

For our final project, we are interested in examining how the following emojis (Skull: 🦴 ; Moai: 🗿 ; Crying: 😭) are used in English tweets and other examples taken from various online environments. We became interested in this question after seeing the vast number of context similarities they share, and how they convey different meanings despite these similarities. We were especially cognizant of the fact that they particularly seem to follow the formula of sentence-final crying-laughing (😭😂) emoji, and alter the tone of the message in ways other than expressing enjoyment/laughter. An example of this phenomena can be seen in the following 4 example sentences:

“The way he just walked out without saying anything 😂”

Emoji seems to indicate that the speaker thought the event was funny.

“The way he just walked out without saying anything 🦴”

Emoji seems to indicate the speaker thought that walking out was embarrassing or bad in some other way.

“The way he just walked out without saying anything 🗿”

Emoji seems to indicate the speaker thought that walking out was “a bruh moment” (moment of bewilderment).

“The way he just walked out without saying anything 😭”

Emoji seems to indicate the speaker thought that walking out was sad, or otherwise a somewhat distressing event.

These identical sentences all carry very different moods towards an identical event and we wanted to examine why that was. Our starting investigation uncovered that people often use these emojis as a sort of ‘mood marker’, indicating how they feel about an otherwise ambiguous or contextless sentence, which lines up with what we were thinking. We hypothesize that individually, the skull is a sort of “I’m dead” or “I’m dying of laughter/embarrassment”, the Moai is a “bruh”, and the crying face is a sadness marker. These generalizations are okay but have noted some uses that fit slightly outside these definitions. We hope that by analyzing data from a variety of sources we can synthesize the most accurate descriptor for how these emojis are used and what they mean.

Most of the data will be scraped from Twitter, looking specifically for tweets that contain the emojis we’re looking at. We’ll then take those tweets and filter them looking for English-only ones. (We may look at other languages, but those will need to be handpicked from the dataset and evaluated by one of us.) We’ll then filter again looking for emojis that are sentence-final. This is because we believe examining the emojis in similar contexts could give us clues as to how exactly they are being used. This could be done a number of ways but we will most likely filter with regex. We will also try and filter based off of how many times it appears in the tweet / how many times it is repeated in a single string i.e. “The way he just left 🦴” vs. “The way he just left 🦴🦴🦴”. This should give us a good environment for examining the mood of the sentences and how the effect of the emoji differs from its intended meaning.

We also will be pulling some data from various online platforms other than Twitter, mainly Discord and other SMS platforms. These handpicked examples could really help to distill the essence of what the emoji is conveying. A prime example was a message containing just a link and a skull emoji. The video could be seen as embarrassing to the poster and the link was sent with just a skull emoji, like so:

"[Link to suggestive/inappropriate video by Markiplier about Pokemon] 🦴"

In this example, the skull is all that is present, however it still is a big tell of how the speaker/sender feels about the video, making it a good piece of evidence in this analysis even if it lies outside of our main dataset.

Another thing we see is that while the moai does often indicate a "bruh moment", it appears in other contexts as well, which shows that we don't yet have a perfect analysis of all these emojis, hence the deeper analysis we will be doing. Some examples of this include:

"At this point, I just open Snapchat to look at people living life and feeling depressed. Thanks FOMO and friends with a happening life 🗿."

"@KnK_Shiki Don't know about that 🗿"

While this could be categorized as a "bruh moment", there is definitely something more waiting to be analyzed. Our running hypothesis on moai tweets indicate general bewilderment or confusion, but this is yet to be closely examined.

These findings mirror what we've found written in various different papers, that "emojis help indicate one's mental state, which can allow addressees to better understand other people and their intentions" (McCulloch, 2019), even more specifically it shows that our examples are confirmed by research into the specific emojis that we are focusing on: "An example would be the skull emoji. The skull emoji has a rather figurative meaning than the literal meaning. Its literal meaning is associated with zombies, corpses, undead, bury, and etc..., but the figurative meaning is associated with dying of laughter or embarrassment" (Robertson, 2021). In general, research suggests that emojis are parts of language that function as tone markers (Weissman & Tanner, 2018).

To go past this research we wanted to focus in on these specific emoji (Skull, Moai, and Crying) because we see them quite often and really want to nail down the nuance of what they mean, because we think these specific ones really have a lot of depth as compared to an emoji like crying-laughing.