

**Nataliia Bober,**  
*Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor,  
Associate Professor at the Department of Germanic Philology,  
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9639-0562>  
Kyiv, Ukraine*

## **Sentential and Suprasentential Models of the Verbal Emoticon: A Structural and Functional Analysis**

### **Реченнєві та надреченнєві моделі вербального емотикону: структурно-функційний аналіз**

**Summary.** *The article examines sentential and suprasentential models of the verbal emoticon as structurally and functionally organised means of representing emotion in contemporary English discourse. The study proceeds from the assumption that the verbal emoticon should be treated not as an isolated lexical marker of affect, but as a multilevel linguistic formation whose emotive potential is realised through syntactic configuration, contextual deployment, and discourse dynamics. The purpose of the article is to identify the principal structural patterns of verbal emoticons at the level of the sentence and the suprasentential unity, as well as to determine their communicative and pragmatic functions in the expression, intensification, modulation, and interpretation of emotional meaning. The analysis distinguishes a range of sentential models, including one-word utterances, elliptical constructions, exclamatory and interrogative emotive patterns, full predicative structures with explicit emotive predicates, and parcelled constructions. At the suprasentential level, special attention is paid to models of emotional amplification, clarification, contrast, repetition, dialogic interaction, and narrative-emotive unfolding. It is argued that these models differ not only in their formal organisation but also in the ways they encode the speaker's affective stance, regulate interpersonal alignment, and structure the interpretive space of discourse. The findings demonstrate that verbal emoticons function as syntactic and discursive devices that ensure the gradual or concentrated actualisation of emotion, thereby contributing to textual cohesion, expressive force, and pragmatic impact. The study substantiates the relevance of integrating structural, functional, and discourse-analytic approaches to the investigation of emotive language and highlights the theoretical significance of verbal emoticons for contemporary linguistics, corpus-based discourse studies, and the analysis of emotionally marked communication.*

**Key words:** *emotional representation, emotive syntax, discourse organisation, pragmatic functions, syntactic modelling, emotionally marked utterance, textual cohesion, affective semantics.*

**Анотація.** У статті досліджено реченнєві та надреченнєві моделі вербального емотикону як структурно й функціонально організовані засоби репрезентації емоцій у сучасному англomовному дискурсі. Вихідним положенням дослідження є розуміння вербального емотикону не як ізольованого лексичного маркера афективності, а як багаторівневого мовного утворення, емотивний потенціал якого реалізується через синтаксичну конфігурацію, контекстуальне розгортання та дискурсивну динаміку. Метою статті є виявлення основних структурних моделей вербального емотикону на рівні речення та надреченнєвої єдності, а також визначення їхніх комунікативних і прагматичних функцій у вираженні, інтенсифікації, модифікації та інтерпретації емоційного змісту. У межах аналізу виокремлено низку реченнєвих моделей, зокрема однослівні висловлення, еліптичні конструкції, окличні та питальні емотивні структури, повні предикативні конструкції з експліцитними емотивними предикатами, а також парцельовані конструкції. На надреченнєвому рівні особливу увагу приділено моделям емоційного наростання, уточнення, контрасту, повтору, діалогічної взаємодії та наративно-емотивного розгортання. Обґрунтовано, що зазначені моделі відрізняються не лише формальною організацією, а й способами кодування афективної позиції мовця, регулювання міжособистісної взаємодії та структурування інтерпретаційного простору дискурсу. Результати дослідження засвідчують, що вербальні емотикони функціонують як синтаксичні й дискурсивні засоби, які забезпечують поступову або концентровану актуалізацію емоції, сприяючи текстовій зв'язності, експресивній виразності та прагматичному впливу. Дослідження підтверджує доцільність інтеграції структурного, функціонального та дискурс-аналітичного підходів до вивчення емотивної мови й акцентує теоретичну значущість вербального емотикону для сучасної лінгвістики, корпусних студій дискурсу та аналізу емоційно маркованої комунікації.

**Ключові слова:** емоційна репрезентація, емотивний синтаксис, дискурсивна організація, прагматичні функції, синтаксичне моделювання, емоційно марковане висловлення, текстова зв'язність, афективна семантика.

Introduction. The linguistic representation of emotion remains one of the most productive and methodologically significant domains of contemporary philological inquiry. In modern discourse studies, emotion is no longer treated merely as a reflection of an inner psychological state; rather, it is understood as a linguistically mediated and context-dependent phenomenon that emerges through the interaction of lexical choice, syntactic organisation, pragmatic intention, and discourse environment [4; 7; 9]. Such an approach is particularly relevant to contemporary English, where emotional meaning is increasingly realised in compressed, dynamic, and interaction-sensitive forms.

