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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## 6 Minute English

### The rise of the emoji

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*This is not a word-for-word transcript*

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#### **Dan**

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English – the show that brings you an interesting topic, authentic listening practice and six new items of vocabulary. I'm Dan...

#### **Neil**

And I'm Neil. We'll be discussing the rise of those little graphics we call emojis and emoticons.

#### **Dan**

You know, I think emojis are a vital tool for communication. And actually, they're not that new, either.

#### **Neil**

Oh really?

#### **Dan**

Well, that's the perfect opportunity to ask this week's question. When was the first emoticon used? Was it?

- a) 1606
- b) 1862
- c) 1982

#### **Neil**

It must be 1982. I'll go with c).

#### **Dan**

We'll find out if you're right or wrong later in the programme.

#### **Neil**

You know, I think we should clear one thing up before we go any further: what's the difference between an emoticon and an emoji?

**Dan**

Good point. Emoticons came first. They're the images made using normal keys on a keyboard – usually punctuation, letters and numbers. For example a colon – two dots - followed by the curved line of a close brackets is a...

**Neil**

A smiley face. Something you use in way too many of your emails!

**Dan**

Well, thanks! Whereas an emoji is something completely different. It's an actual image. It could be a simple, yellow, smiley face; or something like a dancing lady; or even a bowl of noodles...

**Neil**

Ah yes, all those little images we have in our phones. But you'll have to convince me – why do people use them so much?

**Dan**

Well, let's listen to Professor Vyv Evans. He wrote a book called The Emoji Code:

## **INSERT**

### **Professor Vyv Evans, Author of 'The Emoji Code'**

They enable us to express emotion and **empathy** in digital communication. Increasingly, what we're finding is that digital communication is taking over from certain aspects of face-to-face **interaction**. In the UK today, for example, adults spend 22 hours online on average each week. One of the reasons emojis are so interesting is that they really do enable us to express our emotional selves much more effectively.

**Neil**

Ok so he used a very useful word - **empathy**. It means 'the ability to show you understand someone else's feelings'. Ok – tell me more Dan.

**Dan**

Yes – adding an emoticon can show you understand and express emotion, and show **empathy** – more clearly. In digital communication we lack the visual signals we have in face-to-face **interaction** – as he says.

**Neil**

**Interaction**, meaning 'when people or things communicate with each other'. We can also **interact** with things like machines, computers and social media.

**Dan**

Yes, Professor Evans says 60% of information when we're talking to each other comes from **non-verbal cues**.

**Neil**

Wow, that's a lot. A **cue** is a signal that you need to do something.

**Dan**

For example, an actor goes on stage after their **cue**.

**Neil**

And **non-verbal** means 'without using spoken language'. So, here in the studio there are lots of other **non-verbal** signals about how we're feeling - **non-verbal cues**. For example my facial expression, my body language, the look in my eyes, Dan

**Dan**

There's a glint of rage in there somewhere, Neil. Ok, so let's apply this to digital communication. Imagine I sent you a text saying I hit my finger with a hammer – how would you respond?

**Neil**

Well, it depends. Did you hurt yourself badly?

**Dan**

If I followed it with a sad face emoji, then...?

**Neil**

Then I guess I'd know you hurt yourself. Poor you.

**Dan**

But if I followed it with a laughing emoji – the one with the tears coming out because I'm laughing so much?

**Neil**

Then I'd probably reply saying how stupid and **clumsy** you are!

**Dan**

Exactly – without adding the emoji – it's hard to know my emotional state. The emoji is the **non-verbal cue** – like my facial expression.

**Neil**

By the way, is there an emoji meaning **clumsy**? **Clumsy**, means 'physically awkward' – someone who's **clumsy** falls over a lot and drops things. Anyway, you were saying emoticons aren't as new as I think?

**Dan**

Yes, I asked when they were invented. Is it a) 1606, b) 1862 or c) 1982?

**Neil**

I said 1982.

**Dan**

Well, in fact, a witty speech Abraham Lincoln reprinted in a newspaper as far back as 1862 included a semi colon with a close brackets.

**Neil**

Like a winking face?

**Dan**

Exactly. Though people think this was sadly just a typographical error – or what we normally call a **typo**.

**Neil**

A **typo** – a spelling mistake made when typing too fast or carelessly.

**Dan**

The official birth of emoticons is usually given as 1982, when a US professor instructed his students to use smiley faces to indicate jokes - in digital a communication.

**Neil**

Wow, so they're over 30 years old. Maybe I should start using them. Let's round up with another look at today's words.

**Dan**

Sure. The first word we had was **empathy**. Do you have a lot of **empathy**, Neil?

**Neil**

Yes, I think I'm quite good at understanding other people's feelings. My friends tell me that, anyway! It's important to **empathise** with your colleagues too.

**Dan**

That's not what I saw in your eyes! Yes, **empathy** is an important part of all human **interaction**.

**Neil**

Nicely done. If two people **interact**, it means they 'communicate with each other and react to each other'. It's a pretty broad term.

**Dan**

We could also talk about how the way children **interact** with the internet.

**Neil**

Way too much! Next up, we had **non-verbal**, meaning 'without spoken language'. When I first travelled to Poland, I used a lot of **non-verbal** communication to get my message across. Hand movements, counting with fingers, things like that. Next word, Dan?

**Dan**

Next word... that is my **cue** to say the next word – which is in fact – **cue**. A cue is a signal to do something. A commander could give his officer a **cue** to attack. Or I could give you a **cue** to... sing a song?

**Neil**

No thanks. I'll stick with defining words, thank you. Like **clumsy** – meaning 'physically awkward'. I'd have to say Dan, you're a sporty guy, a talented footballer - you're not **clumsy** at all.

**Dan**

That's what I thought until I broke my leg – after a **clumsy** opponent ran into me...

**Neil**

Ouch. Finally – we had type. No hang on, that's not right. It should say **typo**. A **typo** is a mistake in a written document, or a digital file or message.

**Dan**

Always check your scripts for **typos** before reading them, Neil. And, that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. Please join us again soon!

**Neil**

And we are on social media too - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. See you there.

**Both**

Bye!