

A CASE STUDY OF THE LINGUISTIC ROLE OF EMOJI  
IN TWITCH CHAT ROOMS

Master's Thesis

Lauri Heikkinen

University of Jyväskylä

Department of Language and Communication Studies

English

May 2021

## JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos
Tekijä – Author Lauri Heikkinen	
Työn nimi – Title A case study of the linguistic role of emoji in Twitch chat rooms	
Oppiaine – Subject Englanti	Työn laji – Level Pro Gradu -tutkielma
Aika – Month and year Toukokuu 2021	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 49
<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Twitch-suoratoistopalvelun ympärille on viime vuosina muodostunut kasvava ja kehittyvä kielenkäytön kulttuuri, jonka keskeisenä osana toimivat lukuisat emoji:t. Twitch-sivuston omanlainen emoji-valikoima ja -kulttuuri toimivat kynnyksenä ymmärtää sivuston chat-huoneissa käytettyä kommunikaatiota.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen katsauksella yhden Twitch.tv-kanavan chat-huoneen kielenkäyttöön oli tarkoitus selvittää, millaisia asioita emojilla kommunikoidaan käyttäjien mielestä ja kuvailla, miten niitä tosiasiasa käytetään. Kyselyn avulla tämä tutkimus selvitti, tulkitsevatko käyttäjät tiettyjen emojien semanttiset merkitykset samalla tavalla ja millaisia tunnetiloja ja asenteita käyttäjät uskovat näiden emojien viestivän. Pääasiallisena tutkimustapana käytettiin laadullista tapaustutkimusta, jonka avulla Twitch-sivuston chat-viesteissä ilmenevää emojien käyttöä kuvailtiin kielellisestä näkökulmasta kyselyn tuloksiin viitaten. Eräänä tapaustutkimuksen tavoitteena oli osoittaa emojien käytön kielellinen arvo tilanteissa, joissa muita yhtä tehokkaita tapoja ilmaista tunnetiloja tai asenteita ei ole.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että tapauksen käyttäjät tulkitsevat tutkitut emoji:t hyvin samalla tavalla ja käyttävät niitä samankaltaisiin tarkoituksiin. Tutkitut emoji:t viestivät pääosin ironiaa, huvittuneisuutta, jännitystä, pelkoa ja ivallisuutta, mutta käyttäjien kuvailemissa merkityksissä oli myös hienovaraisia nyansseja, kuten millaista huvittuneisuutta tai pelkoa ne ilmaisevat. Merkitysten tulkinnanvaraisuuden ja monimuotoisuuden takia emojilla viestimisessä on myös mahdollisuus väärinymmärryksen syntymiseen. Emoji:t Twitchissä paljastuivat kuitenkin hienovaraisiksi ja tehokkaiksi työkaluiksi digitaalisen kommunikaation kontekstissa.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords Laadullinen tutkimus, tapaustutkimus, semantiikka, emoji, Twitch	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository JYX	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

## Table of contents

1	Introduction .....	4
2	Background.....	7
2.1	Studying digital communication as context for emoji .....	7
2.2	Emoji and emotions as research subjects .....	9
2.3	Emoji and Twitch.tv .....	15
3	Methodology and Data .....	21
3.1	Case study and qualitative analysis as research methodologies.....	21
3.2	Survey on emoji meanings and sentiment.....	23
3.3	Research question.....	25
3.4	Categories of meaning, linguistic roles .....	25
3.5	Data and privacy.....	26
4	Analysis .....	27
4.1	Survey results report.....	27
4.2	Analysis overview .....	30
4.3	Descriptions of emoji meanings.....	32
4.4	Twitch chat comments & discussion .....	35
5	Conclusions .....	44
5.1	Subjects of further study .....	46
6	Bibliography .....	46

## 1 Introduction

Emoji (with origins in the Japanese language, translating the three words "e, mo and ji" roughly to "picture writing character". Davis & Edberg, 2016.) are a relatively new phenomenon that has exploded in popularity alongside smart devices and social media, shaping and diversifying language use worldwide. As their importance to users has begun to be understood, great effort has been made to develop unique sets of emoji for different platforms - from mobile phone operating systems such as Apple's iOS to popular communications software such as WhatsApp to growing livestreaming websites such as Twitch.tv, a website dedicated to live broadcasts of various activities, mainly video gaming, but also arts, chess, travel blogging and so on. As the popularity and importance of emoji has grown, so too has the importance of studying their meanings and functions - the latter field is, however, a step or two behind.

The wide-ranging nature of emoji as a phenomenon in the modern world have made it almost impossible to go a day without seeing them used, particularly in electronic environments – and thus, almost impossible to function in many modern domains of discourse without having at least a level of understanding of them. Lankshear & Knobel's "New Literacies: Everyday Practices and Social Learning" (2011) discusses a range of online social networking practices and poses the question: what does it mean to be literate these days? (p. 174) Understanding and speaking (or writing) the language is rarely enough: a variety of social and cultural factors are always intertwined with understanding genres of texts, and emoji are a part of many of those genres. To understand communications taking place in many electronic environments such as online chat rooms, instant messaging, etc., it is very helpful to have an understanding of how, and why, emoji are used.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the use and meanings of emoji used on the popular streaming platform Twitch.tv, which I will introduce more thoroughly in the following chapter. The emoji on Twitch.tv are small pictures, sometimes animated, often based on

trends, memes and images relevant to a specific Twitch streaming channel. The Twitch platform allows for broadcasters to add emoji unique to their channel. These can be used in any channel by users who pay a monthly fee to support that particular channel by subscribing to it, or alternately used by anyone in the specific chat room they were created for. The channel owner is responsible to how their emoji can be used, what they are named, and what they look like. They often also have a role in determining their meaning or function, but this is a feature that is almost never fixed or definite, as will be discussed in greater depth later.

In order to find out how Twitch.tv users perceive the meanings of the emoji they use, a survey was conducted to supplement the present study and the mainly qualitative data set. The survey included questions regarding emojis' semantic definitions, situations where they could be used, as well as users' perceptions on their sentiment on a positivity/negativity scale. The results of the survey will be further reported on in chapter 4.

More nuanced and complicated graphics used similarly to more standard or familiar emoji are sometimes called emoticons. The term emoji has traditionally been applied to a specific type of graphic easily distinguishable and identified as part of the group of signs, but this definition is becoming less and less adequate. Twitch emoticons and emoji in general may differ in appearance, but share most of their traits and uses. In addition, as per the Cambridge Dictionary (2018), emoticon is not the correct term for the majority of symbols used on Twitch, either. For this reason, I have chosen to use the term emoji as a catch-all, meaning all the picture symbols used on Twitch and other platforms such as the iOS, Twitter, Facebook and the like, excluding letters, punctuation, embedded videos and pictures.

In particular, this study is concerned with the social and linguistic functions that emoji are used for – the practical 'things' that users do by adding emoji to their messages. Messages on Twitch often have their meanings significantly modified by the emoji that the communicators choose to use, sometimes to a great degree. It is not uncommon to write a message entirely contrary to one's meaning, and ultimately add an emoji that readers would

interpret as a sarcasm marker. Additionally, a communicator can effectively indicate their affect or stance without explicitly writing it out – a message can simply be commenting on an interaction and modified by an emoji that others will read as a marker for sincere positivity. These examples represent perhaps some of the more common uses of emoji on Twitch, and go to some lengths to describe the importance of emoji in that particular social context.

A central perspective emoji study has taken, at least traditionally, is that they are used mainly to make up for constraints placed on communicators by their medium – namely, computer-mediated messaging platforms such as chat rooms, instant messaging software, etc. (Tolins & Samermit (2016). These constraints mainly concern nonverbal communication channels and the lack of a feeling of copresence – people cannot see each other's eyes and facial expressions or read their bodily movements, etc. An additional perspective that, in my estimation, is still somewhat overlooked, is the way in which, despite the limitations, technologies have given rise to a whole new set of novel, multimodal practices to enhance communications across mediums. It could be argued that some of these practices, such as the use of GIFs and emoji, can do communicative things that nothing in 'real', face-to-face communication can replicate. It is perhaps for this reasons that some speakers have begun to refer to these unique affordances in their face-to-face interactions, either by saying the names of certain emoji out loud (Luukkonen, 2017) or by mimicing an expression or action shown in a GIF. It is conceivable, then, that communicating through technological mediums rather than face-to-face afford not just limitations and substitutes for 'real' speech, but perhaps something unique and valuable, as well.

Until recently, before the last five to ten years in particular, emoji have been relatively scarcely studied. Now that some inroads are being made into computer-mediated communications (CMC) in general and more specifically the kinds of language that is being used online, the conceptualizations of what emoji are and what they mean is in a constant state of change. A common conceptualization has been that emoji are used mostly to account for the lack of non-verbal communicative resources that are used in face-to-face

interactions such as expressions and gestures.

How thousands of people can use and understand a vast, unique set of emoji where there are sometimes almost no cues as to how a specific emoji should be interpreted is fascinating. Obviously there is no absolute guarantee that everyone has the same meaning attached to each emoji and that all users use them to fulfill the same functions, but it seems to me that the social interactions that take place on Twitch.tv's chatrooms forge a kind of "hive" understanding of how specific emoji can be used. The phenomenon reminds me of foreign loanwords being adopted into a language: new emoji are added, often without any hint as to its intended meaning (if there is one), users try them in different contexts, and the meaning of the emoji is created together by users as they negotiate what the particular emoji is best for - the difference to loanwords being that the "official" meaning is often not known beforehand, it is created on the spot - perhaps akin to the origin of language itself. This is one of the phenomena that got my personal interest piqued on this topic, and one of the questions for which I am looking an answer with my thesis is whether such an understanding exists, if there is a method to the madness that is the ever-expanding wealth of new emoji being used. With CMC and linguistic study of emoji being relatively new fields of study, there is a lot to uncover and to add to our knowledge of linguistic functions and meanings of emoji.

## **2 Background**

### **2.1 Studying digital communication as context for emoji**

In everyday, face-to-face communication, people often rely on non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, body language, tone and volume of voice, to express themselves as accurately as possible. These cues convey both intentional and unintentional signals and facilitate an understanding between speakers through shared affect. (Gesselman, Ta, Garcia: 2019) In digital communication, this is somewhat more difficult to achieve, particularly if the parties are not able to see each other through a video call or similar. This is where emoji have been thought to come in – as pieces to complete an insufficient toolbox

of digital communication. Having examined emoji for an extended time and in more depth, it seems that while this is a good explanation for why emoji exist, it no longer fully describes their function in digital communication. While more established forms of communication of course act as the basis for digital communication, in recent years, a flow to the opposite direction has begun to reveal itself – features of digital communication, such as some new abbreviations, have started to flow into more standard forms of communication, namely writing and speech.

In their article, Dresner and Herring (2010) state that there is more to emoji than being stand-ins for non-verbal cues – as is becoming more evident as more headway into the research area is being made. As Dresner and Herring point out (Dresner and Herring, 2010: 255-256), emoji, or emoticons are not only used to express emotion, but in many cases to indicate the illocutionary force of the textual utterances that they accompany. Emoticons are pictorial representations consisting of punctuation marks, numbers and letters. Emoji are digital images and symbols used for the same purposes. (Cambridge Dictionary, Cambridge University Press 2018)

This seems to hold true especially with my experience of Twitch.tv chat rooms, where emoji are used very often in conjunction with textual utterances. Emoji, then, can be understood as sometimes being used similarly to certain punctuation marks, such as the exclamation mark (!). When an utterance is followed by an exclamation mark, its illocutionary force is altered, and the recipient is supposed to interpret it differently. The same can be said in regards to some typical uses of emoji, although the ways in which they alter illocution vary. The goal of my thesis is to go further in detail describing how the emoji on Twitch.tv are used to modify the meaning of messages and exchanges.

Miller and others (2016) found in their study that as graphics with nuanced details, emoji are open to interpretation and that different renderings of emoji on different devices may give rise to miscommunications in CMC. This is one of the factors that gave rise to the research question of this study – I became fascinated with the idea that emoji with similar appearances may be associated with a variety of meanings and functions. It became evident



that in the case of Twitch.tv, where all emoji look the same to all users, there was still plenty of freedom of interpretation and opportunities for misconstrual.

