant but he sometimes alternates it with other smiling variants. As was mentioned earlier, this reflects how sometimes members in the same group vary in their preferences of some emojis.
This emoji depicts a thumbs-up sign (a fist with a thumb pointing up). It is usually used to display approval and appreciation of what someone has said or shared in the group. It occurred 280 times. In both groups, it sometimes co-occurred with clapping hands (👏), or with a smiling face (😊). It also co-occurred with a kissing face (😘) in the female group.

This emoji represents a face with wide-open eyes, raised eyebrows, blushing cheeks and slightly open mouth. It represents the sender staring directly at the addressee. It is used to display surprise and/or confusion. It is used alone or with questions (why, what, who questions) to communicate a request for clarification or justification about what has been said or shared. That is, when using this emoji, the Omani participants in both groups attend mainly to the wide-open eyes as a salient feature. (This interpretation could be based on how this feature is used in face-to-face interaction, in which a person would use this facial gesture to express surprise or disbelief, especially when something unexpected has been said or happened). In terms of frequency, this emoji appeared 230 times.

This emoji represents a face with one eye open and the second one winking. The lips are pursed blowing a small red heart. According to how it is used in the corpus, the most
Salient feature of this emoji is the blowing of the red heart; it is interpreted and used as blowing a kiss. Generally, in Omani culture, kissing is relatively common between friends and relatives especially when greeting, conferring congratulations or sometimes even when saying goodbye. It is especially common among women when they say goodbye to each other. This emoji appeared 180 times in the corpus.

These three faces are used interchangeably in the data set. They all share the features of a smiling face with a tongue sticking out. They differ in the size and the shape of the eyes. From the left to the right, the first emoji has small round eyes; the second one has tightly-closed or scrunched eyes; and the third one has one eye closed and the other wide-open. These emojis are used mostly to cue joking or childish teasing. Collectively, they appeared 150 times in the dataset.

This emoji represents a winking face. It was used to cue humor or to indicate that the associated utterance was intended as a joke. It was also used to show understanding or cueing a shared experience or knowledge with the addressee. Thus, it was used to display a degree of intimacy and solidarity between friends. It appeared 138 times in the corpus.
This emoji has a small frown, and slightly downturned curved eyebrows and mouth. It was used to display annoyance and distress. Sometimes, it was used interchangeably with the sad emoji 😞 to display sadness. It appeared 120 times in the dataset.

These two emojis represent pouting faces with a turned-down frowning mouth, narrowed eyes, and inward-facing eyebrows. Both of these faces are used to display annoyance and anger with someone or something. In addition to frowning, users attend to the red color as a salient feature in the second face. The color could be interpreted as showing intensity. The way this emoji is used to display anger could reflect how the expression “red face” is used in the Omani spoken Arabic. It is common to describe an angry person by saying, (وجهة قلب أحمر من العصبية), “his/ her face turned red out of anger.” Both faces appeared 100 times in the dataset, although the angry red face emoji 😥 occurred more frequently (82 of the 100 occurrences).

This emoji depicts a face with a slightly downturned mouth, small oval eyes, arched eyebrows and a tear running from one eye. The user of this emoji wants to project or display that s/he is very sad. (The teardrop seems to indicate the intensity of sadness rather than crying). This emoji was used 80 times in the corpus.
😊

This emoji depicts a face with a small-relaxed smile, closed relaxed eyes and arched eyebrows. It is used to convey that the user is satisfied with him/herself (i.e., it displays a complacent attitude). It appeared 72 times in the corpus.

😊

This emoji represents a face with slightly closed eyes, eyebrows, and closed mouth lifted up on one side of the face. It was used to display indifference to what has been said or done. In addition, it is sometimes used to cue sarcasm. It appeared 68 times in the dataset.

👉

This emoji depicts the index finger pointing up. It was mostly used to point to an image, a video, or even a text in a previous turn. It occurred 60 times in both groups.

😍

This emoji represents a happy face with red heart-shaped eyes. It was used when someone wanted to express love for someone or something. It is sometimes used to replace the expression “I love you” or “I love it.” It was used 55 times.

👋

This emoji depicts a smiling woman raising one arm. It is used, in the corpus, in greetings and conversation openings, imitating waving “hi” to someone in face-to-face interaction. It is also sometimes used with text or alone to substitute for the personal pronoun “I.” For
instance, one of the female group members was advertising a product she was selling. She asked if any one in the group was interested in buying the product. A few members used this emoji to indicate that they are interested; it is like raising your hand when saying “me” in face-to-face interaction. The emoji appeared 54 times in both groups. 24 out of these 54 instances occurred in the male group, and were contributed by one member only. Other members used the waving hand (👋) instead. This is could be because this emoji represent a woman while the waving hand is genderless.

😊

This face has curved eyes and a big smiling mouth with the tongue sticking out at one corner of the mouth. It implies that the person has just finished eating something and is licking his/her lips as a sign that the food was delicious. It was usually used when users talk about food or generally about any occasion that includes food (such as an invitation to a meal). In other words, it could be interpreted as standing in for the interjection “yummy!” It was used 53 times in both groups.

👋

This emoji represents a waving hand. It was used in the corpus either alone or in association with “hi” or “goodbye.” This reflects how people use this gesture in face-to-face interaction to greet or say goodbye to each other. This emoji is sometime used interchangeably with the emoji of the lady raising her right arm (🤝). It was used 52 times in the dataset.
This face has a short straight-lined mouth, closed eyes and inverted curved eyebrows. It is mainly used as a sad face. It is sometimes used interchangeably with the sad face with one teardrop (😢). This emoji was used 51 times in the corpus.

This emoji depicts a face with closed eyes, small open mouth and a series of 3 “Z” letters over the head, probably representing snoring. It was used to represent sleeping. It was mostly used in association with a textual announcement of sleeping time or concurrently with a “good night” expression. It was also used in some instances to substitute for the verb “sleep.” (This will be further discussed in Chapter 4). In addition, it sometimes co-occurred with the sleeping symbol (寤). In terms of frequency, this emoji appeared 48 times.

This emoji represents a face with a blue forehead, small round eyes, slightly downturned curved mouth, curved eyebrows and a drop of sweat running down from one eyebrow. Depending on the context, this emoji was sometimes used to communicate embarrassment and sometimes to communicate disappointment. (It is not clear how the drop of sweat and blue forehead are interpreted. It could be that the drop of sweat is
perceived as a result of embarrassment.) In terms of frequency, there were 51 instances of this emoji in the dataset.

These two emojis are used interchangeably. The first emoji (’) represents a face with a straight closed mouth and oval eyes, while the second one (’) represents a face with oval eyes but without a mouth. Both of these emojis were used to communicate that the user is speechless. It was mostly used alone to substitute for the phrase, “no comment!” or “I am speechless.” Collectively, these two emojis occurred 47 times in both groups.

This emoji depicts a clenched fist directed toward the viewer. It was used to represent an act of punching. That is, by using this emoji, the user is jokingly pretending that he /she is punching the addressee for saying or doing something inappropriate. This emoji occurred 45 times in the corpus.

This emoji represents a face with closed eyes, round open mouth and tears streaming down from both eyes. It represents someone crying loudly. It is used to express an intensified sadness, where none of the previous sad emojis seems strong enough to express it. This emoji appeared 40 times in the dataset.
This emoji represents a dancing woman wearing a red dress. It is used to display excitement, celebration and partying. It occurred 38 times in both groups.

This emoji depicts eyes looking to the left. It was used in the corpus in various ways. The most straightforward usage is substituting for the word “eyes.” It is also used metaphorically to check if anyone from the group is available online; using this emoji gives the implication that the user is searching for someone. (It is like saying in spoken language, “Hello, is anybody here?”) It is also sometimes used, specifically in the male group, when a member does not want to chat but at the same time wants to show involvement (like saying, “I am here”). This emoji appeared 36 times in the corpus.

This emoji represents an act of clapping. It depicts two hands slapping each other producing an audible sound. It was used to indicate celebration and excitement. It was also used in the corpus as a sign of encouragement and acknowledgment of someone’s participation. It sometimes co-occurs with the thumbs-up emoji (👍). These uses are reminiscent of how clapping is used in face-to-face interaction. For instance, it is used in parties and celebration along with music or/ and dancing. This emoji was used 33 times in the corpus.
This emoji depicts a face with wide blank eyes, blue forehead, open screaming mouth, and two hands on cheeks. It is used to display shock and fear because something unacceptable has been just said or happened. (This emoji seems to echo Edvard Munch’s famous painting, “The Scream.”) It occurred 30 times in the dataset.

This emoji depicts a hand, in which the thumb and the index finger are connected to form a circle and the other fingers are standing straight. It was used in the corpus to mean, “perfect,” “excellent,” “exactly true.” It occurred 28 times in both groups.

This face has closed eyes and a medical mask over the mouth. The first meaning that comes to mind when seeing this emoji is that the person using it is sick. However, the way it is used in the corpus is not as transparent. It was sometimes used to describe something that smells bad. In addition, users employed this emoji to indicate that what has been said or shared by someone is not new but is a “recycled” old piece of information (i.e., it was used and shared in the past). This is a metaphorical use. That is, it is like pulling a book from a shelf to use again. Since the book has not been used for a long time, it will be covered with dust. You need a mask to prevent dust from getting into your lungs. Supporting this interpretation, there were a few instances where participants verbally asked senders of recycled and old WhatsApp messages to stop filling the group with dust. In terms of frequency, it was used 26 times in both groups.
This depicts a man running. It was used to convey the meaning “I am coming” or “I am leaving” or sometimes to replace the word “running.” It was used 26 times in both groups. In the male group, this emoji was followed by another emoji representing a cloud of dust (🧬) as (💨). These emojis together communicate that the person is running really fast or is in a hurry. They were used in the corpus mostly to end a conversation. That is, by using these two emojis, the user communicates that he is in a hurry and needs to end the conversation.

 строка

This emoji depicts a face with inward-facing eyebrows, closed eyes, frowning mouth, and steam or smoke coming from its nose. It is used to communicate frustration, annoyance and anger. It was used 25 times in the corpus.

This emoji represents a smiling face wearing dark sunglasses. Someone would use this emoji if s/he wants to appear cool. It occurred 23 times in the dataset.

This face has small oval eyes, open mouth and raised eyebrows. It was used to display shock and disbelief. It was used 20 times in the corpus.
This emoji represents a woman with open eyes and open mouth, putting her two hands over her head. It was used to display that the user is overwhelmed by something, for example, how much the other members are talking in the group, which is usually reflected in the large number of messages received. It occurred 16 times in the female group only.

These two emojis are used interchangeably. They both have crossed eyes, which seem to be the most salient feature, and down turned eyebrows, which seems to be the most salient feature. They differ in the shape of the mouth; the first one has a small downward curved mouth, while the second one has a kind of trembling mouth. They were used to display that the user is very frustrated and annoyed. They were used 16 times in the female group only.

This emoji depicts a man sitting with his head tilting down while resting his hands on a table or a surface. (There are small triangles pointing towards his head, but they seem to be unimportant in the way the emoji was used.) The emoji was used to substitute for the phrase “I am waiting.” That is, it was used to imply that the user is waiting for something from the interlocutor or waiting for something to happen. In terms of frequency, this emoji was used 15 times in the male group only.
This emoji represents an index finger pointing down. It was mostly used to point to an image, a video, a link, or even a text in a following turn. It occurred 14 times in the data set.

This emoji depicts the head of a baby. It was used literally to mean a baby or a small child and it was also used metaphorically to describe someone as behaving childishly, specifically in the male group. It was used 14 times in both groups.

This is a thumbs-down sign (a fist with a thumb pointing down to the ground); it was used to indicate disapproval of someone or something. It occurred 12 times in the male group only.

This emoji depicts a man’s arm flexed showing a bicep muscle. It was used in both groups to signal that someone is strong and healthy. It is also used as a signal of celebratory affirmation. It appeared 11 times in the corpus.

This emoji depicts a man’s face with a turban on his head. Women used it to represent an Indian person (used concurrently with the word “Indian”), while men used it to represent
an Indian and sometimes a Sudanese man. This is because both Indians (specifically Sikhs) and Sudanese wear turbans. The emoji occurred 11 times in both groups.

👨‍♂️

This person wears a blue police hat. It was used 11 times in the male group to refer to the manager of the group.

😢

This emoji depicts a face with closed eyes, downturned eyebrows, and open downturned mouth. It was used to communicate that the user is exhausted. It appeared 10 times in the corpus.

🚶‍♂️

This emoji depicts a man walking. It was used as a substitute for the word “walking.” In addition, it was used as a display of walking as an action. It was used 10 times in both groups.

👂

This emoji depicts a single human ear. By using this emoji, the user indicates that she/he is listening or paying attention to what another member in the group wants to say. (It was especially used as a response to someone who prefaces his or her participation by sending, “I want to say something.”) Thus, a typical response including this emoji would be, “go ahead 👀.” This emoji was used 8 times in the female group only.
This emoji represents a woman wearing a crown. It was used concurrently with the word, (إمبراطورة) “empress.” It was only used in the female group. For instance, in one of the conversations, one of the female group members humorously asked another member about her grandmother, (وين الإمبراطورة نصراً), “Where is the Empress Nassra 🥀.” This emoji was used 5 times.

This emoji represents the index finger pointing to the left. It was used to point to a word or an emoji occurring earlier within the same turn. It appeared 5 times in the dataset.

This emoji depicts a man and a woman, with a pink heart between them. In both groups, it was used to refer to someone being busy with his/her spouse. It was also used once concurrently with the word “marriage” in the male group. (Ahmed addressed Fahad who had gotten married recently, (كيف الزواج فهد؟), “how is marriage, Fahad? 🤴”). This emoji was used 6 times in both groups.

This emoji represents two dancing girls, with bunny ears. It was used in combination with other emojis to indicate celebration and partying. It was used twice in the female group.
This emoji represents a woman crossing her arms to form an ‘X’. It was used to communicate negation “no” or “not.” It was used only once in the female group when the group members were discussing how some girls are raised to be dependent and that they cannot do the simplest things for themselves as a result. Raya then used this emoji at the end of her following statement, (الدلع ما ينفع)، “spoiling is not good,” reinforcing the negation.

This string of emojis was used once, in the male group, to represent members of an extended family. It was used in a discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of living with parents after marriage. From left to right, the emojis depict a son, a daughter, a father, a mother, an older man (grandfather), and an older woman (grandmother). These emojis (👦👧👨👩👴👵), without the grandparents, were also used once in the same context to represent members of a nuclear family.

This emoji depicts a man’s face with a white beard and Santa Claus hat. It could be originally designed to represent Santa Claus, but it was used metaphorically to refer to cold weather. It was used once in the male group. Ahmed, one of the group members, used it when he was inquiring about the weather in a particular city in Oman.
This emoji depicts two hands with palms facing outward and blue triangles over them. It appeared one time in the male group; it was used in association with an idiomatic expression, “I have already washed my hands of it,” which means, “I have given up.” The small blue triangles above the hands could be interpreted in this case as representing water. (The example will be analyzed in Chapter 5).

Finally, these emojis were used together in the male group. The first emoji depicts a red mask with thick eyebrows and a moustache, long nose and bulging eyes. The second depicts a purple smiling devilish face with horns while the third represents a gray human skull. The last emoji depicts a grey alien’s face with large open eyes and a small mouth. They were used once by Nasser along with a “good night” phrase. It was not clear how he intended them but the addressee, Hamed, interpreted them as “ghosts.” He jokingly commented, “Go away! You scared me with your ghosts.”

All the above emojis represent people, people’s faces and body parts. Next, I will explain emojis under the category of nature.
3.2.2 Nature

This category will include emojis representing plants, animals, and water. There were 700 instances of emojis (out of the total number, 4369, of emojis in the whole corpus) under this category. They are arranged according to the frequency (from the highest to the lowest)

This emoji depicts a single red rose. It is used when complimenting or responding to a compliment. It was also used concurrently with other emojis as a display of celebration. It was used 60 times.

This emoji depicts the face of a green frog. It was used in the male group only. It was mostly used by Nasser, the manager of the group, in an unusual way (as will be discussed further in Chapter 5). The way he used it might be unique to him, which reflects individual differences in the use of various emojis. This emoji was used 51 times. Nasser, the manager of the group, alone used it 45 times.

This represents a yellow chick hatching from an egg. It was used only in the male group to refer to or substitute for the word “egg.” This could be because there is no emoji for an egg in the repertoire of emojis available in the application of emojis. This was used a lot
during a period when Omanis were boycotting eggs because of a dramatic and sudden
increase in its prices. It was used 35 times.

😃

This is a cat laughing face, with drops of tears coming down from each eye. It was used
interchangeably with the human laughing face (😄) as a display of laughter. The user of
this emoji is probably acting silly. The emoji occurred 30 times in both groups.

💨

This emoji represents a cloud of dust. It was used 20 times in the male group. It was
always used behind the emoji of the running boy (🏃‍♂️💨) to communicate that the user is
in a hurry.

💐

This emoji depicts a bouquet consisting of a bunch of colorful flowers. It was used to
indicate celebration. It was used 17 times in both groups.

🙈

This emoji represents a monkey covering its mouth with both hands. It was used when
the user realizes that he/ she has said something embarrassing. It occurred 15 times in
both groups.
This emoji depicts a monkey covering its eyes with its hands. It is used to indicate that the user feels embarrassed or shy. It appeared 14 times in the dataset.

This emoji represents a tulip flower. It was used interchangeably, in the male group, with the red rose (🌹) as a display of appreciation. It was used sometimes with the thumb-up emoji (👍). It was used 14 times in the corpus.

This emoji depicts 3 water drops. It was used to represent rain in most instances (it was mostly used along with the word “rain”) and it was used to represent water once in the male group. Totally, it was used 12 times in the dataset.

The following seven emojis were only used in the female group. They were used in a specific way. That is, sometimes a woman would send a prayer or a verse from the Holy book and would ask the group members to repeat it a certain number of times and to indicate that they had done so by sending a particular emoji she had chosen. The choice of the emoji seemed to be arbitrary except that it was usually a flower or a fruit. (An example of how these emojis were used is presented in Chapter (4).
This pink flower was used 12 times.

A sunflower occurred 12 times.

A cluster of grapes was used 11 times.

This emoji depicting a cloverleaf appeared 8 times.

A palm tree occurred used 8 times.

A maple leaf was used 7 times.

This last emoji represents wild cherries and it was used 6 times.

Next, I will continue with describing other emojis that were used differently than the previous set of emojis but they are still under the category of “nature.”
This emoji depicts a white hen. It co-occurred with the word “chicken.” It was used 6 times in the female group when discussing the death of one of the group member’s home-raised chickens.

This is an emoji of a small monkey. It was used along with or to stand in for the word “monkey.” It occurred 5 times in the corpus.

These emojis represent smiling cats’ faces. The difference between them is the shape of the eyes. The former has curved eyes while the second has round eyes. Both were used 3 times in the corpus. The first one was used twice in the female group to substitute for the word “cat,” while the second one was used once in the male group along with the word “cats.”

These emojis represent a monkey covering its eyes, its mouth, and its ears with its hands, respectively. The three emojis are used together usually when the person using them does not want to participate in a conversation, for example, when talking about politics. They
are used together to communicate the conventionalized meaning, “see no evil,” “speak no evil,” and “hear no evil,” respectively. They were used 2 times in the male group only.

This emoji depicts a black ant. It was used 2 times by Nasser, the manager of the male group. He indirectly compared his friends in the group to ants because they were not participating in the group. In other words, they disappeared like ants.

This emoji of a yellow baby chicken was used along with the word chick two times in the male group. (It was used in response to a joke about a naughty small chick).

This emoji depicts a rooster. It was used once in the same context as the above emoji of a chick. The user used it as a representation of the chick when it grows up.

This emoji represents a horse. It was used once in the female group when jokingly discussing the difference between a stable and a pen. Fatma, one of the group members, commented, (اُسطبل غير عن زرب “Stable is different than a pen”). It was used, as shown in the example, in association with the word, “stable.”
These emojis were used together once in the female group in the same context as the emoji above. They were used along with the word “pen,” as shown in the example above.

This emoji represents a gray bird head. It was used once by Rashid from the male group. The user was referring to the bird-hunting season. He used this emoji to refer to a particular kind of bird, “quail.” (The example including this emoji is analyzed in Chapter 5).

This emoji depicts a red octopus. Rashid from the male group used it once. He used it playfully, in response to Nasser’s use of the frog emoji (⁅ newRow 1⁆).

This emoji depicts a white goat. It was used once in the female group to stand in for the word “goat.” The user was informing the other group members that her uncle bought her a little goat to put in their farm.
This emoji depicts a green snake coiled up with its tongue sticking out. It was used once in the female group. The user sent this comment first,

(اليوم هذا الثعبان الضخم ملقاي في [اسم المنطقة], “Today this large snake was found in [the name of a place]”), and then she sent this image of a real snake in the next turn.

Finally, this emoji represent the earth. It was used concurrently with “the world” once in the female group. Raya asked Noora about her grandmother, Nassra, in a humorous way,

(وين الإمبراطورة نصرا “Where is the Empress Nassra.”) Noora responded ironically, (الإمبراطورة راحت في جولة حول العالم ), “ The empress went on a trip around the world.”

Next, I will describe emojis representing various objects. This category included 190 instances of various emojis out of the total number of emojis 4369 in the whole corpus.
3.2.3 Objects

This category includes emojis representing various objects. As in previous categories, I arrange them from the most frequent to the least frequent.

This emoji depicts a colorful party popper. It was used with other emojis as a display of partying and celebration. It was used 47 times in the corpus.

This is a depiction of a confetti ball burst open. It was also used to indicate celebration. It occurred 40 times in both groups.

This emoji represents a loudspeaker. It was used to indicate that the accompanying utterance is meant to be interpreted as being said loudly. For further explanation, see analysis of a real example in the next Chapter 4. This emoji was used 21 times in the corpus.

This emoji is of a red balloon. It was also used to indicate celebration. It appeared 15 times in the dataset.
This emoji represents a box gift wrapped with gold paper and a ribbon. It was used in association with written congratulations. It was also used by women concurrently with the word “gift (s).” It appeared 11 times in both groups.

This emoji depicts a dartboard with a dart hitting the center. It was used metaphorically in the male group to indicate what someone said was to the point or addressed the core issue. This emoji occurred 8 times in the male group only.

These two emojis of small red and blue cars were used interchangeably. They were used to refer to cars as a means of transportation. For instance, Fadia, one of the group members, jokingly asked if anyone could go get her from her workplace and Deema, who did not have a car, ironically responded, (أنظمة أتفي بالكم), “I will come get you 🚗🚗🚗.” In addition, it was also used concurrently with the word “car” once in the male group. Together, they were used 6 times in the corpus.

