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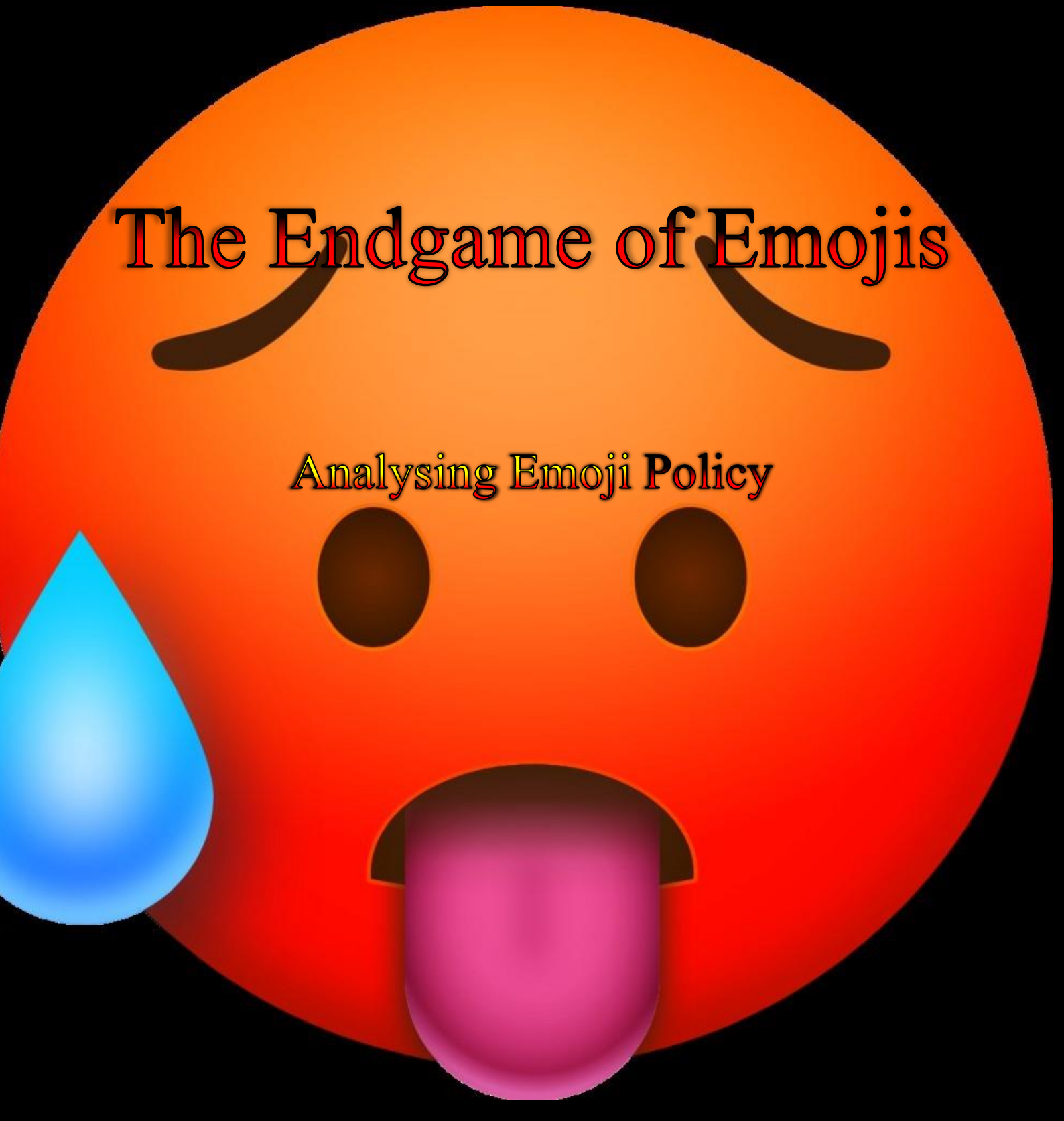
The Endgame of Emojis

Analysing Emoji Policy



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The Endgame of Emojis: Analysing Emoji Policy

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[1] "Hot Face" emoji picture, downloaded from Iconduck.com and created by TheWalePeters. White space removed. Picture is licensed under the open-source deed: CC BY 4.0.

