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2014

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Schamp-Bjerede, T., Paradis, C., Kucher, K., Kerren, A., & Sahlgren, M. (2014). *The signifier, signified & stance : happy/sad emoticons as emotionizers.* Abstract from Conceptual Structure, Discourse, and Language (CSDL), Santa Barbara, CA, United States.

Total number of authors:
5

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Download date: 17. May. 2025

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The signifier, signified & stance: happy/sad emoticons as *emotionizers*

On-line communication has exploded over the past decade. From bulletin boards, to email to blogs, the advantages are many and using this type of instantaneous communication that is available to everyone and at any time is only limited to what you wish to say. Stance studies in language investigate how interlocutors position themselves with their utterances in a dialogic interaction. This synchronic study employs a construction of *stance* and *stancetaking* based on DuBois's evaluation - position – alignment framework (2007). More specifically this study addresses how the emoticon *signifiers*, termed *emotionizers*, :) and :(are used as positive and negative signified emotions in online posts, and how they are employed as emotional intensifiers and/or downtoners, of stance in lieu of words.

Beginning with time criteria and topic, a data-mining, visual analytics tool gathered suitable documents from the internet into a database. After which the search criteria was refined to positive and negative sentiment words that are well-known to be visualized as emotionizers. The tool then created different visual analytical patterns that i) can help in further data refinement and ii) reveal specific data clusters for uncomplicated recognition. After aggregation of the data was completed and ranked as to descending polarization, the documents were loaded for closer analysis and exportation. This further analysis is where complete document contextuality was addressed revealing that these *emotionizers* help individual users create clarity in posts where ambiguity is possible. It was also found that emotionizers were employed as emotional intensifiers and/or downtoners of stance in lieu of words. The analysis posits that emotionizer use is a universally accepted replacement for allusion to vocal tone, style, and mood in on-line, social media discussions.

Du Bois, John W. (2007). The stance triangle. In R. Englebretson Editor, *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction* (pp. 139-182). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Co.