This emoji represents a pink ribbon tied in a bow. Like the various flower and fruit emojis in the previous category, it was used (5 times) in the female group to indicate that
the user had finished a task requested by another group member, such as repeating a prayer or a supplication a certain number of times.

These are emojis representing a banknote with a pound sign, a Euro sign and a dollar sign, respectively. They are used to refer to money (regardless of what they literally represent). In the female group, they were used once in association with donation. Muna was responsible for collecting donations for charity. She sent to the group,

(؟ هلا حريم، حد بعده يريد يتبرع؟) “Hey ladies. Anyone else want to make a donation؟” Men used it 4 times (for example, while they were discussing why minimum salaries for the government employees should be increased, one of the group members responded jokingly,

(؟ إذا ما تحبوا رواتبك، عطوني ايهاى ان أحب الفلس؟) “If you don’t like your salaries, give them to me. I love money؟”).

This first emoji is of fireworks, showing yellow light glowing in a night sky, while the second one represents a sparkler, a form of fireworks held in the hand. They were used together 4 times in the male group as a display of celebration.
This emoji represents a gun. It was not used literally but was used jokingly to indicate a threat. It was also used with an emoji of a bird (啾啾) to stand in for hunting. In terms of frequency, it was used 4 times in the male group only.

👑

This emoji represents a crown. It co-occurred with the words, (ملكة) “queen,” and (الاميرة) “the princess.” For example, Deema, one of the group members, asked the other members to introduce themselves so that she could save their names in her contact list because she lost the names after she changed her mobile device. Muna, another group member, humorously responded, (👑لا تنسىني معك)، “The princess Muna is with you 👑.” The emoji appeared 3 times in female group only.

🔨

This is an emoji of a hammer. It was used twice in the female group to indicate an unserious threat as well.

🪵

This emoji represents a stick with a small red flag and a star attached to it. (According to emojipedia, it represents a wish tree. However, in the Omani culture, a wish tree does not exist and I do not think that the participants in this study used it in this way.) It was used once in the male group with other emojis as a display of celebration. (I think this is
because it is a colorful emoji.) It was used once in the female group to jokingly represent a broomstick. They chose this emoji, as they mentioned in their conversation, because they thought it was the only emoji that looks like a stick.

![Broomstick emoji](image)

This emoji depicts a pile of excrement with eyes and a smiling mouth. It was used, in the female group, to substitute for the word “excrement.” It occurred two times. Once, a few members of the group organized a field trip for the children in the village. Throughout the trip, they were reporting, via WhatsApp, everything to the other members of the group back in the village. However, one of the organizers did not participate in reporting and the other members, back in the village, started to ask about her. Nuha, whose son, Usama, was with the children, humorously responded,

(خائيفة يكون أسامة بابيها في الباص ومنمشكته تو, “I am afraid Usama urinated in the bus and she is troubled with him now.”) Muna, another group member, responded,

(آتمنى يكون بول بس ما, “I hope it is only urine not 🚽,” which for her would be more embarrassing.

![Camera and Antenna emojis](image)

The first emoji represents a satellite antenna, while the second one represents a video camera. They were used together twice to substitute for their equivalent written words and once concurrently with the word, “live broadcast.” They are used once with a loudspeaker emoji 📣.
These two emojis are of a red landline telephone and a telephone receiver. They were used together twice to substitute for “phone calls.” (An example including these two emojis and the previous two will be discussed in the next chapter).

✈

From left to right, these emojis represent a bus, a car, and an airplane. One of the male members used them together one time; he used them after informing the group that he had finished his shift and was going home. He seems to be referring to them as transportation.

✈

As mentioned above this emoji was used to represent an airplane. It was used alone once by Nasser, one of the male group. He was in Malaysia at the time and he wrote, “Back to Oman,” meaning that he was going to fly back home.

✈

This emoji of a car was used alone once in the male group. The participants were discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the different brands of cars they have. One of them used this emoji to refer to a specific type of car, called “Yaris.”
These two emojis represent police cars. They were used together once in the female group. They were used along with the word “help.” Arwa, one of the group members, told the group that their car broke down and she was waiting for her brother to fix it.

Muna responded, (경찰차图标 ), “Do you need any help (경찰차图标).” The emojis here are not used literally to mean police cars but are used metaphorically since police usually are expected to help people.

This emoji represents a bomb. It was used along with the word “explode.” One of the female group members complained that her mobile phone always gets stuck. Another member responded,

(手榴弹图标), “It is because once you meet someone, you get their phone numbers immediately. Of course it is going to be stuck. It is good that it has not exploded yet (手榴弹图标).” What she meant is that saving contact numbers of all the people you meet is what makes the phone be stuck. (The worst scenario, in her point of view, is that the phone would explode as a result of containing a huge amount of contact information).
This emoji represents a camera. It was used once in the male group to refer to a toy camera. When one of the group members informed the group that he was going to perform Umrah, pilgrimage, another member jokingly responded,

(. 😄 ما تنسي الكاميرا عجب 😘.” It is a norm, in many places in Oman, that people who go to perform umrah bring gifts for children—toy cameras that display images of the most important holy places in Mecca and Medina.

💍

This emoji represents a ring. It was used once in the female group. Arwa jokingly asked the group members to give her an iPhone 5 as a gift. Muna responded,

( لايفون ما راح يعطيك اياه الجروب بس يمكن الخطيب 😱 😱 😱 😱)، “The iPhone is not going to be given to you by the group but maybe the fiancé 😱 😱 😱 😱”). The ring emojis are used here to refer to engagement rings. (What Muna is telling Arwa here is that her fiancé, not the group, should bring her an iPhone as a gift with the engagement ring).

👚👖

These emojis represents a pink blouse and jeans. They were used together one time in the female group along with their equivalent lexical words. The group members were discussing what they should wear for an end of the summer party for the children, which was going to be held the next day. One of the group members jokingly wrote,
(لبسي قميص و بنطلون جينز) (“Wear a blouse and jeans”). The jeans emoji was also used once alone to substitute for the equivalent written word.

Finally, this emoji represents a ball used in soccer games. It co-occurred with the word “soccer ball.” It was used once in the female group only. Nassra shared a puzzle with the group. Among the few members who responded, Fatma answered, (كرة قدم), “Soccer ball,” meaning that the answer to the puzzle is “soccer ball.”

Next, I will explain the emojis under the category “food and drink.” There were 68 instances of various emojis under this category.

3.2.4 Food and Drink

This category includes emojis representing various kinds of food and drink. They are also arranged according to their frequency from the highest to the lowest.

This emoji represents a slice of watermelon. It was used 10 times concurrently with or as a substitute for the word watermelon in the male group only. For instance, Salim once sent, (جالس اكل حلوتة), “I am eating does anyone want?” In
addition, it was sometimes used metaphorically when addressing someone to mean, “calm down” or “be relaxed.”

This emoji represents a glass of liquid with a straw and probably a slice of lime. It was used literally to stand for juice. It was used 4 times in the male group only. For instance, a few members from the male group were organizing a get-together picnic. Some of them said they would bring 🍊.

The first emoji represents a piece of a cake, while the second one represents a whole birthday cake. They were used together, along with an emoji depicting a red balloon (🎈), twice in the female group in association with a happy birthday wish for one of the group members.

This emoji represents items on a skewer. It was used once in the female group with the word barbecue. The user was telling the group that she went with her family on a picnic and they had barbecue 🍗. It was also used once in the male group.
These two emojis represent meat. They were used with the emoji (🌙) once in the male group. It was used by Nasser during Eid, an Islamic occasion, when people eat a lot of meat. Nasser sent to the group, (🌙 بسكم آكل لحم ), “Enough eating meat 🌙.”

This emoji represents a cup of coffee. It was used once in the male group while they were discussing how expensive Starbucks drinks are. Saif, one of the group members said, (قهوة, أبغضني ما أدفع 1,800 ريال لكوب قهوة)، “I will not pay 1,800 Rial for a cup of coffee ☕️.” (1.800 = almost 5 dollars.)

Finally, the remaining 3 emojis are classified under a separate category called symbols. This category includes the smallest number (36 out of the total number, 4369) of emojis in the corpus.
3.2.5 Symbols

These two emojis represents a white check mark and a white cross mark in green boxes.

is used to indicate that a certain piece of information is correct, while was used to indicate the opposite. For instance, Ahmed from the male group once wrote the expression “in sha Allah,” which consists of three words, as two words “insha Allah.” This changes the meaning of the expression from “if God wills” to “the creation of God.” Therefore, Salim pinpointed this error and wrote the correct form, (insha Allah, in sha Allah), meaning “insha Allah” is spelled wrong and the correct spelling is “in sha Allah. The check mark box was used 14 times while the cross mark box was used 12 times. They were only used in the male group.

This emoji depicts a series of the letter “Z.” It is used to represent sleeping or snoring.

Sometimes it co-occurred with the sleepy emoji ( 😴). It occurred 9 times in both groups.

To summarize, I classified the wide range of emoji types that occurred in the corpus into the categories: people, nature, food and drink, objects and symbols. The highest frequency of emojis occurred in the category of people (3469 emojis out of the
total number of emojis in the corpus 4369), followed by emojis in the category of nature (700), then objects (190), then food and drink (68). The lowest frequency of emojis occurred in the category of symbol (36).

Next, I will discuss the differences between the two groups in terms of the total frequency of emojis per 1000 words and per month. I will also discuss the role of gender in the use of some emojis in one group but not in the other.

3.3 Gender Differences and Emoji Use

In the previous section, I report the frequency of emojis in both groups together without focusing on gender differences. In this section, I will compare the average of emojis per month and the number of emojis per 1000 words between the two groups.

As I mentioned before, the data collected from the male group occurred during a nine-month period and it resulted in 24,047 words and 3871 emojis, when repeated emojis, such as 😊😊😊, were counted individually. (When repeated identical emojis were counted as one occurrence, the total was 2439). The data collected from the female group occurred during a three-month period and resulted in 17,990 words and 3648 emojis (1930 emojis when repeated emojis were counted as one occurrence). The following table illustrates the average number of emojis per month in each group. (The values are of the total number of emojis in each group with the repeated emojis counted individually).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of emojis</th>
<th>Number of months</th>
<th>Average emojis/month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male group</td>
<td>3871</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female group</td>
<td>3648</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1. Emojis per month

The table above shows that women used more emojis per month than men, although the total number of emojis in the male group is greater than that of the female group. This is because the emojis in the male group occurred over a longer period of time (9 months) as opposed to the emojis in the female group that occurred in 3 months. The women used 1216 emojis per month whereas men used 430.

The next table shows the number of emojis per 1000 words in each group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of words</th>
<th>Total number of emojis</th>
<th>Emojis/1000 words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male group</td>
<td>24,047</td>
<td>3871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female group</td>
<td>17,990</td>
<td>3648</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2. Emojis per 1000 words

This table illustrates that women also used more emojis per 1000 words than men did. They used 202 emojis while men used 161 emojis per 1000 words. These findings are in
line with what has been reported in the earlier research on gender differences and the use of emoticons. For example, Witmer and Katzman (1997), Wolf (2000), Baron (2004), and Herring (2003) found that women tend to use emoticons more than men.

In addition to the difference between men and women in the total emojis per month and per 1000 words, both groups have used some emojis exclusively. In other words, there are some emoji types that were used only in the male group but were not used in the female group and vice versa. For example, only men used the emojis representing a thumb-down (👎), a cross mark (❌), a check mark (✔️), and a policeman (👮). As was explained previously, the thumb-down emoji was used to express disapproval of others’ participation. The cross and check mark emojis were usually used together to explicitly pinpoint and correct someone’s participation that was perceived as wrong. And the policeman emoji was used to refer to the manager of the group as an authority. Men’s tendency to correct each other and to attend to authority could be interpreted as reflecting gender differences previously reported in the literature on face-to-face interaction and on CMC (e.g., Tannen 1990; Coates 1996, 2003, 2013). In face-to-face interaction, Tannen (1990) notes that men tend to focus on relative status and therefore often approach conversation as a negotiation for who is up and who is down. In CMC, Herring (1993, 1994) found that men are more likely to challenge and oppose their addressees than women.

Women in the female group exclusively used the emoji representing an ear (イヤー) to indicate that they are listening attentively or are paying attention to what their
interlocutor had to say. They also predominantly used the kissing emoji (😘). Of the 140 occurrences of this emoji in the whole corpus, women used it 100 times. They used it frequently when they say goodbye to each other. They also used it as a response to thanks or compliments, or concurrently with the thumb-up emoji (👍) to show support and approval of others’ messages. The exclusive use of these emojis by women also can be interpreted as being in accordance with gender patterns reported in the literature. Tannen (1990) observes that women tend to value listening, and the expression of listenership with the use of backchannels, such as “mhm” and “uhuh,” more frequently than men. They tend to focus on connection and support. In CMC, Herring (1993, 1994) found that women tend to express appreciation and support to others more than men. They generally tend to adopt a supportive and “aligned” stance towards their interlocutors.

However, in addition to gender, there might be other factors that affect the frequency of emojis and the types of emojis used in each group. As was mentioned before, these two groups comprise two different communities of practice. The male-only group consisted of members of the same age who are all engineers. They rarely meet offline. The female-only group consisted of members of different ages and of different occupations. All the members are either close relatives or friends who are living in the same geographical place, and thus the chance of meeting offline is very high. All these factors could have influenced the number of emojis used in each group. In addition, the topic of the discussion, the timing of the day and synchronicity of communication could have also had an effect on the frequency and types of emojis used.
3.4 Emoji Placement

I will now turn to investigating where emojis are placed within the discourse. As was mentioned in the theoretical background (Chapter 2), previous studies have examined emoticon placement. Provine, Spencer and Mandell (2007) examined the placement of emoticons in statements posted at four websites. The results indicated that 97% of the emoticons in the data occurred before, after, or in the middle of sentences at phrase breaks. 3% appeared alone or “naked” without any accompanying text. Garrison et al. (2011) explored the placement of emoticons in instant messaging discourse. It was found that the end of a statement was the most frequent position, followed by the beginning of a statement, then “alone with,” and finally “alone.” “Alone with” is an emoticon that is used in a separate turn but is coupled with a prior or a subsequent turn by the same user.

As I examined and reexamined the data from both groups, I identified five positions where emojis are placed. These positions are similar to the ones identified by Garrison et al. (2011). The following table adopted from Garrison et al. (117) defines and illustrates these positions with real examples from their data.
Table 3.4. Emoticon placement in instant messaging discourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement (coded as)</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>End</td>
<td>Emoticon appears last in the utterance.</td>
<td>you’re more than welcome to come:-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start</td>
<td>Emoticon appears first in the utterance</td>
<td>:-) thanks so much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Emoticon appears mid-phrase, separating two clauses.</td>
<td>I’d remain bitter all night :-) and go to sleep early, or read or whatever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone with</td>
<td>Emoticon appears by itself on a separate turn, but is connected to a previous or a later turn by the same interlocutor.</td>
<td>(interlocutor) :-) (same interlocutor) can I try to finish my pper real quick then IM u?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>Emoticon appears by itself as the utterance.</td>
<td>:-D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following table (Table 3.5), I will summarize the result of emoji placement in the whole corpus. (The total number of emojis is with duplicate emojis counted as one).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement</th>
<th>Start</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Alone with</th>
<th>Alone</th>
<th>Total number of emojis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>1599</td>
<td>4369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.1%)</td>
<td>(5.1%)</td>
<td>(44.7%)</td>
<td>(7.4%)</td>
<td>(36.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5. Frequency of emojis by placement.

Similar to the findings of Garrison et al. (2011) and Provine, Spencer and Mandell (2007), the placement of emojis in WhatsApp discourse is not random but seems to be systematic and conventional. That is, emojis occurred at certain positions where they do
not interrupt structures of utterances. They appeared at five positions as shown in the table above.

The most frequent position, 1953 (44.7%), was at the end of utterances. When used in this position, they either took the place of punctuation or were used concurrently with punctuation. In addition, the high frequency of this position could be attributed to the fact that emojis in this position usually function as contextualization cues, indicating how the previous text was meant. The second most frequent position, 1599 (36.6%), was when emojis occurred “alone” without any accompanying text. Provine, Spencer, and Mandell (2007) refer to emoticons occurring at this position as “naked.” They found that this type of emoticon is always a response to a previous message. However, because emojis are pictures of many things and concepts, they were used alone, in this study, not only as responses to previous textual turns but were used in response to ‘visual’ turns consisting of emojis only. They were also used to elicit or invite responses. There were many instances, in both groups, in which participants communicate in emojis alone without using any written texts. That is, emojis were used to stand in for textual communication. All these practices could possibly account for the high frequency of “alone” position emojis in the dataset.

There are three other positions that are relatively infrequent. 325 (7.4%) emojis appeared alone as separate turns but they were coupled with a previous or a subsequent turn. This type of emoji is similar to the ones occurring at the beginning or at the end of an utterance but the difference is that they are placed alone, by themselves, as separate turns. Emojis occurring at the start or the beginning of an utterance or a turn constitute
6.1% (268). The least frequent position is the middle of an utterance with 224 emojis (5.1%).

To summarize, the WhatsApp users in my study seem to follow conventions when placing emojis in their written utterances and conversations. They place emojis in positions that do not interfere with the structures of utterances. That is, they added them either at the beginning, end, middle (between two clauses), or alone (alone as a complete turn or alone in a separate turn but coupled with a previous or a subsequent textual turn by the same user).

These findings are consistent with those of Garrison et al. However, Garrison and his colleagues emphasize that emoticons cannot completely substitute for “print-linguistic utterances in IM.” This was not the case in this study as there were some instances where WhatsApp users were communicating in emojis alone. (An example will be discussed in Chapter 4). In fact, the alone emoji type was the second most frequently occurring in this study while it was the least frequent in Garrison et al. This could be, as I mentioned previously, because emojis, unlike emoticons, can be used to stand in for linguistic or textual communication. They can be used alone to respond or to elicit responses. In addition, there were some conversational excerpts in the data where participants communicate with each other using emojis only.

### 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented a description of the forms, occurrences, functions and placements of the emojis that appeared in the dataset collected for this study. The data
demonstrates that WhatsApp users in both groups are employing mostly similar types of emojis and following the same conventions when placing the emojis in their written utterances. There were 4369 occurrences of 121 emoji types. These various emojis were divided into the categories: people, nature, objects, food and drink and symbols. The highest number of emojis occurred in the category of people, which included emojis representing facial expressions, people, and body parts, followed by the category of nature, then objects, and then food and drink. The lowest number of emojis occurred in the category of symbols. Taking all categories together, the laughing face (😄) was the most frequently used emoji in the corpus followed by the grinning face (😃), followed by the smiling face variants (😊, 😊, 😊, 😊). In previous studies, the smiley :) or :-) was found to be the most frequently used emoticons. The smiling emoticon in some ways is equivalent to all three emoji faces: laughing, grinning, and smiling, which shows that emojis are much more flexible and expressive than emoticons.

The chapter also shows that although the data from the female group occurred in three months compared to the data from the male group, which occurred in nine months, the numbers of emojis per month and per 1000 words were higher in the female group than the male group. These results are consistent with previous studies, which report that women tend to use emoticons more than men. Gender differences also appeared in the exclusive or predominant use of some emojis in one group but not in the other. Finally, when placing emojis in discourse, WhatsApp users added them in positions that do not interrupt the structure of utterances and to help the reader interpret the associated
messages (contextualization cues). The most frequent position was the end of an utterance, followed by the “alone” position. The beginning, the middle of an utterance and the “alone with” positions were relatively infrequent.

In this chapter, the functions of emojis were generally explained, as they were necessary to make the description of emojis clearer. In the next chapter, excerpts from the data are analyzed to illustrate the communicative functions of emojis as they occur in contexts.
CHAPTER FOUR: COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS OF EMOJIS

4.1 Introduction

As was mentioned in the literature review, previous scholarship has mostly focused on emoticons as indicators of affective state, and has taken this meaning for granted (e.g., Derks, Bos, and von Grumbkow 2007; Herring 2001; Rezabek and Cochenour 1998). However, recent studies, such as Dresner and Herring 2010; Vandergriff 2014; and Skovholt, Grøning, and Kankaanranta 2014, have identified other communicative functions served by emoticons. Building on these studies, the analysis of emoji use in this study reveals that emojis were used by males and females in the two private WhatsApp groups to serve other functions than just indicating affective states. In addition to displaying emotion, emojis were used to serve the following communicative functions: as indicating approval or disapproval of others’ participation, responding to expressions of thanks and compliments, signaling conversational openings and closings, indicating celebration and excitement, indicating the fulfillment of a requested task, serving as contextualization cues, substituting for lexical items, and serving as indexical signs. The functions of emojis as contextualization cues, substitutes for lexical items and indexical signs could be grouped together into one category as they relate to expressing propositional meanings and occurred in a single turn. The remaining six functions can be classified into a separate category as they relate to expressing interpersonal meanings and
usually occurred in a sequence of turns. One example is selected from each group to illustrate each function as males and females in both groups use emojis to serve almost the same functions. Thus, the functions are not distinguished by gender unless a difference in usage is observed and needs to be highlighted.

The examples analyzed include a range of emojis, representing different facial expressions, people, objects, etc. Like words, emojis (and emoticons), as visual symbols, can be vague and ambiguous and thus need context to be understood. Huffaker and Calvert (2005) and Wolf (2000) assert that emoticons are context-sensitive. Thus, depending on the local context in which they are used, some emojis are multifunctional as they serve different functions in different contexts. In addition, just like words, phrases, and utterances, emojis can be, as Tannen (1996) observed, ambiguous and polysemous. Tannen explains, “If ambiguity denotes meaning one thing or another, polysemy denotes meaning one thing and another—that is, having multiple meaning simultaneously” (24-25). For instance, a smiling emoji (😊) could be used to indicate happiness or it could simply mean or “you’re welcome” or it could mean both (“happiness and “you’re welcome.”) On the other hand, different emojis can be used to serve the same function. For example, a clapping hands (👏) and a dancing lady (💃) emojis are used to indicate celebration. The analysis below will demonstrate the functions of emojis that I identified in WhatsApp interaction among friends. Next, I will start by analyzing examples from the data, which illustrate the functions that relate to expressing interpersonal meanings since they are more than the ones that relate to expressing propositional meanings.
4.2 The Functions

4.2.1 Indicating Emotions

Consistent with previous literature on emoticons, emojis are used by members of both WhatsApp groups to indicate affective states, such as happiness, sadness, anger, frustration, etc. According to Dresner and Herring (2010), this function is “iconic rather than pragmatic” (257). Users can choose from a range of pre-designed emojis, representing various facial expressions usually associated with certain emotions, such as smiling or frowning faces to indicate happiness or sadness, respectively. However, it is important to note that because emojis are used voluntarily, they work as intentional communicative signals of emotion, not necessarily representing real emotions or facial expressions. Next, I will analyze three examples to demonstrate how emojis are used to indicate emotions such as happiness, sadness and anger.