Abstract

Digital communication is as ubiquitous as ever, and emojis have become an integral part of how we communicate. The organisation behind the emojis on your screen is the Unicode Consortium, which is a non-profit organisation harbouring members such as Apple, Google, and Microsoft that currently pay 50.000$ yearly for their memberships with voting rights. The Unicode Consortium curates an encoding font, the Unicode Standard, which is currently used on over 98% of all websites, and when the Unicode Consortium in 2010 included the first set of emojis in the standard, it marked the beginning of emojis as we know them.

In this paper, emojis are argued to have powerful implications from a poststructuralist perspective. This is first done through a literature review, where emojis as a 'language' and the Unicode Consortium's effect on emojis in terms of diversity, racial and capitalist issues are explored. Secondly, the notion of emojis as a 'language' is discussed against Ferdinand de Saussure's notion of the linguistic sign, and it is asserted that emojis in their current form are not a language. Here, the paper turns to Foucault's notion of power relations that are discussed in the context of the Unicode Consortium's governance of emoji users. Emojis are then argued to be expressions of policy on behalf of the Unicode Consortium, and the paper proposes the term *selecting of emojis* to encompass the full range of the Consortium's emoji policy.

The paper then explores how The Unicode Consortium represents its selecting of emojis through both the historical inclusion of flag emojis as a case of cultural diversity in the years 2010-2023, the selection criteria for emoji selection, and the strategy documents concerning the future of Unicode emojis. This is done through a framework of What's The Problem Represented to Be by Bacchi & Goodwin (2016), where it is the represented problematisations in the selecting of emojis by the Unicode Consortium that are the focus of the analysis.

The paper finds that in the Unicode Consortium's representation of its selecting of emojis, the primary 'problem' is that of adding more emojis, shown throughout the representations of emoji selecting in both the original proposal of emojis in 2009 and in strategy documents and blog posts of the early 2020s. The subproblems of this 'problem' are represented to be (1) users potentially not using emojis, (2) the costs of including more emojis, and (3) political criticism for both the inclusion and exclusion of specific emojis. The Unicode Consortium is here found to represent its selecting of emojis as 'unproblematic' regarding potential political criticism by employing a narrative of technological neutrality (Miltner, 2020; Sweeney & Whaley, 2019), a lack of disclosure of reasonings behind concrete emoji selection, and the Consortium's 'solution' to have ambiguous emojis be 'building blocks' for users to 'build' their own meanings in place of adding more emojis.

Specifically, the Unicode Consortium's emoji policy is found to mostly favour those countries represented with flag emojis in its original set of emojis in 2010. These were the United States of America, the United

Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Russia, China, South Korea, and Japan. The represented intention of the original emoji proposal was not to include any more emojis than those 719 emojis, which were specifically ascribed to having been used by Japanese cell phone users. The available emojis today are therefore found to have been affected by the bias inherent in the original set of emojis due in part to the Unicode Consortium's emphasis on usage. The original representation of those ten countries is therefore reflected upon here as being a representation of the Unicode Consortium's intended userbase for emojis.

Additionally, the Unicode Consortium's emphasis on and conflation of emoji usage with the cost of adding emojis is shown in the analysis to reflect the economic 'burden' of its corporate members regarding the implementation of additional emojis in the user interface of their operating systems. The effective goal of TUC's governance in the instance of emojis is therefore reflected upon as an expression of capitalist notions such as profit, despite the organisation's designated 'non-profit' status. Finally, the Unicode Consortium's 'solution' of emojis as 'building blocks' is discussed in relation to its applicability by users, and the role of TUC as an organisation with a 'monopoly' on emojis is discussed regarding advantages of standardisation against disadvantages of capitalistic profit-orientation.

