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Reinterpreting Technological Language: The Use of Social Media Emojis to Construct New Meanings in Isixhosa Language

Quatro Mgogo, PhD

School of Communication Studies, North-West University

Indigenous Language Media in Africa (ILMA) Research Entity

ABSTRACT

Human language is not only one of the most complex cognitive functions that we command, but it is also the aspect of the mind that makes us uniquely human (Hagoort, 2019). As the social networking among humans dates around one hundred thousand years back, humans have been known as one of the social species, where one of the primary needs of human is to communicate and socialize with other humans. With a distance as a limit to human communication, the advent of technological communication (social media) has shrunk our notion of distance, time and space (Seargeant and Tagg, 2014). Recently, social media has developed its language by introducing emojis which aims at simplifying the language and communication and to capture the diversity of social media users. In this paper, we are analysing the use of social media emojis to construct new meanings in IsiXhosa language, on selected Facebook posts. Through the use of discourse analyses, based on the exposition mode of discourse analysis, preliminary findings show that despite the social media's attempt to simplify human communication, and threatening the survival of minority languages like IsiXhosa, people are still able to Africanize the new forms of digital communication to their own African context. Moreso, in some languages, especially Nguni languages, social media users have reinterpreted these emojis by adopting them to their languages and gave them new meanings. Furthermore, because of their visualization, findings show that proverbs and idioms, especially in IsiXhosa language (Izaci namaqhalo) have been constructed by reinterpreting some of these emojis. Therefore, this is an interesting finding, especially after the introduction of the fourth industrial revolution, and the fact that it adds to the big question about the future of not only the minority languages but the human language in general.

Keywords: Reinterpretation, Social Media, Emojis, IsiXhosa language, IsiXhosa proverbs and idioms.