Example 1 consists of two short messages (A and B); (A) is from the female group and (B) is from the male group. In these messages, a smiling emoji is used to express the user’s happiness about a propositional content expressed in her/his textual utterance, respectively. In (A), Huda, one of the female group members, was welcoming new members who had just joined the female WhatsApp group.
Example 1:

(A)

Translation

7/4/, 10:17:20 PM: Huda: Hi Sara, Asia, and Zakia

It makes us happy that you’ve joined us

Although the smiling emoji (😊) can be used to indicate a set of positive sentiments, including but not limited to the general notion of happiness, it seems that it is unproblematically used by Huda, in this instance, to express her happiness that Sara, Asia, and Zakia had become members in the group. Taken together with the preceding utterance, “It makes us happy that you’ve joined us,” the use of this smiling emoji could be viewed as being “motivated by a co-occurring instance of inscribed AFFECT” (Zappavigna 2012; 80); it is clearly used to further emphasize the positive emotional state of the users.

However, this is not always the case. For instance, in the following message (B), the smiling emoji is used to indicate happiness although the accompanying utterance does not include any affective words. In this message, Nasser reports that it was raining in the place where he lives (I removed the name of the place, to protect privacy, and replaced it with […], a convention that will be used henceforth). In a dry country like Oman, where rain is scarce, raining is always a happy occasion worthy of reporting.
Translation

8/29, 5:15:01 PM: Nasser: Heavy rain, now, in the city of […]

Nasser, above, uses the smiling emoji (😊) to indicate his happiness, as a consequence of what he has expressed in his preceding utterance (that it was raining heavily in his city). Thus, the interpretation of this emoji is dependent and connected to what has been expressed in the accompanying textual utterance.

Similarly, in the following example from the male-only group, emojis are used to express emotions such as sadness, surprise, and anger. At the beginning of the exchange, Fahad, one of the group members, declares the end of his vacation (annual leave). He was on a leave for a month. (In turn [3], the quote “And from the evil of an envier when he envies” is a commonly cited excerpt from a longer chapter of the Quran [chapter 13], the theme of which is requesting protection from several worldly evils, including that of the envy of others.)
Example 2:

Translation

1. 7/25, 2:46:57 PM: Fahad: 😞 The vacation finished

2. 7/25, 2:47:27 PM: Nasser: 😯 So you’re still on vacation until now?

3. 7/25, 2:50:24 PM: Fahad: “And from the evil of an envier when he envies”…
   ➔ I have been saving my leave days for a year and a half and I couldn’t get more than a month

In the first turn, Fahad uses an emoji, representing a sad face with a teardrop running from one eye (😞) to indicate his sadness and disappointment that his long vacation is coming to an end imminently. In response, Nasser, in turn (2), uses an emoji, representing a face with wide-open eyes (*width*), to express his surprise that Fahad was still on vacation. It seems that Nasser expected Fahad to have already resumed his work and thus was surprised to learn the opposite. In addition, by using the question, “So you’re still on vacation until now?” with the surprised emoji, Nasser indirectly sent Fahad the metamessage (Bateson 1972), “you have had a long vacation and I am jealous.” This interpretation is supported by Fahad’s citation of the Quranic verse in turn (3). In face-to-
face interaction, I have heard people quoting this excerpt when they think that someone is jealous or being envious of something they have, or have done, and that they might get harmed as a result of the evil eye. (Some cultures believe that if someone looks at you with envy, he/she is going to jinx you and might cause you misfortune.) In the same vein, Fahad quotes this verse, here, as a type of verbal talisman to, albeit partly jokingly, protect himself against Nasser’s presumed envy. Then, in the second utterance in the same turn, Fahad explains how it was difficult for him to get more than a one-month of vacation, although he had refrained from taking any day off for a year and half. He ends his utterance with two emojis, representing a red angry face (😡😡), probably to indicate that he is angry and frustrated, as a result. The duplication of the emoticon could be interpreted as being used to emphasize the emotional state. (In spoken Omani Arabic, the expression, “his/her face turned red” is often used to indicate that someone is very angry. It could be equivalent to the idiomatic English expression, “seeing red”).

To summarize, in the previous examples, emojis have been used iconically to indicate how the user felt towards what s/he had expressed in the propositional content of his/her preceding verbal utterance. In example 1 (A and B), a smiling emoji (😊) was used to display happiness. Although, the smiling or the happy face [:)], along with the frowning face [:()], were the most studied emoticons in previous studies, other emoji were used in this study to express various emotions. For instance, in example (2) above, emojis such as (😢, 😨, 😡) were used to express sadness, surprise, and anger, respectively.

In addition, there are sometimes multiple variants of a certain emoji (smiling, sad,
for instance), which can be used to express the same sentiment. The choice of a certain variant of an emoticon depends on individuals’ preferences. For example, a user might choose (😊), while another might choose (😊) to express happiness. Yet, the situation sometimes is far more complicated as emojis do not always straightforwardly express emotions; that is, emojis might be used to serve other non-affective functions, as will be illustrated next.

4.2.2    Indicating Approval or Disapproval

The data in this study has yielded examples in which emojis serve other functions in addition to indicating senders’ emotions. Emojis can be used to indicate approval or disapproval of other participants’ messages. The most frequent emoji used to show approval is the thumb-up (👍). By way of partial comparison, this emoji functions similarly to the “like” button on Facebook and other social network services in allowing users to show their agreement and appreciation of the content of other members’ participation. The following two examples will illustrate how this emoji and others are used to publically endorse and recognize others’ participation.

The first example is drawn from the chat corpus of the male group. It occurred at a period of time during which a movement to boycott eggs for one month was going on in Oman. This boycott movement occurred as a response to a dramatic and sudden increase in the prices of eggs. The exchange started when Fahad wrote to encourage the members of the group to continue the boycott even if the prices went down to punish the traders so
that they will not increase the prices again.

Example 3:

Translation

1. 2/22, 7:42:52 PM: Fahad: Guys don’t buy eggs even if the prices went down
   At least we should complete one month; it is ok just be patient..
   and if the period were to be prolonged, we are ready and prepared..
   so that they (traders) be punished and will not increase the price again ..
   and we will teach them that we are a perseverant nation..

2. 2/22/13, 7:44:05 PM: Anwar: Logical words 100 %

3. 2/22, 7:50:01 PM: Mahmoud:

4. 2/22, 7:52:29 PM: Saif:

5. 2/22, 7:54:10 PM: Fisal:

Anwar in turn (2) agrees with Fahad’s argument and expresses his support by
using a textual evaluation and emphasizes it with a thumb-up emoji (👍). Likewise, Mahmood, Saif, and Faisal in turns (3, 4, and 5, respectively) use the same emoji (👍) to show their approval and agreement with Fahad’s argument. In addition to showing approval and support, the use of this emoji could also mean that Anwar, Mahmood, Saif and Faisal agreed to do what Fahad suggested (continuing the boycott for one month even if the prices were reduced).

In the following example, female users also use emojis as a means to express their appreciation and endorsement of a message shared by Arwa. (A lot of WhatsApp group members share and forward verbatim messages they got from the Internet or from other groups they are members in. The comment, “The best of what I have received today” at the end of turn (1) below could be considered Arwa’s “external evaluation” of the whole message and which also implies why Arwa wanted to share it with the group.) The message consists of three quotes pertaining to relationships between people. The first quote indirectly states that it is better sometimes not to know what other people say about us, in our absence, in order to maintain good relationships. The second quote emphasizes the importance of being content and satisfied with what one has. The third quote underscores the importance of confidence and forgiveness. The full exchange goes as follows,
Example 4:

1. 8/14, 11:49:05 PM: Arwa:
   - لو أننا نعلم ما يقال عننا في غيابنا لما
     ابتسمنا في وجوه الكثير من الناس!! (حقيقة)
   - قليل من الماء ينقذك وكثير من الماء قد يغرفك!!
     فتعلم دائما أن تكتفي بما تملك.
   - كي تنجح في الحياة تحتاج أمريين:
     الثقة والتجاهل
   {أجمل ما وصلني لهذا اليوم}

2. 8/14, 11:50:19 AM: Sara: 🙌🙌👍👍

3. 8/14, 11:51:43 AM: Yasmeen: 👍😢😢

Translation

1. 8/14, 11:49:05 PM: Arwa:
   - If we knew what others said about us in our absence, we would
     never smile in the faces of a lot of people!! (fact)
   - Little bit of water could save you and a lot of it could kill you!!
     Therefore, always learn to be satisfied with what you have.
   - To succeed in life, you need two things: confidence and
     forgiveness
   {The best of what I have received today}

2. 8/14, 11:50:19 AM: Sara:

3. 8/14, 11:51:43 AM: Yasmeen:

Sara, in turn (2), aligns with Arwa, and uses a combination of emojis representing
clapping hands (🙌🙌), a thumbs-up (👍), and the index finger touching the thumb to
make a circle (_circle) to express her approval and agreement with the content of Arwa’s message. (The usage of the clapping emojis [_clap_] implies a sense of applause while the emojis [_like_totalagree_] can be translated, from the left to the right, as “I like it; I totally agree” respectively.)

Yasmeen in turn (3) also uses the thumbs-up emoji (thumbs-up) to express her approval and appreciation of Arwa’s message. In addition, she follows it with two kissing emojis (kissing). Although the thumbs-up emoji can mean a sign of approval of both the sender and the content of the message, the kissing emojis can only be directed to the sender as a symbolic gift of appreciation. Therefore, this example has shown that various emojis, such as the thumbs-up, clapping hands, a kissing face, were used by female participants to indicate their approval and appreciation of the message and possibly of the sender as well. Similar to the men in the previous example, both Sara and Yasmeen used these emojis as stand-alone without any associated textual messages. Obviously, these emojis are highly context-dependent since the participants need to be able to decode the intended meaning based only on the context in which these emojis are used.

Although not as frequent as the thumbs-up (thumbs-up), the thumbs-down (thumbs-down) emoji has appeared a few times in the chat corpus of the male group only; it was used to show disapproval, as the following example will illustrate. In this example, Fahad, Mahmoud, Basim and Nasser were talking about the England football (soccer) teams they are fans of...
[alongside, they were also talking about an ongoing football match in which the Omani team was playing. ([…] between the turns means that the turn(s) are truncated]. Fahad and Nasser use the emoticon (五大) to show their disapproval of certain English football teams. The exchange starts as follows:

Example 5:

Translation

1. 1/5, 6:21:14 PM: Fahad: Frankly, in the English football season, every year I support a different team. But the first team I supported was Leeds

2. 1/5, 6:22:01 PM: Basim: And this year? […]

3. 1/5, 6:27:06 PM: Fahad: This year Liver (Liverpool) I had enough of Chelsea last year I will support any team except Man United
In the first turn, Fahad declares that he supports a different (English) football team each year. In turn (5), he declares that he is supporting the Liverpool Football team this year, as a response to Basim question in turn (2). He also declares, in turn (3), that he will not support the Manchester United football team. He uses the thumbs-down emoji (↓) to display his dislike and disapproval of the team. Mahmoud, in turn (8) seems to be excited that Fahad is supporting Liverpool (as is reflected in his duplication of the vowel “o” in Liverpool), while Nasser in turn (12) disagrees with Fahad, and perhaps with Mahmoud as well. He does not like Liverpool; he uses a thumb-down emoji to express his disapproval of the team, “Liver (Liverpool) ↓.” Thus, the thumbs-down emoji (↓) here is straightforwardly used to indicate disapproval.

To summarize, the examples in this section have illustrated that some emojis can be used either alone or in association with texts to express approval and appreciation of the sender or/and the content of his/her message. Various emojis can be used to serve this function such as a thumbs-up, clapping hands, and kissing emojis. It is interesting to note that women tend to use other emojis in combination with the thumbs-up, as example 13 showed, to indicate appreciation and approval, while men tend to use the thumbs-up emoji alone, although sometimes repetitively. (Rashid, one of the male group members, is
the only one who tends to use the smiling emoji (😊) along with the thumbs-up).

Women also tend to use the clapping hands emoji (👏) to show approval while men used it just once to serve this function. Furthermore, the thumbs-down emoji (👎), appeared in the male chat group only, and was used to serve an opposite function: that is, showing disapproval of something, as the last example in this section showed. This emoji was never used in the female group.

4.2.3 Emojis as a Response to Thanking and Compliments

This function refers to the use of emojis in response to thanking and compliments. In other words, emojis are sometime used alone to substitute for an expected verbal response to a thank-you expression. The following examples will demonstrate how emojis are employed to serve this function.

The first example (Excerpts A and B) is from the female group. Excerpt (A), begins with Nuha, who is a teacher at a school, answering a question previously posted by Azza who was inquiring about the first day of school. (Azza’a question was asked a few turns prior to the following excerpt, which is a part of a longer exchange).
Example 6:

(A)

Translation

(A)

1. 8/20, 8:31:10 PM: Nuha: Hi, schools start 9/1
2. 8/20, 8:33:04 PM: Azza: Thank you Nuha
3. →8/20, 8:59:41 PM: Nuha:😊

Nuha, in turn (1), answers Azza’s question by providing the date, in which the new academic year at schools will begin. In line (2) Azza thanks Nuha, to which Nuha responds with a smiling emoji (😊). This stand-alone emoji constitutes a second pair part of an adjacency pair. (The first pair part is Azza’s turn thanking Nuha in turn [2]). Although this smiling emoji could mean that Nuha is happy for providing the answer to Azza’s question, it could also be interpreted as substituting for the expected verbal response, as in a face-to-face interaction, “you are welcome.”

In (B), emojis are used as an appreciation token of a compliment in the previous turn. Before this exchange, Huda shared a long symbolic story about the reward one gets for helping others.
Translation

1. 9/4, 7:19:32 PM: Raya: Thank you Huda for the story it is woooonderful

2. → 9/4, 7:22:00 PM: Huda: 😘😘😘

Raya in turn (1) thanks and compliments Huda for sharing the story. Huda, in turn (2), responds with three stand-alone kissing emojis (😘😘😘). Like the previous exchange, using the kissing emojis here does not necessarily mean that Huda is kissing Raya (even in face-to-face interaction, kissing is not an expected response for compliments). Thus, depending on the context, these stand-alone emojis could be interpreted as Huda’s indirect way of signaling her acceptance or appreciation of the compliment.

Similarly, this strategy was also used in the chat corpus of the male group. For instance, prior to the following exchange, Anwar shared a video clip of a dolphin saving a dog from drowning in the sea. Salim, one of the group members, thanks Anwar for sharing the video clip.
Example 7:

1.  3/19, 5:16:33 PM: Salim: شكرا انور ع هذا المقطع الجميل
2.  → 3/19, 5:16:54 PM: Anwar: 😊

Translation

1.  3/19, 5:16:33 PM: Salim: Thank you Anwar for this nice clip
2.  → 3/19, 5:16:54 PM: Anwar: 😊

In this excerpt, Anwar (turn 2) responds to Salem’s compliment with a stand-alone smiling emoji (😊). Similar to the kissing emoji in the previous example, this stand-alones emoji could be interpreted as signaling appreciation of the compliment in the previous turn. It could also equally mean, “I am happy you like it.”

The previous examples have illustrated how emojis can be used as stand-alones to signal appreciation and maybe acceptance of compliments. Various emojis can be used to serve this function but the most frequent ones are smiling and kissing emojis, although kissing emojis are used more frequently by females. These examples also illustrated how these emojis are highly context dependent; they serve different functions in different contexts.

4.2.4 Signaling Openings and Closings of Conversations

Emojis in this study were also employed as resources to initiate and close conversations. They were used alone or with texts in openings and in leave-taking turns.
The following examples will illustrate, first, how emojis were used in openings and then in closings of WhatsApp chat conversations.

4.2.4.1 Conversational Openings

Example 8 (A) is drawn from the chat corpus of the male group. In this extract, Nasser attempts to initiate a conversation with other members in the group. He uses emojis along with texts in his opening sequences.

Example 8:

(A)

1. —>3/12, 9:10:51 PM: Nasser: 😊
2. 3/12, 9:11:13 PM: Nasser: مساء الورد لأحبى الورود
3. —>3/12, 9:11:21 PM: Nasser: 😏
4. 3/12, 9:11:29 PM: Nasser: كيفكم شباب؟
5. 3/12, 9:11:34 PM: Nasser: مختفين؟
6. —>3/12, 9:11:39 PM: Nasser: 🦚

Translation:

1. 3/12, 9:10:51 PM: Nasser:
2. 3/12, 9:11:13 PM: Nasser: Evening full of flowers for the most beautiful flowers
3. 3/12, 9:11:21 PM: Nasser: 😏
4. 3/12, 9:11:29 PM: Nasser: How are you guys?
5. 3/12, 9:11:34 PM: Nasser: You disappeared
6. 3/12, 9:11:39 PM: Nasser:
Nasser’s attempt to initiate a conversation extends over six short turns. He starts in turn (1) with an emoji representing two eyes looking slightly at one direction (👀). This emoji, in this context, implies searching for other members available online. It could be translated as, “Hello! Anyone available in here?” (I have also observed the use of this function in my personal WhatsApp communication with siblings and friends. My brother always first sends this emoji alone when he wants to initiate a conversation with me and he will not send anything else before I respond to him, which would mean I am available and ready to engage in a conversation. It was also used several times in the female group to serve the same function). In turn (2), Nasser greets his group members using a flattering term of address, “the most beautiful flowers.” This flattering greeting is uncommon among the members of the group (and among males in general) but Nasser is using it as a strategy to provoke his friends in the group in order to get them respond to him. In turn (3), he uses an emoji representing a smiling face with heart-shaped eyes 😍, which can be interpreted as, “I love you.” This emoji reinforces the meaning of the previous textual greeting. In turn (4), he continues his greeting by using the verbal expression, “How are you guys?” Even after four turns, he still did not receive any response from anyone in the group. In turn (5) he comments on his friends’ silence and lack of response, “you disappeared,” which could be interpreted as an indirect way of saying, “Where are you? Why don’t you respond and interact in the group?” In turn (6) he concludes his opening sequences with an emoji representing a small black ant 🐜.
First, I was puzzled by his usage of this emoji and thought he was trying to be ambiguous. After reading the extract many times, I started to see a connection between his previous turn, “You are disappearing” and this emoji. That is, he is drawing a comparison between his friends and ants, because ants are understood locally to often run and hide. I asked Anwar, one of the group members, about his interpretation of this emoji. He also interpreted it in connection with the previous turn. He thought that Nasser meant to say, “You are disappearing like ants.” Thus, various emojis (☂️, 😊, and 🐜) were used to initiate a conversation in this excerpt. By using these emojis, Nasser was trying to provoke his friends in the group to engage in a conversation with him, but unfortunately his attempt was unsuccessful as no one responded to him.

Females also used emojis to perform greetings. In the following extract, Deema rejoined the group after she opted out of it for a few days. She uses emoticons in her greeting as is shown in the following exchange:

(B)
Translation

1. 7/5, 10:27:01 PM: Deema: Good afternoon ladies

2. →7/5, 10:27:14 PM: Deema:

3. 7/5, 10:27:27 PM: Nada: Good afternoon

4. 7/5, 10:27:36 PM: Deema: I couldn’t resist (rejoining)

5. → 7/5, 10:27:43 PM: Arwa:

Deema in turn (1) starts with a verbal greeting following it, in turn (2), with two emojis, representing a waving hand (👋) and a smiling face (😊). In face-to-face interaction, a waving hand gesture is used when greeting people from a distance and using it here could be a result of the perceived physical distance since the other members are not present at the same physical location as the sender. On the other hand, the smiling emoji (😊) here could be interpreted as, “I am pleased to be back,” but it could also be a reflection of how smiling is used in face-to-face interaction. In other words, the usage of the smiling face and the waving hand here shows that emojis can be used to inscribe visual cues into written communication as means of representing facial and non-verbal gestures. (It could also indicate how WhatsApp interaction is conceived similar to face-to-face interactions). Arwa in turn (5) responds with an emoji (👋) representing a woman raising one hand. She uses this emoji to visually represent herself greeting Deema back by waving to her. Thus it also constitutes another example of an emoji substituting for words. To summarize, this example illustrated how females used emojis along with verbal greetings in conversational opening sequences to represent greetings in face-to
4.2.4.2 Conversational Closings

Closing sequences in the data are generally initiated by one of the group members announcing some reason for ending the conversation, most often presented as an external requirement obliging them to quit, such as having to go to bed or to eat. Emojis are used, sometimes in closing sequences, which often take the form of several turns in which the responder sends the same emoji thereby creating a bond of common ground and rapport.

In the following two excerpts, I will illustrate how emoticons can be used in leave-taking turns. I will start with the following excerpt extracted from the female group, and which characterizes a leave-taking turn initiated by Muna. It goes like this:

Example 9:

(A)

1. 7/3, 11:28:08 PM: Muna: يا الله حريم 😍 بصبحن ع خير 😍😍😍😍
2. 7/3, 11:28:33 PM: Nada: وانتي من حياني 😍😍😍😍
3. —> 7/3, 11:28:44 PM: Nada: 😍😍😍😍
Translation

(A)

1. 7/3, 11:28:08 PM: Muna: Okay ladies 👧🏻 good night 😘😘😘😘😘

2. 7/3, 11:28:33 PM: Nada: You too 😘😘😘😘😘

3. 7/3, 11:28:44 PM: Nada:

This exchange took place late at night as is shown in the time stamp (11:28:08).

Muna in turn (1) uses the emoji representing a woman raising one hand (👧🏻), a gesture of waving a “goodbye,” to indicate that she is leaving. She ends her leave-taking turn with five kissing emojis (😘😘😘😘😘) marking the end of her conversation.

Nada in turns (2 and 3) acknowledges Muna’s departure using a conventional verbal expression, “you too” and the same kissing emoji (😘😘😘😘😘), and thus the conversation ends here. The usage of the same emoji with almost the same number here has an implication in creating and enhancing rapport and solidarity between these interlocutors. All instances of kissing emojis in leave-taking turns in the data of this study came from the females groups. Men never used it in closing, but did use it sometimes in greetings. Physical kissing is a widespread act of greeting and parting in face-to-face
interaction especially among women and sometimes among men in most Arab cultures. The use of kissing emojis here thus may be considered an attempt to imitate face-to-face interaction. Markman and Oshima (2007) reported the use of a kaomoji blowing a kiss (\(^*^3^*\)/ ~☆ placed in the closing of electronic messages. They postulated that blowing kisses is an act usually associated with farewells and thus indicates a specific act of expressing affection.

This example has shown that emojis, such as the emoji representing a woman raising her hand (右手)，and a kissing face ( ^_^), were used to close a conversation. These same emojis have been used to serve other functions in other contexts; the woman waving a hand was used also in the openings of conversations.