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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

As society becomes increasingly digitalized, our very ability to communicate also becomes increasingly monetized and altered by large corporations selecting what we can and cannot input as characters on our devices. The Unicode Consortium (TUC) is a non-profit corporation, formed in 1991 with an aim to "standardize, extend and promote the Unicode character encoding, a fixed-width, 16-bit character encoding for over 60,000 graphic characters." (The Unicode Consortium, Summary Narrative, 2023m). The Unicode Standard (TUS) is such a standardization, with TUC aiming at text representation in all software products, and as of October 2023, 98% of websites use Unicode instead of any other font (Davis, Slide 9, 2023; W3Techs, 2023). TUC now deals with an expanded array of things regarding TUS such as code libraries, core algorithms, and curation of over 140.000 characters (The Unicode Consortium, Summary Narrative 2023m; Why Join Unicode, 2023y; Davis, Slide 7, 2023). As TUC succinctly puts it in their Unicode Emoji presentation: "On a laptop, server, or mobile phone every character you type, every character you see is Unicode" (Davis, Slide 7, 2023).

Among those more than 140.000 Unicode characters are emojis. According to TUC, emojis are "pictographs (pictorial symbols) that are typically presented in a colorful form and used inline in text." (The Unicode Consortium, Unicode Emoji, 2023t). Emojis can depict a variety of different things such as food, drinks, animals, plants, faces, buildings, weather, activities and more (The Unicode Consortium, Unicode Emoji, 2023t). Currently, there are 3770 emojis included in TUS (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Counts, 2023c). The first 719 emojis were imported from Japanese phone carriers into TUS in 2010, and since 2014, new emojis have been added every year (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Counts, 2023c; UTS #51: Unicode Emoji, 2023q). The process of adding emojis to TUS has since 2014 been based on selection factors, according to TUC, and these selection factors are relayed on a page called 'Guidelines for Submitting Unicode® Emoji Proposals' at TUC's website (The Unicode Consortium, UTS #51: Unicode Emoji, 2023q).

TUC's motives for selecting emojis should not be presumed to be entirely altruistic, and its practices should not be assumed to be objective, because despite it being non-profit, TUC has a select number of members paying between 20.000-50.000$ for voting rights in matters also regarding emojis (The Unicode Consortium, Membership Levels, 2023o). Members are at the time of writing: Apple, Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Meta, Adobe, Netflix, Governments of Bangladesh and Tamil Nadu, ETCO, Airbnb, Salesforce, Sultanate of Oman, and University of Berkely (The Unicode Consortium, Membership History, 2023n). TUC's underlying presumptions when selecting emojis are important to uncover, and a recent example to highlight the importance of such is shown in this quote by the chair of the Emoji Subcommittee at TUC, Jennifer Daniel:

> […] today, there's way over 3,000 of these tiny glyphs at your fingertips. What this means is it requires us to review proposals in a way that maybe we didn't have to do in the earlier days. The criteria for inclusion is much higher.
>
> (Hutchison, 2022)

Here, Daniel does not specify how or why the current number of emojis require TUC to heighten the criteria for emoji inclusion, and in the 'Guidelines for Submitting Unicode® Emoji Proposals', there is no clear timeline regarding how the criteria may have changed (The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). As such, this shows how changes in emoji selection by TUC can happen without the public knowing or even being able to affect any of the decisions, when TUC does not convey their underlying reasoning.

This exemplifies why TUC's motives and responsibilities should be questioned. In this paper, emojis are first argued to have powerful implications through a narrative literature review that discusses firstly whether emojis are a language, and secondly what possible biases there are on behalf of TUC such as capitalist interests, colour-blindness, and gaps in the cultural representation of emojis (see section 2.1). Then, the argument that emojis are not a language is advanced through discussing Saussure's notion of linguistic signs (see section 2.2.1). Therefore, it is instead argued that TUC's relation to emojis can be applied to the framework of Foucault's governmentality (see section 2.2.2). The broad Foucaultian notion of power and hence policy in the poststructural policy analysis approach called What's The Problem Represented to Be (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016) is then related to viewing emojis as an object of analysis (see section 2.2.3). These discussions advance the argument that due to the Foucaultian notion of power being a productive force, I do not regard TUC's policy of emojis to be seen primarily in the TUC's documents of selection criteria nor in the currently available selection of 3000+ emojis but rather in TUC's historical *selecting of emojis* (see section 2.2.4).