Twitch.tv, although usable with a range of devices, renders emoji the same regardless of whether using a tablet, mobile phone or a PC. I argue that despite all users being able to see the same emoji, misconstruals are still possible and there is a breadth of functions and meanings that a single emoji may have. The aim of my study is to demonstrate this in greater detail. I intend to disregard the matter of different renderings on various devices and focus on analysing a scenario where the emoji are visually the same for everyone, but users may still have different meanings in mind when using them.

Miller et al.'s study solicited people's interpretations of emoji graphics by way of an online survey to find out how people perceived sentiments of emoji they chose. What that study found is that a low percentage (only 4.5%) of the emoji they studied have a consistently low variance in their sentiment interpretations, and in 25% of cases participants did not agree whether the emoji in question was positive, negative, or neutral. This would seem to suggest that there are indeed miscommunications happening in a lot of cases involving emoji use - Miller et al.'s approach to identifying people's interpretations of emoji was to use sentiment (how positive a message with an emoji is considered by participants) and semantics (what an emoji means for participants) as defining metrics. While the present study will discuss these aspects of emoji use secondarily, the data I have collected cannot (and is not intended to) answer these questions in a comprehensive manner. Instead this issue will be looked at from another perspective – I will analyse the linguistic role of emoji within utterances, what the signs add to the comments they are used in, and how a single emoji may have multiple meanings and functions associated with it. An adapted and modified version Miller et al.'s survey was used in order to provide data on users' perceptions of the emoji that were studied.

## **2.2 Emoji and emotions as research subjects**

Literature on emoji has largely focused on two aspects: emoji as substitutes for non-verbal cues in communication (Miller et al., 2016), and as indicators of illocutionary force

(Dresner, Herring, 2010). The former forms its basis around the understanding that emoji act as written or digital stand ins for social behaviors that are otherwise produced physically in face-to-face interactions, and that people use these behaviors to facilitate the conveying of messages and shared understanding. While the understanding of these phenomena has a solid foundation, it is of interest that facial behaviors have a surprisingly low correlation with the emotions that are expected to co-occur with them (Fernandez-Dols, Crivelli, 2013).

Facial expressions have been found to often not be reliable in determining the emotional states of people. Rather, they seem to be caused by an interaction of the 'sender', receiver and the environment and functioning to influence other people's behaviors. Even smiling, which is universally the most recognized facial expression, has been shown to be interactive (dependent on the audience and/or context) and have multiple potential meanings and functions. Smiling is most often associated with happiness, but anyone can probably also name a number of different uses if prompted – apologetic smile, flirty smile, a mocking/sarcastic smile, none of which seem to necessarily correspond with happiness.

In this study I will consider both of the aforementioned aspects of emoji and contemplate whether one takes any precedence over the other in the instances in which I will be studying them. Although the depth of emoji meanings can not really be narrowed down to just two boxes - emoji have been shown to play various other roles in a sociological sense, including expressing intent, sociocultural difference and identity, among other things. (Derks, Bos, & Von Grumbkow, 2007; Schnoebelen, 2013; Park et al., 2013), the majority of uses in the context in which this study takes place, can be placed under one of the two primary categories: as substitutes for non-verbal communicative resources or as indicators of illocutionary force.

A Hakami (2017) mentions that many CMC-users may have no idea what the "official" meanings of the emoji they use are - an interesting problem that is faced by people daily in the era of social media and smart devices. The paper also mentions that prompted by this issue, Unicode Consortium, a non-profit organization that coordinates the development of

the Unicode standard (a code standard that allows data transportation through different platforms, devices and applications without corruption) has created Emojipedia, a website that lists official meanings for any emoji standardized by the Consortium. While an incredibly useful and insightful tool, no such database has thus far been created for a lot of other platforms with non-standardized emoji. Although there may now be a guiding, semantical meaning for some emoji, this is not the case for the vast majority of a potentially endless variety of emoji. Furthermore, pragmatic meanings – the ways in which emoji are actually used- which this study focuses on, are even harder to pin down or standardize.

The study points out that as graphics with nuanced details, emoji may be open to interpretation. Although the study largely concerns different device platforms and renderings of the same emoji (such as when using Facebook or WhatsApp, or an iPhone or Google's Nexus phone), its conclusions seem to apply across all CMC – it is sometimes difficult to tell what emoji mean. How do users determine which emoji to use? What do they do with the emoji? This is one of the major points of interest in relation to the platform I have chosen to inspect, given that all emoji on Twitch.tv are non-standardized, and in large part quite open to interpretation based on their names and graphics. Emoji use on Twitch.tv has a number of clearly identifiable differences to most other emoji using platforms, and thus far it has not been studied in depth. This is something the present study seeks to change.

A concept that I find useful for discussing emoji in this context is the idea of a basic or standard meaning. In this context, this would be the meaning which most people would attribute to the emoji, sign, word, or another linguistic unit, and a meaning that crosses context borders. For example, a word like “button” may be the nose, the navel, an affectionate name for a child, the name of a pet, or a whole host of varied meanings depending on the context, but it is always at least a small fastener used in clothing and a virtual or physical control element in computers or other electrical devices. While the former meanings can be understood by people when used in specific contexts and by specific speakers, most people can connect the word “button” to the two latter meanings regardless of who says the word, and if there is no additional context provided. In this

manner, emoji function largely as words do. Most, though likely not all, emoji seem to have a basic meaning as their foundation, but it is very seldom the only one. To better explore this concept, a survey about emoji meanings and functions was conducted, and the responses were classified to produce a common standard meaning for the emoji that were studied.

Regardless of their official or basic meanings, emoji, like words oftentimes, may have additional, context-specific meanings associated to them. Here, by context I mean the people who use them, the group or environment they are used in, and the level of familiarity between group members, etc. A word like “nice”, while being rather positive by its basic meaning, can become a sarcastic, passive-aggressive word, not only through tone of voice but also through a negotiation of meaning. A group of friends may find themselves often using “nice” sarcastically while messaging each other on WhatsApp, and eventually find that they perceive the word as being negative when messaging in that particular group, or perhaps even outside of it. This type of process is natural in social interactions and particularly in communities of practice, where members might interact around a shared activity or interest for a long time and find recurring themes or phenomena for which they develop a certain shared meaning or shorthand. With emoji, this type of development seems very commonplace. Communities develop shared meanings for emoji in continued interactions, and sometimes these meanings end up difficult for people outside of that community to interpret correctly. This is certainly the case for Twitch.tv chatrooms' emoji use, both generally and channel by channel. The specifics in regards to Twitch and emoji use will be discussed further in the following chapter.

With no pre-determined meaning associated with emoji, the speakers shape them as they communicate with one another – these processes seem to be quite like the birth and evolution of natural languages themselves. A natural part of the process is a certain vagueness, and sometimes even gradual changes in emoji meanings as they are used. On Twitch, emoji are constantly added, sometimes old emoji are made into new variations or altered, and the meanings negotiated by their users are in a similar state of flux. The communities in which emoji are used are the entities that shape their function and

meanings, and thus a single emoji may mean different things among different groups of people.

In the case of popular, established emoji, the basic meanings seem relatively stable. In a similar vein as most people will be able to determine that a smile could express happiness, most Twitch.tv users seem to agree on basic qualities of the most popular emoji. The popularity of certain Twitch emoji over others is significant, as I will show in a later section (Chapter 3), and it may affect the degree to which the meanings and functions remain stable. If a lot of speakers use emoji in a certain way, this is the way the new users will be likely to learn. If there was a lot of variance, the development of an emoji's commonly understood meaning might also change.

Houston's (2013) book *Shady Characters: The Secret Life of Punctuation, Symbols and Other Typographical Marks* explores the history of punctuation and symbols through two thousand years of the written word, all the way to the current age of the Internet. The book discusses symbols' "lives", the states they are in now as well as the changes they went through during the time they've existed. The book also discusses emoji in some depth: as part of such a long-standing tradition of symbols (other than letters), emoji seem to be something we as people need – otherwise it seems likely that they would not have persevered or developed to the extent that they have. I argue that emoji, both the traditional sort and the one I plan on studying (Twitch.tv emoji), are a continuation of the long history of symbols created to indicate something that only writing cannot. They are perhaps not as commonly accepted and understood as punctuation marks or as universal as facial expressions and body language, but they seem to be representations related to both. In short pieces of communication that express opinions or attitudes, emoji play a central role in clarifying what the speaker means. For example, denoting sarcasm in an online chat room may be difficult (or it may be difficult to pick up on for others), for which emoji provide a more elegant, efficient tool than typing out the sarcastic intent.

The way in which we interpret emoji meanings seems to be a culturally-created. As stated in the background of A Hakami (2017), a study by Churches, et al. (2014) revealed that

emoji expressions trigger similar responses in the brain as do real faces and expressions. This was explained as an entirely culturally-created neural response, basically stemming from the way in which people have accepted emoji as representations of real faces and expressions. As such, it seems that we have psychologically internalized that emoji are supposed to help us express the same things that our physical expressions do. In addition to expressions, emoji can be used for other non-verbal purposes such as gestures or indicators of tone or attitude, or non-emotional indicators that correlate to, but are not necessarily the same as facial expressions, such as joking. A Hakami's text also elaborates that these, although prevalent, aren't the only reasons for emoji use, but that emoji play various roles related to many fields of study. In short, we do use emoji to substitute for physical non-verbal cues in communication, but we also do much, much more with them, including varied and subtle purposes such as creating a sense of belonging or community, enabling linguistic play, etc.

With some emoji, our knowledge of common human emotions and expressions helps us guide our interpretation of what the emoji in question is supposed to represent. In some cases, however, these aids can prove insufficient. In a research article by Miller et al. (2015), it was discussed that emoji interpretations vary to a great degree, as illustrated by the title: “Blissfully happy” or “ready to fight”: Varying Interpretations of Emoji.

Emoji on Twitch.tv are distributed to either side of this issue. There are emoji where the represented expression is relatively clear and has a direct impact on what the sign is taken to mean by users or what its basic meaning is. Two examples of this are two incredibly popular Twitch.tv emoji I have chosen for closer inspection, LUL and monkaS. LUL is a Twitch emoji picture of the laughing face of a popular video game reviewer. LUL is most often used to indicate laughter, similarly to the abbreviation LOL (laughing out loud). (<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/lul>)

MonkaS is a Better Twitch TV emoji featuring Pepe the Frog with a frightened or apprehensive expression, sweating and with eyes bulging out. MonkaS is generally used to express anxiety or tension when reacting to either the video broadcast or other users in

chat. (<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/monkas>)

There are also, however, cases where the emoji image gives little to no indication of what it may mean, or cases where the emoji is used in a way despite what it might look like.

### **2.3 Emoji and Twitch.tv**

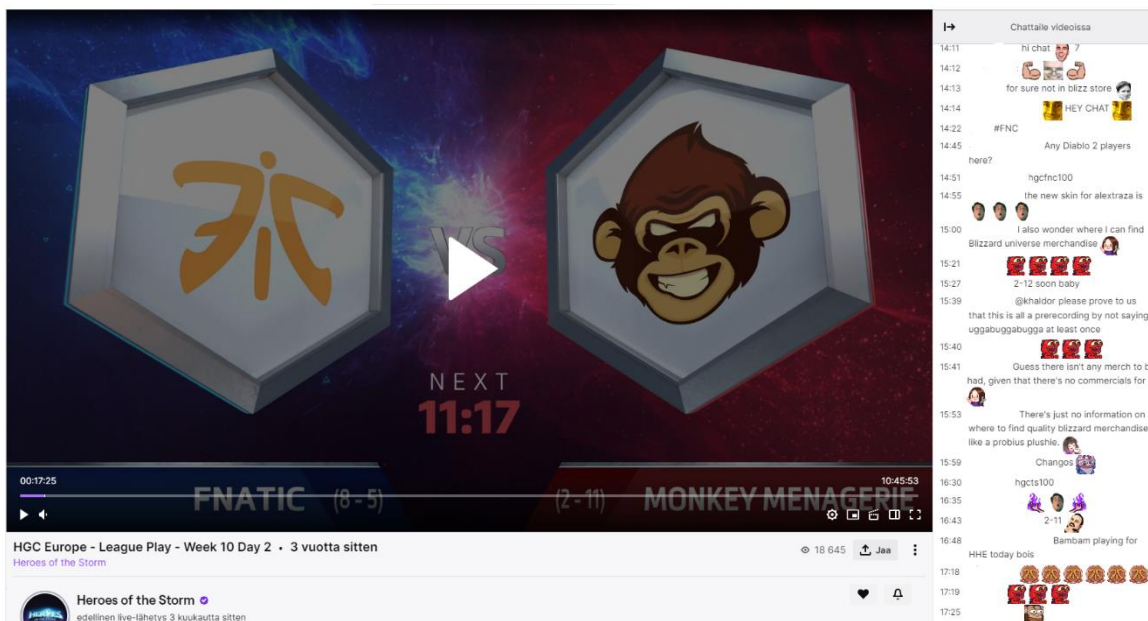
As has been established, emoji have a range of uses and platforms on which they are used. One such platform, and of particular interest due to its uniqueness and popularity with a certain subset of users, is Twitch.tv.