Within this broader field, special attention should be paid to verbal units that function as compact markers of affective stance, emotional reaction, and interpersonal positioning. Interjections, discourse markers, lexical surrogates, and related expressive forms have long occupied

a marginal place in grammatical description; however, recent studies convincingly demonstrate that such units play a central role in structuring interaction, negotiating stance, and organising discourse progression [5; 8]. In particular, M. Dingemanse argues that interjections should be viewed not as peripheral «affect bursts» but as essential interactional devices that contribute to the management of conversational coherence and speaker alignment [5].

Against this background, the verbal emoticon may be defined as a lexicalised verbal marker of emotion whose full semantic and pragmatic value becomes visible only in discourse. Unlike graphic emoticons or emoji, the verbal emoticon belongs to the verbal plane of expression and participates directly in sentence construction and discourse organisation. In digitally mediated communication, such units often combine expressive economy with a substantial pragmatic load, functioning as signals of emotional intensity, evaluation, mitigation, irony, or solidarity [2; 6; 12]. At the same time, contemporary research into language and emotion indicates that emotional meaning cannot be adequately accounted for by isolated lexical markers alone; it must be interpreted in relation to context, sequential environment, and discourse development [4; 7; 11].

Despite the growing scholarly interest in emotive language, discourse markers, and emotion-sensitive communication, the structural modelling of verbal emoticons at the sentential and especially suprasentential levels has not yet received sufficient systematic treatment. Existing studies tend to focus either on general questions of emotional language, on the pragmatics of computer-mediated cues, or on computational emotion recognition [1; 10; 11]. Far less attention has been paid to the syntactic and discourse patterns through which emotional meaning is distributed, intensified, clarified, contrasted, or narratively unfolded. This underexplored aspect determines the scholarly relevance of the present article.

The practical significance of the study is conditioned by the possibility of applying its results in corpus annotation, discourse analysis, pragmatics, stylistics, and computational approaches to affect-sensitive language processing. Recent research in corpus pragmatics and emotion recognition in conversation shows that interpreting emotional meaning requires close attention to contextual embedding, sequential dynamics, and discourse organisation rather than relying solely on isolated lexical cues [3; 10; 13].

The **aim** of the article is to identify and systematise the principal sentential and suprasentential models of the verbal emoticon in contemporary English discourse and to determine their structural organisation and functional potential in the representation of emotional meaning. To achieve this aim, the following objectives are set:

1. to clarify the linguistic status of the verbal emoticon within the system of emotive language;
2. to classify its principal sentential realisations;
3. to describe its main suprasentential patterns of deployment;
4. to establish their communicative, pragmatic, and discourse-organising functions.

Methodology. The study's methodological framework is interdisciplinary, combining structural-syntactic, functional-pragmatic, discourse-analytic, and corpus-assisted procedures. Such an integrated design is justified by current research showing that emotion in language cannot be adequately interpreted at the level of isolated lexical items alone, but must be examined in relation to context, interaction, and discourse organisation [4; 9; 13].

The study proceeds from a functional-structural understanding of the verbal emoticon as a multilevel linguistic formation whose emotive potential is realised through syntactic patterning, discourse position, and pragmatic effect. This view correlates with contemporary approaches that reconsider interjections and discourse-pragmatic markers as central rather than peripheral elements of linguistic organisation [5; 8]. From this perspective, the verbal emoticon is interpreted not merely as an affective lexical signal, but as a discourse-sensitive unit involved in stance marking, interpersonal alignment, and the management of emotional interpretation.

The research is based on a mixed qualitative-analytical model with corpus-assisted observation. The qualitative component is used to identify, interpret, and classify the structural realisations of verbal emoticons in authentic English-language discourse, while the corpus-assisted component serves to verify recurrence, contextual distribution, and functional regularities across a broader empirical base [9; 13]. At the same time, recent work in corpus pragmatics warns against reducing complex categories such as stance, evaluation, and emotion to automatic sentiment scoring alone [3]. For this reason, the present study relies on linguistically informed contextual interpretation rather than decontextualised computational labelling.

The empirical material consists of emotionally marked utterances and discourse fragments in contemporary English in which verbal emoticons occupy structurally salient positions. The unit of analysis is therefore not restricted to a single lexical item: it includes the sentence, the immediate micro-context surrounding the emotive marker, and the larger suprasentential sequence within which emotional meaning is intensified, clarified, contrasted, repeated, dialogically negotiated, or narratively unfolded. This methodological decision is supported by recent studies on

language and emotion, which stress the decisive role of context, sequence, and interactional environment in affective interpretation [4; 10].

