

## THE PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE IN ENGLISH SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION

**Bekberganova Khilola- "Ma'mun-Universiteti" nodavlat ta'lim muassasasi,  
[bekberganovakhilola@gmail.com](mailto:bekberganovakhilola@gmail.com), ORCID: 0009-0009-6025-9990  
Nazarov Murod Maksudbekovich- Urganch davlat Universiteti  
[nazarov.murod84@gmail.com](mailto:nazarov.murod84@gmail.com), Orcid 0000-0002-2845-5096**

### ABSTRACT

In the digital age, social media platforms have revolutionized English-language communication, with expressive language—encompassing emojis, slang, profanity, and emotive speech acts—serving crucial pragmatic functions. This thesis explores these functions, drawing on scholarly analyses to demonstrate how expressive elements facilitate emotional conveyance, social bonding, persuasion, and intent revelation in online interactions. Through a pragmatic lens, including speech act theory and implicature analysis, the study reveals that expressive language in English social media not only compensates for the absence of nonverbal cues but also enhances user engagement, fosters rapport, and sometimes violates politeness maxims to achieve communicative goals. Key insights include the role of emojis as illocutionary force indicators, slang's contextual adaptability in gaming communities, and profanity's cathartic and abusive purposes. Utilizing data from platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and online health communities, the analysis underscores variations across age groups, cultural contexts, and thematic discourses (e.g., political, health-related). Findings indicate that expressive language boosts cognitive and emotional resonance in digital dialogues, with implications for digital literacy, behavior change interventions, and cross-cultural pragmatics. This work contributes to understanding how social media reshapes linguistic pragmatics, promoting more effective online communication strategies.

**Keywords:** pragmatic functions, expressive language, social media communication, speech acts, implicatures, emojis, slang, profanity, politeness maxims, online discourse, digital pragmatics, illocutionary force, contextual implicature, emotional expression, rapport-building



## INTRODUCTION

Social media has emerged as a dominant arena for English-language communication, transforming traditional linguistic practices into dynamic, multimodal exchanges. Expressive language, which includes elements like emojis, slang, profanity, and emotive phrases, plays a pivotal role in conveying intent, emotions, and social nuances on these platforms. This thesis delves into the pragmatic functions of such language, examining how it operates within the constraints and affordances of digital environments. Pragmatics, as the study of language in context, provides a framework to analyze how users imply meanings beyond literal interpretations, often through implicatures and speech acts.

The proliferation of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and online forums has led to an "emojification" of language, where visual and textual elements intertwine to enhance expressiveness. For instance, for Pakistani Facebook users, emojis compensate for missing facial cues, performing speech acts equivalent to words. Similarly, in health-oriented communities, expressive acts reveal user intent, such as sharing struggles or offering applause, fostering peer support. Political discussions on Facebook among Congolese users illustrate dialogic speech acts, where updates initiate actions and comments react, completing pragmatic cycles.

This introduction sets the stage by highlighting the evolution of expressive language in social media, influenced by anonymity, interactivity, and cultural diversity. Drawing from Grice's cooperative principle and Searle's speech act theory, the analysis extends to modern adaptations like Weigand's Minimal Action Games, emphasizing the dyadic nature of online interactions. The thesis addresses gaps in understanding how expressive elements flout politeness maxims for communicative efficacy, particularly in English-dominant global discourses. By integrating findings from diverse contexts—ranging from gaming slang to profane expressions—the work underscores the need for pragmatic awareness in digital literacy education.

Furthermore, the introduction contextualizes the topic within broader linguistic shifts, where social media accelerates language change. In English slang usage during internet gaming, pragmatic aspects adapt to context, enabling creative implicatures. Ecolinguistic perspectives in media discourse reveal how environmental themes employ expressive language for persuasion, blending cognitive and pragmatic

elements. Overall, this section establishes the foundation for exploring how expressive language not only conveys emotions but also builds social cohesion, challenges assumptions, and influences behavior in English social media communication.

### **RELEVANCE OF WORK**

The relevance of investigating the pragmatic functions of expressive language in English social media communication lies in its profound implications for contemporary linguistics, digital sociology, and communication studies. As social media usage surges globally—with over 4.9 billion users in 2025—English remains the lingua franca, amplifying the need to understand how expressive elements shape interactions. This work addresses a critical gap in pragmatics by focusing on how emojis, slang, and profanity function beyond mere decoration, serving as tools for intent revelation, emotional catharsis, and social influence.

In healthy communities, expressive language reveals user motivations, such as in tobacco cessation forums where it conveys struggles and applause, associating with higher engagement (e.g., 18% prevalence in abstinent users). Politically charged Facebook discourse demonstrates dialogic speech acts, where expressive implicatures challenge shared knowledge, fostering debate in multilingual settings like Congo-Brazzaville. The "emojisfication" phenomenon among younger users (e.g., 459 emojis in 151 comments from 18-25-year-olds) highlights age-based variations, making this research vital for educational interventions in digital literacy.

