

MSC 2020**International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.
COMMUNICATION»****GENDER PECULIARITIES OF EMOTICONS USAGE IN THE
RUSSIAN AND GERMAN INTERNET DISCOURSES**

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Abstract

The article analyzes characteristic features of Russian and German Internet discourse with emoticons in Internet users' messages. The authors investigate the characteristic features of the usage of emoticons taking into account the gender of their senders and receivers belonging to two linguistic cultures. The relevance of studying the gender characteristics of Internet users' communicative behavior based on cross-cultural analysis is stipulated by the scientific community's growing interest in anthropological studies, which focus on the communication of a gender linguistic personality in close connection with the structure of the mentality. The studied material allows arguing that despite emoticons being able to independently convey emotions, they are often combined with a verbal statement in Russian and German Internet messages. Considering emoticons as the main means of expressing emotions in the Internet discourse, the authors concluded that emoticons can rightly be considered as innovative means of graphical presentation of ideas, expanding the possibilities of writing, compensating for its lacking means of expression compared with oral speech. This study also revealed some gender preferences of emoticons usage, e.g. the choice of different kinds of emoticons. The research results lead to the conclusion that female and male characteristics of Russian and German Internet users' types of discourse have more similarities than differences. The degree of similarity in the usage of emoticons is stipulated by many of sociocultural factors (senders' and receivers' statuses, including closeness to another person), and the revealed minor differences can be associated with the manifestation of the temperamental characteristics of these nations.

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Keywords: Cross-cultural analysis, emoticons, emotions, female and male communication, gender, internet discourse



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1. Introduction

Over the recent years, the interest in the study and analysis of gender linguistics has encouraged research of masculine and feminine features in different types of communication including the Internet discourse. Internet discourse performs both functions: the one coinciding with the functional language/speech and a specific function of self-presentation/self-expression. Numerous researchers' interest in the problem of expressing emotionality in the Internet discourse is stipulated by the ever-expanding number and variety of forms of information transfer and their emotional components in virtual communication.

From the standpoint of psycholinguistics, Internet discourse is mediated by socio-cultural concepts of masculinity and femininity, which change in the process of the society's development. These concepts are largely based on gender stereotypes.

2. Problem Statement

The correlation of sex and language has long attracted the attention of linguists. The relevance of this study is stipulated by the keen interest in researching the ways of representing gender in the communication, where the usage of emoticons as a means of expressing the emotional coloring of texts in Internet discourse are not widely covered.

3. Research Questions

3.1. Do males or females use emoticons more frequently and eagerly in the Internet discourse?

3.2. Are there specific features of the usage of emoticons in the Russian and German Internet discourses?

3.3. Do Russian and German Internet users show any differences in the aspect of the masculine/feminine opposition?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to consider the gender specific features of the usage of emoticons in the German and Russian Internet discourses.

5. Research Methods

The purpose and problems of our research cause the descriptive and comparative methods of analysis. The theoretical approach is based on the analyticity and publicity in linguistics of the Internet discourse. The cross-cultural comparative method is necessary to identify priorities in the usage of emoticons by participants of the Internet discourse. In this regard, the study of gender features can also help understand the national peculiarities of Russians and Germans.

6. Findings

Analyzing the features of the Internet discourse, we determined that the purposes of this kind of communication overlap with the purposes of communication in general. As humankind grew, human communication became more complex, diversified and globalized. A similar trend can be traced in the Internet discourse. Ed Krol (1987) in “The Hitchhikers Guide to the Internet” points out to the rapid progress of online communication over a relatively short period: “When the Internet was designed it was to have about 50 connected networks. With the explosion of networking, the number is now approaching 300” (p. 7). In our study, we share Kazyaba’s (2020) viewpoint that the Internet in a linguistic sense is an information and communication environment containing a conglomerate of texts representing all the existing styles and genres of a language, its national, social and cultural peculiarities.

In the Internet discourse people often use emoticons expressing emotions in their Internet messages. Emoticons appeared in the Internet discourse since they combine the features of both written and oral types of speech. New technologies and means of telecommunication have encouraged people to invent emoticons, a very eloquent way of expressing emotions using signs and symbols. But according to Makeev (2015) it is important to understand whether the graphical interpretation of emotions in the form of emoticons is a novelty on communication or it is a remnant of the past (e.g. pictograms of the ancient world) in new forms.

In their research, Dos Reis et al. (2018) state that the Internet discourse lacks elements inherent to natural face-to-face conversations for signaling intentions. The authors propose the term “intenticons” as a set of emoticons that support users in render their intentions.