At the first stage, the descriptive method is employed to identify verbal emoticons and characterise their formal linguistic properties. At the second stage, the structural-syntactic method is used to classify the principal sentential and suprasentential models. At the third stage, discourse analysis enables the determination of how verbal emoticons function in connected discourse, interact with neighbouring utterances, and contribute to coherence and affective progression [8; 13]. At the fourth stage, the pragmatic method is applied to establish the communicative functions of verbal emoticons, including the encoding of affective stance, the regulation of interpersonal alignment, and the intensification or mitigation of emotional content [2; 6; 12]. Finally, contextual and interpretive analysis is used to explain why the same verbal emoticon may perform different functions depending on genre, discourse environment, speaker intention, and sequential placement.

The reliability of the methodological model lies in multi-method triangulation. By combining structural description, syntactic classification, discourse analysis, pragmatic interpretation, and corpus-assisted verification, the study reduces the risk of one-dimensional analysis and enables the account of both the formal and functional complexity of verbal emoticons [3; 9; 13].

**Results and Discussion.** The analysis demonstrates that the verbal emoticon in contemporary English should be interpreted not as an isolated expressive token, but as a structurally and functionally organised unit whose emotive potential is realised at different levels of discourse segmentation. The results confirm that the verbal emoticon displays regular patterns of occurrence both within a single sentence and across suprasentential formations, where emotional meaning is distributed, intensified, reformulated, or interactionally negotiated. Accordingly, two principal domains of realisation may be distinguished: sentential models and suprasentential models.

At the sentential level, the verbal emoticon functions primarily as a compressed marker of affective reaction. The first and most compact type is represented by one-word utterances, in which the emotive marker constitutes an autonomous communicative unit: *Wow! Ugh! Seriously? Great!* These forms are characterised by syntactic minimalism, yet they are pragmatically dense and highly expressive. Their communicative effect depends on immediacy, economy, and contextual salience. Such units are especially frequent in interactional discourse, where they serve as instant emotional responses, evaluative signals, and discourse-uptake devices [5; 12].

A second recurrent type is formed by elliptical constructions, in which emotional meaning is conveyed through syntactically reduced but semantically interpretable structures: So nice. Not again. Too bad. In these cases, structural incompleteness functions not as a deficiency, but as a resource of emotive economy. The omitted elements are recoverable from context, while the reduction itself foregrounds evaluation over description. This supports the view that emotional force may be intensified through syntactic compression [4; 8].

Another productive group consists of exclamatory constructions, which represent one of the most explicit forms of sentence-level emotional actualisation: That's amazing! How awful this is! I'm so happy! Here, emotional meaning is reinforced both lexically and syntactically. Exclamation foregrounds emotional salience, communicative urgency, and speaker involvement. Such models are especially effective at verbalising high-intensity affective states, including admiration, surprise, joy, frustration, and indignation [4; 7].

The analysis also identifies interrogative emotive patterns, formally shaped as questions but pragmatically oriented toward surprise, disbelief, irritation, irony, or evaluative challenge: Really? Are you kidding me? Why would you do that? This finding is important because it shows that emotional meaning may be encoded indirectly through sentence type. In such structures, interrogativity often serves not to request information, but to externalise stance and intensify evaluation [8; 12].

A further significant type is constituted by full predicative constructions with explicit emotive predicates: I'm thrilled about the result. She felt devastated. It was a huge disappointment. These models are structurally more developed and semantically more transparent than the previously discussed patterns. They not only signal emotion, but also nominate, specify, and conceptualise it. As a result, they perform both expressive and interpretive functions.

The final sentential type identified in the material is represented by parcelled constructions, in which emotional emphasis is achieved through syntactic segmentation: I can't believe it. At all. So unfair. Completely unfair. Parcelling intensifies the emotional impact by redistributing the informational weight across short segments. Its function is not merely stylistic: it reflects affective tension, insistence, hesitation, or emotional overload, and thus serves as a productive means of emotional highlighting [8].

Taken together, the sentential models reveal that verbal emoticons are not random expressive insertions, but recurrent structural formations with identifiable formal and functional properties. Their diversity reflects the multiplicity of ways in which emotion may be compressed, intensified,

reformulated, or made interactionally relevant within the limits of a single utterance.