Twitch.tv is a live streaming video platform owned by Twitch Interactive, a subsidiary of Amazon.com. (Wawro, 2014.) Founded in 2011 as a spin-off of another, more general-interest streaming platform Justin.tv, the site primarily focuses on video game streaming, although recently there has been an influx of other content as well, including music and comedy broadcasts, creative content such as live streaming painting or drawing, etc.

The reason Twitch in particular was chosen as the case for the present study is the unique variety of emoji and the context in which they are used. A lot of the emoji use seems to be aimed at conveying emotional states or attitudes related to the happenings in the video broadcast. A large variety of different emoji are used at a high frequency, and the sheer volume and variety of emoji use may seem overwhelming to the uninitiated, and many times even to those with significant experience in the culture. Many times the emoji are named in a way that does not clearly indicate its meaning, and even the images can be difficult to decipher, especially as they are rendered rather small in the chat (see Figure 1.) There are discussions between viewers in the chat, too, but in comparison to most communication, there seems to be less true interaction between interlocutors and more broadcasting of individual feelings. To study this particular phenomenon in more detail would be of interest, but is beyond the scope of the present study. There are discussions between viewers in the chat, too, but in comparison to most communication, there seems to be less true interaction between interlocutors and more broadcasting of individual feelings. To study this particular phenomenon in more detail would be of interest, but is beyond the scope of the present study. Rather, this paper focuses on the more general functions of emoji as linguistic resources in this particular context.

Twitch is viewed by millions of people on a daily basis, and there are (as of February 2020) some 3.8 million broadcasting channels. According to the website [businessofapps](#), these figures seem to put Twitch ahead of many traditional media outlets. The distribution of demographics on Twitch has been changing in recent years, but it is still male (65% male viewers as of Q2 2019) and young user-dominant. In 2019, 73% of users were under the age of 35, and the greater share of users, 41%, was in the age range of 16-24.





*Figure 1: Twitch interface*

*On the left is the stream window where the video plays, on the right there is the chat box where the discussion happens and the emoji appear.*

Twitch.tv has eclipsed the popularity of its now-defunct predecessor Justin.tv, and overtaken many traditional media in the younger demographics. The effects of Twitch viewership or broadcasting have not been studied extensively, but some kind of effect on youth culture and behavior can reasonably be expected. There have been studies suggesting that so-called Twitch-speak can transfer over to the spoken language (Luukkonen, 2017), including the use of names of emoji to convey specific kinds of messages that perhaps could not otherwise be communicated, or at least not as easily and/or eloquently.

Twitch.tv is a force with significant impact on the video game industry, which has grown into a global powerhouse phenomenon in its own right in the recent decades. A feature of interest in a linguistic sense of Twitch.tv is its in-depth chat system and the language (including but not by any means limited to jargon specific to each game or Internet culture as a wider context) that seems to be constantly developing.

Emoji, as do words, go through transformations in their function and semantics as more

people become accustomed to using them for different purposes and in different contexts. The various communities of broadcasting channels and viewers on Twitch.tv may all have slightly different views on what certain emoji may mean or how they should be used 'correctly'. This means that a sensible task is not to provide a rigid definition of each emoji and their functions in communication, but rather to explore the range of what is being done with them.

On Twitch, useable emoji are added on the site in two ways: by the site itself for use by anybody on any channel (Twitch emoji) or by a specific broadcaster for use by their channel paid subscribers (channel emoji). When emoji get added, they are given a name that acts as the textual command that makes the image appear in the chat. Sometimes these names relate to the intended meaning of the emoji, but often neither the name nor the image give an unambiguous clue as to how the emoji is supposed to be used. In these cases, the meaning or function is determined by the masses using the emoji – by using emoji in specific ways in specific contexts, users affect how other people in the channel perceive their meanings. Two of the three emoji I have chosen for closer inspection exhibit this phenomenon: at a surface level a new user might not have any idea how to use them; the only way to learn their meaning would be to observe its use in a Twitch chat room and infer meanings from a number of messages where the emoji are used.

To narrow down the focus of the study, I chose one channel to focus on for my data and analysis. Heroes of the Storm is the official Twitch.tv channel of Blizzard Entertainment dedicated to broadcasting live streams of their video game of the same name. As of March 2021, the channel has some 314,000 followers and has produced content ranging from North American collegiate HotS competitions to global world championship tournaments, as well as promoting upcoming content to be added to the game. Henceforth I will be using the common abbreviation of HotS when addressing the video game.

Heroes of the Storm the video game is a competitive multiplayer battle arena (Moba) game, where participants compete in two teams of five players in an effort to destroy the opposing team's base. Players will choose their player character from among about 90 different

characters, called heroes, from other Blizzard Entertainment video game franchises such as Warcraft, Starcraft and Overwatch. These heroes have vastly different abilities and properties, and the playerbase have a whole host of perceptions, opinions and disagreements about their relative strengths, general usefulness and skillfulness on the player's part, for instance.

My interest in this community in particular stems from my personal experience with the game and a passive participation in the channel. It was while following this particular chat room that I have developed an interest in the inner workings of emoji within the context of language. Furthermore, to successfully analyse the language used in this channel, extensive knowledge of the subject matter of this community of practice is likely required. My experience with the video game extends from the year 2015 to present day and includes amateur and semi-professional competition, as well as thousands of hours of playing the game. This helps me interpret what is being referred to in the chat room and make sense of the language specific to the community.

A key part of Twitch.tv is the interaction between the broadcaster and their viewers. Most broadcasters communicate with their viewers through audio, though they can also take part in the chat room where their viewers interact with each other and with the stream. Since a lot of the interaction is between viewer and stream / broadcaster, and the live streams are mostly about progressing activities such as video games, the communication tends to be short-form and quickly move from one subject to the next, reacting and interacting rather like a crowd appreciating a sporting event, play, movie or any other form of shared entertainment.

A big part of this ever-evolving linguistic phenomenon are emoji, of which there are now more than ten thousand, possibly tens of thousands (Magdaleno 2014), but it is almost impossible to keep track of all of them, as new emoji are constantly being added. Twitch.tv broadcasters can create their own emoji according to a set of rules and guidelines provided by Twitch, which can then be used by users of their chatroom by typing the name of the emoji in the chat.

An important distinction when considering emoji language in a Twitch.tv chatroom is that while other platforms where emoji use is common (e.g Twitter, Facebook) often feature complete conversations where the referent of each utterance is clearly indicated, on Twitch.tv a large part of the commentary refers to what is happening in the streaming video feed. Some conversation happens where users refer to each other by their usernames and carry out a continuous interaction, but this seems to be in the minority. This mode of interaction has an effect on what kinds of utterances occur, and emoji are often used to clarify or reinforce the attitude of the text. The effect is similar to having a crowd of people viewing a sporting event or similar shared experience – a live virtual crowd, so to speak - communication is related to the spectated event, and longer conversations or bilateral interactions are rare.

A community of practice is formed by a group of people who share a craft or profession and engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain (E. & B Wenger-Trayner, 2015), in this case in viewing streamed content on Twitch and talking about it. More specifically for my study, they share an interest in viewing and discussing streamed video gaming content. Along with the shared interest, a certain level of proficiency in jargon and key concepts related to the specific game in question usually follow, as a vast majority of Twitch viewers of any given game are at least familiar with what they are viewing. On Twitch there are several concurrent communities of practice, sometimes even within a single channel.

For a community to be considered a community of practice, three criteria are proposed by E. & B.Wenger-Trayner: a shared domain of interest, communal behavior and a practice. In this sense simply viewing and commenting a shared domain of interest would not constitute as a community of practice [as an example from Wenger-Trayner (2015), a group of people who like certain kinds of movies, for instance, does not constitute a community of practice], but almost all viewers on video game related Twitch channels are players of video games themselves, and most viewers on any given game also play that specific game - a significant distinction to the movie example given in Wenger-Trayner (2015) and one that in my mind means that Twitch chat rooms fulfills all three criteria. A single Twitch

chat room will often consist of people that share an interest in the game that is being streamed (domain), a certain way of speaking (including emoji), as well as jargon, when talking about the game and shared knowledge about it (communal behavior) and watching the game, as well as often playing it (a practice). In a wider view, it can be argued that Twitch chat itself has all these aspects, as well.

A definition from Wenger-Trayner (2015) regarding communities of practice also describes a Twitch chatroom very accurately: a community of practice is defined with a highlight on shared practice and shared communicative resources to address recurring issues. This seems especially apt to emoji use: as people in a Twitch.tv chat room engage in shared learning in a community of practice, they develop ways of addressing certain recurring issues, in this case ways of using specific signs (emoji) to show shared knowledge or attitudes towards something.

While the model is often used for more traditional or physical contexts, I claim that emoji used in Twitch.tv chat rooms play a central role as tools and ways of addressing issues shared by their users. In particular, on the Heroes of the Storm channel, participants share an interest in the HotS video game, mostly share the activity of playing the game, and use shared language to talk about it.

### **3 Methodology and Data**

#### **3.1 Case study and qualitative analysis as research methodologies**

Case studies have traditionally been seen as an effective methodology to examine and conceptualize complex issues in real world environments, especially in domains such as the social sciences (Harrison et al., 2017). As a research method with a long history, case study has naturally seen changes in both definitions of itself as well as what is considered its main focus: a traditional view (Stake, 1995) is that while the processes should be rigorous, the focus of the case study is what is studied rather than the how. Another definition (Yin, 2014) is that the emphasis of a case study should be in empirical inquiry

and the importance of context to the case in question. Finally, Merriam (2009, p. 40) emphasizes as the defining feature of a case study the in depth description and analysis of a bounded system. In taking aspects of all three of these definitions – which do not necessarily conflict with one another – lies an approximation of how this study defines itself.

This study will attempt to provide an in depth, qualitative analysis of a bounded system (emoji use on a particular Twitch.tv broadcasting channel), while focusing on the importance of context, in this case a number of possible contexts including language barriers between emoji users, understanding of subject matter, what is happening simultaneously on the broadcast, etc. The study will also have quantitative aspects, namely frequencies of specific emojis used in the data as well as more broadly collected statistics of emoji use in general, but these will be mainly supplemental to the main focus, which is a qualitative, in depth analysis of how emoji use relates to the language in messages where emoji act as modifying the meanings in the text.

There are two types of data used in the study. First, the online survey that was distributed through a subject-specific social media channel (reddit/r/heroesofthestorm) in 2018 and yielded 84 responses from Heroes of the Storm on Twitch.tv viewers and emoji users of varying experience levels. The survey data consists of brief descriptions of what the users believe the emoji to mean, as well as some quantitative data regarding their perceptions on whether the emoji are positive or negative in sentiment.

The second type of data that will be analysed with the help of the survey results is a collection of individual replies on the Heroes of the Storm Twitch channel's chat room. The replies that were chosen had to include one of the three emoji that were studied as well as additional English language to provide additional context. Additionally, the meanings of emoji often have to be considered in the context of the broadcast, both what is happening on the video feed as well as what is being said.

The chat replies were collected in spring 2018 after the live streams from VoD's (videos-on-demand), where the stream as well as its chat is replayed at the viewers' leisure and can be paused and rewound. Two VoD's were used, the first some two hours in total length, and the other almost eleven hours, of which only the first two hours was used. In total, approximately four hours of video and chat replays were analysed in the context of use cases of the three emoji that were chosen as well as their linguistic functions in the cases. In the four hours of VoD material, 87 cases were found for analysis.

The emoji use cases are compared to the survey responses and additionally the emoji use is analysed separately in context to determine what changes in meaning the existence of the emoji may contribute to. Finally, a categorization of meaning and linguistic role is described in each emoji based on Na'aman et al.'s (2017) framework (described further in section 3.4).