Furthermore, profanity's pragmatic roles—cathartic, abusive, and social—violate politeness maxims (e.g., tact and approbation), indicating offensive pragmatics that can escalate online conflicts. Ecolinguistic insights show expressive language in environmental media discourse persuades through emotional appeals, unifying global responses to issues like climate change. Slang in gaming adapts pragmatically, flouting maxims for creative meaning-making.

This study's relevance extends to practical applications: informing AI-driven content moderation, enhancing online training for pragmatic competence, and supporting behavior change in digital health. By drawing on high-impact sources indexed in PubMed Central, ResearchGate, and ScienceDirect, it contributes to interdisciplinary fields, promoting nuanced understanding of how expressive language

navigates anonymity, power dynamics, and cultural contexts in English social media, ultimately aiding in reducing miscommunications and fostering inclusive digital spaces.

### **PURPOSE**

The primary purpose of this thesis is to systematically analyze the pragmatic functions of expressive language in English social media communication, elucidating how elements like emojis, slang, profanity, and emotive speech acts contribute to meaning-making, social interaction, and intent conveyance. By integrating pragmatic theories such as Grice's implicatures, Searle's speech acts, and Weigand's dialogic model, the work aims to uncover patterns in how expressive language flouts conversational maxims to achieve communicative goals, while addressing violations of politeness principles in digital contexts.

Specifically, the study seeks to: (1) Identify variations in expressive functions across platforms and user demographics, such as age (e.g., younger users' emoji dominance vs. older users' restraint) and themes (e.g., health vs. politics); (2) Examine the role of expressive language in fostering rapport, persuasion, and emotional release, as seen in health communities where it supports behavior change; (3) Investigate politeness maxims violations, particularly in profanity use, to reveal offensive pragmatics; (4) Explore cultural and contextual influences, including multilingual environments and environmental discourse; (5) Provide insights for practical applications, like enhancing digital pragmatics training and content moderation.

Through a mixed-methods lens, drawing from corpus-based sociopragmatics and discourse analysis, the purpose is to bridge gaps in current literature, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding expressive language's evolution in social media. Ultimately, this contributes to advancing pragmatic linguistics in the digital era, promoting effective, culturally sensitive online communication.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results reveal that expressive language in English social media serves multifaceted pragmatic functions, primarily emotional conveyance, social bonding, persuasion, and intent revelation, often through implicatures and speech acts. In healthy communities, expressive acts (e.g., sharing struggles like "In my first few weeks of this quit I replaced the pack of cigs... with a stack of index cards") comprise 18% among



abstinent users, associating with themes like social support and obstacles ( $P < .05$ ), fostering peer motivation and behavior change. Discussion highlights how these acts co-occur with directives, enhancing emotional reassurance (e.g., "YES, cravings will go away!!!").

Emojis, as illocutionary indicators, dominate younger users' discourse (459 emojis in 151 comments), performing expressive acts (e.g., "Face with Tears of Joy" for laughter, replacing "lol") and declaratives (e.g., "Red Heart" for compassion), leading to "emojification." Results show 37% smileys among youth vs. 40% in older groups, with interviews confirming emojis reduce rudeness and save time. Discussion posits emojis as a universal language, compensating for nonverbal cues, though older users view them as unnecessary.

Profanity functions cathartically (emotional release), abusively (insults), and socially (rapport), violating maxims like tact and approbation. Corpus analysis from Facebook/Instagram shows patterns favoring other-oriented violations, indicating offensive pragmatics. The discussion warns of escalation risks but notes cultural variability.

In political Facebook interactions, expressive implicatures flout maxims (e.g., "And it's wet, wet, wet! Enjoy your day, soggy monarchists..." implying anti-monarchy sentiment, with explorative acts predominant. Results from 265,147 words confirm dialogic speech acts via Minimal Action Games, where updates initiate and comments react. Discussion emphasizes anonymity's role in bold expression, influencing public discourse.

Slang in gaming adapts pragmatically, though limited data suggests contextual flouting for creativity. Ecolinguistic media discourse uses expressive elements for persuasion (e.g., "climate-related disasters"), unifying global responses. Results identify core concepts like "environment" and "pollution," with negative modality dominant.

Overall discussion integrates findings: expressive language enhances digital pragmatics but risks misinterpretation; age/cultural differences necessitate tailored interventions. Quantitative associations (e.g., Cramer  $V=0.22$  for abstinence) support pragmatic training's efficacy.



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the pragmatic functions of expressive language in English social media communication are integral to conveying emotions, building rapport, and achieving persuasive goals, as evidenced by speech acts, implicatures, and maxim violations across diverse contexts. Emojis and slang enhance expressiveness, while profanity offers catharsis but risks offense. This thesis underscores the dialogic nature of online interactions, advocating for pragmatic education to mitigate miscommunications and leverage expressive elements for positive social outcomes. Future research should explore AI-mediated pragmatics for evolving digital discourses.

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