Emoticons can express several positive and negative emotions. They let people read senders’ viewpoints or feelings. They are informative and give a wide scope to imagination and expression (Romanov, 2004). According to Porshnev et al. (2015) there is a high correlation between the appearance of “sad” and “happy” emoticons in the Internet discourse. The authors suggest that a rise in public emotionality will lead to an increase in the use of emoticons expressing both positive and negative feelings and emotions.

Tarasova (2015) suggests considering emoticons as “pasigraphic signs”, that is, “general cultural phenomena”, comparing them with numbers, which also express ideas understandable to everyone without revealing their meaning and translation into another language. Studying emojis in polymodal texts, A. Alekseeva and Lukashovich (2018) came to the conclusion that a concept can be represented by several consecutive emojis, representing certain attributes of the concept. The order of adjacent emojis is usually random, which may lead to ambiguity. We share the above-mentioned researchers’ viewpoint and consider that it also holds true for emoticons, since they are similar to emojis both in form and function. Thus, the incorporation of emoticons into Internet messages, i.e. the simultaneous use of graphical and language characters contributes to the emergence of a new genre - creolized texts. (Gutorenko, 2016).

Text creolization including the types of connection between verbal and nonverbal components has received researchers’ attention. For instance, Gladkaya (2017) analyzed the nature of the comic effect of both verbal and nonverbal components (the latter including emoticons) and its impact on recipients representing various cultures.

We have found that emoticons can be classified according to the method of presentation and the function. According to the method of emoticons presentation, two groups can be singled out: symbolic and graphical ones. The graphical ones can be divided into static emoticons presented in the form of a still picture and animated emoticons in the form of a moving picture. The second feature of emoticons classification is their functions. Here, three groups can be singled out:

Emoticons expressing emotions.

Emoticons reflecting physical actions.

Emoticons expressing categories of people, features of human appearance, occupations or animals.

So, emoticons ease message interpretation and comprehension and reduce ambiguity. Their usage saves time and space in internet-mediated communication because their selection is made with a “ready button”. But also, a standard and generally accepted set of punctuation marks can be used to create emoticons. According to Makeev (2015) they are called classical and have several subspecies.

There are social functions of emoticons of both senders and receivers. As to senders, we mean the emotive and phatic functions, as to receivers – the conative and referential ones (Zhang, 2020). The information transmitted through emoticons affects not only receivers’ minds, but also their feelings, which in turn allows, as in the case of other paralinguistic elements (gestures, facial expressions, intonation), to perceive it unconsciously, i.e., the subconscious (Korenc, 2016). The senders using emoticons are not afraid of being condemned for excessive openness. The messages with emoticons make the atmosphere of the communication friendlier and more understanding. On the one hand, emoticons duplicate and amplify the corresponding verbal constructions, and on the other, they can be used in non-verbal communication.

Since emoticons mark relatively self-sufficient speech fragments, their positions often coincide with the punctuation. It should be noted that in scientific circles there is such a viewpoint that emoticons can be classified as unregulated punctuation marks expressing the author’s opinion or attitude (Goncharova, 2018). When used alongside with punctuation marks, their functions of separating sentences and their fragments from each other overlap (Makeev, 2015). We share Saidova’s (2017) viewpoint that emoticons have recently acquired full syntactic independence in the texts of Internet discourse and are used there in isolation, out of context.

The data of the Russian Internet discourse was compiled from “Mein VZ” and “VK”. The size of the sample for this research was similar in both Internet discourses. It needs explaining why social networks were chosen and analyzed: firstly, present-day social networks belong to the leading types of communication in the Internet discourse; secondly, communication in social networks is highly productive as a research material in the sense that it is a very representative section of the sphere of modern communication in contrast to specialized and “exclusive membership” forums or blogs. Internet chats, forums, and blogs are most often examined to find features of gender representations in the Internet discourse and to define gender identity as an object.

“Mein VZ” and “VK” are available for people of both sexes. The senders and the receivers were identified as either “man” or “woman”. Besides, we have analyzed the usage of emoticons in three age-groups of the audience. The first group is for users who are about 18 years old, the second one is for 30-year old people, the third one is for people aged over 40. In total, the interaction between randomly chosen 50 men and 50 women of both social networks. The results of our research prove Kitova’s (2016) statement

that emoticons are used in communication with people belonging to the same “community” and are not used with outsiders, people with a higher status, or those who are unpleasant and aggressive. Emoticons are used to create friendly atmosphere and make conversations less official.