The aim is to produce a description of what different functions emoji have, linguistically, that give them a 'purpose', making them uniquely useful for communicating certain kinds of information. However, constraints of emoji as communicative resources is also discussed, in terms of potential for several distinct interpretations and, therefore, misconstruals.

### **3.2 Survey on emoji meanings and sentiment**

In order to examine users' perceptions of emoji meanings, the present study includes a survey based on a similar one devised by Miller et al. (2016) that solicited responses about emoji sentiment (positivity/negativity) on a scale from 0-10, as well as free form responses about emoji meanings and the situations in which the users would use them. There was a relatively high percentage of overlap in users' descriptions of the emoji, indicating that people have relatively similar interpretations of the specific Twitch.tv emoji I have chosen to examine closely.

The survey was linked to popular social media site Reddit.com ([reddit.com/r/heroesofthestorm](https://www.reddit.com/r/heroesofthestorm)) on a section dedicated to the Heroes of the Storm video

game. As of early 2021, the subreddit (a section or channel of the site that specializes in a certain topic) has some 290 thousand users. The distribution site for the survey was chosen specifically because a community specializing in discussing *Heroes of the Storm* will likely share a grasp of the communicative aspects and resources that are commonly used in the discourse. The goal was to receive data about the emoji understanding of experienced Twitch users who share an interest in *Heroes of the Storm*. Of course, not all users of the subreddit are also Twitch.tv users, but there seemed to be enough overlap that the survey yielded informed responses.

First, the respondents were asked about their experience in using Twitch as well as their level of participation in the chat. Responses to these questions were used to analyse the relation of experience to the 'correctness' of users' emoji definitions. Second, the respondents were asked to define the three emoji chosen for this study (questions 3-6) in ten words or less. Third, they were asked to rate the sentiment of each emoji on a scale from 0-10, describing whether they thought the emoji were positive or negative. And finally, the users were asked to describe a situation in which they themselves would use each of the three emoji. The final set of questions had a relatively similar result as the questions 3-6 on definitions of emoji meanings, but there were a few interesting distinctions that will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

Overall, the survey provides a set of quantitative data that acts as a point of reference when analysing the separate, non-numerical data taken from the Twitch.tv chat room. This will be useful particularly in discussing the stability of emoji meanings across users, as well as the potential for multiple interpretations. Several advocates of case studies encourage the use of multiple methods, that is, both qualitative and quantitative, to better describe the case in question (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). In the present study, the survey data will be referred to when discussing the qualitative data to provide additional evidence and grounding for the interpretive analysis.



### 3.3 Research question

My research question is: “What kinds of affective and stance-related meanings do emoji on Twitch.tv express?” The main purpose of exploring and answering this question is to deepen our understanding of how emoji are used as linguistic resources.

Additionally, the survey portion of the study was made in order to find out what do Twitch chat users believe emoji to mean and whether there was a shared understanding of meanings between users.

### 3.4 Categories of meaning, linguistic roles

Na'aman et al. (2017) conducted a study on Twitter emoji that divided instances of use into three high level categories: **function**, **content**, and **multimodal**. This was done with the help of the observation that emoji are often used in contexts that make them replacements for other existing lexical units, and that such use cases are relatively easy to interpret. Examples of such cases would be to replace conjunctions, punctuation or other features with emoji, such as the utterance: “I [donut emoji] like you.” This type of context was labelled as a **function** use.

A few other contexts were identified, where emoji were used as stand-ins for lexical words or phrases that are part of the main informative content of the utterance, such as “My [heart emoji] is full.” This type of context was labelled as a **content** use.

These two contexts appear to be relatively common in a Twitter context, but rarer in a Twitch.tv chatroom. Explanations for this observation may be subject to future examination, but are beyond the scope of the current study.

Instead, a third context mentioned by Na'aman et al. (2017), labeled **multimodal**, can be explained as a larger category of its own, which encompasses the other two contexts but also includes situations where neither function nor content defines the use cases. In this context, emoji are characters that enrich an otherwise complete text with markers of affect or stance – characteristics that either express an attitude or serve as replacements for a non-

verbal cues in face-to-face interactions. Emoji themselves are always multimodal, but there are instances where they can be more specifically categorised into either content or function use contexts, and other instances where their multimodality can be elaborated upon.

I chose to analyse the data by categorising the emoji meanings into one of these three classes and providing explanations as to how I came to the conclusions given. By doing this, I can begin to answer the question of “What kinds of affective and stance-related meanings do emoji on Twitch.tv express?” and then begin to answer the broader, more general question of “how are emoji used?”.

### **3.5 Data and privacy**

The data for the study consists of a set of 84 survey responses and a collection of chat messages from two Twitch.tv videos-on-demand (henceforth called VoDs) with a recording of the text chat that occurred alongside the video stream. I will provide a close reading of the chat replies with at least one of the emoji I have chosen to analyse, determining the subtype of the emote's linguistic role, explaining how using the emoji modifies the utterance in question. I will be excluding replies (which are many) that only contain emoji, as those can only be analysed in relation to the video, with limited linguistic context.

The Twitch Privacy Notice (<https://www.twitch.tv/p/fi-fi/legal/privacy-notice/>) states that certain actions on the Twitch Services are “public or intended to be public in nature”. The document references broadcasting content (streaming), participating in the chat room, posting profile information for your Twitch account, following a channel or subscribing to a channel as actions whose information may be collected, used or disclosed by other users. By choosing to interact in a Twitch chatroom, users agree that their communications are public and potentially stored in VoDs. Regardless, I have chosen to hide users' profile names in the data extracts. Excluding names of chat participants does not take anything away from the analysis, and is as such an easy decision to make. I will be referring to different participants in the chat exchanges by different pseudonyms, while the names

of people mentioned or showed in the broadcast will be substituted with brief descriptions of their role in the broadcast. (e.g. “a player in the blue team” or “one of the competition's commentators”).

## **4 Analysis**

This chapter includes a brief quantitative overview of the data as background for a qualitative close reading analysis of emoji functions. First, in the Analysis overview sub-chapter, the amount of data is described and the distribution of the emoji I chose to examine is explained. Second, the next sub-chapter includes brief explanations of what the studied emoji are generally perceived to mean, based on the survey responses as well as definitions given by a community-maintained encyclopedia of Internet culture and memes. The data provided by the survey is discussed in this section as a general overview of the results. Additionally, some samples of the qualitative Twitch chat data are given to illustrate and discuss the perceived emoji meanings. Third, an in-depth discussion of the data is provided with more illustrating examples of the data.

### **4.1 Survey results report**

49% of the 84 responses (41 users) answered a question related to their active Twitch.tv experience with the option "More than 3 years". Only 8% (7 users) answered with "Less than a year".

When asking how much they participate in Twitch chat, with the qualification that both reading and writing count, the large majority answered that they do participate. 30% of respondents chose "A lot" as their answer, while 56% chose "Some". One of the aims of this question was to determine whether active participation would be linked to a different perception of emoji meanings.

The rest of the questions focused on perceptions of emoji meanings and instances where the respondents would use them. There was a remarkable consensus on the three emoji

studied, although there were differences in the degree of unanimity between them. The meaning of monkaS was agreed upon the least: there were 10 responses that did not provide a description but rather referred to another emoji or gave an unclear reply. There were three responses that admitted to not knowing what the emoji means.

Both the meanings of LUL and Kappa were agreed upon rather unanimously. When describing the meaning of LUL, all but 4 responses referred to laughter, humor, mockery, joking, being funny or amused. The outliers either referred to other emoji or were unclear. When describing the meaning of Kappa, the respondents largely agreed that the emoji denotes sarcasm or irony. Some responses also pointed to smugness, joking and lying. A number of respondents pointed to the distinction of LUL as opposed to other forms of signifying laughter: "often used to laugh at own joke", "funny, sarcastic", "stronger, more ironic LOL" "something funny happend[sic], mostly because someone failed", etc. These distinctions are interesting in further defining the value of emoji as communicative tools and as replacements for other ways of specify stance and affect in digital communication.

Three of the questions asked for the respondents to judge whether they thought the emoji are negative or positive in sentiment on a scale of 0-10. LUL scored the highest weighted average at 6.63, while monkaS scored the lowest at 5.06, and Kappa in the middle with 6.29. These results indicate that generally the respondents thought the emoji to be either positive or neutral in sentiment. However, there is an important caveat to making this conclusion: the scores given may represent the respondents' perceived averages – they may refer to emoji use across different contexts, and the question itself does not take this into account. The same emoji may have different sentiments based on context, but this was not separately asked about in the survey. Therefore it is difficult to say definitively that an emoji is only positive or neutral. Perhaps the key finding here is that although a lot of the responses point to meanings such as mockery, smugness, sarcasm, anxiety, stress and so forth, the use of these emoji is overall viewed as positive.

Another aspect that was analysed in regards to the survey data was the relationship of Twitch experience and perception of emoji meaning. As there was generally a consensus

of the meaning of each emoji, there were outliers in responses about each individual emoji. One of the interesting tasks related to the survey was to determine whether these outliers were from the less experienced Twitch chat users – the users who were not as accustomed to the culture, including the linguistic elements used. To do this, a number of key words and concepts were used in determining whether the perceived meaning of each emoji was 'correct' or in line with the majority. While there may be several interpretations of each emoji and no interpretation is necessarily more correct than another, for the purposes of this study, the most agreed upon aspects of each emoji were considered the defining factors. For example, if the definition of Kappa lacked the idea of irony or sarcasm, the response was considered an outlier. Naturally, responses that stated that the participant did not know the meaning were also part of this grouping.

Standard definitions for the emoji were formulated using key words and concepts that were present in the majority of responses. These were as follows:

- monkaS: apprehension, anxiety, fear, tension, stress, discomfort
- LUL: humor, laughter, amusement, hilarity, joking
- Kappa: sarcasm, irony, joking, trolling, kidding

Among the seven respondents that had been using Twitch chat for less than a year, only two responses were entirely aligned with the majority or 'correct' definitions on all three emoji. The five others had degrees of deviation on one or more emoji definitions. In this category of participants, Kappa was present the most with four cases. MonkaS was defined against the standard definition three times, and LUL only once.

In comparison, there were a significant amount of non-standard definitions for emoji meanings in the more experienced Twitch chat users, too. The overall numbers of the non-standard definitions were sixteen instances for monkaS, ten for LUL and twelve for Kappa. MonkaS was the emoji with the most overall deviation, while Kappa was the emoji with the most deviation among inexperienced participants. Overall, LUL was the emoji with the least amount of deviation among all participants.

The final set of three questions asked respondents to describe situations or functions in which they would use the three emoji. These resulted in responses that were largely similar to the brief descriptions of meanings, but there were also additional interesting details and distinctions discovered. In particular, many respondents defined the emoji meanings more generally and specified the ways in which they personally use them to answer the function questions. For example, one respondent defined monkaS as meaning "nervousness and being scared", but answered that they would only use the emoji for "expressing nervousness". Similarly, one response described Kappa as "using irony or lying", but using the emoji "to express sarcasm". This seems to imply that users perceive emoji as having several potential functions, but that they may prefer certain functions over others. Also, some respondents claimed that they would not use some emoji in any situation despite knowing their standard meanings. In general, the responses to the function questions were more specific and tied to personal situations when compared to the definition answers.

## **4.2 Analysis overview**

Based on analysis of the Twitch chat data, the use of Kappa can be roughly categorized as multimodal – the emoji is used mainly to signify irony or sarcasm, and can be interpreted as such in all eight of the instances found. There were also cases in which the meaning was somewhat unclear, but this may at least in part be on purpose.

According to the survey results, the sentiment of Kappa is positive, a weighted average of 6,29 on a scale from 0-10 where 0 is strongly negative and 10 is strongly positive. In the freeform descriptions of its meaning, a majority of users pointed to sarcasm or irony, joking or 'trolling'. A troll is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as someone that leaves annoying or offensive messages on the Internet in an effort to upset someone or to get attention or cause trouble. (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/troll>)

Out of the 84 survey responses, 74 (85%) included references to this function, while there were also a small number of responses that claimed that the emoji constitutes as lying, and

a few that admitted to not knowing what it means.