As such, this paper analyses TUC's selecting of emojis from 2010 until 2023 with the WPR method, using both the TUC's documents of selection criteria, the cases of flag emoji inclusion and exclusion based on the available documents for the selection of emojis as well as contextual knowledge produced in newspapers and gathered through the narrative literature review. The paper finds that the primary problematisation of TUC is the addition of more emojis, while the 'subproblems' in this problematisation are (1) the (potential) non-use of added emojis, (2) the costs of adding emojis, and (3) the political critique for adding and excluding emojis. The selecting of emojis is found 'unproblematised' primarily through a narrative of technological neutrality, non-disclosure of reasons for selecting specific emojis, and the 'solution' of presenting emojis as 'building blocks' for users to create their own meanings through ambiguous emojis. The discussion centres around whether TUC's 'solution' of 'building blocks' is applicable by users, and what TUC's main role is shown to be through its representation of the selecting of emojis.

1.2 Problem formulation

How does The Unicode Consortium (TUC) represent its selecting of emojis for The Unicode Standard (TUS) through the historical inclusion of flag emojis in the years 2010-2023 and related policy documents?

Chapter 2

2.1 Literature Review: Emojis are power

In this chapter, knowledge and critique concerning emojis, The Unicode Consortium, and the Consortium's selection criteria is relayed and discussed to some extent through a review of the literature on these subjects. The primary purpose is to relay relevant literature and knowledge that is used to discuss findings in later sections and chapters, but the review itself is not considered the primary way to answer the problem formulation. It can therefore be characterized as a narrative review (Bryman, 2012, p. 110).

The narrative review is conveyed with an extensive scope in mind to cover the contextual information relevant to the subject areas and the analysis. This is also due to the methodology of What's The Problem Represented To Be (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016; see sections 2.2.3, 3.1.3), as context from the review is leveraged in the analysis.

First, the review discusses the notion of emojis as a 'language' through literature that regards comparisons to language, emoji interpretation, and usage across countries. Secondly, TUC's effect on emojis is explored through both literature on how the Unicode Standard affects languages, then the literature on the Consortium's racial effects on emojis, and finally, the literature that does concern the emoji selection criteria to some extent. To the best of my knowledge, no peer-reviewed paper has been written with the sole focus of performing in-depth questioning of The Unicode Consortium's selecting of emojis and its selection criteria at the time of writing, despite some papers being very close subject wise.

2.1.1 Emojis as a 'language'

Whether emojis can be a language is a significant discussion as it relates to what kind of power that TUC holds over them, and what this power means for their use. As such, this section also exemplifies what issues can arise when encoding characters that are ubiquitously used but unpredictably interpreted.

For Alshenqeeti (2016), the linguistic capabilities of emojis can be better related to naturalistic communication as a sort of paralanguage, where especially facial expressions have potential in communication cross-culturally. The notion of naturalistic communication may be supported by the findings of Lee et al. (2019) that many Chinese radicals have direct or indirect emoji equivalents, despite being 3,000 years older. Yet some gaps still exist in the emoji 'lexicon' according to Lee et al. (2019). The notion that emojis are not equivocal to words can also be supported by how the meaning of emojis are fundamentally more difficult to understand than words according to the findings of Tang et al. (2020), where they tested how meaning retrieval was impacted by emojis compared to words.

In the field of law, direct comparisons of emojis and words have been made due to the ubiquitous nature of emojis and their influence on legal matters. Goldman (2018) discusses the IP protection of emojis, arguing that emojis are akin to words and short phrases, since they are "[…] communication building blocks for larger messages in sentences and paragraphs" (2018, p. 1290). Goldman further notes that the IP protection of emojis "[…] provides IP owners with an unprecedented degree of control over how people talk with each other" (Goldman, 2018, p. 1290). Discussing this notion of emojis being equivalent to words in the field of law, Danesi (2021) asserts how emojis can show criminal intent, while relaying how emojis are used to convey different meanings, so they are more akin to a 'natural' language for which rules may not be entirely set. Outside the field of law, other consequences of emojis may be that they grant capitalist interests even more access to data about users, as Stark & Crawford argue that "[…] informational capital continually seeks to instrumentalize, analyze, monetize, and standardize affect." (Stark & Crawford, 2015, p. 8).