While sentential models demonstrate the local realisation of emotive meaning, the suprasentential level reveals how emotion unfolds across sequences of utterances and becomes integrated into broader discourse organisation. At this level, verbal emoticons contribute to the gradual construction of affective perspective rather than functioning as isolated emotional signals.

One of the most productive suprasentential patterns is the model of emotional amplification: I didn't expect this. It feels strange. Honestly, I'm shocked. In this configuration, emotive meaning develops cumulatively from a relatively neutral statement toward more explicit emotional articulation. Each subsequent sentence adds interpretive weight to the previous one. Emotional force thus emerges through sequential accumulation rather than through a single isolated marker.

A second type is the model of emotional clarification, in which an initial emotive reaction is subsequently specified or explained: I'm upset. Not because of the result itself, but because of the way it happened. Here, emotion is not merely expressed but analytically unpacked. Such a pattern is especially important in discourse contexts where the speaker seeks to avoid ambiguity and guide interpretation more precisely.

Another recurrent suprasentential formation is the model of contrast, in which emotional meaning arises from the juxtaposition of expectations and outcomes: I thought it would be easy. It turned out absolutely exhausting. In this case, emotional effect is generated by an oppositional discourse structure. Contrast enhances both expressive force and interpretive depth, making this model particularly relevant for representing disappointment, frustration, irony, or disillusionment.

The data also demonstrate the productivity of the model of repetition or lexico-syntactic rhythmization: I'm tired. So tired. Extremely tired. Repetition functions here as a mechanism of semantic reinforcement and rhythmic escalation. It not only duplicates previous content but also reorganises discourse in a way that foregrounds persistence or intensity of emotional experience. In this respect, repetition contributes to both textual cohesion and expressive emphasis.

A distinct suprasentential type is the dialogic model, where verbal emoticons are distributed across speaker turns:

- I got the job.
- Really? That's amazing! I'm so happy for you!

In such cases, emotional meaning is co-constructed rather than individually projected. The verbal emoticon performs the functions of alignment, empathy, evaluation, and social bonding. This model clearly demonstrates the interpersonal dimension of emotive discourse [5; 12].

The final major suprasentential pattern is the narrative-emotive model, in which emotional meaning unfolds through a short narrative sequence: When I saw the message, I froze. For a second, I couldn't breathe. Then I realised it was true, and I felt pure joy. Unlike the previous types, this model embeds emotion in temporal progression and experiential framing. Emotional effect arises through the narration of perception, reaction, realisation, and evaluation. Such patterns are particularly significant for the verbal representation of complex emotions whose interpretation requires causal and temporal development [4].

Overall, the suprasentential analysis confirms that emotional meaning is often distributed across connected discourse rather than concentrated in a single sentence. Verbal emoticons thus contribute not only to local expressivity but also to discourse cohesion, interpretive progression, and affective framing.

A central result of the study is the establishment of a systematic correlation between structural patterning and functional load. Syntactically compressed sentential models tend to foreground immediacy, spontaneity, and expressive condensation, whereas structurally extended and suprasentential models favour emotional development, interpretive clarification, and discourse integration. In other words, the choice of structural form directly shapes the mode in which emotion becomes linguistically available.

These observations substantiate the claim that verbal emoticons should be studied as multilevel discourse units rather than merely lexical signals. Their function is realised not only through what they denote, but also through where they occur, how they are syntactically arranged, and how they interact with surrounding discourse segments. This conclusion is consistent with broader tendencies in the linguistics of emotion, discourse pragmatics, and corpus-based discourse studies, all of which emphasise the contextual, relational, and sequential nature of affective meaning [3; 4; 9].

The findings also highlight the explanatory value of combining structural and functional analysis. A purely lexical or inventory-based approach would not sufficiently explain why the same emotive unit may produce different effects in different syntactic and discourse environments. The present results indicate that exclamation, ellipsis, parcelling, repetition, and sequential contrast are not secondary embellishments, but integral mechanisms of emotive meaning construction.

**Conclusions.** The present study has demonstrated that the verbal emoticon in contemporary English discourse should be interpreted as a multilevel linguistic formation whose emotive potential is realised through structurally and functionally differentiated models at both the sentential and suprasentential levels. The conducted analysis confirms

that the verbal emoticon cannot be reduced to an isolated lexical marker of affect, since its semantic, pragmatic, and discourse-organising properties become fully observable only within syntactic configuration, contextual embedding, and sequential development.