LUL was the only emoji to be used in both multimodal and function sense. Out of the 58 instances, six were part of a series of replies where multiple users repeated the same message (“EL LUL VATOR”) where the emoji LUL took the place of the letter 'e' in 'elevator'. The rest of the instances could be classified as multimodal, but were still varied in their meanings. The emoji is, however, mainly concerned with humor and laughter (its name can be related to LOL – laughing out loud).

LUL was by far the most used emoji with 58 instances (two thirds of the whole data set), which seems to be in line with the emoji use statistics provided by StreamElements (<https://stats.streamelements.com/c/global>, July 2020) as typical of a Twitch.tv chatroom.

The survey results point to LUL being the most positive of the three emoji with a weighted sentiment average of 6.63. 75 of 84 (88%) responses also pointed to characteristics such as "humor, laughter, amusement, hilarity or joking" when defining the emoji. There were also distinctions on the type of laughter or humor LUL denotes, including mockery, irony or ridiculing or making fun of something.

MonkaS was used 21 times, each time in a multimodal manner. The emoji was primarily used to signify apprehension (15 times), but in some cases it was unclear what the apprehension was meant for. More than a third (6 times) of the instances were unclear in their meaning.

In the survey, monkaS scored the lowest on the sentiment scale with a weighted average of 5.06 out of 10. In terms of consensus of its definition, the emoji also had the largest degree of deviation, as 16 of 84 (19%) participants defined it against the standard. This means that even the least agreed upon emoji is defined similarly by 81% of the participants in the survey.

A general conclusion that seems to draw itself is that the use of these Twitch emoji is complicated – very rarely do the use cases fall directly in a particular category, and most

times a nuanced analysis is needed to determine what is being said by adding the emoji. However, on a broad level, users seem to share a consensus on what the emoji mean. Misconstruals and non-standard uses do occur, seemingly varying from one emoji to the next.

### 4.3 Descriptions of emoji meanings



*Figure 2. Kappa*

Kappa is the grey-scale face of a former employee of Justin.TV, a streaming website that can be seen as a predecessor of Twitch. It is primarily understood to convey sarcasm, but it is also at times used as spam with little to no context.

(<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/kappa> )

#### Sample 1

*Sample1User: @ReferentCommentator Pls stop leaking strats Kappa*

In the example, a chat user is referring to a commentator analysing the game and the strategies used by the players. “Pls stop leaking strats” seems to ask the commentator to not tell these strategies to everyone, but the use of Kappa seems to indicate that the speaker is not serious. The meaning of Kappa in this instance may be to convey that the strategies the commentator is analysing are common knowledge (“leaking strats” being sarcastic) and that the commentator doesn't need to tell the spectators about them, or to joke that the strategies are supposedly secret and he shouldn't be explaining them to everyone. In either interpretation, the emoji Kappa plays a major role in how to read and interpret the text.



Without it, the message may be construed as a genuine plea or complaint that the commentator should stop analysing the strategy that he was talking about.



*Figure 3. LUL*

LUL is an emoji featuring a picture of video game reviewer John Bain, better known by his online handle TotalBiscuit. The emoji is typically used to indicate laughter in a similar vein to typing the abbreviation LOL (laughing out loud). (<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/lul>)

Out of the three emoji I chose to analyse, the LUL-emoji is perhaps the most straightforward in its use, and unusual in that the image clearly relates to its functional meaning. The facial expression/body language of the emoji makes it easier than most to interpret in its commonly perceived meaning. LUL is mainly used multimodally to express a humorous attitude, or to replace a content word, in this case “laughing” or “laughter”. (e.g I [LUL-emoji]'d approximately = I laughed out loud)

## **Sample 2**

*Sample2User: nice spear LUL*

In this sample the user is referring to the video stream, where a player's action (a player character's ability called Ancient Spear) misses its intended target, and is complimented sarcastically in the chat. In this instance LUL is used similarly to Kappa, although it can be argued that due to the additional element of portrayed laughter or glee, the intended

attitude is more severe and negative. The emoji is used to clarify that the user does not mean what the text alone would indicate. Both LUL and Kappa are used for mockery in this context.



*Figure 4. monkaS*

MonkaS is an emoji of an illustration of Pepe the Frog appearing frightened and sweating. It is typically used in Twitch chat during moments of high tension in video game matches to express anxiety or apprehension.

Pepe the Frog is a cartoon character created by American artist Matt Furie in his cartoon *Playtime*. (Furino, 2016).(<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/monkas> )

The character has become a topic of controversy due to associations with hate speech and propaganda (https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-pepe-the-frog-hate-symbol-20161011-snap-htlstory.html,https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/pepe-the-frog).

The political connotations of the emoji may play a factor into users' perceptions of its meaning. In the survey, only one participant pointed to this in describing the emoji's meaning: "alt-right support", although another also referred to Donald Trump, "pepe trump stressed".

In the data collected, monkaS seems to exhibit the greatest variation and difference to the other emoji in its use cases. This was also the case with users trying to define monkaS in

the survey. Two examples are provided to try to help illustrate this point.

### **Sample 3**

*Sample3User: Mods are being oppressive monkaS*

“Mods” refer to moderators of the chat channel, users with rights to remove or suspend other users according to a set of rules the stream owner or broadcaster has set for the channel. In this instance, moderators are removing messages and suspending users in the chat, and the other users are seemingly protesting and joking about the moderators' powers.

In this particular sample, the use of monkaS seems a sincere, straightforward instance of the multimodal subtype. The message, when interpreted transparently, is reinforced with the use of the emoji, which is used to express a negative feeling of anxiety or apprehension.

#### **4.4 Twitch chat comments & discussion**

The following is an analysis of the Twitch chat comments including both a) text and b) at least one of the three types of emoji I chose to examine. Samples are included in cases where they are helpful in illuminating the points being made. The data was gathered from Twitch.tv vods (videos-on-demand) from an event on May 6th, 2018 called "HGC 2018 EU Phase 1 Crucible", a set of professional Heroes of the Storm games between two teams playing for a spot in the professional league. Another vod was also used, called "HGC Europe – League Play – Week 10 Day 2", a more than ten hours long video of several professional matches. With the amount of data available in the second vod, the analysed data had to be restricted, and as such only the cases of emoji use in the first hour of this vod were included. The data excerpts also includes any comments in the downtime during the streams, including advertising or other kinds of breaks, where commercials are shown and/or the commentators and analysts speak and break down the games.

Out of all the pieces of data, the LUL-emoji was used the most with 58 instances. MonkaS was used 21 times, and Kappa only 8 times (+1 KappaHD – altered version of Kappa). This makes the data set somewhat typical of Twitch.tv chat rooms in terms of emoji

distribution: as of July 3rd, 2020, LUL is still the second most used emoji globally with more than one billion instances (<https://stats.streamelements.com/c/global> ) while Kappa is fifth with some 700 million uses, and monkaS at only 19th of “BTTV Emotes” with some 75 million uses (a set of additional emoji that require installing a browser addon to get access to). Kappa was used a relatively low amount, but in diverse enough ways that its role can be discussed in depth.

## **Emoji 1 - LUL**

LUL is predominantly used in the multimodal function, to convey a humorous attitude to the messages it's associated with. In most of the data, it is used simply by adding the emoji to a short comment about what is happening in the video stream – to basically communicate “this made me laugh” or “I thought this was funny”.

### **Example 1.1:**

*User: not voting for DS LUL*

A chat user comments: “not voting for DS LUL” when the results of a live voting event are being shown. Participants are being asked to vote on whichever team they believe is going to win the following game. The user in this example seems to believe that the team known as Diamond Skin (DS) will win, and is ridiculing the alternative opinion by adding LUL to signify irony in their message. Without the addition of LUL, the message could only be read as “not voting for DS”, which would have the opposite meaning: “I am not voting for DS”.

### **Example 1.2:**

*User: NA Overwatch LUL*

A user comments: “NA Overwatch LUL”. There is little (or no) context to the message, other than the fact that some of the characters in Heroes of the Storm originate in another

game called Overwatch. NA is a commonly used abbreviation for the region of North America, which has its own game servers and competitions usually separate from their European, Oceanic and Asian counterparts. The addition of LUL here basically makes the message read as “North American Overwatch is a joke”, ridiculing the level of competition in the region. This type of “NA + LUL” memes are common in Heroes of the Storm and other gaming stream communities, among European streamers and viewers in particular, and the rivalry could be elaborated upon for a full-length paper of its own, but I will not go into further detail here.

LUL is also sometimes used in the function role, to stand in for some textual part of the message. In these cases, it can be inferred that the choice of the emoji also conveys a sense of humor or irony, although this is not the main function, nor is it necessarily always the case. A particularly clever use of LUL in the data is writing the word “elevator” by substituting the “e” with the LUL emoji – this function use of the emoji allows chat users sometimes circumvent using banned words while still getting their meaning across. The users in the data discuss this:

**Example 1.3: (comments in quick succession)**

*User A: EL LUL VATOR*

*User A: BANNED FOR WRITING EL LUL VATOR*

*User B: @tag\_me\_when\_mods\_ban I can't even figure out why EL LUL VATOR is a banned word Jebaited*

*User B: BibleThump is banned in the Hearthstone channel LUL*

Here, two users use the form “EL LUL VATOR” to say “elevator” without being banned from the chat channel. The reason why the word is banned isn't known, and is commented on by User B. User B further states that BibleThump, another emoji, is a banned “word” on another channel run by the same organization. While substituting a letter or letters with an emoji is in itself a function, here the users seem to also be ridiculing or mocking the

moderation and rules of the channel(s) by using LUL.

**Example 1.4:**

*User: Chen 0% winrate on masterleague LUL*

Here a user makes a comment about a character, Chen, that is being picked to be played on the broadcast by one of the players. The user ridicules the decision by adding LUL to an otherwise superficially factual utterance. They effectively change what would be a simple statement of perceived fact that the hero in question never wins into a critique of one of the players or possibly their team for letting the decision happen.

**Example 1.5:**

*User: 2-11 LUL*

A user refers to two opposing teams' win-loss records being shown next to each other on the stream as the next match is about to begin. During the season, one of the teams has won two matches and lost eleven, which is considered one of the poorest records in the league. As a comparison, the opposing team has won eight matches and lost five. Here, LUL is clearly used as mocking laughter, a meaning that some of the survey responses also attributed to the emoji. In the message, the emoji seems to be doing most of the work in determining stance and affect, while the rest of the message is only there to point at the target.

**Emoji 2 monkaS**

MonkaS was used exclusively in multimodal ways, to convey a sense of apprehension in the meaning of associated messages – a role that was, out of the three emoji types, perhaps the most challenging to pin down or to concretize. In almost all of the use cases (one possible exception, discussed later), the emoji seems to communicate that the user is scared or worried about whatever the rest of their message pointed to.

**Example 2.1:**

*User: Mods monkaS*

A user comments “Mods monkaS” after another user was timed out – temporarily removed from the chat room by moderators (“mods”), users who are given authority over the chat channel by its founders. There are many similar messages that follow, indicating that users are scared of the moderators, perhaps implying that they worried about possible abuse of power. Another user at 11:54 remarks: “Mods are being oppressive monkaS”.

Although it is reasonably clear why monkaS is used here, it is difficult to tell how seriously the messages are meant to be read. It is possible that the role of monkaS ranges from conveying fear or apprehension to conveying pretend fear or apprehension.

### **Example 2.2**

*User: ReferentPlayer on Tracer monkaS hope his practice payed off!*

In this sample, the emoji monkaS is used when referring to a player that is shown on the stream and the player character he has chosen to play as. The meaning of the emote can be interpreted in several ways depending on the context of the reader.

A possible interpretation is that the monkaS is expressing anxiety and directing it at the referent player's opponents. In this interpretation, the chat user expresses that the referent player is scary when playing the hero Tracer, and perhaps expects the opposing team to be feeling emotions or feelings best expressed by 'monkaS' when the character is chosen on the stream.

With the addition of “hope his practice payed off!” after the emoji, a reader might expect that the attitude of the utterance is doubtful of the player's performance, and that there has been prior discussion of practice on the player character that was chosen. In this interpretation, the use of monkaS expresses a sympathetic sense of apprehension for the referent player's benefit. The use of monkaS here is, therefore a crucial determining factor in interpreting what is meant by the comment. Although it is relatively easy to see that the basic meaning of monkaS is used, in the sense of expressing anxiety or apprehension, the

target of the expressed emotions is more open to interpretation.