Regarding the interpretation of emojis, we deduced nine categories of emoji usage and interpretation from 10 interviews in a semester project at Aalborg University in 2020 (Rønsbro et al., 2020). These corresponded to some degree to Kelly & Watts' (2015) findings from 20 interview participants that emojis are used to create continued connection, invoke light-heartedness in a conversation, make the conversation more personal, and reinforce a message. These are also echoed in the findings of Shah & Tewari (2021) that many different elements motivate emoji usage in youth, such as linguistic patterns, social relationships, gender, and level of formality. Li & Yang's (2018) findings also shows such usage of emojis in their seven revised functions of emojis. However, Li & Yang (2018) do base their dimensioning of usage categories on the questionable presumption that emoticon usage would be equivalent to emoji usage, which is a notion that lacks confirmability (Bryman, 2012, p. 390).

Specifically, emojis can be used to amplify both negative effects and positive effects from messages, with positive emojis conveying general positivity while negative emojis relay more specific mental states (Boutet et al., 2021; Erle et al., 2021; Pfeifer et al., 2021). The positive effects of emojis are stronger than the negative effects, and they can induce pleasantly affective states (Erle et al., 2021; Gantiva et al., 2021). Congruence between text and emojis can increase understanding of messages, suggesting that emojis can be effective cues in non-verbal communication, and emojis with clear semantic meanings are more likely to be used (Boutet et al., 2021; Erle et al., 2021; Ai et al., 2017). Emojis are also found to be more prevalent in sentimental contexts, and most emojis used are positive (Ai et al., 2017; Novak et al., 2015; Li & Yang, 2018).

Other functions of emojis can be for both parties in a conversation to appear positively and seem more polite (Coyle & Carmichael, 2019; Beißwenger & Pappert, 2019). The findings of Riordan (2017a; 2017b) suggest that non-face emojis can convey positive emotions as well as disambiguate messages, and that the affection of non-face emojis may relate to the level of disambiguation that they contribute to a message. Emojis are also used for flirting, and mutually equivalent emoji use may signal romantic capability, while specific emoji

combinations can signal sexual interest (Thomson et al., 2018; Nexø & Strandell, 2020). Sender gender may also affect how emojis come across in terms of likability and appropriateness (Butterworth et al., 2019).

Across countries, emoji usage is likely to vary. According to the findings of Lu et al. (2016) based on a corpus of 6,06 billion messages with emoji usage measured from input throughout one month in 2015, French users used mostly heart emojis, while users in other countries such as US, Spain, Russia, Turkey, Indonesia, Colombia, Argentine, Mexico, and Brazil used mostly face emojis. Additionally, Lu et al. (2016) found that 119 of the available 1281 emojis at the time constituted about 90% of emoji use. The findings of Ljubešic & Fišer (2016) support the notion that emoji usage varies by country to an extent based on a cluster analysis of a corpus of 17 million tweets, despite the dimensioning of their analysis being somewhat unclear regarding specific clusters of countries and emojis. However, Barbieri et al. (2016) found that across 30 million tweets in four languages – Spanish, Italian, UK English and US English - the semantics of emojis remained largely the same with only some emojis exhibiting language-specific patterns.

The variation of emoji use does also potentially impact emoji interpretation and negate the potentially linguistic effects of emojis. Variations in interpretation of emojis have been found to happen both within one platform and across different platforms with different depictions of emojis (Miller, et al., 2016; Tigwell & Flatla, 2016; Franco & Fugate, 2020). Facial emojis across platforms and versions have also not been found to be anatomically equivalent (Fugate & Franco, 2021).

As such, considering emojis to be a language is not likely to be feasible due to these differences in interpretations and contextual uses across the world, where there could possibly be many, many different local and contextual emoji 'dialects'. This ambiguity of emojis may be created in part by The Unicode Consortium's curation of emojis, which is therefore explored through literature in the following section.

2.1.2 The Unicode Consortium and its effect on emojis

In this part of the review, the literature concerning The Unicode Consortium and its curation of the Unicode Standard and then emojis as part of the Unicode Standard will be relayed. The concrete information described in these sections are also used to some extent in the analysis.

2.1.2.1 The Unicode Standard and its effect on language

Liao (2017) draws attention to how the choice of fonts have consequences for preserving and recognizing the language of minorities as well as their participation in digital parts of society. In the paper "Encoding for access: how Zawgyi success impedes full participation in digital Myanmar", published in ACM Computers & Society in 2016, Liao details how the local font in Myanmar is less inclusive than The Unicode Standard is,

due in part to TUS simply being more capable with more 'space' to incorporate Myanmar's minority languages. Here, Liao (2017) highlights an important discussion surrounding the view of specific technology to be superior to local alternatives, as he urges Myanmar to switch to TUS while ultimately disregarding geopolitical issues in doing so.