Next, the following exchange will demonstrate how men use emojis in leave-taking turns. Before this exchange, Rashid, Saif and Basim had engaged in a long conversation. Rashid then proposed a closing for the conversation by initiating a leave-taking turn. (Uncles Shuyukh is the plural form of “uncle sheikh” used previously in example 6. It is used as an endearment expression between men friends.)
Translation:

1. →12/29, 9:26:11 PM: Rashid:  It is time to leave, my uncles Shuyukh
   🧼🧼👋

2. →12/29, 9:28:08 PM: Saif: ✈

3. 12/29, 9:29:37 PM: Rashid: 😊👍

4. →12/29, 9:30:09 PM: Basim: 🏃‍♂️💨

5. →12/29, 9:31:14 PM: Rashid: 😊👍

Rashid’s turn (1) constitutes an initiation to end the conversation by explicitly stating that he had to leave. He ends his textual utterance with an emoji representing a waving hand (👋), another representing a person running (🏃‍♂️), and two more representing clouds of dust (💨). The waving hand (👋) is used as a “goodbye”
gesture here. The emojis of the running man (🏃) and the cloud of dust (灰尘) are often used together. They mean that the man is running so fast that a cloud of dust was created behind him. Using them together conveys a sense of urgency. That is, by using these emojis, Rashid sends a metamessage that he was in hurry and needed to leave immediately which provides an account or justification for why he initiated the closing.

Saif and Basim (in turns 2 and 4) ratify Rashid’s initiation to end the conversation. Saif, in turn (2), uses an emoji representing an airplane (✈) to indicate that he is leaving, too. His use of this emoji could either mean that he, in the physical world, was about to leave in an airplane or he just picked this emoji to indicate that he was leaving as well. Rashid in turn (3) acknowledges his leave-taking by using the smiling emoji (😊) and the thumbs-up (👍). The smiling emoji here cannot mean that Rashid is happy because his friend is leaving, but it could be interpreted as imitating the goodbye smiling used when waving a goodbye in a face-to-face interaction between friends. It could be working similarly to a smiling emoticon :), usually added at the end of signatures in emails. Skovholt, Grønning and Kankaanranta (2014) interpreted the function of a smiling emoticon placed at the end of signatures in workplace emails as “signaling aspects of the sender’s identity and her positive attitude towards the recipient” (9). However, the thumbs-up emoji could be interpreted as indicating acknowledgment and approval, “yes, go ahead.” Basim, in turn (4), on the other hand, uses the emojis (🏃灰尘) to communicate that he is leaving as well. Similarly to what he did with Saif in turn (3),
Rashid repeated the same emojis, (😊) and (👍), in turn (5), to approve Basim’s leave-taking turn and to finally terminate the conversation. This extract thus shows that stand-alone emojis were used in closing sequences leading to the termination of the conversation.

To summarize, the previous four extracts have illustrated how emojis were used as communicative resources in opening and closing sequences in WhatsApp conversations. In the opening extract from the male group, Nasser used various emojis representing eyes (👀), face with heart-shaped eyes (😍), and an ant (🐜) in an attempt to initiate a conversation with other members of the group. On the other hand, Deema from the female group used emojis representing conventional gestures used in face-to-face greetings, such as a waving hand (👋) and a smiling face emoji (😊). Likewise, in closing sequences, females (Muna and Nada) used emojis representing a waving hand (👋) and a kissing face (😘) to mark the end of a conversation. However, in addition to a waving hand, males used emojis representing a boy running (🏃) with a cloud of dust behind him, and another one representing an airplane to signal departure.

4.2.5 Indicating Celebration

Emojis in this study seem to enable WhatsApp users to do things they might not
be able to do when communicating in spoken language. The data included instances in which WhatsApp users employed emojis to celebrate and throw virtual parties. They celebrated their friends’ weddings and new people joining their groups by using emojis representing things and actions usually used in celebration and parties. The following two examples illustrate these functions.

In the first example, drawn from the chat corpus of the male group, various members of the group used emojis along with verbal texts to celebrate their friend’s, Anwar, engagement, who, prior to this exchange, sent an invitation to the group. They used emojis representing roses and flowers, fireworks, and party poppers.

Example 10:

1. —> 6/21, 6:53:23 PM: Rashid: 🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹玫瑰的花朵
2. 6/21, 6:59:38 PM: Anwar: الله يبارك فيك عمي الشيخ
3. —> 6/21, 7:01:01 PM: Basim: 🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹玫瑰的花朵
4. 6/21, 7:06:02 PM: Anwar: الله يبارك فيك عمي الشيخ
5. —> 6/21, 8:17:00 PM: Faisal: 🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆🎆烟花爆竹

Example 10:
Translation

1. 6/21, 6:53:23 PM: Rashid: 🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹 Congratulations, my uncle sheikh. May Allah bestow upon you happiness and benevolence and make you hear what you like.

2. 6/21, 6:59:38 PM: Anwar: God bless you my uncle sheikh.

3. 6/21/13, 7:01:01 PM: Basim: 🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹 Congratulations my uncle sheikh. May Allah bestow upon you happiness and benevolence and make you hear what you like.

4. 6/21, 7:06:02 PM: Anwar: God bless you my uncle sheikh.

5. 6/21, 8:17:00 PM: Faisal: 😐😁😁😁😁😁😁😁😁😁😁😁😁 May you live happy life.. and we ask God to give you good kids.

6. 6/21, 8:34:45 PM: Salim: May God bless you, surround you with blessings and bring you both together in virtue and prosperity. Congratulations my friend and May God grant you a successful conclusion (to the engagement). 🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹
Rashid was the first one to congratulate Anwar. He starts and ends his verbal congratulation with strings of emojis representing a colorful party popper (🎉) and an individual red rose (🌹). Using verbal congratulations is an expected response in such situations. However, choosing to add celebratory emojis to the verbal congratulation can tell us something about the sender’s intent and the relationship between him and the receiver. In other words, by using these emojis, Rashid is sending the metamessage that he is happy and excited. Basim in turn (3) responds by repeating Rashid’s message, “🎉玫瑰🌹玫瑰🌹玫瑰🌹玫瑰
Congratulations my uncle sheikh. May Allah bestow upon you happiness and benevolence and make you hear what you like. 🌹玫瑰🌹玫瑰🌹玫瑰🌹玫瑰.
This might be because he had used the copy and paste function. (Although I am not sure if Rashid did copy and paste this message, I am inclined to think so because I have observed this phenomenon a lot in other WhatsApp groups I am a member of. It is always faster and easier to copy and paste the same message rather than create a new message, especially in congratulations and condolences). In turn (5) Faisal, another member in the group, starts his message with thirty-three emojis representing a kissing face (合わさる)，followed by a textual prayer wishing his friend a happy life and good children. His use of the large number of emojis could be interpreted as his way of indicating intensity or emphasis. In a similar face-to-face interaction, kisses and hugs are used (by both males

136
and females) to congratulate close friends although the number of kisses will never be as many as it is in this virtual congratulation.

Finally Salim joins Rashid, Basim, and Faisal in congratulating and celebrating Anwar’s engagement. He starts his message with a verbal congratulation and ends it with various types of emojis representing different things associated with celebration in physical world, such as roses (🌹), bouquets of colorful flowers (🌺), sparklers (🎆) (a type of hand-held fireworks), fireworks (🌌) (a yellow explosion of light in the night sky), and party poppers (🎉). Using these various emojis (each multiple times) also sends a metamessage of excitement and enthusiasm. The exaggerated number of emojis in this example can be explained using Tannen’s (2005) concept of “enthusiasm constraint,” an element of high-involvement style in spoken conversations. Analogously, Tannen (2013) reported examples of text messages and emails in which young women used repetition of letters and punctuation marks, capitalization, and longer messages as unmarked or required markers of enthusiasm. Thus, the use and repetition of emojis by participants in this example can be viewed as unmarked displays of enthusiasm. That is, using a verbal congratulation alone or with a single emoticon, in this context, could be interpreted negatively as signs of un-excitement and indifference. Thus, all Anwar’s friend used various emojis multiple times along with their verbal messages. In addition, there was a pattern that each one used more or a larger number of emojis, to display enthusiasm and excitement, than the one before.

In previous literature, Baron (2004) and Herring (2003) found greater use of non-
linguistic features, such as emoticons and letter repetition, to be characteristic of women’s expressive style in electronic interactions. However, this example, and other similar examples in the chat corpus of the Omani male group, has shown that men, too, use emoji repetition to display enthusiasm and excitement, although not as frequently as women, which could reflect a cultural difference.

In a similar vein, female participants in this study used various emojis to indicate celebration. For instance, in the following excerpt, some members of the group are welcoming Zakia who has just been added to the group by Nada (the manager of the group). Zakia at this time was living outside Oman and the group’s members decided to add her as a means to keep her connected and updated about what was going back home. The excerpt starts when Deema asks Nada (called Nadoosh, a diminutive form of the name Nada) about the new person joining the group. Depending on whether you have had the person’s mobile number in your contact list before or not, a message will appear in your chat screen saying “NAME (similar to how you saved it in your contact list) is joining the group” or if you do not have it, the message will state, 9999999 (the person’s telephone number) is joining the group. The example will illustrate that some members of the group used various emoticons representing various objects and actions associated with parties and celebrations to welcome Zakia.
Example 11:

1. 7/4, 10:06:24 PM: Deema: من ألي دخل نووش
2. 7/4, 10:06:33 PM: Nada: زكيه
3. 7/4, 10:06:38 PM: Arwa: هذي زكيه
4. 7/4, 10:06:53 PM: Arwa: نورين زكيه الغاليه
5. →7/4, 10:06:55 PM: Nuha: رحبوا جميعنا باختي زكيه الحلوه
6. →7/4, 10:07:01 PM: Sara: مرحبا مالا
7. →7/4, 10:07:16 PM: Muna: رحبوا جميعنا باختي زكيه الحلوه
8. 7/4, 10:07:16 PM: Nuha: 🍭ineligible characters
9. →7/4, 10:07:18 PM: Deema: مرحبا هلا وعندي زكيه رحبوا جميعنا
10. →7/4, 10:07:41 PM: Deema: 🍭ineligible characters
11. 7/4, 10:07:58 PM: Deema: ثورما نور الحروف
12. →7/4, 10:08:14 PM: Nada: 🍭ineligible characters
13. →7/4, 10:09:19 PM: Arwa: 🍭ineligible characters

Translation

1. 7/4, 10:06:24 PM: Deema: Who joins (the group) Nadoosh?
2. 7/4, 10:06:33 PM: Nada: Zakia
3. 7/4, 10:06:38 PM: Arwa: This is Zakia
4. 7/4, 10:06:53 PM: Arwa: Welcome dear Zakia ((lit. you have lit up the (group) dear Zakia)

5. →7/4, 10:06:55 PM: Nuha:

6. →7/4, 10:07:01 PM: Sara: welcome welcome

7. →7/4, 10:07:16 PM: Muna: All of you, welcome our beautiful sister Zakia 😞
8. 7/4, 10:07:16 PM: Nuha:

9. →7/4, 10:07:18 PM: Deema: Welcome welcome and a basket full of sweet my
cousin 😍😍😍, Zakia, I am Deema

10. →7/4, 10:07:41 PM: Deema:

11. 7/4, 10:07:58 PM: Deema: The group has just lit up

12. →7/4, 10:08:14 PM: Nada:

In turn (1) Deema asks Nada, “Who joins (the group) Nadoosh?” Deema asks
Nada because Nada, as the manager of the group, was the only one who can add new
members to the group. Nada in turn (2) informs Nada that it is Zakia. Thus, in turn (3)
she introduces Zakia and welcomes her. The literal translation of Arwa’a welcome
expression is “you have lit up the (group) dear Zakia.” (It is an expression used in Arabic
spoken dialects to welcome people).

Nuha welcomes Zakia visually in turns (5 and 8) by using and repeating emojis
representing a confetti ball (🎉), a colorful party popper (🎊) and a red balloon (🎈).
She uses these emojis instead of a verbal welcome. Sara in turns (6) combines verbal and
visual expressions, “welcome welcome😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊.” The visual welcome, reflected in
the use of multiple emojis representing a confetti ball (.ModelForm) and a party popper (ModelState),
visually dominates the verbal welcome. The repetition of these emojis seems important
since using one or two of them would not produce the same visual effect of celebration
and therefore would not indicate the same level of enthusiasm and excitement. Muna in
turns (7) joins the “welcome party” by inviting all the members of the group to welcome
Zakia. She ends her invitation with three kissing emojis (ModelState), which might be
interpreted as her own way of welcoming Zakia. Aligning with Muna, Deema, in line (9)
ends her verbal welcome with kissing emojis (ModelState). By using kissing emojis,
Deema seems to ratify and approve Muna’s welcome in line (7). In turn (10), Deema
continues her welcome by using emojis representing clapping hands (ModelState), a confetti ball
(ModelForm), party poppers (ModelState) and balloons (ModelState). In turn (11) she reinforces her
enthusiastic welcome by using another welcome expression, “The group has just lit up,”
which also echoed Arwa’s welcome in line 4, “you have lit up the (group) dear Zakia.”
The repetition of this expression, representing many voices at once, also contributes to
creating a sense of party.
In turn (12), Nada uses another emoji, which represents a dancing lady in a red dress. The use of this emoji could have been invoked by Deema’s use of the clapping hands emoji since clapping and dancing are often associated together in real life celebration and parties, at least in Oman. Finally, Arwa, who has already welcomed Zakia in turn (4), rejoins the conversation in turn (13) by using various emojis representing a dancing girl, clapping hands, bouquets of flowers, red roses, red balloon, and party poppers. Arwa uses all the emojis used by other participants in previous turns but she introduces two new ones representing a bouquet of flowers and an individual red rose, which could also be used in parties and celebrations in real life. In this example, I see the repetition of the same emojis across different turns, by different users, as serving similar functions as the repetition of the words or phrases of other speakers in face-to-face conversation. According to Tannen (2007), the repetition of other speakers’ words, phrases and sentences, “(a) accomplishes a conversation, (b) shows acceptance of other utterances, their participation, and them, and gives evidence of one’s own participation. It provides a resource to keep talk going, where talk itself is a show of involvement, of willingness to interact, to serve positive face” (61).
In addition, as was mentioned with the previous example from the male group, the use of various emojis (each multiple times) not only creates a sense of party and celebration, but it also constitutes a display of enthusiasm and excitement. In other words, using multiple emojis could be interpreted as unmarked visual display of enthusiasm and excitement. Using no or just one emoji could be considered marked in this situation. Thus, Zakia and Arwa, who welcomed Zakia in turns (2, 3, and 4), verbally came back in turns (12 and 13) and used emojis to visually display excitement and probably to show alignment with other group members.

To summarize, the above examples showed how emojis were used by males and females to create a sense of celebration. Emojis representing various objects such as flowers, fireworks, party poppers, confetti balls, and kissing faces, were used by males to congratulate their friend, and by women to welcome a new member to the group. In both examples, males and females used emoji repetition to signal enthusiasm, and to send a metamessage of involvement and rapport. Previous studies have reported that greater use of emoticons is characteristic of women’s digital communication. Yet the examples have shown that Omani men, from the male group, also used a large number of emojis to display enthusiasm and excitement in certain contexts.

4.2.6 Emojis as Indicators of Fulfilling a Requested Task

The chat corpus from the female group yielded instances in which emojis were used in a distinctive way. Women used the WhatsApp group to share and forward religious messages. (Some Muslims believe that if they share a prayer or any religious
text and someone reads that text or shares it, the sender gets double rewards). Thus, some female users requested that others read and forward their shared religious messages and then report back when they are done. Emojis are employed as easy and fast techniques to indicate that a receiver has performed the task. For instance, in the next example Fadia shares a verse from the Holy Quran and encourages the group members to repeat it ten times. She also requests that they use two emojis representing a sunflower (🌻), to report back that they performed the task. The excerpt starts as follows,

Example 12:

1. 7/9, 7:24:32 PM: Fadia:
   حسيننا الله سبوتنا الله من فضله انا إلى رينا راغبون 10مارات ولن جريه زياده 🌻من تنتهي ترسل
2. —>7/9, 7:25:16 PM: Faida: 🌻
3. —>7/9, 7:26:31 PM: Samia: 🌻
4. —>7/9, 7:29:14 PM: Nasra: 🌻
5. —>7/9/13, 7:29:58 PM: Fatma: 🌻
6. —>7/9, 7:30:22 PM: Safia: 🌻
7. —>7/9, 7:30:40 PM: Maram: 🌻
8. —>7/9, 7:31:12 PM: Salwa: 🌻
9. 7/9, 7:31:12 PM: Fadia: 🌻وردة حب للسابقات ف الذكر
10. —>7/9, 7:35:39 PM: Muna: 🌻
11. —>7/9, 7:35:55 PM: Shamsa: 🌻
12. —>7/9, 7:38:44 PM: Asia: 🌻
13. —>7/9, 7:40:32 PM: Azza: 🌻
Translation

1. 7/9, 7:24:32 PM: Fadia:

   Come on, sisters repeat,

   "Sufficient for us is Allah; Allah will give us of His bounty, and [so will] His Messenger; indeed, we are desirous toward Allah " 10 times and you are free to add more

   When you finish send

2. 7/9, 7:25:16 PM: Faida:

3. 7/9, 7:26:31 PM: Samia:

4. 7/9, 7:29:14 PM: Nasra:

5. 7/9, 7:29:58 PM: Fatma:

6. 7/9, 7:30:22 PM: Safia:

7. 7/9, 7:30:40 PM: Maram:

8. 7/9, 7:31:12 PM: Salwa:

9. 7/9, 7:31:12 PM: Fadia: a flower of love for the ones to be first in remembrance

10. 7/9, 7:35:39 PM: Muna:

11. 7/9, 7:35:55 PM: Shamsa:

12. 7/9, 7:38:44 PM: Asia:

13. 7/9, 7:40:32 PM: Azza:
In this example, eleven members, including Fadia, the initiator, (turns from 2 to 13), respond using the sunflower emojis ( 🌻🌻 ) as stand-alones, constituting complete turns in their own right. By repeating these emojis, these participants are conveying that they have fulfilled the request; that is, repeating the verse ten times. Faida, the initiator, was the first to complete the task in turn (2). By doing so, she sets herself as a model to encourage other members to complete the task. Additionally, Fadia, in turn (9), acknowledges this participation and involvement by sending an emoji representing a bouquet of colorful flower ( 🌸 ), as a visual gift for the ones who were first in completing the task.

The choice of the ( 🌻 ) emoji or its number in this example, and other similar examples in the corpus, is usually arbitrary. In other words, the sender can choose any emoji from the repertoire of emojis available at her disposal, and she could use either one (e.g. 🌻 ) or two identical emojis (e.g. 🌻🌻 ), as it is the case in this example. The emoji ( 🌻 ), in this example, has no inherent meaning but the sender, Fadia, designated a meaning for it. Using this emoji, in this context, means that a user has repeated the verse ten times. (The meaning is irrelevant to what the emoji represents, a sunflower). In addition, by reporting back that they completed the task, by repeating the same emoji (s), the participants are showing their involvement and giving evidence of their participation. This collective action creates rapport, a sense of belonging and a sense of belonging to the group.

This example showed that female participants used emojis to serve a specific
function, in this case indicating the completion of a required task. The use of emojis in this way does not reflect what these emojis literally represent or refer to. In addition, when used to serve this function, emojis are used as stand-alones without any accompanying text. Therefore, the context, in which these emojis are used, always provides a good base for the interpretation of their meanings. This function of emoji is specific to the female group; men in the male group never used it. Next, I will analyze examples that illustrate the functions of emojis that are related to expressing propositional meanings.

4.2.7 Emojis as Contextualization Cues

With the absence of paralinguistic cues in WhatsApp interaction, it is very possible that interactants misunderstand or misinterpret teasing for real hostility, for example. Thus, emojis are used as resources to provide interactants with information about how they should interpret the associated verbal utterances. In other words, using Gumperz’s (1982) term, emojis can function as “contextualization cues” that help WhatsApp users, in this case, to frame and interpret individual verbal utterances or an extended exchange as joking or playful rather than serious, or teasing rather than aggressive. Thus, I, next, will illustrate how emojis are used as “contextualization cues” to construct mostly non-serious frames.

In the following exchange, which comes from the chat corpus of the male-only group, Nasser and Khalid use an emoji featuring a face with a tongue sticking out of a smiling mouth (😄) at the end of their verbal utterances. As the date and time stamp
indicate, this exchange took place January 19, early in the morning (8:45:22 AM). At this time of the year, it is wintertime in Oman and it is usually very cold in the morning.

Example 13:

1. →1/19, 8:45:22 AM: Nasser: 🤗 أحاول أتصل بك وأحاول أرسلك بس من البرد يتجمد الاتصال والرسائل
2. →1/19, 9:17:32 AM: Khalid: 😄 غلي بماي التلفون وأمورك طيبة

Translation

1. →1/19, 8:45:22 AM: Nasser: I am trying to call and text you but because of the cold, the calls and the messages froze 😘
2. →1/19, 9:17:32 AM: Khalid: Boil it in water, the telephone, and everything will be okay 😏

Nasser in turn (1) is jokingly addressing his group members; his utterance implies that the cold weather prevented him from contacting them. He is being ironic, here, because in reality, cold weather cannot cause phone calls and text messages to freeze and the fact that his message had already been received is contradictory to his utterance (his message did not freeze; it went through). However, Nasser uses the sticking-out tongue emoji ( khóa ) at the end of his utterance to explicitly signal the teasing tone in which the utterance should be interpreted. Khalid in turn (2) has recognized that a humorous play frame has been invoked and has chosen to maintain it; he interprets Nasser’s turn as humorous teasing as evidenced by his response. He responds to the literal meaning of Nasser’s message (that the calls and text messages froze) by providing an equally ironic
solution. He suggests that Nasser put his device in boiling water in order to solve this apparent problem. Likewise, he ends his utterance with the same emoji (🤔), which Nasser used in the prior turn to indicate that his solution should not be interpreted as serious and that he is only teasing Nasser back.

Females also use emojis as contextualization cues to frame their textual utterances. For instance, in the following excerpt, various emojis, such as laughing faces and faces with tongue sticking out, are used by the participants to frame individual utterances as non-serious and humorous. The exchange begins when Shamsa and Nada respectively (in turns 1 and 2) sent the same exact joke just a few seconds apart. A possible explanation for such duplication is that the message is a canned joke and both of them had gotten it from another source and then copied and pasted it to the WhatsApp group at the same time. However, WhatsApp messenger reproduces messages in the order they were sent and thus users cannot control the exact timing (or the placement) of their messages, as the timing depends on, among other things, the user’s connection to the Internet, the local server speed, etc. Nevertheless, this overlap was used as a source of humor and teasing in the subsequent turns.