### **Example 2.3**

*User: Can someone tell me who these heroes are? MonkaS I need 2D portraits to tell them apart NotLikeThis.*

Here, it is more difficult to read monkaS as an indicator of apprehension than with the other cases. The message refers to a new update in Heroes of the Storm that shows new three-dimensional portraits of the characters in the pre-game screen instead of the previous 2D versions. The user seems to complain that they can't recognize the characters because of the update.

To reveal what monkaS could possibly add to the meaning of the message one has to examine its visual appearance: Pepe the frog's eyes are bulging out, or perhaps squinting. Perhaps the user did not know or agree with the commonly understood interpretation, or perhaps they wanted to use the emoji creatively to convey a different meaning. It seems likely that the user took the squinting eyes part of the emoji and wanted to use that to reinforce their message about not liking the new, three-dimensional character portraits.

NotLikeThis is another Twitch.tv emoji where a man holds his head with both hands and has his eyes closed. The emoji is often used, as its name may suggest, in contexts where mistakes have been made, or to express feelings of frustration, confusion or a (shared) sense of shame.

### **Example 2.4**

*User: instant picks monkaS*

The user in this example refers to heroes being chosen in the pre-game draft. The draft is the part of the game where players choose which characters to play, as well as 'banning', which means removing heroes from being available to be picked. The draft takes place in



turns, where the starting team gets to choose a hero first, after which the team that goes second gets to choose two. The teams take turns until both have banned three heroes from the opponent and picked five, one for each player.

In HotS draft, there is a thirty second timer for each hero pick or ban. In the stream, both teams are using very little of the allowed time, instead choosing heroes to ban and pick very quickly.

The user could be communicating a sense of surprise at the speed at which the draft is progressing, which would be considered a somewhat non-standard use of the emoji, although the surprise could also be read as apprehension or excitement, which were more commonly attributed. Another possible interpretation would be that the quick drafting speed is significant for one reason or another: perhaps the user believes that the teams have a strong plan and thus do not need the extra time, or maybe that they are making a mistake by drafting quickly.

### **Emoji 3 - Kappa**

Kappa, like monkaS, was used exclusively in the multimodal function, to modify messages and to give them a sarcastic, ironic or humorous tone.

#### **Example 3.1**

*Example6User: is UI still bugged ?? Kappa*

The chatter refers to two coinciding factors here: the new Heroes of the Storm update that changed the pre-game screen that is being showed to feature three-dimensional character portraits, and a user interface bug before the update that would sometimes fail to show any character portraits at all. The chatter is using Kappa to communicate that they are making a joke: although there are character portraits visible, they say they cannot recognize them, apparently because the graphics are different (as in, “still bugged”).

#### **Example 3.2**

*User: CHEN Kappa*

Here, the use of Kappa is linked to a playable hero that is chosen on the broadcast by one of the players. It is impossible to determine the significance of the emoji without understanding the broader context related to the game. On the broadcast, one of the players / their team makes an unusual choice in an important game where they are expected to lose, and the chat user seems to be, based on the capitalisation, perhaps sarcastically excited. Furthermore, other comments during this section of the broadcast are commenting on the same issue:

*User: MM trolling so hard (MM is the abbreviation of the team that picked Chen)*

*UserB: they just playing for fun*

*UserC: playing over under to see how fast MM loses*

*UserD: what a troll picks*

Later, during the gameplay, another user follows up on this issue:

*User: Chen is good pick, other pros don't know how to play against him Kappa*

The user is making a point or perhaps a joke, that because Chen is such an abnormality in professional games, it might work in MM's favor. The addition of Kappa, here, might signify that the user doesn't really believe in their statement or that they find the situation humorous. The first interpretation could be considered the more standard use of Kappa, while the second points to 'joking', which was one of the less common meanings attributed to the emoji.

### **Example 3.3**

*User: @UserB: i am afk for a few seconds, i hope the game isnt done when i return Kappa*

Here a user directs their comment to another user, referencing an earlier discussion on both

the broadcast and in the chatroom. The two commentators discussed their thoughts on the heroes that were picked by both teams and how they predicted the game to go, focusing specifically on how long the game would last. One of the commentators asked the chat to engage with them and write “over” or “under” if they thought the game would end in over or under 14 minutes. This elicited many replies in the comments on both sides, as well as comments stating users' own predictions, ranging from 2 minutes to 18 minutes.

In general, HotS games are expected to last roughly 20 minutes (Mendelsohn, Tom. 2017) but a common perception is that the less competitive or close a battle between two teams is, the quicker the game ends.

If interpreted using the basic, sarcastic meaning of Kappa, one could read this comment as the user reversing the utterance's original meaning and hoping that the game would end sooner.

However, because the comment is referencing the earlier discussion, it is possible that the emoji itself is directed at that topic, too. By adding Kappa, the user might be referring to one of the commentators predicting a quick game or other chat users that made predictions to that effect. In this interpretation, the comment comes off as a joke – the user states that they have to leave the stream for a moment, and hopes that the game is not over when they return, perhaps not genuinely believing that it would be, but acknowledging the general sentiment of the community that the game would end quickly.

### **Example 3.4**

*User: abathur can tank Kappa*

This example can be considered a very standard use of Kappa but one that requires in-depth understanding of game terminology to interpret.

The user refers to 'tanking', which in HotS is the act of being the front line in battle,

engaging first and receiving most of the damage from the enemy and in doing so protecting more fragile allies.

They also refer to one of the heroes chosen to take part in the match, Abathur. Abathur is a unique supporting hero that is one of the most fragile characters in the game, unable to face off against any other hero in a head-on fight. The user is therefore using Kappa as an indicator of sarcasm, effectively reversing the intended meaning of their message. The message is directed at the stream, where one of the teams has elected to not play any heroes traditionally considered to be good 'tanks'. Other users also comment on this, for example:

*User: MM cant engage without tank*

*UserB: You don't need a tank if u dont take damage LUL*

## 5 Conclusions

The aim of this study was to add to our knowledge of the linguistic meanings and roles of emoji by studying the chatroom of a Twitch.tv streaming broadcast. By picking out three specific emoji to describe and analyse, the study attempted to give an indication of the variety of uses, the degree of objectivity/subjectivity of emoji meanings, as well as the effect of emoji on the meaning of textual utterances.

The survey results showed that despite having no official meanings tied to them, the emoji on Twitch.tv are largely understood and interpreted the same among users. The responses also indicated that as linguistic resources, emoji can be both delicate and effective in communicating desired emotions or attitudes.

By choosing to categorize emoji use cases by their **linguistic roles** (Na'aman et al. 2017), the study describes how the three chosen emoji are used in the data and attempts to answer the research question of “what linguistic roles do emoji play on Twitch.tv chat rooms?” and goes to some length to answer the more general “how are emoji used?”.

The main findings of this study were that emoji on Twitch are largely used in a **multimodal**

**role** as indications of affect or stance, and that users have a shared understanding of what the emoji mean. As parts of messages, emoji often give an indication of how the user wants their message to be interpreted – they may represent humor, irony, sarcasm, anxiety or apprehension, among other social and emotional states. By analysing the use of emoji in context specifically, the study showed that emoji can often greatly alter the meanings of textual utterances, even reverse them. A comment like “You speak good English” in a Twitch.tv chat room might mean the exact opposite if a Kappa-emoji was added. The same utterance with a LUL-emoji might mean that the chatter is surprised or delighted at the fact, or the emoji might sometimes be used similarly to Kappa. If a monkaS was added, the chatter may present themselves as surprised or even alarmed that the person in question speaks good English. All in all, the study found that apart from acting as stand-ins for physical gestures, emoji afford users with tools to effectively and diversely communicate their intentions. It is difficult and perhaps unnecessary to compare the two sets of tools in terms of their value or effectiveness as both are largely used independently for their own domains, but this study has hopefully shown that the importance and functionality of emoji as linguistic resources should not be dismissed.

While the study is about Twitch.tv emoji specifically, similar results can perhaps be expected on other platforms: the roles of symbols in general appear to be universal to an extent: they are used to explain something that words alone cannot. Different platforms might, however, lead to varying degrees of multimodality, and in some cases other linguistic roles might be more prevalent. At a surface level, it would appear that platforms such as instant messaging, Twitter and Instagram (other media where messages are often short and utilize emoji) show an increased degree of **function** and **content** use, such as replacing letters, words or other linguistic features with emoji. Although these uses are present in Twitch.tv chatrooms, they are clearly a minority to the multimodal roles.

The main problem of the present study is that because the interpretations of emoji can vary, the analyses of meanings of emoji and their effects on textual utterances can be somewhat subjective. I went to some lengths to try and account for multiple interpretations where I saw them as relevant, but a method to better frame the analysis was needed. The survey

part of the study was made in an effort to provide a framework to analyse the Twitch chat data. This proved largely successful, as users' perceptions of the meaning of each emoji could be categorised and a standard definition could be reached.

### **5.1 Subjects of further study**

More and larger-scale surveys about perceived emoji meanings would give us insight into what emoji users believe emoji to mean and thus help in illuminating the potential variances in use. These might in turn give rise to new difficulties, such as why these variances might emerge – this might be interesting to study in a dedicated paper, as well.

Another area of potentially interesting research material would be to compare multiple Twitch communities in terms of their emoji usage habits – these can vary greatly. We could potentially gain insight into what specific emoji can tell about the people that choose to use them, or the communities themselves.

Recently, as I have studied the subject further, I have come to realize that Twitch emoji (in particular, for other emoji I cannot confidently say) seem to come and go in trends – when searching for more data from recent recordings, it turned out that the emoji I have focused on in this study are now used nowhere near as prominently as they used to back in 2018-2019 when I started my research. The trend dynamics of emoji in general are interesting, and whether there are particular differences between different emoji use contexts would be a good area for further study. Trends and changes in culture tell a lot about the changes in us as people, and the evolution and turnover of specific emoji, as well as their meanings and functions, would no doubt reveal a lot about their users.

## **6 Bibliography**

ADL.org. <https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/pepe-the-frog>. (Taken 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2021)

- Ben-Ze'ev, Aaron & Aharon (2000). *The Subtlety of Emotions*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press.
- Derks, Bos & von Grumbkow (2007). *Emoticons in Computer-mediated Communication: Social Motives and Social Context*. *Cyberpsychol Behav.* N. pag.  
<https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/cpb.2007.9926>
- Dresner, E. & Herring, S. (2010). *Functions of the Nonverbal in CMC: Emoticons and Illocutionary Force*. *Communication Theory* 20(3): 249-268. Washington D.C, International Communication Association.
- Fernández-Dols, J., Russell J. *The Science of Facial Expression*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fernández-Dols, J. Crivelli C. (2013) *Emotion and Expression: Naturalistic Studies*. *Emotion Review* 5(1): 24-29.  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1754073912457229>
- Furino, Giaco (2016). *Pepe the Frog's Creator Talks Making Zine History*. Vice.com.  
<https://www.vice.com/en/article/qkw97d/pepe-frog-creator-matt-furie-talks-zine-history>  
 (taken 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2021)
- Gesselman A., Ta V., Garcia J. (2019) *Worth a Thousand Interpersonal Words: Emoji as Effective Signals for Relationship-Oriented Digital Communication*. *PLoS ONE* 14(8). N. Pag.
- Hakami (2017). *The Importance of Understanding Emojis: An Investigative Study*. *Social Networking* 10 (2). N.pag. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.
- Harrison, H., Birks M., Franklin R., Mills J. (2017). *Case Study Research: Foundations and Methodological Orientations*. *Analyzing Narratives Across Media* 18(1). N. pag.  
<https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/2655>

Hébert, Louis (2011). *The functions of language*. », in Louis Hébert (dir.), Signo [online], Rimouski (Quebec), <http://www.signosemio.com/jakobson/functions-of-language.asp>

Houston K. (2013). *Shady Characters: The Secret Lives of Punctuation, Symbols, and Other Typographical Marks*. New York City: W.W. Norton Company.

Jackson Tolins & Patrawat Samermit (2016) *GIFs as Embodied Enactments in Text-Mediated Conversation*. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 49:2, 75-91,

Jakobson (1960). *Linguistics and Poetics in Style in Language*. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics* 7 (3), 350-377. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Lankshear, Knobel (2011). *New Literacies: everyday practices and social learning*. Open University Press. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.