This can be discussed as technological determinism, a term coined by Judy Wacjman (2002) that asserts how effectivity is not necessarily the driver of technological change. In the paper, "The Construction of the Multilingual Internet: Unicode, Hebrew, and Globalization", published in the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication in 2013, Nicholas A. John then explores the encoding of the Hebrew language as a case which adds to the argument that the view of one technology as 'better' than another may be a result of determinism rather than actual merit of the technology. As such, John (2013) is critical of the assessment that TUS can 'save' languages simply by including them in the standard, and instead John (2013) draws attention to the importance of discussing the degree to which TUS is guided by other interests than language preservation. John (2013) asserts that TUS only affords users a 'precarious heterogeneity' that, while enabling communication in their own language, is the result of TUS being created and controlled by American multinational companies (John, 2013).

John (2013) calls for more attention to the power dynamics that through these technologies allow the internet to function. These dynamics, such as technological determinism, may for example be present in Liao's (2017) view of TUS. This contextualises the importance of critically assessing TUC's processes when selecting emojis for inclusion in TUS, and the racial implications of those processes are relayed in the next subsection.

2.1.2.2 Race, emojis and The Unicode Consortium

A good example of the 'precarious heterogeneity' (John, 2013) of characters in TUS is the skin tone variants of face emojis that were introduced in Unicode 8.0 in 2015 (Miltner, 2020; Sweeney & Whaley, 2019; Coats, 2018).

Figure 1: The emoji skin-tone variations. Screenshot from Kelly H. (2015)

In the paper "Skin Tone Emoji and Sentiment on Twitter", presented at the 3rd Digital Humanities in the Nordic Countries Conference in 2018, Steven Coats found that the usage of skin-tone emojis corresponded to some degree to skin-tone of the resident population of a country. This was done through sentiment analysis of over 650 million tweets, where Coats also finds that mean tweet sentiment and mean tweet skin tone on a country/territory basis was negative to a degree. The methodology in this paper regarding the validity and replicability of sentiment inference from emojis can be discussed, and therefore, what is regarded as significant here is Coats' (2018) conclusion, as he asserts that the global distribution of the skin tone emojis shows them to be working as intended by TUC - giving people the possibility to represent themselves online.

While the use of skin tone emojis may largely correlate with skin colour globally, it can be discussed whether representation through this set of skin tones is unproblematic. Mentioned in section 2.1.1, Stark & Crawford (2015) highlighted how TUC based the skin tone emojis on the Fitzpatrick scale, which was originally intended to classify people with white skin, only adding darker skin tones later. They also noted that the system of the scale with type 1 for the 'whitest' skin colour and type 6 for the 'blackest' skin colour is in itself "[…] exemplary of the emoji character set's indebtedness to established hierarchies of gendered and racialized authority and inequality." (Stark & Crawford, 2015, p. 7).

In a sense, the origin of the Fitzpatrick scale is arguably much like TUC's own emoji lexicon, which is the case when viewed from the framework of Sweeney & Whaley (2019), who argue that TUC assumed 'default whiteness' when creating the original set of yellow face emojis. In Sweeney & Whaley's (2019) critical

technocultural discourse analysis of TUC documents and 35 other articles, they find that TUC emphasised technological neutrality in their discourse while being situated in an American context, where whiteness is generally considered neutral and raceless. TUC therefore effectively presupposed that a lack of realistic color in their emojis made racial inequality irrelevant, which implicitly strengthened white supremacy, according to Sweeney & Whaley (2019).