The research has enabled the identification and systematisation of the principal sentential models of the verbal emoticon, including one-word utterances, elliptical constructions, exclamatory and interrogative emotive patterns, full predicative structures with explicit emotive predicates, and parcelled constructions. It has also established the main suprasentential models, namely emotional amplification, clarification, contrast, repetition, dialogic interaction, and narrative-emotive unfolding.

A major conclusion of the article is that there is a direct correlation between structural patterning and functional load. Syntactically compressed models foreground immediacy, spontaneity, and expressive condensation, whereas expanded and suprasentential models are more closely associated with interpretive elaboration, emotional development, and discourse integration.

The theoretical significance of the study lies in substantiating the relevance of structural, functional, and discourse-analytic approaches to the investigation of emotive language. Its practical significance consists in the possibility of applying the proposed typology to corpus annotation, discourse interpretation, the teaching of stylistics and pragmatics, and the analysis of emotionally marked communication in digitally mediated environments.

Prospects for further research may be seen in several directions: corpus-based quantitative analysis of model frequency and distribution across genres; comparative investigation of verbal emoticons in different varieties of English and across languages; study of their interaction with punctuation, graphic emphasis, emoji, and other multimodal resources; and development of computational tools for more accurate interpretation of context-dependent emotional meaning [3; 10; 13].

Thus, sentential and suprasentential models of the verbal emoticon constitute a productive and promising object of contemporary linguistic inquiry, since they reveal how emotion is structurally organised, pragmatically shaped, and discursively unfolded in English communication.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. Adelman J. S., Estes Z., Cossu M. Emotional sound symbolism: Languages rapidly signal valence via phonemes. *Cognition*. 2018. Vol. 175. P. 122–130. DOI : 10.1016/j.cognition.2018.02.007.
2. Derks D., Fischer A. H., Bos A. E. R. The role of emotion in computer-mediated communication: A review. *Computers in Human Behavior*. 2008. Vol. 24, no. 3. P. 766–785. DOI : 10.1016/j.chb.2007.04.004.

3. Bednarek M., Taboada M. Attitude in reported and non-reported news: A critique of sentiment analysis in corpus pragmatics. *Corpus Pragmatics*. 2025. Vol. 9. P. 111–133. DOI : 10.1007/s41701-025-00185-6.
4. Ferré P., Fraga I., Hinojosa J. A. The interplay between language and emotion: A narrative review. *Cognition and Emotion*. 2025. Vol. 39, no. 7. P. 1418–1445. DOI : 10.1080/02699931.2025.2549965.
5. Dingemanse M. Interjections at the heart of language. *Annual Review of Linguistics*. 2024. Vol. 10. P. 257–277. DOI : 10.1146/annurev-linguistics-031422-124743.
6. Dresner E., Herring S. C. Functions of the non-verbal in CMC: Emoticons and illocutionary force. *Communication Theory*. 2010. Vol. 20, no. 3. P. 249–268. DOI : 10.1111/j.1468-2885.2010.01362.x.
7. Betancourt Á.-A., Guasch M., Ferré P. What distinguishes emotion-label words from emotion-laden words? The characterization of affective meaning from a multi-componential conception of emotions. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2024. Vol. 15. Art. 1308421. DOI : 10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1308421.
8. Fraser B. What are discourse markers? *Journal of Pragmatics*. 1999. Vol. 31, no. 7. P. 931–952. DOI : 10.1016/S0378-2166(98)00101-5.
9. O’Keeffe A., McCarthy M. J. (eds.). *The Routledge Handbook of Corpus Linguistics*. 2nd ed. London ; New York : Routledge, 2022. 754 p. DOI : 10.4324/9780367076399.
10. Pereira P., Moniz H., Carvalho J. P. Deep emotion recognition in textual conversations: A survey. *Artificial Intelligence Review*. 2024. DOI : 10.1007/s10462-024-11010-y.
11. Perinán-Pascual C. The use of generative artificial intelligence for interpreting emotions in corpus-based critical discourse analysis. *Corpus Pragmatics*. 2026. DOI : 10.1007/s41701-025-00203-7.
12. Vandergriff I. Emotive communication online: A contextual analysis of computer-mediated communication (CMC) cues. *Journal of Pragmatics*. 2013. Vol. 51. P. 1–12. DOI : 10.1016/j.pragma.2013.02.008.
13. Moreno-Ortiz A., García-Gámez M. Corpus annotation of functional discourse units for aspect-based sentiment analysis. *Corpus Pragmatics*. 2025. Vol. 9. P. 435–461. DOI : 10.1007/s41701-025-00199-0.

Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 19.03.2026  
 Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 16.04.2026  
 Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 29.05.2026