Luukkonen, J. (2017). *The semiotic and social functions of Twitch.tv's emoticons in spoken interaction*. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, Department of Languages

Mendelsohn, Tom. 2017: *Heroes of the Storm: 2,490 matches later, here's why I can't stop playing*. <https://arstechnica.com/gaming/2017/04/heroes-of-the-storm-2-0/>. (taken March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021.)

Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation (2nd ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, Thebault-Spieker, Chang, Hecht (2016). *"Blissfully happy" or "ready to fight": Varying Interpretations of Emoji*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Na'aman, Provenza, Montoya (2017). *Varying Linguistic Purposes of Emoji in (Twitter) Context*. *Student Research Workshop*, 136-141. Vancouver, Canada: Association for Computational Linguistics.



Roy, Jessica (2016) *How 'Pepe the Frog' went from harmless to hate symbol*. Los Angeles Times. (<https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-pepe-the-frog-hate-symbol-20161011-snap-htmlstory.html>) (taken 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2021.)

Stake, Robert E. (1995) *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tolins, J. & Samermit P. (2016). *GIFs as Embodied Enactments in Text-Mediated Conversation*. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 49 (2): 75-91

Wenger-Trayner E. & B. (2015). *Introduction to communities of practice*. <https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/> (21<sup>st</sup> May, 2021)

Yin, Robert K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. CJPE 30(1) N. pag. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

## Using Twitch chat emoji

Questionnaire base courtesy of Miller et al. 2016, modified

APPENDIX 1. 1/27

- 1 How long have you been using Twitch chat? Both reading and writing counts.



8% (7)

Less than a year

25% (21)

1-2 years

18% (15)

2-3 years

49% (41)

More than 3 years

12.57

Standard Deviation

84

Responses

- 2 How much do you participate in Twitch chat? Both reading and writing counts.



14% (12)

Basically not at all

56% (47)

Some

30% (25)

A lot

14.45

Standard Deviation

84

Responses

**3** In 10 words or less for each, what do you think this emoji (1) means?

Apprehension or tension

Anxiety

Something that could have been OK went bad

Stress, anxiety, uncomfot, fear

intense moment/insane play

Oh jeez

I am saddened by what is going on

I'm nervous

Pepe trump stressed

"I am nervous/scared/concerned."

POGGERS

FeelsBadMan

Kappa

Pepe

Maybe some embarrassment or fearful excitement of whats gonna happen?

Racists are scared

When something scary or stressful happens

Expression of nervousness or worry

Stressful situation

Embarrassment for own disfunctionality

Someone made a mistake that is funny

we're no strangers to love

A tense or close situation, perhaps a near death experience in game.

Something is perceived as stressful (jokingly or not)

being in a weird/bad situation, odds not in your favor

Stress, tension, suspense

No idea, missed the origin of "monkaS."

Uneasiness, discomfort

Nervous

nervous

Nervousness, close call, "oh shit", apprehension.

Nervous anxiety

Nervous/Unnerving feeling

Pocket Spaghetti Intensifies

Being under pressure

Discomfort

Stress anxiety nervous wtf uhh waiting

tense situations

monkaS

I'm anxious and nervous about what is going to happen

Scary, spooky, creepy

A very tense moment

Tough situation or a close call

It's a nervous frog

It means a tense situation is unfolding.

You sweatin' because some shit about to drop on you

TFYM when you see your puppy injured his paw.

Oh man

Close call, scary moment, risky

Intense

Tense or creepy stream atmosphere.

nervous or anxious

Sadness or feeling uncomfortable

Tension, unexpected event or a close call

Something was funny or ridiculous

Oh shit

nervous

Anxiety

cringe situation causing anxiety

alt-right support

Worried, Pensive, Shaken, Scared

Stressed, nervous, or uneasy

never really understood its meaning

tension, anxiety, impatiently waiting for an outcome of a situation

Almost no clue. Something about being puzzled/seeing smth inadequate.

stressful situation

A somewhat unexpected intense moment, that almost makes you hold your breath.

Stressful situation, suspense, tension

Heavy stress or tension

panic, fear, cold sweat after a close call

Under big stress

i dont know

A tense moment

When the player nearly dies

Heatenings, scared, excitement

Discomfort and awkwardness

Nervousness and being scared

Tough situation or a close call

Its tense pepe showing some kind of "Excitement" or uptightness

	APPENDIX 1. 5/27
when the game is intense	
Something stressful or frightening	
Close call, panic, heatenings	
something stressful happened on stream	
A state of fear or excitement	

**4** In 10 words or less for each, what do you think this emoji (2) means?

Humor or laughter

Laughing

A way to mock something amusing happening

Mockery and hilarity

you joking ?

Wow that just happened

This amuses me greatly

A funny thing happened

For the lulz

"That thing you just did is ridiculous and funny."

POGGERS

For the lols

Kappa

Laughing about a mistake

its a LOL

Laughing at someone

When something funny happens. Or EU LUL.

Laughing at something or someone,

Joke or something stupid happened

That's hilarious

Someone said or did something silly/dumb

you know the rules, and so do I

Sarcastic or genuine laughter, can be very satirical. ie NA LUL

Something is funny (often at expense of streamer)

APPENDIX 1. 7/27

funny or fail moment

Reaction to a funny event

Laughter at something goofy or unexpected, especially failure

Overt laughter

Funny, you fucked up something.

laughing uot loud

Mocking laughter, super obvious sarcasm, used to frame a statement in all caps that will irritate/mock the "other team". Ex. LUL NA lol LUL

Funny ridiculous

Something Funny

HaHa

Really happy

Mocking laughter

A more funnier version of LOL

laughing

mocking

That's a joke guys

Funny thing happens

Something stupid and funny just happened

Someone/something screws up, gets rekt or talking about achievements.

A mocking laugh

It means someone did something worthy of ridicule.

Expression of fun/hilarious happening

TFYM when your best friend hits a street sign with his head

Lol

NA

HAHA

When something funny happens during the stream



genuine laughter

APPENDIX 1. 8/27

Laughter

Laughter, absurdity of a situation, sheer silliness

Funny, sarcastic

Fail

laughter

Someone did something funny.

stronger, more ironic LOL

funny

Laughing (Out Loud)

Something was funny, often used to laugh at own joke

expression for funny or "what happened?!" moments

something funny happend, mostly because someone failed

Ridiculing something.

something funny

A very funny moment or fact.

LUL like in "NA LUL" : laughing out loud

Laughter, maybe mockery

great amusement, laughing (sometimes at ones expense)

Other form of lots of laughs

i dont know

A funny/questionable moment

Mockery of something

Laughing, reacting to funny moments

Laughter. Be it positive or negative.

Something hilarious or funny

Making fun of something

I have no idea.

when something funny happens

APPENDIX 1. 9/ 27

Something funny that makes you laugh

Mocking laugh

kind of like LOL but more of an insult

Laughing out loud

**5** In 10 words or less for each, what do you think this emoji (3) means?

Sarcasm or irony

Sarcasm

A sense of bravado or machismo, often sarcastic

Sarcasm and light-hearted speech

just a joke bro

Troll

This situation is ironic and/or unlikely

Just kidding

Sarcastic

"Fooled you! But now I'm being obvious about it."

POGGERS

JK

Kappa

Same as lol

I don't even know what kappa means though i've studied it. A word of no meaning tbh.

"Joke"

When something suggestive or troll-ey happens.

Sarcasm, someone is lying

Sarcastic thing or teasing happened

My statement is so ironic

Sarcasm incarnate

A full commitment's what I'm thinking of

Sarcasm, genji mobility is very balanced kappa

Sarcasm

APPENDIX 1. 11/ 27

sarcasm,trolling

Sarcasm, being cheeky

Indicates sarcasm

Sarcasm

Sarcastic

sarcasm

Just joking, not serious, sarcasm, cheeky humor designed to poke fun without malice.

Not serious

Sarcasm

A mix of sarcasm and smugness

Its judgemental

Sarcastic joking around

Jk trolling

after saying something not serious

/s

Do you see what I did ?

Ironi, sarcasm, telling a funny little lie

They see me trolling \*Insert musical note\*

Not meant for being taken seriously

Irony or sarcasm

It denotes sarcasm, so people don't mistake it for truth.

Sarcasm

sarcasm

I'm just joking

Sarcasm

Not really

When streamer is lying about sth. Overused emote

sarcastic

APPENDIX 1. 12/ 27

Irony

Sarcasm

Sarcasm

Indicative of sarcasm

sarcasm

Sarcasm

something bad happened

I've actually had this explained to me, but I can't recall. Doing badly?

Just Kidding (or not Kappa)

Sarcasm

simple irony or sarcasm flag

sarcastic "sure", something funny. or just spam. kappa

Indicates sarcasm.

just kidding

Sarcasm

Sarcasm. Like in "Hey, let's put back Warhead Junction in the rotation Kappa"

Sarcasm, irony, cynicism, laughter

sarcasm, smug

Sarcasm

some old meme from twitch

Shows sarcasm

Used after a sly statement

double negative, changes the meaning to the opposite

Mostly sarcasm.

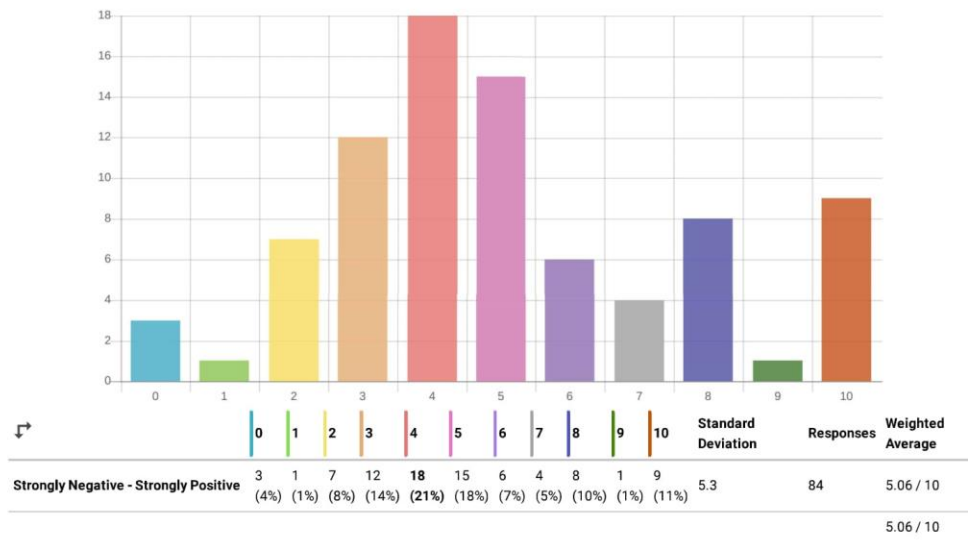
Using irony or lying

Irony

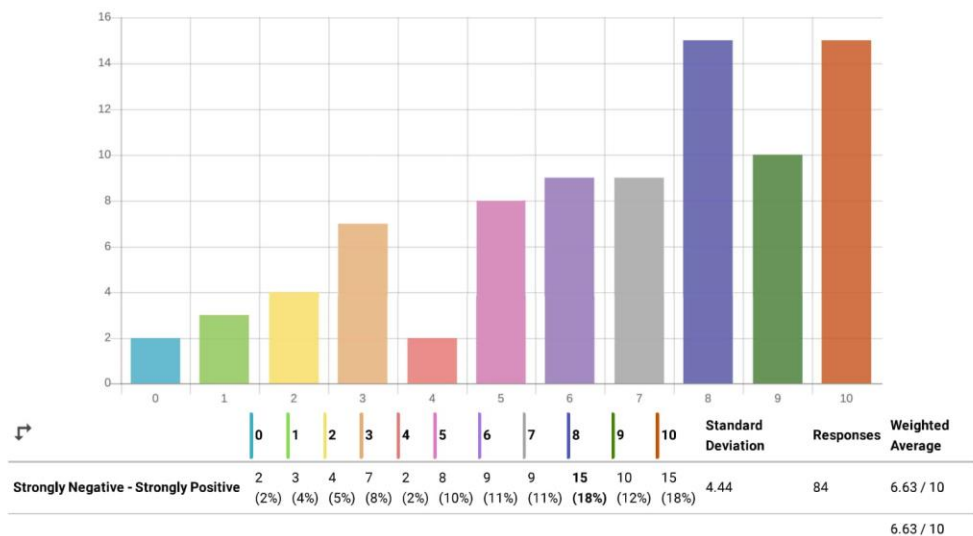
Its spam emoji. Replaced "lol".