Concerning the concrete decision-making processes at TUC, Sweeney & Whaley (2019) refer to a 2015 version of a paper, authored by Kate M. Miltner, called ""One part politics, one part technology, one part history": Racial representation in the Unicode 7.0 emoji set", which was rewritten and published in the journal New media and society in 2020. Miltner's (2020) interview with a ranking TUC member together with analysis of TUC documents from 2007-2014 supports the notion that TUC believed in technological neutrality when encoding the skin-tone variants of emojis. It is important to note that the reason Miltner could obtain TUC documents such as members-only mails is due to Miltner being an individual member of TUC without voting rights (2020, p. 519). Furthermore, Miltner (2020) shows how TUC consciously avoided political discussions by renaming emojis, and how members who did argue against using the Fitzpatrick scale due to its racial implications were not only ignored but explicitly ridiculed and undermined when doing so. As such, Miltner (2020) concludes how TUC viewed its task as a technical problem to simply solve, instead of a political task, which prompted the organization to seek the most effective way of including the skin tone emojis without engaging in (political) discussion.

TUC's view of the skin-tone variants of emojis as a 'technical problem' to solve shows how its original intention of those skin-tone variants may not inherently be representation as Coats (2018) implies. The question remains regarding whether TUC solely viewed skin colour representation as a problem for the public or for itself in light of political pressure. As such, regarding its selecting of emojis in relation to a narrative of technological neutrality may highlight TUC's biases with emojis and indicate whether TUC considers the task of representation to be problem-solving on behalf of users or itself. The next subsection explores TUC's selection criteria in relation to this task of representation.

2.1.2.3 The Unicode Consortium's selection criteria

Only two papers were found to examine TUC's selection criteria as part of their research goal. In the paper, "I second that emoji: The standards, structures, and social production of emoji", published in First Monday in 2018, Bethany Berard argues that TUC's selection criteria show how the creation of emojis is a social process. This is due to Berard's (2018) reading of the selection criteria as showing that TUC requires emojis to have "interpretive flexibility" (Berard, 2018) with the emoji approval process also incorporating a committee that needs to read and decide on emoji proposals sent in by individuals or groups. Berard (2018) also draws attention to TUC's membership structure, where only full and institutional members have one full vote, with

supporting members having half a vote and all other membership categories having no vote, despite most members being able to sit in on committee meetings. Berard (2018) noted at the time that the full members were primarily North American tech companies in 2015, with Huawei joining in 2016, while associate members included non-profits such as Emojination as well as for-profits such as Tinder in 2018, but those associate members did not have voting rights then and still do not have them now (The Unicode Consortium, Membership Tiers, 2023p).

In the discussion of what influences this social process of emoji creation, Berard (2018) highlights two different arguments. Firstly, Berard (2018) argues that despite emojis being encoded with both a code and a specific name, emojis are polysemic just like language is with multiple different meanings attributed to each emoji, and these are also partly influenced by the usage of different social groups. However, Berard notes how TUS has 1,114,112 code points in total, with the standard having included 137,300 characters at the time of the paper's publication (The Unicode Consortium, Technical Introduction, 2023r; Berard, 2018). Berard (2018) relates this to TUC's policy that the encoding of a character is permanent, and as such the consequences of TUC's encoding of characters and emojis is highlighted for both its limitations and its permanence.

Secondly, Berard (2018) exemplifies the influence of having full membership in TUC by highlighting a rifle emoji that was slated to be released in 2016 but which was reportedly blocked by Apple, despite it being approved for encoding already. Berard (2018) also notes how the opposite movement can happen, exemplifying it with Google publicly campaigning in 2016 for the inclusion of more professional women emojis. Finally, there were petitions for a taco emoji by the chain Taco Bell and a condom emoji by the manufacturer Durex, where Berard (2018) highlights that despite TUC claiming petitions to not influence over emoji selection, a new taco emoji was released in 2015 (Durex Canada, 2015 in Berard, 2018; Hof, 2016 in Berard, 2018).

With the above examples, Berard (2018) discusses how actors such as Apple and Google are shown to willingly exert influence over the selecting of emojis, likely taking the critique of social groups in consideration, while ultimately still having the final say in those decisions. Those notions – that TUC's selection criteria require interpretive flexibility of emojis, that TUS has more than one million code points available with only little more than 10% used by current characters, and that TUC members show willingness to exert influence in concrete emoji selecting processes – are regarded as important additions to the interpretive framework for my analysis.