Before presenting the excerpt and the analysis, I will explain some of the terms and the character mentioned in the excerpt. First, Aladdin is the main character in a famous Arabic folk tale, entitled Aladdin. He was famous by his magic lantern or lamp, which when rubbed would cause a genie to appear and then grant wishes. Second, Nada is referred to as the “manager of the group” in the excerpt, because she was the one who formed the group. Finally, Fadia in turn (3) uses the Arabic word “yekharef,” a word usually used to describe the action of a stereotypical elderly person exhibiting signs of
dementia such as forgetfulness and disorientation, but is also used informally in spoken language to mock anyone who would say, write, or do things that seem confusing or illogical. I translate this expression as “out of it.”

Example 14:

Translation

1. 7/3, 11:01:21 PM: Shamsa: A wise man was asked: What is the similarity between Aladdin’s lantern and girls’ makeup!!!

→ He said: Both of them, when you clean them, you get a genie 😊

2. 7/3, 11:01:29 PM: Nada: A wise man was asked: What is the similarity between Aladdin’s lantern and girls’ makeup!!!

→ He said: Both of them when you clean them, you get a genie 😊
3. 7/3, 11:02:10 PM: Fadia: It seems the group manager is out of it 😁

4. 7/3, 11:02:34 PM: Arwa: 😁

5. 7/3, 11:02:37 PM: Nada: 😂😂😂

6. 7/3, 11:02:57 PM: Nada: I sent it first.

7. 7/3, 11:03:42 PM: Deema: 😂😂😂

8. 7/3, 11:03:45 PM: Nada: But the net service was weak (down)

9. 7/3, 11:05:12 PM: Shamsa: I sent it first 😁😁😁

The joke (in turns 1 and 2) makes a comparison between girls, after removing makeup, and Aladdin’s genie, which implies that girls without makeup can make for a startling sight. It is important to note that in the Omani culture, Aladdin’s genie is imagined as being rather frightening and intimidating; thus being compared to a genie is a kind of insult. However, the emoji (InSeconds), with the tongue sticking out and a winking eye, at the end of the message is explicitly employed to direct the reader to interpret the message as a joke, albeit somewhat crude, rather than a hostile insult. The emoji (InSeconds) combines two salient features: a stuck-out tongue, a teasing gesture, and a winking eye, usually a friendly gesture implying a degree of solidarity. In other words, the function of this emoji could be interpreted as signaling mutual understanding and signaling to the reader that the user is being sarcastic, ironic, or otherwise insincere but with the intent of
creating humor. As such, the presence of this emoji redresses the potential face threat of the joke.

However, instead of responding to the joke, Fadia comments on the duplication of the joke message. She thought that Nada had resent the same message deliberately, and thus jokingly accuses her in turn (3) of not paying attention, (“It seems the group manger is out of it”). She ends her remark with a laughing emoji (😊) to signal humor and to indicate that her comment is not intended literally. She is making fun of Nada’s action. Thus, using the laughing emoji sends the metamessage, “this is play” (Bateson 1972).

Straehle (1993) posits that, “this is play” involves a paradox of message and metamessage: when a “hostile” phrase is cast with a metamessage that signal a frame as “play,” the utterance does not mean what it would mean under other circumstances, but conveys participant rapport instead. Thus, though words may denote hostility, we can interpret them as play (216-217).

Arwa in turn (4) recognizes the humor in Fadia’s comment and uses four laughing emoji (😊), as her entire turn to signal her appreciation of the humor and the playful frame. Nada, in turn (5), however, did not ratify the play frame perpetuated by Fadia and Arwa. She rather responds with four emoticons depicting angry faces (😡😡😡😡) probably to signal her affective state. Additionally, by using these emojis, Nada is indirectly expressing her disagreement with how she was positioned by Fadia’s comment. She is attempting to shift the interaction to a serious frame by providing a justification to defend her action of resending the joke, which was divided into two turns (turns 7 and 10, “I sent it first,” “but the net service was weak,” respectively). However, before
completing her reason, Deema in turn (7) sends four stand-alone laughing emojis
(😂😂😂😂), which indicate that she aligns with the humorous frame established by
Fadia and Arwa in turns (3) and (4) and perceives the interaction as humorous. In
addition, her use of laughing emojis suggests that she did not consider Nada’s anger or
irritation in turn (5) to be a display of real feeling, but rather as a signal of protest and
annoyance of how she was positioned by Fadia and maybe by the weak internet
connection she had. Darics (2012: 173) notes, “although there is a strong link between
real-life emotions and emoticons, the actual inscription process is always conscious and
voluntary, meaning that emoticons functions as a contextualization cues to indicate
emotional state and NOT as representations of actual emotions.”

On the other hand, Shamsa, who appears to have been the first person to share the
make-up/lamp joke, joins the interaction in turn (9) and disagrees with Nada’s claim that
she was the one who had sent the message first. She, too, insists that she had sent it first.

She ends her utterance with three stuck-out tongue emojis 😜😜😜 to signal the
teasing tone in which her utterance should be interpreted. Thus, this example showed that
the sticking-out emojis 😜, 😜 in turns (1, 2, and 8) and the laughing emoji 😂 in turn
(3) were employed to frame the preceding utterances as humorous and playful teasing. In
addition, the laughing emojis were used alone as complete turns to signal recognition and
acknowledgment of a prior humorous turn(s). On the other hand, the example also
illustrated how two different emojis 😜 and 😜 were used to serve the same function
(in this case humorous teasing) and how the same emoji 😂 was used to indicate humor
as well as appreciation and uptake of humor.

The next example, from the male-only group, will show how emojis can be used to frame an utterance, containing implicit or explicit criticism, as a friendly or humorous comment. The exchange starts with a turn by Faisal in which he comments on a long story forwarded by Anwar in a prior message.

Example 15:

1. 
   2/6, 6:59:12 PM: Faisal: 🧡님의 메시지는 좋아요 하지만 몇몇 틀림이 포함되어 있습니다.

2. 
   2/6, 6:59:45 PM: Nasser: 😘

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Translation

1.   2/6, 6:59:12 PM: Faisal: Anwar your message is nice but it includes some grammatical and typographical errors 😧

2.   2/6, 6:59:45 PM: Nasser: Here comes the grammarian 😞

Faisal’s comment in turn (1) includes a positive and a negative evaluation of Anwar’s message. He starts with a positive general assessment describing the message as “nice.” Then, he introduces his criticism by pointing out that the message includes, “some grammatical and typographical errors.” Faisal ends his evaluation with a kissing face emoji (😘) to signal that his utterance is intended as a friendly comment rather than a criticism. The kissing emoji could be interpreted, here, as downgrading the effect of the negative implication of the comment, while at the same time foregrounds a positive
attitude. In addition, it sends a metamessage of rapport by ratifying Anwar’s contribution.

Nasser in turn (2) sarcastically comments on Faisal’s focus on the grammatical errors in Anwar’s message by referring to him as “the grammarian.” In other words, Nasser describes Faisal as “the grammarian” to make fun of him rather than to compliment him, which is potentially face threatening. However, Nasser uses an emoji depicting a grinning smile (😊), at the end of his comment, to signal that it is meant as humorous rather than hostile, which consequently mitigates any face threatening potential. It seems that this emoji in particular has the potential to serve these two functions (framing the accompanied verbal utterance as humorous and mitigating a face threatening acts) simultaneously. (Using other emojis might not have given the same meaning. For instance, using a kissing emoji [😊] at the end of the utterance, “here comes the grammarian” could have made the interpretation of the utterance as a compliment more probable, while using a happy emoji [😊] could have framed it as humorous without paying any attention to the face-threatening potential.) Thus, this example has shown that a kissing emoji (😊) was used by Faisal, at the end of a criticism or a negative feedback to frame it as a friendly comment, while Nasser used the grinning face emoji (😊) to explicitly mark his sarcastic utterance as humorous but at the same time to redress its face-threatening potential.

According to Gumperz (1982: 131), contextualization cues also include what he calls “prosodic phenomena.” In English digital discourse, capital letters are sometimes
used to indicate increased volume, or even shouting but the Arabic alphabets does not have capital letters. However, emojis are sometime used to indicate voice quality such as volume and rate. Thus, the WhatsApp users (males and females in this study) employ an emoji representing a loudspeaker (📢) when they want to indicate loud voice. In other words, the loudspeaker emoji is used when a user wants his/her preceding verbal utterance to be interpreted as being said loudly as will be shown in the next example.

Prior to this example, Deema and a few other participants mentioned that they missed Samia, who used to be an active participant in most conversations. Thus, Deema, in this example wrote:

Example 16:

1. —>7/2, 10:53:28 PM: Deema: Samia
2. 7/2, 10:53:49 PM: Deema: فلن اخطف ثم

Translation

1. →7/2 10:53:28 PM: Deema: Samia
2. 7/2 10:53:49 PM: Deema: Where have you disappeared

Deema, in turn (1), uses two emojis of a loudspeaker to indicate that she is calling Samia loudly. Thus, the emojis (📢) are used as a contextualization cue to signal that the preceding utterance should be interpreted as being said in a loud voice.

In summary, the previous examples have shown that emojis can function as
contextualization cues. They help WhatsApp users to frame and interpret individual verbal utterances as joking rather than serious or as teasing rather than hostile. Thus, adding an emoji with a sticking-out tongue (😊) helped users frame their verbal utterances as humorous teasing while a laughing emoji (😂) helps frame utterances as humorous as in example (14). By serving these functions, they are also used to send the metamessage, “this is play.”

In addition, example (15) has shown that adding a kissing emoji (❤️) at the end of a negative comment helps the user deliberately frame his utterance as a friendly comment, while using the grinning emoji (🤗) at the end of a comment (that poses a potential face threatening act) helps the user frame his comment as humorous, and simultaneously mitigates its face threatening potential. Finally, the loudspeaker emoji was used, in example (16), to signal that the preceding verbal utterance was to be interpreted as being said loudly.

4.2.8 Substituting for Lexical Items

One of the distinctive functions served by emojis in the WhatsApp chat corpus in this study, and which have not been discussed much in previous research, is substituting for words, concepts and sometimes propositions. As was mentioned before, the emoji keyboards available in most smartphones nowadays, provide users with a large array of
emojis representing various things such as people, objects, nature, etc. The WhatsApp
users have employed these emojis creatively not only to indicate affective states but also
to replace lexis. The following examples will illustrate how some emojis are used to
serve this function.

The first excerpt is drawn from the chat corpus of the female group. Raya, one of
the group members, was used to raise hens in her backyard, but some of these hens died.
Prior to this exchange, she shared an image of the dying hens with the group members,
who started to console her and asked her about the reason. She did not know the reason.
In this exchange, Samia, Raya’s sister, treats this incident playfully. Samia and Raya use
emojis, representing some objects, to visually substitute for their lexical equivalents.

Example 17:

1. 7/7, 2:09:08 PM: Samia: ريا الله يعرض عليش ما في مشكلة توكتت مع الباحثين شاشين الجدل التشريحي وعفوت الانساني اوكميكن النقل الببتش

2. 7/7, 2:09:48 PM: Nuha: يبكون من الحير والعطش

3. →7/7, 2:10:10 PM: Raya: 📞📞🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍四十

Translation

1. → 7/7, 2:09:08 PM: Samia: Raya may Allah recompense you. No problem I was
with the detectives and they took the corpses for dissection and I knew the
reasons. Now you will receive a live broadcast from the middle of the scene
but we are preparing 📞📞🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍四十

2. 7/7, 2:09:48 PM: Nuha: May be it was due to the hot weather and thirst

3. →7/7, 2:10:10 PM: Raya: 📞📞🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍四十
In turn (1), Samia starts by consoling Raya for her dying hens and then playfully portrays the event as a crime by using words such as “detectives,” “corpses,” and “dissection.” She also positions herself as a reporter, in the middle of the scene, who is going to report the result of the “investigation” for the group in a “live broadcast.” She uses emojis representing objects allegedly important for the “live broadcast” such as a video camera (телисам) a loudspeaker (громкоговоритель), a satellite antenna (антенна) to substitute for their equivalent lexical words in the object position of the clause, “we are preparing.” She also uses an emoji representing a telephone receiver (телефон) and a red traditional landline home phone (телефон) to substitute for the possible noun phrase “phone calls,” which completes the clause, “and we are doing some.” Thus, Samia here uses these emojis to visually replace written lexical words. This strategy could make the reader or the recipient more involved in meaning-making process by requiring him/her to translate these emojis to words, in their mind, to complete the phrases.

Raya, in turn (3), operates at the same frame by pretending that she is curious to know the results and thus waiting for Samia’s phone calls. However, instead of using writing words, she uses two emojis, representing a red landline home phone (телефон) to replace the phrase “the phone call(s)” in the object position of the statement, “I am waiting.” Thus, Samia and Raya, in this example, used emojis to substitute for lexical words and phrases. Samia used (телевизор), (громкоговоритель), and (антенна), to replace their equivalent
lexical words (a video camera, a loudspeaker, and antenna respectively). In addition, she used (📞 ℞) to replace the phrase “phone calls,” while Raya used (📞 ℞) to stand in for the same phrase.

In the next excerpt, from the male group, an emoji that depicts someone sleeping is used to substitute for a verbal phrase, “are sleeping.” The exchange occurred between Nasser and Anwar from the male group. Anwar is working at Itihad Airways in the United Arab Emirates. Anwar in this exchange calls Nasser “My uncle sheikh.” The word “uncle,” here is not meant literally as a kinship term despite the fact that the Arabic word translates to “paternal uncle.” It is also used as an honorific in the Arabic language to address a male who is older than the speaker as a sign of respect. Sheikh (pl. Shuyukh), on the other hand, is an honorific title used, in Oman, when addressing the leader or the head of a tribe to call royal males in other countries in the Arabian Peninsula such as Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the UAE. However, this double-honorific expression “uncle sheikh” (pl. uncles shyookh) is used by men to address their friends in informal settings. In other words, when used among friends, it is an expression of endearment rather than an honorific. (This expression and its plural form are used frequently by participants in the male group and thus will come up in later examples.)
Example 18:

1. 4/18, 11:30:14 AM: Nasser: 😊

2. → 4/18, 2:06:51 PM: Anwar: I am here I am here, my uncle sheikh,

but as you know today we are at work not like some people who 😴.

Anwar’s statement in turn (1) implies that Anwar was not participating in the ongoing interaction in the group. However, Anwar was at work during the time Nasser sent to ask about him. This is evident by his answer in turn (2), “I am here I am here my uncle sheikh, but as you know today we are at work not like some people who 😴.”

Anwar also told me, when I asked him about this message, that Nasser was off that day, while he was at work. Thus, he was indirectly referring to Nasser when he said, “not like some people who 😴.” He uses the emoji (😴), which depicts a sleeping face, to replace the phrase “are sleeping” although it might not necessarily mean literally sleeping but rather more generally “not working.” Thus, Anwar, here, uses the sleeping emoji, to substitute for a verbal phrase.

In addition, a stand-alone emoji can be used as an entire turn and as such
substitutes for a complete sentence. The most frequent emoji used to perform this
function is the one with wide-open eyes ( 😲 ). (It is also used with questions to indicate
surprise or confusion as was shown above under the section of emojis as indicators of
emotions). The following excerpt, from the female group, illustrates how this emoji is
used to substitute for a question.

Before presenting the excerpt, I should point out that a lot of the female group
members are mothers. Sometimes their children get access to their phones and start to
explore and play with the devices. In this excerpt, Huda’s child, Rakan, who was 3 years
old, got access to his mother’s phone and opened the WhatsApp application and initiated
a turn, consisting of various stand-alone emoji. The exchange unfolds as follows:

Example 19:

1. 8/29, 12:34:57 PM: Huda: 😆😈😭😢😭个月内
2. —>8/29, 12:42:12 PM: Wafa: 😲
3. 8/29, 12:42:23 PM: Wafa: هدى
4. 8/29, 12:42:36 PM: Huda: هذا راكان

Translation

1. 8/29, 12:34:57 PM: Huda: 😆😈😭😢😭个月内
2. —> 8/29, 12:42:12 PM: Wafa: 😲
3. 8/29, 12:42:23 PM: Wafa: Huda
4. 8/29, 12:42:36 PM: Huda: This is Rakan
Huda’s son in turn (1) sends a string of random emojis consisting of two emoji representing purple devilish faces with horns (urple devilish faces with horns ( ), one representing a face with blue shaded head and slightly open mouth ( ), one depicting a face with shaded head, slightly open mouth and a drop of sweat coming down from one side of the forehead ( ), one representing the Earth ( ), one representing a quarter of the moon with a face ( ), one representing a full moon with a human face ( ), and one representing an umbrella with drops of rain on top ( ). These emojis were chosen randomly by the child as he was playing; there was no relationship between them. Wafa, however, in turn (2), thought that Huda was the one who sent these emojis and was puzzled by her message. Thus, instead of asking Huda, in written text, what she meant by sending these emojis, she uses the emoji ( ) to simultaneously indicate her puzzlement and to replace an unstated question, “what is this?” or “what does this mean?” The decoding of Wafa’s use of the emoji is clearly done by Huda, who provides clarification. She explains that it was her son Rakan, who sent the previous message, a fact that explains its ambiguity. Thus, this exchange presented an example of how the emoji ( ) was used to serve as an entire turn, substituting for a complete question.

To summarize, the above examples demonstrated that emojis can be used to
replace lexical items and complete sentences in WhatsApp chat. This is consistent with Kavanagh (2010), who found that Japanese used emojis to serve the same function in blogs. Users can choose from the emojis available at their disposal to visually substitute written words, concepts or propositions. Thus, in the first example from the female group, icons representing a video camera, a loudspeaker and a satellite antenna were used to substitute equivalent written words, while in the second example, the sleeping emoticon was used to replace the phrase “are sleeping.” However, these are only a few instances; the data is rich with similar examples where emojis are used to stand for lexical items. In addition, emojis are used alone as entire turns to stand in for a complete sentence or question as in the last example in which the emoji (😊) was used to replace an unstated question, “what is this?” or “what is going on?”

4.2.9 Emojis as Indexical Signs

Emojis also have been used by WhatsApp users in this study as indexical signs to establish a link between a textual comment and an image, a video, a website link, etc. which had been sent in an earlier or a later turn. They are used sometimes to substitute for indexical words such as this, these. The most frequent emojis used to serve this function are ones representing the index finger pointing up (👉), down (👉), right (👈) or left (👉). The following examples will illustrate the use of these emojis to serve this
function. The first excerpt comes from the male group. In this example, Saif, who was working at an oil company in the desert, shared an image of a thunderstorm that occurred at his workplace. [Since images and video clips are not included in the text logs of the WhatsApp chat, they will appear in the examples as <image omitted> or <media omitted>]. The omitted image in the next example was an <image of a thunderstorm>.

Example 20:

Translation

1. 4/28, 11:00:00 PM: Saif: <image>

2. ➔4/28, 11:00:26 PM: Saif: العاصفة الرعدية التي مرة علينا قبل قليل

3. 4/28, 11:01:08 PM: Mahmoud: وين هذا؟

4. 4/28, 11:01:29 PM: Saif: مفتاح الصحراة

After sending the image, Saif in turn (2) adds a comment about it. He ends his comment with the emoji (☝️), pointing up, to indicate that his comment refers to the image in his prior turn. (Note that WhatsApp users at the time were not able to add a caption to any image they wanted to share. The usage of this emoji illustrates how they creatively adapt to this technical constraint. The current version of the application does
allow adding captions to images.) Saif, in this example, used this emoji (铖) to signal that his preceding utterance or comment is about the image he sent in his previous turn.

The next excerpt comes from the chat corpus of the female group. It is a short excerpt of a longer conversation between several members of the female group. The longer exchange is about the frustration that the group members were going through because of a power outage. This power outage occurred in July, in which the temperature sometimes reaches 110 F at night. This means there was no light or air conditioning. With this frustration, Nasra, one of the group members, was teasing the other members by suggesting silly solutions such as asking them to go outside or go and sleep on the roofs of their houses. The following short excerpt came after these suggestions:

(Nasor is a diminutive name for Nasra.)

Example 21:

Translation

1. 7/9, 12:37:27 AM: Nasra: 💥💥💥火花💥💥💥火花
2. 7/9, 12:37:55 AM: Deema: 👤儿نظرا
3. 7/9, 12:38:12 AM: Nasra: 😬
4. 7/9, 12:38:14 AM: Shamsa: 😄علينا
In turn (1) Nasra uses four emojis ( ❤️❤️❤️❤️), depicting a baby’s face, to represent “babies” or “kids,” one emoji representing the index finger pointing to the left (👈), and two emojis ( 😢😢), representing a crying face with tears streaming down from both eyes, to denote crying. She uses the emoji of the index finger to establish a semantic connection between the baby faces and the crying faces. That is, the index emoji points to the emojis representing babies’ faces to mean “these babies” or “these kids.” The whole string of emojis can be translated to “these babies or kids are crying.” Nasra uses this visual statement to refer to the kids, in the village, who might have been frightened by darkness. She is teasingly addressing the mothers in the group, who were suffering not only because of the hot temperature and darkness, but also because of their crying kids. Using these emojis to construct a sentence introduces a level of creativity and playful (cf. Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright, and Rosenbaum-Tamari 1997), thus contributing to the creation of friendly and humorous teasing.

In summary, the previous two examples have shown how emojis can be used as indexical signs, specifically emojis representing the index finger pointing at various directions. Thus, the emoji representing the index finger pointing up was used to indicate that a comment refers back to an image in a previous turn. In the second example, the emoji representing an index finger pointing to the left was used to establish a connection between two different emojis within the same turn in order to form a visual statement.
4.3 Conclusion

In the previous literature emoticons (emojis) were mostly construed as indicators of emotion (except Dresner and Herring 2010; Vandergriff 2014; and Skovholt, Grøning, and Kankaanranta 2014). However, this analysis of naturally WhatsApp interaction presented in this chapter provides evidence that in addition to indicating emotions, emojis serve other communicative functions such as indication approval and disapproval, responses to expressions of thanks and compliments, conversational opening and closings, creating a sense of celebration, indication of the fulfillment of a requested task, contextualization cues, substituting for lexical items and indexical signs. However, these are functions I observed in this study and they are not intended as an exhaustive or universal list.

In addition, the findings showed that emojis are “highly context-dependent, and their functions are at times complex, multi-layered and overlapped” (Darics 2013: 172).