literally fits in every situation, sometimes used as a sarcasm indicator.	APPENDIX 1. 13/ 27
Indicates sarcasm, used as means to tell person is joking	
Sarcasm	
sarcastic	
Sarcasm modifier	

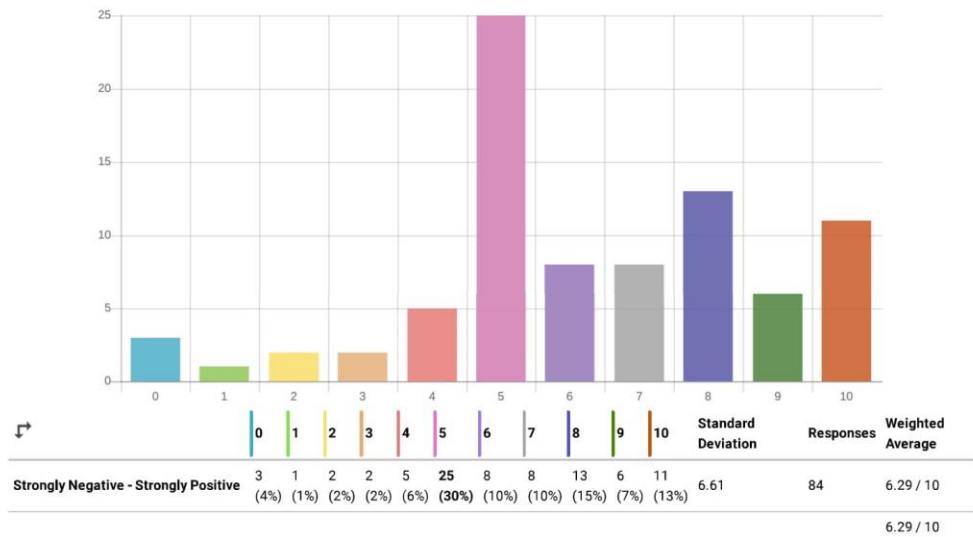
**6** Judge the sentiment expressed by the emoji "monkaS (1)" [on an ordinal scale from Strongly Negative (0) to Strongly Positive (10)]



7 Judge the sentiment expressed by the emoji "LUL (2)" [on an ordinal scale from Strongly Negative (0) to Strongly Positive (10)]



8 Judge the sentiment expressed by the emoji "Kappa (3)" [on an ordinal scale from Strongly Negative (0) to Strongly Positive (10)]





9 Fill in the blank: I would use monkaS (1) [to / for / when] \_\_\_\_\_.

something intense happens

something scary happens

Describe a situation that went bad.

when the broadcaster is in concerning moments or is yelling violently.

be impressed by insane play you wouldnt accomplish anytime soon

To express shock in a humorous way

To express sadness/sentiment

Diablo is missing

Spamming

"a player escapes/enters a tense situation."

POGGERS

Streamer is in tough spot

Kappa

When something stupid happens

when i've fucked up?

Not

when someone comes close to dying in a video game or when something scary happens.

Something tense is occurring

There is a close call on stream

I failed at a tower dive hilariously

When someone feeds in a video game

you wouldn't get this from any other guy

I face checked into a bush party but somehow narrowly survived.

When something intense is happening on stream; when someone says the monkaS supply is running out; when the streamer is talking about banning/moderation; when chat is heavily moderated

APPENDIX 1. 17/ 27

streamer is about to face a tough situation(like 1v5), a tense moment, an uncomfortable/scary situation

Emphasise a suspenseful moment

No idea

a hairy situation occurs

To signal something is worrying, usually in memeish way.

breath taking moments/that make you sweat

I think I might have screwed up/be about to get banned. I saw a very close call/impressive play. To add a layer of uncertainty to what I'm saying/seeing.

Something tense or scary is happening

Mods are banning too much monkaS

When:

>I'm Bruce Wayne

>Alfred is on vacation

>I left the garage door open to the Bat Cave

when im under a lot of pressure

to express sadness over something not actually very sad.

When something bad is going to happen

a tense situation is happening

when someone is pointing gun at me

when I'm nervous about what is going to happen in the game

Something creepy happens

Someone with low health is running away from 5 people

Someone is between a rock and a hard place.

when the mods appear in Twitch chat to "hide your memes".

I would use monkaS to show that whatever just happened makes me anxious or tense.

Enemy 0/3 jungler ganks from vision (sarcastic way monkas)

You are close to dying, and then, from fog of war a skillshot flies just right past you (insert monkas for close call)

When i hover over Genji in ranked and my team first bans him.

To make a joke

When something spooky might happen or a risky play is being made

APPENDIX 1. 18/ 27

Even match 1 minuets left

To show that the atmosphere is tense or the game is spooky.

when someone says something scary or awkward, maybe creepy

When a Player on the stream fails in a sad way

Close call

Never

When my opponent drafts an overwatch hero or chromie

scared

When streamer/chatter says or does something suprising thats against the norms/against the objective of the game.

something unexpected happens

I'm a twelve year old.

I'm worried but also jokingly

If I get bad news

never

when there's a long teamfight in hots stream

when I learn what it means. (I won't anyway, I think.)

there is a clutch situation in the game

To show that the moment is really intense, almost making me hold my breath while i'm waiting for it to be resolved.

Stressful situation, objective coming up, or HOTS chinese bush meta about to gank a team

For when I'm anxious or in anticipation

when someone spooky happens

There's moments of high tension

never

A tense moment is occuring

the streamer nearly dies

when streamer says or does something controversial.

When something not-so-nice happens

when something not so nice happens.

Expressing nervousness

APPENDIX 1. 19/ 27

A streamer survives a tough spot with very little health left

i would not

player just barely escapes death.

Expressing situations when I feel anxious stressed or frightened

Streamer almost dies ingame but barely survives

something stressful happens on stream

Express an intense feeling of being gripped by the action in the stream

**10** Fill in the blank: I would use LUL (2) [to / for / when] \_\_\_\_\_.

something funny happens

something funny happens

Mock someone doing something amusing or in some way pathetic

when someone screws up with plays or makes a good joke.

mocking someone or something (NA LUL) or laughing about a bad play or unpredictable play

When something funny happened

When something is funny

Murky kills Diablo

Funny

"a player does something obviously stupid, but the situation remains funny."

POGGERS

Streamer/Game is funny

Kappa

When some is doing something really dumb

when something is funny or when i try to be a wiseass.

Not

when EU does something stupid, or when someone makes a joke on-steam or something funny happens.

Someone makes a joke or funny mistake

When something funny happens

Another player failed a t a tower dive hilariously

When I feed in a video game

I'm just gonna tell you how im feeling, gotta make you understand

ETC moshes and it hits nobody. Great zoning mosh LUL

	APPENDIX 1.	21/ 27
When something funny happens; when the streamer makes a mistake; when the streamer is complaining about someone else's mistake		
streamer or chat makes a joke, streamer or other players do/say something stupid or funny,after a fail		
Laughing at the misfortune of the streamer		
Something goofy or unexpected happens on stream, especially the streamer dying/losing in an amusing way.		
a funny situation occurs		
When something is funny. Usually just replacement of normie lol.		
something funny happens		
I'm shit-talking another group. Mocking a stupid statement or opinion. Spamming chat with copy/paste trash.		
Someone says something dumb or something funny happens		
NA LUL		
When: I wouldn't.		
when someone tells something funny		
when someone fails		
I want to laugh at something really funny		
something funny happens		
when someone fails		
When I want to make fun of something which happened		
When somethings funny		
When NA does what NA does		
EU beats NA		
a player does an obvious mistake.		
I would use LUL to show that I thought whatever just happened was funny, whether it was intentional or accidental.		
Stream shows last teamfight damage: someone is at zero. Start shouting "0 LUL" in Twitch chat		
Usually, when someone fails something which they should've obviously succeeded in, luls are thrown		
When my best friend hovers over Genji in draft and my team bans him		
To make fun of something		
When something funny or a fail halldmd		
When someone does something I think is funny		

when the streamer fails miserably

when something funny happens, intentional or not

When a Player fails on stream

Laugh

When the streamer fucks smth up

Someone dies stupidly

express laughter

Someone says/does something funny.

somebody fails miserably

When something extraordinary happens, be it funny or epic.

something funny happens

When I make a joke

when something unexpected and funny happens

when someone dies in hots in stupid way, if said player is from NA, bonus points with NA LUL,

to indicate a derogatory tone in regards to anything mentioned. (I won't.)

something funny happens

To emphasize something as ridiculous or very funny.

NA LUL

To express strong laughter, basically an alternative to an all-capital LOL

when something humorous happens on stream

Something funny happened

never

A questionable choice is made

NA wins against EU

to express laughter, when streamer makes a funny mistake for example.

For fun situations

When something makes me laugh

Making fun of streamers misplays

i would not

APPENDIX 1. 23/ 27

something funny happens.

When something makes me laugh or smile

Streamer fails

something embarrassing happens on stream

Something very amusing happens



**11** Fill in the blank: I would use Kappa (3) [to / for / when] \_\_\_\_\_.

I want to make a joke or act stupid

I make a sarcastic comment or joke

To sarcastically punctuate something that I did well, or alternatively, to seriously punctuate something I did well.

when I want to insert sarcasm into comments.

express that a racist joke (as example) is SRSLY just a joke

For when I am making a joke/sarcasm

When the streamer is very lucky/unlucky, especially if they "called it"

I lie but then want to come clean Kappa

Sarcasm

"I want to pretend what I'm saying is witty even though everyone knows it isn't. And that's the joke."

POGGERS

When Streamer/Myself says something I would not like taken seriously.

Kappa

When I'm sarcastic

WTF does kappa mean, REALLY??! i bet u don't know either. no one does.

Not

for when chat confuses a the streamer

Someone makes an obvious lie or Im being sarcastic

A joke donation comes in

I talk about the competence of my team

When I tell a joke

never gonna give you up

chromie is the most fun and interactive character to play against.

To convey sarcasm in a very slow chat (where actual conversation happens as opposed to only being able to tell what emotes are used most often as chat flies by); when there is a Gray Face (no space) copy/pasta; if someone says "golden Kappa check" APPENDIX 1. 25/ 27

saying something sarcastic, spamming it with the rest of chat at random moments

To playfully emphasise sarcasm

When making a sarcastic joke.

denote a sarcastic statement

When I'm being sarcastic, saying something I don't mean.

expressing sarcasm

I want to make sure I'm not taken literally. I think a statement might come off as harsher than I meant it.

Using sarcasm

When I want to actually not waste time on twitch Kappa

When: I'm trolling

I wouldn't use it.

after a sarcastic statement

When I'm being sarcastic or trolling

I say something not serious

after I say obvious lie or sarcasm

When I want to make a funny comment without seem offensive, just a joke

I express irony

When I'm trolling/being sarcastic

I don't want me be taken too seriously

when saying something i actually don't mean.

I would use Kappa to show that whatever I just said wasn't meant to be taken seriously.

Same way as someone in reddit would say something and put /s in the end

When my team has no tanks and i say in chat "tanks are overrated let's go as 5 specialists :kappa:"

To make fun of something

When I'm being a sarcastic asshole

Sure you did a great job, not

To show that streamer is lying about sth

To show that someone is trying to get out

i dont use this emote

To Mark a sentence as irony

Sarcasm

Sarcasm

Discussing how fair and balanced chromie is

le epic troll ecks dee

I mean to convey sarcasm.

something fails hilarously

The streamer is failing.

Trolling or joking

To express sarcasm for something I just said

when I want to make clear that something wasn't meant seriously

when other people use kappa, more kappa are needed

to indicate I was being sarcastic. (I won't.)

i would say something sarcastic

To show my comment is of a sarcastic nature.

Making a sarcastic comment

For expressing sarcasm

when I'm being sarcastic/ironic, when I don't really mean what I'm saying sincerely but for a joke

I'm sarcastic

never

Making a derogatory mark about the streamer

I make a semi-racist comment

To joke around with a streamer, for example: "You are a good player Kappa"

Sarcasm

To express sarcasm

Intentionally giving the streamer poor advice

KAPPA KAPPA KAPPA KAPPA KAPPAPRIDE. Would spam it anywhere.

APPENDIX 1. 27/ 27

when i got bored of other emojis.

When I want to make sure people know I'm not being serious about what I'm saying

Never

I try to say something funny/sarcastic in chat