

## Emoji and the Future of Writing

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### **The Semiotics of Emoji. The Rise of Visual Language in the Age of the Internet**

Marcel Danesi

Bloomsbury Advances in Semiotics, London-New York, 2017, pp. 197.

This book by Marcel Danesi is very well built.

Now, take the previous sentence and add an emoji at the end: «This work by Marcel Danesi is very well built 😊»

Did the meaning change? I would say so. And how is it changed?

What has been added is a ‘smiley.’ Technically it is part of the emoji character set<sup>1</sup>. Emoji are the evolution of emoticons :-)) whose parents are, on one branch, the ‘smiley’, the famous highly stylised smiling face<sup>2</sup>, and on the other the ASCII and typewriting arts<sup>3</sup>.

In my example, an iconic sign representing a smiling face is appended to the proposition. The human face is stylised, that is, the traits common to the sign and the object have been reduced in number and simplified to the essential. A graphic sign of this kind is a *pictogram*.

I guess most of the readers have immediately caught what the emoji means in this context, because they are already trained in emoticons and emoji reading. But if we take a step back and try to reconstruct the interpreting process as if we were emoji-illiterates, we see that the comprehension is not so obvious. If we simply add to the sentence the literal verbal transposition of the pictogram we obtain something like «This work by Marcel Danesi is very well built. A smiling face». Or «Somebody smiling». The questions are: “Whose is the face?” “Why does it smile?”

When a standard receiver interprets the sentence, it is usually tacit that the smiley must be attributed to the utterer (and not to the grammatical subjects) of the sentence, that the pictogram refers to the previous proposition which it comments by saying something like “I like it!”, “I am pleased about that!” or “that makes me happy!” It is also implied that the verbal sentence and the emoji are connected by an ‘and’ logical operator. These are all suppositions we rely on because we are learned in the emoticon-emoji code.

If I change the emoji and write: «This work by Marcel Danesi is very well built 😏» or «This work by Marcel Danesi is very well built 😞», the whole meaning of the sentence will be different and the reader will be authorised to

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<sup>1</sup>I am not an emoji expert. The EmojiOneColor set I use here was found in the LibreOffice Writer 5.3.x.x special characters list.

<sup>2</sup><https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smiley> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emoticon>

<sup>3</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ASCII\\_art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ASCII_art)