That is, a particular emoji, such as a kissing emoji (😘) or a smiling emoji (😊), can serve various functions in different contexts or sometimes simultaneously in the same context. On the other hand, different emojis can serve the same function (e.g., laughing and stuck-out tongue emojis can both work as contextualization cues to signal humor and teasing). Finally, whereas previous studies focused on emoticons, which always represent facial expressions, the examples in this chapter included many emojis other than just ones representing facial expressions.
CHAPTER FIVE: REPETITION OF EMOJIS: FORMS AND FUNCTIONS

5.1 Introduction

Repetition of the same emoji is a ubiquitous phenomenon in the data examined for this study. This chapter focuses on this phenomenon, its forms and functions. I have organized this chapter based on form, following Tannen’s (2007) distinction between self and allo-repetition and immediate and delayed repetition. Thus, I have identified several forms of emoji repetition:

1. The repetition of the same emoji by the same user in the same turn
2. The repetition of the same emoji(s) by the same user across multiple turns.
3. The use of an emoji and its equivalent lexis by the same user in the same turn.
4. The repetition of the same emoji(s) by different users across multiple turns.
5. The repetition of the same emoji over a long period of time.

The first three forms can be categorized as “self-repetition,” while the fourth form can be categorized as “allo-repetition.” The last form can be categorized as “delayed repetition.” Examples from the data are analyzed to illustrate the interactional functions served by each of these forms. These functions include indicating intensity of emotion, displaying enthusiasm and excitement, displaying insistence and emphasizing and highlighting a part of an utterance as important or as funny and humorous. Finally, the chapter discusses the repetition of a single emoji over a long period of time, that is “delayed repetition,”
and how through repetition, it takes on meanings that it will not have in any other contexts.

Before discussing the forms and functions of emoji repetition, I will, next, briefly survey some of the research that has been done on repetition in spoken and digital discourse.

5.2 Literature Review

Repetition is a widespread phenomenon in spoken and written discourse. Many researchers have identified the functions of repetition in conversational speech (e.g., Bada 2010; Johnstone et. al., 1994; Norrick 1987; Schegloff 1997; Stivers 2004; Tannen 2007, among others). Tannen (2007), for instance, identified several criteria that could be used to distinguish various forms of repetition. She makes the distinction between self-repetition and allo-repetition or repetition of others. Localness, or proximity, of occurrence is another criterion she uses to distinguish forms of repetition. That is, an instance of repetition occurring immediately in the same turn or the next turn performs differently than the one occurring later in the discourse. Also, forms of repetition are distinguished based on the extent to which they are identical or altered. According to Tannen, this form of repetition ranges from “exact repetition (the same words uttered in the same rhythmic pattern) to paraphrase (similar ideas in different words)”(63). She also makes a distinction based on a temporal factor ranging from “immediate to delayed repetition, where delay can refer to delay within a discourse or delay across days, week, months, and years” (64).
In addition, Tannen shows that repetition serves various interactional functions in discourse. She notes that repetition in face-to-face conversation plays a major role in establishing coherence and interpersonal involvement. She states that, “repeating the words, phrases, or sentences of other speakers (a) accomplishes a conversation, (b) shows one’s response to another’s utterance, (c) shows acceptance of others’ utterances, their participation, and them, and (d) gives evidence of one’s own participation… all of this sends a metamessage of involvement” (61). Cook (2000) asserts that in addition to allowing a longer period of time for processing, repetition creates a more relaxed atmosphere, and thus constitutes a pivotal feature in language play. Johnstone et.al (1994:8) note, “Two iterations can be “more than” plural or emphatic. A playful situation in which there are three, four, or five repetitions is often a funnier or more intensely playful situation.”

Schegloff (1997) examined how immediate repetition of other speakers’ words was used to initiate repair. However, he also found that immediate other-repetition can be used to serve other functions such as “registering receipt” and “targeting [sic] a next action.” On the other hand, Stivers (2004) examines immediate repetition of the same words produced by the same speaker, such as “No no no.” She found that speakers use this form of repetition to indicate that, “the prior speaker’s course of action was overdone and that it should properly stop” (276). Gordon (2002) shows that a mother and a daughter repeated bits of language from previous interactions to create play (especially pretend play). In addition, Gordon (2006, 2009) shows that the repetition of the same prior text within and across interaction can be used to create different identities and accomplish different interactional goals and that shared prior text binds participants
together. However, when it comes to computer-mediated discourse, little has been written about the repetition of letters, punctuation marks, words and sentences and no research, to the best of my knowledge, has been written on repetition of emoticons. Some scholars, such as Crystal (2001) and Herring (2001), attributed repetition of letters and punctuation marks to the playful and ludic nature of computer-mediated communication.

Other scholars have specifically examined the communicative functions of letter repetition and punctuation marks as they occur in contexts. For instance, Kalman and Gergle (2014) examined the functions of letter repetition in the Enron Corpus, which consists of more than (~500,000) emails sent by and to employees of the Enron Corporation. They concluded that letter repetition often, but not always, is used to imitate stretched syllables used in spoken discourse. Furthermore, they asserted that this form of repetition tends to communicate tempo, pitch, prosody, and other paralinguistic elements. On the other hand, Darics (2013) examined the interactional functions of letter repetition in naturally occurring IM interaction from a virtual workplace. She concluded that, depending on the context, letter repetition can be used to add emotion to writing, signal informality by employing a relaxed writing style, and evoke auditory cues.

Vandergriff (2013) found that advanced language learners of German used ellipsis or repetition of dots in the middle of a turn, in their task-based online chat, to mitigate disagreement, while they used it at the end of a turn to indicate room for expansion. In addition, they used multiple exclamation marks to serve various functions such as making friendly closings, intensifying disagreement, and cueing humor. Tannen (2013) reported that women college students used repeated letters, exclamation points and question marks, in their text messages, as unmarked indicators of enthusiasm. However, although
emoticons have been examined, either alone or along with other nonverbal cues in digital discourse, nothing has been specifically written on emoticon or emoji repetition. Emoji repetition, here, means that the user repeats the same emoticon more than one time (e.g., 😊😊). (The number of repetitions can range from 2 to hundreds.) The repetition in the structure of ASCII emoticons [:)])]) has been briefly discussed by Amaghlobeli (2012). She states that, “the process of reduplication in the structure of emoticons is also interesting. It is expressed in the repetition of the right (lower) part of the emoticon and serves to reinforce the emoticon” (350). On the other hand, Yus (2014) treats this kind of reduplication similar to letter repetition and refers to both types as “textual deformation” (5). He hypothesizes that, “users inferred a greater intensity in the user’s feelings and emotions when a greater amount of text was typed” (5). That is, a reader would interpret [:))))))) as expressing more intensified emotion than [:)]) or [:]).

This chapter will contribute to the literature on repetition and computer-mediated discourse by investigating the forms and functions of the repetition of emojis in natural WhatsApp interaction. Next, I will illustrate these forms and functions by analyzing many examples from both male and female groups.
5.3 Forms and Functions

5.3.1 Repetition of the Same Emoji in the Same Turn

One of the pervasive forms of emoji repetition in the dataset, using Tannen’s term, is “self-repetition.” It is the repetition of the same emoji multiple times by the same user either in the same turn or across multiple turns. This form also includes using an emoji concurrently with an equivalent word or phrase.

Repeating the same emoji by the same user in the same turn was employed by WhatsApp users, in this study, to serve various interactional functions such as indicating intensity, enthusiasm and encouragement. For example, in the next excerpt, from the female group, Deema and Salwa employ emojis to indicate their frustration, annoyance, and anger when the village experienced a power outage at midnight in the summer. (I have provided background information about this event in the previous chapter when I analyzed example 11.)

Example 1:

1. 7/9, 12:02:21 AM: Nuha: بنت الكهرباء
2. –>7/9, 12:03:54 AM: Deema: 😞😞😞😞
3. 7/9, 12:03:57 AM: Deema: حز
4. 7/9, 12:04:02 AM: Deema: كنت ناية
5. 7/9, 12:04:51 AM: Shamsa: 😞
6. –>7/9, 12:06:01 AM: Salwa: 😞😞😞😞😞😞😞�
7. –>7/9, 12:06:02 AM: Salwa: 😞😞😞😞😞😞
Translation:

1. 7/9, 12:02:21 AM: Nuha: The power went off

2. 7/9, 12:03:54 AM: Deema: 😞😞😞😞

3. 7/9, 12:03:57 AM: Deema: It’s hot

4. 7/9, 12:04:02 AM: Deema: I was sleeping

5. 7/9, 12:04:51 AM: Shamsa:

6. 7/9, 12:06:01 AM: Salwa:

7. 7/9, 12:06:02 AM: Salwa:

In turn (2), Deema uses a crying emoji (😭) to indicate distress over the hot weather and her inability to continue her sleep. She repeats the same emoji four times consecutively to communicate the intensity of her emotion. Salwa in turn (6) repeats the emoji (😢), representing a sad face or scared face with a shaded forehead and a drop of sweat running down one side of the head, used by Shamsa in the previous turn (5) probably to indicate her agreement and alignment with Shamsa. That is, like Shamsa, she is annoyed and frustrated by the power outage on a hot night. (The use of this emoji with a drop of sweat could also be indexing sweating in this hot night.) However, Salwa repeats the emoji (😢) eight times to highlight and reinforce the intensity of her emotion (“I am very aggravated”). Furthermore, she uses the angry red emoji (😡), in turn (7), and repeats it six times to communicate that she was very angry, probably with the power company (since power outage was a recurrent problem at that time).
This example shows that Deema and Salwa used emoji repetition to communicate intensified emotion. However, I should note that although the act of repeating emojis must be intentional and is used strategically to communicate additional meaning, I think that the exact number of times an emoji gets repeated is most probably arbitrary. In other words, I do not think that any user would intentionally count the exact number of times s/he would repeat the emoji in order to communicate a certain level of intensity (especially when an emoji is repeated more than three times).

Repeating an emoji in the same turn can also be used to display excitement and enthusiasm. This function has been illustrated in the previous chapter when I discussed the function of emojis as indicators of celebration. There, I mentioned that participants of both groups used emoji repetition as unmarked display of enthusiasm. I will present another example here to remind the reader how users employ repetition of the same emoji to show excitement and enthusiasm. In this example, Muna is trying to encourage Samia to publicly narrate a story to the group members. (Muna knew the story because Samia had narrated it to her in a previous offline encounter.) She is also asking the group members to encourage Samia to do so. (Susu is a diminutive of the name “Samia.”) However, Samia claimed that she had forgotten the story and refused to retell it.
Example 2:

1. 7/4, 10:38:11 PM: Muna: Come on, come on, Susu
   Come on (all of you) encourage her

2. 7/4/13, 10:39:37 PM: Samia: But I have already forgot the story, Muna

3. 7/4/13, 10:40:00 PM: Fatma:

Muna uses the clapping hands emoji (👏) at the end of her turn (1) as a sign of encouragement. She repeats the emoji multiple times, to represent what could be a continuous act of clapping, which reinforces and emphasizes the meaning of encouragement expressed in the associated verbal expression, “come on, come on Susu.”
Likewise, Fatma repeats the clapping hand emoji (👏) 77 times, as a complete turn. She uses this large number of repeated emoji as display of enthusiasm, excitement, and interest to hear the story.

Next, I will analyze three examples to illustrate functions served by self-repetition of the identical emoji or a string of emojis across different turns, in response to the same addressee.

5.3.2 Repetition of the Same Emojis by the Same User Across Multiple Turns

The first example of this form comes from the male group. It consists of an exchange between Nasser and Khalid. It starts when Khalid shared a link to an announcement by the Ministry of Manpower at Oman Daily newspaper. The announcement includes names of people who were accepted for specific jobs in the Ministry. (Sharing and asking people to forward similar announcements is a common practice among WhatsApp users in Oman. This practice makes these announcements reach as many people as possible since a lot of people use WhatsApp but do not necessarily read newspapers. That way someone who reads such an announcement might know someone among the candidates and then forward it to him/her.) After the first turn, Nasser and Khalid only communicate with each other in emojis until the last turn when Nasser uses a textual utterance.
Example 3:

Translation:

   This is a link with the names of people who got accepted by the
   Ministry of Manpower.
   The name + the job for which he/she got accepted
   Share
   The names were announced today

2. 12/31, 10:21:38 AM: Nasser:

3. 12/31, 10:22:14 AM: Khalid:

4. → 12/31, 10:23:22 AM: Nasser: 😄😄😄😄😄

5. → 12/31, 10:24:00 AM: Khalid:

6. 12/31, 10:25:43 AM: Nasser: 😊😊😊😊😊
Nasser in turn (2) uses a laughing emoji (😊) alone as a complete turn in response to Khalid’s previous turn. Since this emoji is always used straightforwardly to represent laughter, its use, here, is ambiguous. In other words, by using the laughing emoji here, Nasser treats Khalid’s serious and informative turn as laughable.

Consequently, Khalid in turn (3) uses the emoji (👀), which represents a wide-eyed stare, to display puzzlement and confusion. The emoji could also be interpreted (as we have seen in the previous chapter) as standing in for a question, in this case, “why are you laughing?” or “what’s funny?” but with a nuance of confusion. This reaction implies that Khalid took the laughing emoji seriously. In other words, by using this emoji, Khalid is calling Nasser to account for his use of the laughing emoji.

However, instead of clarifying why he was laughing, Nasser, in turn (3) repeats the same laughing emoji (😊) he used in turn (2), five times. Nasser’s repetition of this
emoji here could be interpreted as continuation of the laughter he started in turn (2) (while the use of multiple laughing emojis, in the same turn, could be interpreted as representing a continuous burst of laughter). When I asked Anwar to verify with Nasser the reason why he used this emoji here, he told him that he doing it intentionally to tease Khalid.

On the other hand, Khalid in turn (5) reacts by repeating the same emoji 😂 he uses in his previous turn too. His repetition of the same emoji could be interpreted as indicating continuous puzzlement, and insistence to know the reason why Nasser used and repeated the laughing emoji (or in other words, why he was laughing). Khalid does not only use the same emoji again but he also repeats it 192 times. This exaggerated repetition of the emoji could be interpreted as an attempt to top Nasser’s repetition of the laughing emoji in the previous turn. It may further convey annoyance with Nasser’s persistence in using the laughing emoji ambiguously, a stance that may not be conveyed by a single or a small number of a repeated emoji. In other words, Khalid’s exaggerated repetition of the emoji could be interpreted as an indirect way of expressing annoyance. (In order to produce this number of the emoji, one needs to deliberately tap the emoji in the keyboard 192 times although I do not think that Khalid was counting while tapping his mobile keyboard.) To verify this interpretation, I also sent this exchange to Khalid via Anwar. He supported my interpretation that he was slightly annoyed because Nasser kept laughing without any obvious reason.

Thus, this example shows that Nasser’s repetition of the laughing emoji 😂 in turn (4) functions as a continuation of and probably an escalation of the laughter in turn
(2). On the other hand, Khalid’s repetition of the emoji (😊) in turn (5) to mark his insistence on knowing the reason why Nasser used the laughing emoji. In addition, the exaggerated repetition of this emoji in the same turn could be interpreted as Khalid’s indirect way to communicate his annoyance and frustration.

The next exchange, from the female group, constitutes another example of how a string of identical emojis is repeated by the same user in separate turns. The exchange was between Fadia and Arwa. It begins when Fadia shares a video with the group. (Fadia commented on the content of the video as a “touching story,” but unfortunately, I could not know what the story was about because the video was not attached to the data. Thus, it is indicated as <media omitted> in the excerpt. I contacted Fadia and Arwa to ask them about the video but both of them could not remember.) Arwa used the emoji (😷) with a medical mask in this exchange. As was described in Chapter 3, one of the uses of this emoji in the corpus is to teasingly inform the sender that a media or a written text, which he/she has shared, is not new and that he/she is only recycling an old thing. This meaning is an extension of the meaning of wearing a mask to, for example, clean dust from a book which was left on a shelf for a long time. In other words when you need to use a book again, after leaving it on a shelf for along time, you need to wear a mask to protect yourself from the dust. (This meaning was expressed explicitly in a textual message shared by Deema somewhere else in the data from the female group. The message states,

[أخي العزيز. الرسالة التي أرسلتها قديمة الرجاء إرسال رسالة جديدة ليس عليها غبار. شكرا.]

“Dear
brother, the message you sent is old. Please, send something new that has no dust. Thank you.” Likewise, one participant, in the male group, addresses another member, [ ما ترسلوا أشياء قديمة ما نريد الجروب يترس غبار ], “Don’t send old things because we don’t want the group filled with dust.”) Arwa, next, uses a string of this emoji and then repeated the same emoji in her following turn to tease Fadia.

Example 4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>User</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7/3, 1:27:20 PM</td>
<td>Fadia</td>
<td>A very touching story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/3, 1:27:52 PM</td>
<td>Fadia</td>
<td>&lt;media omitted&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/3, 1:28:38 PM</td>
<td>Arwa</td>
<td>😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/3, 1:28:52 PM</td>
<td>Arwa</td>
<td>القديمة قادمة ومنتهية من زمان بثايم البالغة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/3, 1:29:49 PM</td>
<td>Fadia</td>
<td>😫</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/3, 1:30:16 PM</td>
<td>Fadia</td>
<td>أنا ما يعجبني ذا الأسلوب إذا كانت قديمة حاش ما قديمة حال الأخرين</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/3, 1:30:44 PM</td>
<td>Arwa</td>
<td>😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/3, 1:30:52 PM</td>
<td>Fadia</td>
<td>حنى الكلام قديم</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/3, 1:31:00 PM</td>
<td>Arwa</td>
<td>😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/3, 1:32:14 PM</td>
<td>Fadia</td>
<td>أعرف إنها قديمة بس يمكن حد فاتح الواضب جديد ما جالح يشاها</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Translation

1. 7/3, 1:27:20 PM: Fadia: A very touching story
2. 7/3, 1:27:52 PM: Fadia: <media omitted>
4. 7/3, 1:28:52 PM: Arwa: It (the story) is old, Fadia, and it expired a long time ago
5. 7/3, 1:29:49 PM: Fadia: 😫
6. 7/3, 1:30:16 PM: Fadia: I don’t like this behavior. If it is old to you, it is not for other people
7. ✔7/3, 1:30:44 PM: Arwa: 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart 😨 Breitbart
8. 7/3, 1:30:52 PM: Arwa: Even what you have just said is old
9. 7/3, 1:31:00 PM: Arwa: 😘😘😘😘😘

10. 7/3, 1:32:14 PM: Fadia: I know it is old but someone might have just got WhatsApp and has not seen it yet.

Arwa, in turn (3), uses a string of the emoji (😊) to emphasize the fact that she has already seen the video, which Fadia has just shared in the prior turn. She repeats the emoji nine times to emphasize the meaning that the story is not new but is recycled. In turn (4), she paraphrases this meaning verbally. She describes the story as “old” and “expired” (i.e., WhatsApp users have stopped recycling and sharing it). Although Arwa used the emoji (😊) to frame her comment as banter, Fadia took it seriously. She responds with an angry emoji (😠) to convey that she is angry but ostensibly not to the extent that she would not use an emoji. She continues to verbally express her dislike of Arwa’s reaction in turn (6), “I don’t like this behavior. If it is old to you, it is not for other people.” However, instead of enhancing the seriousness of the statement, the use of the angry emoji mitigates it. (In other words, Fadia’s statement would have been more serious if it were not prefaced by the angry emoji.)

Instead of apologizing, Arwa continues with her teasing by repeating the emoji (😊) five times. She goes on to ridicule what Fadia said in turn (6) by describing it as “old” too. (Although Arwa might not mean what she said literally, she is jokingly repeating the idea that Fadia is recycling things to heighten the teasing.) In addition, she follows these two turns by repeating the emoji (😭), with a stuck-out tongue and a
winking eye, six times, to explicitly mark and emphasize the metamessage, “this is play” or “I am just teasing you.” Thus, Arwa, in this exchange, repeats the string of the emoji 😅 to communicate insistence and continuity of the teasing action she started in a prior turn, which is strikingly similar to what Nasser did in the previous example.

Finally, the following exchange constitutes an example in which the same user repeats the same emoji in multiple turns consecutively to show insistence and to cast the addressee’s request as strange and unusual. For instance, in the next exchange, Nasser asked the group members if they knew anyone who would go to America soon. Apparently, he wanted to send something important to a family member studying there.

Example 5:

1. 2/19, 8:03:59 PM: Nasser: شباب 😅

لعرفوا أحد يروح امريكا قريب؟ 😅

2. —> 2/19, 8:05:47 PM: Basim: 😅
3. —>2/19, 8:06:01 PM: Basim: 😅
4. —>2/19, 8:06:07 PM: Basim: 😅
5. 2/19, 8:06:11 PM: Basim: حال مع؟ 😅
Translation:

1. 2/19, 8:03:59 PM: Nasser: Guys

   Do you know anyone who will go to America soon?

   😳

2. → 2/19, 8:05:47 PM: Basim:

3. → 2/19, 8:06:01 PM: Basim:

4. → 2/19, 8:06:07 PM: Basim:

5. 2/19, 8:06:11 PM: Basim: Why?

Basim in turn (2) uses the emoji (ocado) as a reaction to Nasser’s inquiry in turn (1) to indicate that he is surprised by this request and needs clarification. His repetition of the same emoji in turns (3) and (4) implies that he is insisting on getting a reply or an explanation. It also casts Nasser’s question as peculiar and unusual. In addition, the quick succession of these three turns along with turn (5) guaranteed Basim the holding of the conversational floor and did not allow Nasser to take a turn. Thus, repeating the emoji (ocado) individually in three separate turns is used to convey insistence unlike repeating them consecutively (ocadoocadoocado) as one turn, which is usually used to convey emphasis.

Next, I will discuss the third form of emoji repetition in which the same user uses emoji(s) along with the equivalent lexis.
5.3.3 The use of an emoji and its equivalent lexis in the same turn

The data from both groups include examples of another form of emoji repetition. That is, users use emoji (s) along with its equivalent lexis in the same turn. This is not redundancy but could be viewed as a specific form of repetition; I called it a visual paraphrase of a lexical item or a verbal concept. It is used to serve certain functions in discourse, as the next examples will illustrate.

The first example comes from the female group. It consists of one turn, by Muna; this turn came after a long conversation that lasted for almost two hours continuously.

Example 6:

7/2, 11:24:03 PM: Muna: 🛌🛌🛌🛌
Translation:

7/2, 11:24:03 PM: Muna: Come on, enough chattering. Go to sleep 😴😴😴😴

Muna here uses the sleeping emoji (😴) multiple times after she verbally commands the group member to “go to sleep.” These emojis stand out from the associated text, drawing the eyes to focus on them and consequently on what they represent, “sleeping.” They function similarly to putting an accent on or underscoring a word to emphasize it. It could also be interpreted as a strategy used to draw the readers’ attention away from the potential face-threatening act posed by the imperative, “go to sleep,” by adding a comic element.
This form is also used in the next turn that came from the male group. Prior to this turn, Nasser was trying to convince Mahmoud and Saif to attend an off-line gathering for the group members. However, Mahmoud and Saif informed him that that they could not make it. Then, Nasser responds as follows:

[“I washed my hands” is used idiomatically to mean “I gave up” much like the English idiom “I wash my hands of it.”]

