

A picture speaks a thousand words. And with over a thousand emoji pictures to represent our words, who needs to speak or write any more?! Let's take a closer look at the UK's fastest-growing language.

According to Professor Vyv Evans of Bangor University, Emoji is the UK's fastest-growing language – evolving faster than any language in history. These little electronic images started life in Japanese mobile phones in the 90s and are now hugely popular. In the UK they are becoming more popular than internet abbreviations like 'lol' (laughing out loud), 'muah' (the sound of a kiss) or 'xoxoxo' (hugs and kisses). They have inspired fashion, like the real-life dress copied from the dancing lady emoji, and are even recognised as art! In New York's Museum of Modern Art you can now see the first set of the 176 original emojis.

Why do we love them so much?

We really seem to 'big red heart' emojis! But why? They allow us to personalise text and have fun as we express ourselves, make people laugh and be creative in how we use them. UK teenagers also told us they really appreciated the fact that emojis are quick and easy.

'... they're quick to use instead of words and show hidden meanings.'

Will, 15

'My favourite emoji is 'laughing face' because it saves you putting 'hahaha' or 'lol.'

Lucia, 15

'It's easier for lazy people.'

Lucy, 15

'Yeah, cuz talking's effort.'

Katy, 15

People also really identify with their favourite emojis. The emojis we choose can reflect our personality. What does your recently used emoji board say about you? Is it full of party poppers and smileys? Or unhappy faces? In the UK, the most used emojis are 'face with tears of joy', 'face blowing a kiss' and 'love heart'. Maybe (with emojis at least) the British are more fun and romantic than people think! You can also tell a lot about a culture from their emoji complaints. Until 2015 when the 'cheese wedge' arrived, British people were constantly complaining about the lack of cheese! Now, the addition of 'bacon' in 2016 means we're very close to a full English breakfast.

Diversity and representation

Getting the emoji you want can be a more serious problem than not finding exactly what you had for breakfast. Emojis do not always represent the people that use them. However, after many years of public anger and campaigning, things are changing. Instead of just cartoon-yellow people and faces, we now have the option for five different skin colours. Recent updates also included opposite gender pairs, so we have 'Mrs Father Christmas', a smartly dressed 'man in tuxedo', as a partner for the bride, and a 'dancing man', to match the dancing lady. Soon there will be a redhead emoji, by popular demand, and a woman wearing a headscarf, after German teenager Rayouf Alhumedhi campaigned for an emoji to represent her.

Emojis for campaigns

Can emojis help to change society for the better? Did you know that the 'eye in speech bubble' or 'I am a witness' emoji represents speaking out about online bullying? It was created by Apple and the Ad Council for their 'I Am A Witness' campaign. Use it to say that someone's comment is rude and not OK, or to show someone that you're on their side when people are not treating them right.

Companies such as McDonalds have also tried to use our love of emojis to their advantage. In their 'good times' campaign they use a series of emojis on a billboard to tell a story of a frustrating day given a happy ending by a visit to McDonalds. Unfortunately for McDonalds, the blank white space after the end of the story was too tempting for British graffiti artists. Can you guess what they added? That's right ... the vomiting emoji was a popular choice!

The future of emojis

What is the future of emojis? They are already shaping social media as existing and new platforms evolve to incorporate and respond to their use. Is emoji evolving so rapidly that it will soon compete with English as a global language? Or is technology changing so fast that emojis will soon be forgotten when the next big thing comes along? It is hard to predict and even technology and language experts are divided on the subject. What do you think? Keep your eyes open for new developments!