Table 1. Frequency of emoticons usage by men and women in Russian Internet discourse

Members / Gender	Use emoticons	Did not use emoticons
Male	76%	24%
Female	88%	12%

In order to assess the prevalence of emoticons use by people of both sexes, the total number of men and women using and not using emoticons was recorded. The above results (Table 01) show that a higher percentage of Russian women used emoticons in comparison to Russian men.

Table 2. Frequency of emoticons usage by female age-groups in Russian Internet discourse

Age Group	Used emoticons	Did not use emoticons
18-29	81%	19%
30-39	73%	27%
Over 40	62%	38%

Table 3. Frequency of emoticons usage by male age-groups in Russian Internet discourse

Age Group	Used emoticons	Did not use emoticons
18-29	81%	19%
30-39	73%	27%
Over 40	62%	38%

All the age-groups of both sexes tend to use emoticons. The most significant differences are observed between the (18-29) and (over 40) age-groups (Tables 02, 03). As we can see, in the first age-group emoticons are used more frequently than in the second age-group. We concluded that young Internet users were more likely to use emoticons in chat messages than older members. An analysis was also conducted on the differences in the types of emoticons used by people depending on their age.

Next, we analyzed whom emoticons were sent to, and whether it depended on the sender being either male or female (Table 04).

Table 4. Gender differences among receivers in the Russian Internet discourse

Sender's gender	Receivers	
	Male	Female
Female	43%	57%
Male	23%	73%

In the Russian Internet-discourse men sent more emoticons to women too, women sent more emoticons to women (Tables 05, 06).

Table 5. Frequency of emoticons usage by men and women in the German Internet discourse

Members Gender	Used emoticons	Did not use emoticons
Male	89%	11%
Female	92%	8%

Table 6. Frequency of emoticons usage by female age-groups in the German Internet discourse

Age group	Used emoticons	Did not use emoticons
18 – 29	94%	6%
30 – 39	88%	12%
Over 40	81%	19%

We concluded that in the German Internet discourse all the age-groups tend to use emoticons, except for the “over 40” age-group, since there is an insignificant difference in percentage (Tables 07, 08). Taking into consideration that short text messages are the dominant format of communication with peers among modern adolescents and youths, the prospects for further research in this field are obvious.

Table 7. Frequency of emoticons usage by male age-groups in the German Internet discourse

Age group	Used emoticons	Did not use emoticons
18 – 29	91%	19%
30 – 39	86%	14%
Over 40	84%	16%

Table 8. Gender differences among receivers in the German Internet discourse

Sender’s gender	Receivers	
	Male	Female
Female	58%	42%
Male	32%	68%

The analysis and comparison of quantitative data on the usage of emoticons of both Internet discourses showed that their percentage ratio is uniform. After analyzing messages of both Internet discourses, we have concluded that there are some common features in the priority of emoticons usage. Women of both Internet discourses send more emoticons to women, and men send more emoticons to women. But at the same time, women send more emoticons to women than men do to men.

In both Internet discourses, emoticons can be used in a random position, that is, both in the middle and at the end of a message or statement:

Men: "Kein Problem, wenn du mir nicht antwortest" 😞

Women: "Wow 😊 ich mag diese Band auch! Was ist dein Lieblingslied? "

Men: "I’m clearly not the first who wants to meet you. 😄 But I am the best! 😄 I can prove it! "

Women: "How about flirting? 😏"

We proved that the difference between men and women in the use of emoticons is generally insignificant of both Internet discourses, because there is currently a tendency to switch to the “female” style of the Internet discourse, which is more emotionally colored and involves the usage of more emoticons. But we think that the other factor determining the priority in the use of certain emoticons is native speakers’ cultural preferences.

Analyzing the obtained data, we concluded that women belonging to both linguistic cultures express emotionality in the Internet discourse more clearly than men do, but the difference in emoticons occurrence is not significant. Symbolic emoticons are used by men in the Russian Internet discourse to a greater extent than by men in the German Internet discourse. Also, female users of the German and Russian Internet discourses use static graphical emoticons much more often than male users do. On the other hand, the differences in the use of animated emoticons are insignificant.

The revealed slight differences in the use of emoticons can be explained by the manifestation of temperamental characteristics of the Russian and German nations.

7. Conclusion

Summarizing the results of the present research, we can make the following conclusions:

1. Women of both Internet discourse are more likely than men to use emoticons in their messages.
2. Emoticons are used by men in the German Internet discourse to a greater extent than by men in the Russian Internet discourse.
3. Male and female users of the German Internet discourse tend to use emoticons more often for the purpose of depicting emotions than male and female users of the Russian Internet-discourse.

The usage of emoticons can depend not only on one's gender or cultural background, but also on such factors as discourse participants' age.

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