Example 7:

3/7, 1:32:21 PM: Nasser: أنا خلاص صمتت يديني

Translation:

3/7, 1:32:21 PM: Nasser: I have already washed my hands

Nasser here follows his turn with two emojis, representing drops of water (💧) and two hands with palms facing outward (👋🏻), respectively. By using the combination of these two emojis, Nasser is visually depicting the concept of “washing hands” expressed in the preceding utterance. This visual representation highlights the expression and reinforces the meaning that Nasser has given up and that he is never going to talk to Mahmoud and Saif again about attending the gathering. Thus, the meaning of the two emojis, together, builds on or exploits the meaning of the preceding verbal idiomatic expression.
Finally, visual repetition of equivalent lexis can also be used to add humorous effect as in the following turn by Raya, from the female group. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Raya used to raise hens in her backyard but quite a few of them died. This turn occurred a few turns after example (7), discussed in the previous chapter, in which Samia jokingly positioned herself as a reporter who had got news about the reasons behind the hens’ death and would announce them in a “live broadcast.” In this turn, Raya is addressing the group members,

Example 8:

Translation

7/7, 2:12:10 PM: Raya: Come visit me and bring me a bunch of hens

Raya, above, ends her utterance with a string of 22 identical emojis representing a white hen. This string of hen emojis immediately follows the phrase “a bunch of hens”; it could be interpreted as a visual paraphrase of the phrase, “a bunch of hens.” It highlights and accentuates the phrase and draws attention to it. Raya’s verbal request, “bring me a bunch of hens,” is already funny because it is an unusual and strange request. However, paraphrasing the idea visually enhances the humorous effect of the utterance. According to Kavanagh (2010), Japanese also use emojis (or what he calls graphic emoticons) with
an equivalent word or phrase to serve an emphatic function. This can be seen as similar to Gordon’s (2002) observation that repetition can be used as a resource in creating play in family interaction.

Next, I will discuss the fourth form of emoji repetition, which is distinguished from the previous forms as being “allo-repetition” or other-repetition.

5.3.4 The Repetition of Emojis by Multiple Users Across Turns

The data also consists of instances where several participants repeat the same emoji or a string of identical emojis across multiple turns. For instance, in the following example, Deema, Salwa, Maram, Fatma, Fadia and Huda, from the female group, are offering their condolences to Raya, whose hens died. They repeated a string of multiple crying emojis (😭) to show sympathy and solidarity. [The textual expression, “Surely we belong to Allah and to Him shall we return- is a fixed religious expression used when offering condolences.]

Example 8:

1. —>7/7, 10:29:02 AM: Deema: 😭😢😢
2. —>7/7, 10:29:15 AM: Salwa: 😭😢😢
3. —>7/7, 10:29:37 AM: Maram: 😭😢😢
4. —>7/7, 10:31:07 AM: Safa: 😭😢😢
5. 7/7, 10:31:18 AM: Fatma: 😭😢😢
6. —>7/7, 10:41:36 AM: Fadia: 😭😢😢
7. —>7/7, 10:45:07 AM: Huda: 😭😢😢
8. 7/7, 10:45:33 AM: Huda: 😭😢😢
Translation

1. 7/7, 10:29:02 AM: Deema: May Allah have mercy on them 😢😢😢

2. 7/7, 10:29:15 AM: Salwa: Surely we belong to Allah and to Him we shall return 😢😢😢

3. 7/7, 10:29:37 AM: Maram: Surely we belong to Allah and to Him we shall return 😢😢😢

4. 7/7, 10:31:07 AM: Safa: 😢😢😢

5. 7/7, 10:31:18 AM: Fatma: May Allah recompense you, Raya

6. 7/7, 10:41:36 AM: Fadia: Surely we belong to Allah and to Him we shall return 😢😢😢

7. 7/7, 10:45:07 AM: Huda: Surly we belong to Allah and to Him we shall return 😢😢😢

8. 7/7, 10:45:33 AM: Huda: May Allah recompense you all good, Raya.

Deema in turn (1) uses a string of three identical emojis (😢😢😢), representing a crying face, along with textual condolences to communicate sadness and sympathy. (The repetition of the same emoji three times could be interpreted as a display of the intensity of the emotion.) On the other hand, Salwa in turn (2) uses another form of textual condolences but repeats the same string of three crying emojis. Maram, Fadia and Huda in turns (3, 6 and 7 respectively) repeat Salwa’s exact textual condolences and the same string of three identical crying emojis. Safa, in turn (4), on the other hand, repeats the string of the crying emoji (😢) alone as a complete turn. Thus, repetition in this
example includes repeating a “formulaic expression”- religious condolence expressions, and an identical string of identical sad emojis. This form of repetition, specifically turns (2, 3, 6, and 7), can be described as “automatic” repetition. In spoken interaction, Tannen (2007) refers to this form of repetition as “shadowing” (i.e., “repeating what is being heard with a split-second delay”[93]). In fact, shadowing and exact repetition in written computer-mediated communication can be much easier and more productive with the availability of the technical feature of “copy” and “paste.” That is, participants can copy and paste each other’s utterances within seconds.

In addition to showing solidarity with Raya, repetition, here, can be thought of as serving similar interactional functions as repeating others’ words and phrases in face-to-face interaction. That is, repetition between the participants in this exchange serves various interactional functions such as affirmation and endorsement of the selected textual expressions and emoji(s). It also shows acceptance and approval of other members, their responses and participations. Additionally, it constitutes evidence of one’s participation and willingness to interact in the group. All of this, according to Tannen (2007: 61), “sends a metamessage of involvement.” In addition, Gordon (2009) notes that repetition binds participants together. Thus, in this example repeating the same emoji(s) can help bind the group members together in a shared world or group.
5.3.5 Repetition of the Same Emoji Over a Long Period of Time

The data from the male group includes a very interesting example of repetition of an emoji. An emoji representing a smiling green frog ( 😊 ) was repeated 51 times over a period of 7 months. (This type of repetition could be characterized, using Tannen’s [2007: 65] classification, as “delayed repetition.”) Due to the repetition, the frog emoji takes on new meanings, which often are completely unrelated to what the emoji usually represents, and which it might not have in any other contexts outside of this group. In addition, repetition creates history for the emoji and as Johnstone et al. (1994: 8) state, “when something is repeated, its meaning changes. It’s got a new box around it, because it happened a second time.” Furthermore, Tannen (1987) suggests that “repetition in conversation establishes a sort of local formulaicity, in that expressions that are repeated become temporarily familiar, in the way that formulaic expressions are familiar.” This also applies to the repetition of the frog emoji.

The frog emoji was used first probably referentially to denote a frog. Then, it was used probably in place of laughing and/or smiling emojis to serve multiple functions such as cuing humor, irony and teasing. It was also used as a resource for joking and humor, and then it was used teasingly as a nickname for Nasser, who first used it and who repeated it the most. However, sometimes it was not clear how it was being used in some interactions. Next, I will analyze six examples to trace how those meanings arise and evolve as the frog emoji is repeated in the WhatsApp interaction among the group members. I chose these examples to show how and when the emoji was introduced, by Nasser, into the group, when the other members first explicitly react towards its use, and
when they first started to use it.

Nasser was the first one to introduce the frog emoji into the group. He used it for the first time in the following excerpt, which comprises the last part of a longer exchange. In this excerpt Mahmoud, Nasser and Anwar are playing with words, but before they were discussing how a power company, called Rural areas Electricity Company, is working hard to provide electricity for people in rural areas, especially the Bedouins (the nomads). Anwar picks up on the word “Bedouin,” and initiates word play without explicitly signaling the frame, “This is play.” He uses the word, “Badawi,” which is an adjective that is derived from the noun “Bedouin” and is used to refer to a person who lives in the desert, and juxtaposes it with “hadari,” used to refer to a person who lives in urban areas. In response, Mahmoud and Nasser recognize the frame and play along with him. (This is not the first time they got involved in this type of play. That is, once one of them picks up a word from an interlocutor and juxtaposes it with another word, which might rhyme with it or is related to it in one way or another, the other participants would do the same by picking up a word from the previous participant and providing their own set of juxtapositions. And sometimes, some participants might just provide random words that might not have any relation to each other or to the previous turn. But this will not, in most cases, stop the other members from continuing the play. Because this kind of play is already an established practice in the group, once one of them invokes the frame, the other members would instantly get the metamessage, “let us play.”) Nevertheless, in this play exchange, each participant provides two words and connects them with “or” (e.g., X or Y) and the following person would use the last word in the previous turn and provide another word to create another set (Y or Z). The exchange goes as follows:
(Rashdi, Hashami and Nassri are used to refer to people whose last names or tribes are Alrashdi, Alhashami and Alnassri. Nassri also echoes the name of a former Egyptian president, Abdul Nasser. Assadat is the last name of the Egyptian president who came after Abdul Nasser).

Example 9:

Translation

1. 1/2, 11:06:07 PM: Anwar: Badawi (Beduin) or Hadari (urban)
2. 1/2, 11:06:21 PM: Mahmoud: Hadari or Rashdi
3. 1/2, 11:06:34 PM: Mahmoud: Nassri or Assadat
4. 1/2, 11:06:57 PM: Anwar: Assadat or Hashami

5. →1/2, 11:07:51 PM:Nasser: or

As I mentioned above, Anwar initiates the play by comparing two related words (bedouin and hadari). Mahmoud in turn (2) picks up the word “hadari” from Anwar’s, in the previous turn, and juxtaposes it with a word that rhymes with its ending but is also Anwar’s last name. He continues in turn (3) by providing another pair, but this time the first word of the pair is not the last one in his previous turn but it rhymes with its ending Nasseri, which is also Nasser’s last name. Nasseri also echoes the name of the former Egyptian president, Abdul Nasser. Thus, it was juxtaposed with “Assadat” (another Egyptian president who came after Abdul Nasser). Anwar, in turn (4), juxtaposes the word, “Assadat,” from the previous turn with “Hashami,” which is Mahmoud’s last
name. Anwar purposely used the word “Hashami,” although it has no relation to “Assadat,” because Mahmoud used his last name in turn (2).

Nasser in line (5) joins the play but chooses to use emojis, instead of words, to create a similar pattern (X or Y). He juxtaposes an emoji representing a frog face (.randn) with an emoji representing a small monkey (/rand). (None of these emojis relate to any of the words used in the prior turn). He seems to use them to stand in for what they refer to (i.e., frog or monkey). By using these funny emojis, Nasser probably wanted to add a level of humor to the play. However, none of the group members commented on this response as the conversation ends here. This example shows how Nasser used and introduced the frog emoji within a play frame for the first time.

After two days, Basim, Mahmoud, and Fahad were discussing football matches and which teams were going to play that day. It started when Basim inquires about the timing for the Omani football match. Then, the conversation changes to be about whether the Liverpool football team was going to play that day and against which team. Nasser participated minimally in this conversation by sending the frog emoji. From this example and other conversational exchanges in the corpus, Mahmoud seems to be the most enthusiastic and informed football fan in the group.
Translation

1. 1/5, 6:11:41 PM: Basim: Guys_ when is Oman’s football match?
2. 1/5, 6:13:52 PM: Mahmoud: 8:15
3. 1/5, 6:14:30 PM: Basim: Thank you Mahmoud So, is Liverpool playing today?
4. 1/5, 6:15:30 PM: Mahmoud: Tomorrow for England cup
5. 1/5, 6:15:39 PM: Mahmoud: There is no match today in the season
6. 1/5, 6:15:46 PM: Basim: With whom?
7. 1/5, 6:16:05 PM: Fahad: Mansfield!
8. 1/5, 6:16:18 PM: Mahmoud: Woooow, look at you Fahad
9. 1/5, 6:16:28 PM: Mahmoud: You are knowledgeable
10. 1/5, 6:16:43 PM: Nasser: 🐸
11. 1/5, 6:16:44 PM: Mahmoud: It seems that you are strongly following the leader [meaning the Liverpool football team]

Nasser uses the frog emoji (🐸), in turn (10), alone as a complete turn. He overlaps with Mahmoud, who was complimenting Fahad (turns 8, 9, and 11) for providing the right answer (turn 7) for Basim’s question (turn 6). However, it is not clear how Nasser is using the frog emoji here, but based on the context, one could interpret it as serving various potential functions. It could be interpreted that Nasser had nothing to add or participate to the ongoing conversation but by using this emoji he is signaling his virtual presence (i.e., “I am here”) and involvement. It could also be interpreted in
relation to the previous turn (Mahmoud’s turn in line (7)). That is, Nasser could be using
it as a display of his approval or endorsement of Mahmoud’s compliment of Fahad. In
serving this function, it could be a substitute for the supportive smiling face (😊).
Nevertheless, again none of the group members commented on the use of the frog emoji
in this exchange and thus it was not clear how they perceived or interpreted it. (I asked
Anwar about it and he said that he did not pay attention to the emoji when he first read it.
This is because he and other group members are used to Nasser’s using strange emojis
and he thought that this might be one of them and Nasser would eventually stop using it.)

However, after one month, Nasser used the frog emoji again, 3 times, possibly to
serve different functions. This time, his interlocutor, Fahad, asked him explicitly about
why he is using it. The exchange starts when Fahad sends a nice message, which is
addressed to the “passive” members of the WhatsApp group. This message is ironic
because it is in contrast to the way passive group members are treated and perceived in
reality. They are always criticized for not participating and interacting in their groups.
They even sometimes get removed from their group for this reason. However, the irony
stems from the fact that the message is not intended literally but rather it mocks the
passive members to amuse the reader.

(The expression “I would sacrifice my life for you” in turn (6) is used idiomatically as
equivalent to the English idiom, “I would lay down my life for you.”)
Example 11:

1. 2/5, 2:13:13 PM: Fahad:
   عزيزي اللي ماترسل شيء
   خذ راحتك ب لستني ولا يهمك كلام الناس
   أهم شيء راحتك
   وإذا تامروا بشي حاضرين ترا
   انت بس آقرا الي ارسله وما عليك
   (حملة أتمحوه يمكن تتغير)

2. 2/5, 2:13:59 PM: Nasser: 😊
3. ——>2/5, 2:14:08 PM: Nasser: 😊
4. 2/5, 2:14:18 PM: Nasser: 😊
5. 2/5, 2:28:11 PM: Fahad: 😊 كيف يعني
   فديته بو مقصبة
6. ——>2/5, 2:39:35 PM:Nasser: 😊 انزين مضففع لبيبيش؟
7. 2/5, 2:42:05 PM: Fahad: 😊 لأنت انت اسمك فهيد
8. ——>2/5, 2:46:04 PM:Nasser: 😊
9. 2/5, 2:46:10 PM:Nasser: 😊

Translation

1. 2/5, 2:13:13 PM: Fahad:
   My dear the one who never sends anything
   Be comfortable in my (contact) list and ignore what other people say
   The most important thing is your comfort
   and if you need anything, we are ready (to do it for you )
   (You) just read whatever I send and don’t worry (about anything else)
   (Let us praise him. Maybe he would change)
   I hoooooooope he will change
2. 2/5, 2:13:59 PM: Nasser: 😂
3. 2/5, 2:14:08 PM: Nasser: 😕
4. 2/5, 2:14:18 PM: Nasser: 👨
5. 2/5, 2:28:11 PM: Fahad: What is this supposed to mean 😎
6. 2/5, 2:39:35 PM: Nasser: I would sacrifice my life for the one who is angry 😂
7. 2/5, 2:42:05 PM: Fahad: okay, a frog whyyyyy?? 😑
8. 2/5, 2:46:04 PM: Nasser: Because your name is Fahad 🤣
9. 2/5, 2:46:10 PM: Nasser: It is lunchtime 😋

Nasser responds to Fahad’s message, about praising the passive group members, using three different emojis (😂, 😕, 👨), each of which comprises separate turns (2, 3, and 4, respectively). His use of the laughing emoji (😂) in turn (2) could be interpreted as a display of his appreciation and understanding of the irony in the previous message, (which is constructed as a nice message, addressing the passive members, but in reality it is making fun of them.) However, his use of the frog (_fk) and the boy (👨) emojis in turn (3) and (4) is ambiguous. Anwar thinks that Nasser was acting silly by using the frog emoji. He also informed me that the group members usually use the boy (👨) emoji to communicate that the user is wandering in the group, as if the group were a physical space. Thus, it could be interpreted, here, as a response to Fahad’s message, specifically
the part, “be comfortable in my (contact list).” In other words, by using this emoji, Nasser is depicting himself whimsically walking (in the group) to indicate that he is being comfortable, as Fahad requests in his message.

In response, Fahad seems like he did not understand what Nasser was trying to convey by using these emojis and thus he asks him explicitly about what he meant in turn (5). He ends his utterance with an angry emoji (😡) to display annoyance at the fact that Nasser is using emojis ambiguously, although I do not think that Fahad is seriously angry because he knew that Nasser was joking and trying to be humorous. This interpretation is supported by Nasser’s response in turn (6) as he did not take Fahad’s inquiry seriously. That is, instead of answering Fahad’s question, Nasser attends jokingly to his mock anger (or his use of angry emoji). He responds ironically with a flattering comment, “I would sacrifice my life for the one who is angry.” In real life, this expression would not be said to someone who is seriously angry; he/she would think that you are ridiculing him, but, in this case, it is acceptable since the frame is non-serious. In other words, it has the same effect as the expression, “you look cute when you are angry”; it is used to disarm someone by saying sweet things.

Nasser ends his comment with the frog emoji (🐸) probably to mark it as nonserious and humorous. (The frog emoji is used here as a contextualization cue similar to a smiling emoji in other contexts). As a result, Fahad softens his reaction in turn (7). He prefaces his turn with the discourse marker “okay” to change the topic and focuses on the frog. He explicitly requests a clarification from Nasser, “a frog, whyyyyy??” He uses letter repetition, and double question marks to emphasize his curiosity to know the reason
why Nasser was using the frog. He ends his inquiry with a winking emoji (笑脸)， which could be interpreted as an attempt to persuade Nasser (i.e., “tell me why; it is between you and me.”) However, Nasser dodges Fahad’s question in turn (8) by providing an irrelevant answer, “because your name is Fahad.” (Although this answer contradicts Grice’s maxim of relevance, I think Nasser is doing it for the sake of teasing Fahad.) In addition, he uses the frog emoji again as a stand-alone in a separate line in the same turn possibly to reinforce the humor and the ambiguity emanating from using the frog emoji. This is similar to what he did to Khalid when he repeated the laughing emoji ( saja) in example (3) and to what Arwa did when she was teasing Fadia by repeating the emoji with a medical mask ( 😷) in example (4).

In turn (10) Nasser changes the topic abruptly, by announcing it was lunchtime for him, which also means that he is going to end the conversation. (Although it might be true that he had to end the conversation to have lunch, this was also a way to avoid Fahad asking more questions or insisting on getting an answer.) He ends this turn by using the emoji with the tongue sticking out ( 🤣) to explicitly mark what he was doing as teasing. Nasser seems to deliberately end the conversation without providing Fahad a satisfying answer as a means to tease him.

This example has shown that even after being repeated several times, Nasser’s use of the frog emoji is still ambiguous. However, it was the first time a group member explicitly paid attention to it and asked Nasser about how he was using it. Nasser, on the
other hand, avoided answering the question to maintain the mystery and ambiguity of his frog emoji.

In the following exchange, Nasser uses the frog emoji twice and Rashid, another group member, also explicitly inquires about its use. He even started to speculate some reason for why Nasser was repeating the frog emoji. The exchange took place the next day after the previous conversation (between Nasser and Fahad) in example (11) above. Prior to this exchange, Nasser shared an image of a hunting rifle, which was displayed for sale. (Sometimes the group members would share or forward images or advertisements of things they are themselves selling or someone else they know is selling (a type of online trading). Rashid responds wittily by describing how Omanis are generally fond of hunting guns. (Rashid in this example uses the colloquial words, “sektoon,” which means “a hunting rifle” and “Sufrid,” which means “a quail” - a type of bird that is popular in Oman. He also uses the word “crocodile of the house” to refer to a kind of lizard that is usually found in houses in countries with hot weather. It is humorously referred to as “the crocodile of the house” because it looks like a crocodile but in a small size and it lives in houses. Rashid also in turn (5) uses the address expression “my uncle sheikh,” which, as I explained before in Chapter 4, is used as a term of endearment.)
Example 12:

Translation:

1. 2/6, 10:08:18 AM: Rashid: The Omani and the hunting rifle.. a love story that never ends 😞🔫

2. 2/6, 10:26:58 AM: Rashid: The season of hunting the quail is back 🤕 😊

3. →2/6, 10:28:10 AM: Nasser: 🍒

4. 2/6, 10:28:38 AM: Rashid: 😨

5. 2/6, 10:30:53 AM: Rashid: Tell me uncle sheikh.. what is your story with frogs!?.. I see that you are using a lot of them 😐

6. 2/6, 10:31:25 AM: Rashid: You like raising frogs, for example 😊

7. 2/6, 10:31:55 AM: Rashid: Or is it the crocodile of the house 😐

8. →2/6, 10:32:01 AM: Nasser: Ask Fahad 🍒

9. 2/6, 10:32:10 AM: Rashid: 😊

10. 2/6, 10:32:59 AM: Rashid: What do you mean? Explain more 😐
Rashid uses his utterance in turn (2), “The season of hunting the quail is back,” as a verbal explanation or translation of the combination of the bird and rifle emojis (🐦枪) he used in his previous turn. In other words, the bird emoji is representing “the quail” and the rifle emoji is representing “hunting.” Rashid uses the emoji of the index finger pointing up (☝️) to help the reader understand that his preceding utterance is referring to the combination of emojis (🐦枪) in the previous turn, rather than the “hunting season of the quails” in real life. He ends his utterance with a laughing emoji (😂) to explicitly indicate the nonseriousness of his utterance and that it is meant as a jest. In response, Nasser uses the frog emoji (🐸) possibly to indicate his appreciation of Rashid’s playful jest. Thus, the frog emoji could be interpreted as standing in for a laughing emoji (😂), which is typically used to serve this function. It could also be that Nasser used this emoji as a sign of his virtual presence and involvement. Rashid, on the other hand, seems to perceive the use of the frog emoji as funny and thus responds with an emoji (😹), representing a laughing cat with a tear running down from each eye in turn (4). He uses this emoji instead of the human laughing face (😂) probably because it is funnier. In addition, by using a funny animal emoji, Rashid could be showing alignment with Nasser, who has just used the frog emoji.
However, similar to Fahad in the previous example, Rashid also seems to be puzzled by Nasser’s repetitive use of the frog emoji. Thus, he directly asks Nasser, in turn (5), “Tell me uncle sheikh .. what is your story with frogs!?.. I see that you are using a lot of them.” (Although Nasser, has used the frog emoji once so far in this example, Rashid asks him about “frogs” in a plural form, which means that he is referring to previous instances in which Nasser used the frog emoji as well.) Rashid uses the grinning emoji 😁, to indicate that his question is not meant literally and that he is just making fun of Nasser’s use of the frog. This is supported by the fact that he did not wait for Nasser to respond. He goes on to suggest possible explanations. In turn (6), he jokingly asks Nasser whether the reason is an interest he has in raising frogs. He ends his turn with a winking emoji 😄 to explicitly indicate that his utterance is not meant seriously. In addition, by using the winking emoji, Rashid could also be jokingly encouraging Nasser to share his secret with him.

In turn (7), Rashid continues, without giving Nasser a chance to respond, to provide another funny and unlikely interpretation of the emoji, “Or is this the crocodile of the house.” In other words, this emoji possibly does not represent a frog but maybe represents a lizard. He ends his utterance with the emoji 😯 to indicate that his preceding interpretation is meant to make fun of the frog emoji rather than a serious interpretation of it.

However, instead of providing an account for how and why he is using the emoji, Nasser, in turn (8), refers Rashid to get an answer from Fahad. (He is alluding here to the
conversation that took place between him and Fahad in example (11) above, in which Fahad asked him about the reason why he was using the frog but Nasser ended the conversation without providing an answer to the question.) In addition, he uses the frog emoji again at the end of his utterance possibly to indicate that he is being ironic but at the same time he seems to repeat it intentionally to tease Rashid. In response, Rashid uses the laughing emoji (😊), in turn (9), to indicate that he perceives Nasser’s answer as laughable and funny (because he knew that Nasser did not tell Fahad any reason and possibly for the fact that Nasser is repeating the frog emoji). Finally, Rashid, in turn (10) seems to feign misunderstanding and thus asks Nasser to explain his answer. He ends his request for clarification with the grinning emoji (😆) to signal that he is not serious and he is joking along with Nasser. (Without the emoji, Rashid’s turn would have come across as a serious request for clarification).

To summarize, Nasser used the frog emoji twice in this exchange possibly to serve different functions. He used it alone, as a complete turn, in response to humorous turns. He probably used it, in this case, similar to a laughing emoji, to show appreciation for humor. He also used it in turn (8) possibly as a contextualization cue to mark his preceding utterance as ironic. Additionally by repeating it, he could also be teasing Rashid, who wanted to know why he was using this emoji. On the other hand, Rashid treated Nasser’s ambiguous use of the frog emoji humorously. This is evident in his multiple use of the laughing (😊), (😊), and grinning (😆) emojis.
In the next example, Nasser uses the frog emoji again in response to Rashid. The emoji then becomes the focus of Rashid’s participation. Prior to this exchange, Nasser shared a long message about friendship and the importance of maintaining consistent contact with friends. Then, the exchange goes as follows:

Example 13:

Translation:

1. 2/12, 10:22:24 AM: Rashid 🐸: May our friendship never end (last forever)

2. → 2/12, 10:22:45 AM: Nasser: 😊

3. 2/12, 10:23:28 AM: Rashid: 😞: Please uncle, I am allergic to frogs

4. 2/12, 10:25:35 AM: Rashid: 😞: or I'm gonna put all members of the frog kingdom cooked in the largest Kebseh (an Arabian dish) so that it goes in Guinness Book of World records

In turn (2) Nasser uses the frog emoji (🐸) in response to Rashid’s warm wish for the group members to be friends forever. The emoji could be interpreted here as signaling appreciation or indexing alignment (i.e., “I hope so, too”). It could also be interpreted as smiling back to Rashid who used the smiling emoji at the end of his
previous turn. However, it is interesting how Rashid again reacts to the use of the emoji. He responds humorously in turn (3) as if the frog emoji were real. He begs Nasser to stop using it because he is allegedly “allergic to frogs.” He uses the grinning emoji (😄) at the end of his statement to probably indicate that his previous utterance is not serious or that he is not truly “allergic to frogs.” In turn (4), he continues his playful banter by threatening Nasser that if he did not stop using the frog emoji, he would collect all the frogs in the world and cook them with rice to make the largest kebseh. (This response is funny and ironic because frogs are never used as food in Oman but rather a lot of people find them disgusting and scary.) Rashid employs exaggeration when he used phrases like “frogs kingdom,” “the largest kebseh,” and “the Guinness Book of world records” to reinforce the humorous effect of his utterance. In addition, he uses the grinning emoji (😄) to explicitly mark his threat as playful and humorous. Thus, this exchange represents another example in which Nasser used the frog emoji again to possibly indicate alignment and appreciation. It could also mean smiling back at Rashid who used a smiling emoji in a prior turn. In addition, by now he surely knows that some members in the group object his use of the frog emoji but he continues using it probably to tease them. Rashid, on the other hand, continued to interpret the emoji referentially as a frog, which also allows him to use it as a resource for humor and joking.

Finally, in the following example, Nasser uses the frog emoji, first, in his response to a prior discussion about the phenomenon of price rises, specifically of food and real estate, and its negative effects on many people’s lives in the country. However, Rashid, again, reacts humorously, which encourages Nasser to use the emoji again. At the
end of the exchange, Rashid himself used it to tease him back.

(In turn (4), “Think I’m scared” (“feker ana khof”) is rendered in what is known as Gulf Pidgin Arabic, which Bakir [2010:202] defines as a “reduced linguistic system” used by the Arabic speakers in the Gulf countries such as Oman, Saudi Arabia, Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait, to communicate with the non-national labor force, mostly from India, Pakistan and other Asiatic countries.”)

Example 14:
Translation

1. 2/14, 9:07:50 PM: Nasser: The dowries are getting higher, which means the value of the citizen is increasing too

2. 2/14, 9:18:04 PM: Rashid: down all crocodiles of the house down. I have started to get goose bumps

3. 2/14, 9:23:56 PM: Nasser:

4. 2/14, 9:25:15 PM: Rashid: Think I’m scared?

5. 2/14, 9:25:43 PM: Nasser:

6. 2/14, 9:26:18 PM: Rashid: Who is this zol?!! (zol means a man in Sudanese Arabic)

7. 2/14, 9:27:02 PM: Nasser: Kumar

8. 2/14, 9:28:33 PM: Mahmoud: Whyyyyyyyy!!!

9. 2/14, 9:29:30 PM: Rashid: but I thought he is zol Osman

10. 2/14, 9:31:04 PM: Rashid: How are you my friend?

11. 2/14, 9:38:29 PM: Nasser: Who is your friend?

12. 2/14, 9:42:14 PM: Mahmoud: Nasser the frog

13. 2/14, 9:43:34 PM: Nasser: Mahmoud the zol

14. 2/14, 9:48:09 PM: Rashid: I don’t have any other friend

15. 2/14, 9:52:29 PM: Nasser: I am going to have dinner

16. 2/14, 9:54:48 PM: Rashid:
Nasser’s comment on the increasing dowries (the sum of money paid by a groom to a bride), in turn (1), implies that people are making a profit not only from selling houses and other goods, but also from “dowries.” He ends his comment with the frog emoji (蜍), which seems to function as a contextualization cue, to indicate that he is being sarcastic. (By referring to dowries here, Nasser could be framing this custom as selling people.) Rashid, on the other hand, immediately reacts to Naser’s use of the frog emoji in turn (2). He jokingly interprets it this time as “crocodile of the house.” He protests, “down all crocodiles of the house 😁 down.” This utterance echoes a slogan chanted by Egyptian demonstrators against the military rule in 2013, “Down… down military rule!” Rashid employs this intertextual reference to create humor by indirectly juxtaposing “crocodiles of the house” with the military rule in Egypt. He ends his protest with the emoji grinning emoji (😁) to indicate that he is being funny. Then, he claims that he started to get scared and annoyed by these frogs or “crocodiles of the house,” as if they were real. (As I mentioned before, a lot of people in Oman get scared and feel disgusted when they see a frog or lizard). He ends his turn with a sad emoji (😢) as a display of annoyance. I do not think that this sentiment is real because it seems that Rashid is enjoying Nasser’s repetition of the frog emoji and he is employing it as a source of play; he jocularly comments on it every time Nasser uses it. On the other hand, his continuous humorous comments on the emoji seem to encourage Nasser to repeat it. (This kind of reciprocal entertainment creates rapport and reflects interpersonal
involvement.) Thus, Nasser, in response, repeats the frog emoji (蜍) in turn (3). This time, he seems to be using it intentionally to tease Rashid since Rashid pretended to be scared. Rashid, in response, humorously and playfully challenges him by using three emojis representing octopi (蛸蛸蛸) as if to defend him. In other words, Rashid is jokingly telling Nasser, “I am not afraid, I have these three octopi to defend against your single frog.” (Of course he is not serious but using emojis to play along with Nasser.)

In turn (12) Rashid addresses Mahmoud, who has just joined the interaction in turn (8), “how are you my friend?” However, Nasser immediately takes this as an opportunity to tease Rashid. He asks him, “Who is your friend? This 🐸?” pretending that he did not know whom Rashid was addressing and that he was addressing the frog.

Rashid, in response, plays along, in turn (14), by claiming that (蛸) is the only friend he has, which allegedly makes him sad since he ends his utterance with a sad emoji (😢). On the other hand, Mahmoud reacts to Nasser’s repeated use of the frog emoji in turn (14) by adding, “the frog,” as a nickname to Nasser, “Nasser, the frog,”

In turn (18), Nasser indirectly announces his leave-taking by stating that it was dinnertime for him. He uses the frog emoji again at the end of his statement. He seems to be repeating it deliberately to playfully tease Rashid and Mahmoud because they rejected his use of it. Rashid, in response, acknowledges his departure by using a combination of these emojis (👏蜍😢). The waving hand (👋) could be interpreted as standing for
“goodbye,” and the frog as standing in for Nasser. It seems that Rashid here is aligning with Mahmoud, who calls Nasser “Nasser the frog.” In other words, the combination of these two emoji (😔部分地区) could be interpreted as standing for “Goodbye, Nasser the frog,” or “Goodbye frog.” However, Rashid follows these emojis with (😊) to indicate that he is just joking and maybe teasing Nasser back.

This example has shown how Nasser repeats the frog emoji (🐸) as a resource for teasing his friends, especially Rashid. It has also shown how by the end of the exchange Mahmoud and Rashid employ the frog in doing reverse teasing against Nasser by adding it to him as a nickname.

To summarize, this section illustrated and traced how the frog emoji took on various meanings and served various functions while it was repeatedly used across many conversational examples and across time. It also traced how some of the group members interpreted and interacted with it. Nasser used the frog emoji referentially to denote a frog. However, later he used it in many instances to serve functions which would be served by laughing or smiling emojis in other contexts, such as signaling irony and humorous teasing, and indicating approval or appreciation of other participants’ humor and participation. However, other group members, specifically Fahad and Rashid, playfully interpreted it mainly as representing a frog. After failing to get any explanation from Nasser of why he was repeating the frog emoji, they started to treat it as a resource for joking and humor. Later, they themselves started to use it to humorously tease Nasser back. Thus, the repetition of the frog emoji in this group adds another level of meaning to
the frog emoji rather than that of representing a frog. It has become a resource for joking and teasing among the group members. In addition, the repetition of the frog emoji has created a history of use for it in this group. Whenever it is used again in future interaction in this group, it will always be remembered and associated with Nasser and with the playful humor and teasing that are invoked by its past uses. The repetition of the frog emoji has also made it a “local formulae” in this group. A recurrent pattern of use has developed in the interaction between Nasser and some of the group members. That is, once Nasser repeats the frog emoji, other members, especially Rashid, would start using it as a resource for joking. Then, Nasser started to use it purposely to tease him and other group members, who became familiar with it and started using it to tease Nasser back.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I identified five forms of repeating emojis that recurred in the data. The first form is repeating the same emoji multiple times in the same turn by the same speaker. This type of repetition was used to communicate emphasis and intensity of emotion, and to display enthusiasm, excitement and encouragement. The second form was repeating the same emojis by the same user across multiple turns. It was used to indicate insistence and continuity of an action stated in a prior turn. Using an emoji along with its equivalent lexis was another form of repetition identified in this chapter. It functions similarly to putting an accent on a word to emphasize it. The fourth form was repeating the same emojis by multiple participants. This automatic repetition was used to show solidarity with another group member, show approval and endorsement of others’
participation, and show evidence of one’s participation, all of which sent “a metamessage of involvement” (Tannen, 2007: 61). Finally, this chapter also discusses the repetition of a single emoji, the frog emoji, over a long period of time, during which it takes on new meanings. I analyzed six examples tracing how those meanings evolve. It was first used straightforwardly to represent a frog. Then it was used to serve functions usually served by smiling and laughing emojis. It was also used as a resource for humor and playful teasing between the members of the group. It thus becomes a local formula in the group. Thus, as Gordon (2006, 2009) shows in family interaction, the repetition of the frog emoji in this group was used to help bind the group members together into a shared world.

In the following chapter, I will summarize and discuss the main findings of this study.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I summarize and discuss the significance of the findings of this study as they relate to the three main analysis chapters: forms, frequency and placement of emojis (6.1), communicative functions of emojis (6.2), and the repetition of emojis: forms and functions (6.3).

6.1 Forms, Frequency and Placement of Emojis

Recently the use of emojis has become a ubiquitous phenomenon in online communication but has attracted little attention from scholars of computer-mediated discourse. The few studies that have examined the use of emojis have focused on Japanese computer-mediated discourse. This could be because emojis were originally invented and used in Japan and until recently were not popular in the West, where the majority of studies on computer-mediated discourse were conducted and published. Emoticons, the predecessor of emojis, have been the main focus of many studies in English and a few European languages. In this study, I examined the forms and functions of emojis as they were used by members of two Omani WhatsApp groups: one male-only group of former engineering classmates and one female-only group of friends and relatives from the same village. The findings of this study revealed that the members of both groups employed 121 types of emojis in their messages. These types of emojis were classified into five categories: people, nature, objects, food and drinks, and symbols. The total frequency of emojis in the corpus was 4369 when duplicate emojis were counted as
one instance, while it was 7519 when duplicate emojis were counted individually (out of the total number of words, 42,037). This large number of emojis reflects that emojis are popular and widely used in WhatsApp interaction among Omanis. In other words, they can be considered as a defining feature of the Omani WhatsApp interactions.

In terms of the total frequency of individual emojis, the laughing emoji (😊) was the most frequent in the corpus followed by the awkward grin (😅), followed by the smiling face and its variants (😊, 😊, 😊, 😊). This is different from the findings of most studies on emoticons, which report that the smiley :) was the most frequently used emoticon. This could be because emojis are more expressive and can express nuances of meanings that the smiling emoticon cannot express. In other words, instead of relying on the smiling emoticon to serve various functions, emojis’ users can use different emojis to serve these functions. In addition, the availability of emoji keyboards in mobile devices could have played an important role in facilitating the use of more diverse emojis.

I also found that the women tended to use more emojis per month and per 1000 words than the men. This result accords with the findings of previous studies on gender and computer-mediated discourse which report that women tend to use more emoticons than men (e.g., Witmer and Katzman 1997; Wolf 2000; Baron 2004; Herring 2003). I also found that some emojis were exclusively or predominantly used in one group but not in the other, reflecting gender patterns that have been reported previously in studies on face-to-face interaction (e.g., Tannen 1990; Coates 1996, 2003, 2013) and on computer-mediated discourse. For example, the emojis representing a policeman (👮‍♂️), a thumb-
down (👎), a cross mark (❌), and a check mark (✅) were only used in the male group. The policeman emoji was used to refer to the manager of the group as an authority while the thumb-down emoji was used to express disapproval of others’ messages. The cross and check marks were usually used together to identify something wrong in other members’ messages and to correct it. The use of these emojis affirms Tannen’s (1990) observations about men’s tendency to approach conversation as a negotiation for who is up and who is down, and Herring’s (1993, 1994) findings that men are more likely to challenge and oppose their addressees than women. According to Tannen (1990) women tend to value listening and indication of listenership and they tend to focus on connection and support more than men. This could account for the exclusive use of the ear emoji (👂) to indicate listening and the predominant use of the kissing emoji (💋) to indicate support in the female group.

However, I am not attempting to draw any conclusions about gender differences in this study, as the main focus was on examining the forms and functions of emojis. Many previous studies have focused on gender and the use of emoticons and thus I wanted to report a pattern I noticed in my data. As was mentioned in Chapter Three, the male and the female groups are not exactly comparable. The male group consisted mainly of friends and colleagues who are of the same age and who lived in different parts of Oman, while the female group consisted of friends and relatives of different ages and lived in the same place. Thus, these two groups comprise two different communities of practice. In her work, Holmes (2006) talks about workplaces as gendered communities of practice, in which different gendered-related types of interaction prevail. Similarly, this
study showed how emojis were employed for online communication in two different and
gendered communities of practice. However, there might be other factors besides gender
that have influenced the use of particular emojis or emojis in general such as topics of
discussions, time of the day, the setting and the synchronicity of communication, and the
age of the users.

Some of the previous studies on emoticons have looked at the placement of
emojis within computer-mediated discourse (e.g. Provine, Spencer and Mandell 2007;
Garrison et al. 2011). Similarly, in this study I examined the placement of emojis to find
out whether emojis exhibit similar patterns and follow similar conventions. Consistent
with Garrison et al. (2011), I found that emojis occurred in five positions within the
discourse: (1) the beginning of a turn; (2) the middle of a turn between two utterances; (3)
the end of a turn; (4) Alone as a complete turn; and (5) “alone” in a separate turn but
coupled with a prior or a following turn. The end of a turn was the most frequent position
followed by the “alone” position. The remaining three positions were relatively
infrequent. The most frequent occurrence of emojis at the end of turns could be attributed
to how emojis were used as contextualization cues (Gumperz 1982). In other words,
emojis at the end of turns usually function as contextualization cues to help the readers of
the WhatsApp messages interpret them in a certain way. In addition, emojis are
expressive and can be used alone in separate turns as speech acts or in place of
propositions, a fact that could account for the high frequency of emojis occurring in the
“alone” position. As was shown in Chapter Four, stand-alone emojis can be used to serve
various functions such as indicating approval of others’ messages, responding to
expressions of thanks and compliments, indicating celebration and indicating the
fulfillment of a requested task. In addition, there were some conversations in which participants communicated in emojis only.

6.2 Communicative Functions of Emojis

The analysis of the data also showed that emojis were used to serve various functions. The functions such as indication of emotions, indication of approval and disapproval of others’ messages, responses to thanks and compliments, conversational openings and closings, and indication of the fulfillment of a requested task can be classified under one category as they relate to expressing interpersonal meaning. The other functions such as contextualization cues, indexical signs and as substitutes for lexical items can be classified under another category as they relate to expressing propositional meaning. This list of functions is not comprehensive and not all these functions are discrete. Emojis are “highly context-dependent, and their functions are at times complex, multi-layered and overlapped” (Darics 2013: 172). For example, the emoji ( 😳 ) with wide-opening eyes was used to show emotions (surprise and confusion) and to substitute for a question (what is wrong? Or what happened?). In addition, multiple emojis were used to serve the same function. For instance, the clapping hands ( 👏 ), the thumbs-up ( 👍 ) and the kissing face ( 😘 ) emojis were used to show approval of others’ participations. Furthermore, just like words, phrases, and utterances in spoken interaction, emojis can be, as Tannen has observed, ambiguous and polysemous. Tannen (1996) asserts that “all linguistic strategies are potentially ambiguous … and
polysemous” (23). She notes, “If ambiguity denotes meaning one thing or another, polysemy denotes meaning one thing and another—that is, having multiple meanings simultaneously” (24-25). In the case of emojis, as I mentioned above, the emoji 😁, for instance, could indicate “surprise and confusion” or it could stand in for a question. But it could also be polysymous and serve both functions simultaneously.

6.3 Repetition of Emojis: Forms and Functions

Using duplicate or repetitive emojis was also a ubiquitous phenomenon in both groups. None of the previous studies on emoticons or emojis has reported the occurrence of this phenomenon. Thus, this study also examined the forms and functions of repetition of emojis. The forms encompassed: (1) the repetition of the same emoji multiple times in the same turn; (2) the repetition of the same emoji by the same user across multiple turns; (3) the use of an emoji and its equivalent lexis in the same turn; (4) the repetition of the same emoji or the string of emojis by different users across multiple turns; (5) the repetition of the same emoji by different users over along period of time. When examined in their context of use, these forms of repetition were found to serve various functions such as indicating intensity of emotions, displaying excitement and enthusiasm, indicating insistence, showing solidarity, and adding emphasis or highlighting a certain part of an utterance. Repetition of emojis was also used as a resource in creating play, as Gordon (2002) shows for family interaction, as when a child and mother repeat material from a prior interaction in their play.
It was also shown in this study how through repetition over a long period of time, an emoji representing a green frog took on meanings that it might not have in any other contexts outside the WhatsApp group in which it was used. In other words, through repetition, this emojis became a local formula in the male group. The repetition of the frog emoji also could be related to Gordon (2006) in which she shows how “the same” prior text can be used to create different identities and accomplish different interactional goals within/ across interactions. Gordon (2009) also notes that shared prior texts bind participants together. Therefore repeating the same emoji or string of emojis by different participants can help bind the group members together in a shared world or group. The frog emoji can be seen to function in this way for the male group.

There have been many studies of repetition in face-to-face interaction and there have been some that focused on the repetition of letters or punctuation marks in computer-mediated discourse but none has focused on the repetition of emojis or their predecessors, emoticons. Thus, this study contributes to the literature on computer-mediated discourse by examining the forms and function of this phenomenon in computer-mediated discourse. Repetition of emojis should not be overlooked in research but rather should be looked at as a strategy that users employed to serve different communicative functions.

To summarize, given the ubiquity of text-based mobile communication via WhatsApp and other mobile applications and given the ubiquity of emojis after the introduction of emojis in smartphones all over the world, the exploration of emoji use in computer-mediated discourse is of great importance. This study contributes to the literature on computer-mediated discourse by providing “systematic meaningful
characterization of the discourse in emergent mediated environments” (Herring 2007). In other words, this study constitutes an important step towards a contextual analysis of the forms and functions of emojis, a recently introduced, increasingly common, and little studied feature of computer-mediated discourse. It also focused on the forms and functions of the repetition of emojis, a feature that has not been reported or discussed in previous studies on the distinctive features of computer-mediated discourse. In addition, this study contributes to the literature on Arabic computer-mediated discourse in general and on Omani Arabic discourse in particular. Moreover, it focused on this popular feature in WhatsApp, one of the most popular communication channels in all the Arab World.
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