Conversely, in the paper "Examining the "Global" Language of Emojis: Designing for Cultural Representation", published in Proceedings of CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems Proceedings in 2019, Philippe Kimura-Thollander & Neha Kumar explore the concrete cultural gaps and social recognition of cultural emojis from the user perspective. They also conduct participant observation of a

meeting in TUC and include TUC's selection criteria for emojis in their exploration of cultural gaps within TUC's selected emojis at the time (Kimura-Thollander & Kumar, 2019).

Kimura-Thollander & Kumar (2019) conducted two surveys along with 17 semi-structured interviews and a participatory exercise. The first survey received 150 complete responses from respondents of 10 different ethnicities residing in 32 countries and surveyed whether respondents experienced cultural gaps in emojis. Based on opt-ins from that survey, the 17 semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents from 14 different countries, where Kimura-Thollander & Kumar (2019) honed in on emoji use and cultural gaps. They also conducted a participatory exercise with 9 individuals from 7 different countries, where participants drew culturally connotated elements from their culture next to their country's flag (Kimura-Thollander & Kumar, 2019, p. 6). The results of the survey pointed to respondents using emojis both to create connection and intimacy but also to express their cultural identity by sending culturally related emojis, which the authors of the paper designate to, amongst others, be emojis like the taco emoji and the sushi emoji. As such, 70% of the survey respondents reported to have experienced situations, where they had wished some non-created emoji existed (Kimura-Thollander & Kumar, 2019, p. 7).

A common theme was food, and through the interviews and the participatory exercise, Kimura-Thollander & Kumar (2019) narrowed down the possible concepts and items that were not yet depicted as emojis from which they create 40 'new' emojis that were made to represent 16 countries:

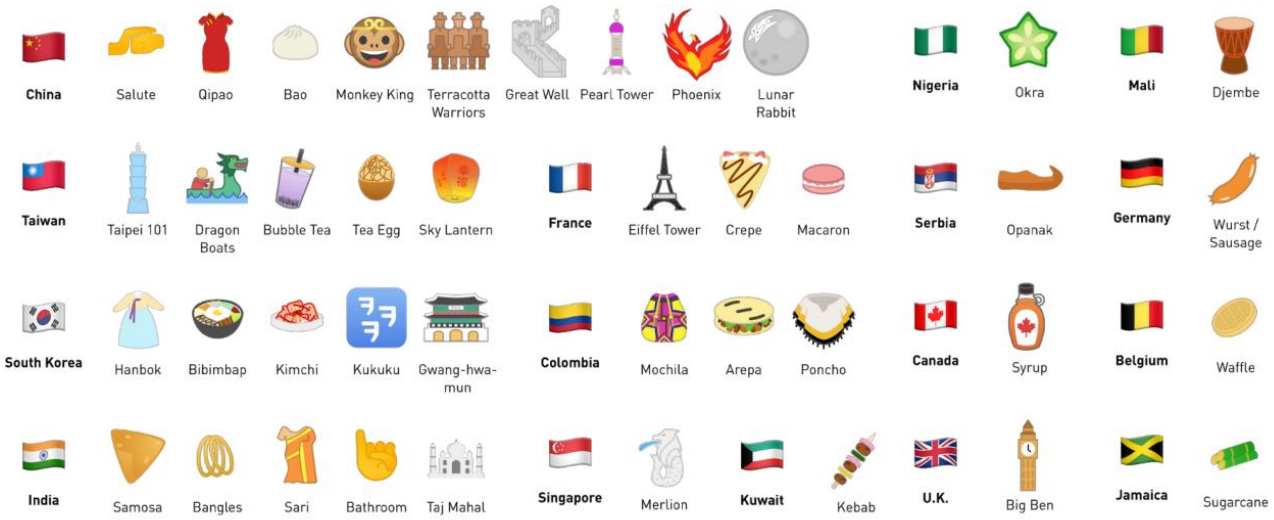

Figure 2: Figure number 8 from the paper, screenshot. All 40 emojis with country of origin, designed from interviews and the participatory exercise (Kimura-Thollander & Kumar, 2019, p. 10).

In a second survey with 128 complete responses with respondents from 25 countries, respondents were asked to identify what the above emojis were meant to represent, while also identifying some Japanese emojis already

included by TUC such as the Tokyo Tower, which received only a 31% recognition rate. Comparably, most the self-designed emojis by the authors were recognized to a much higher degree by the respondents:

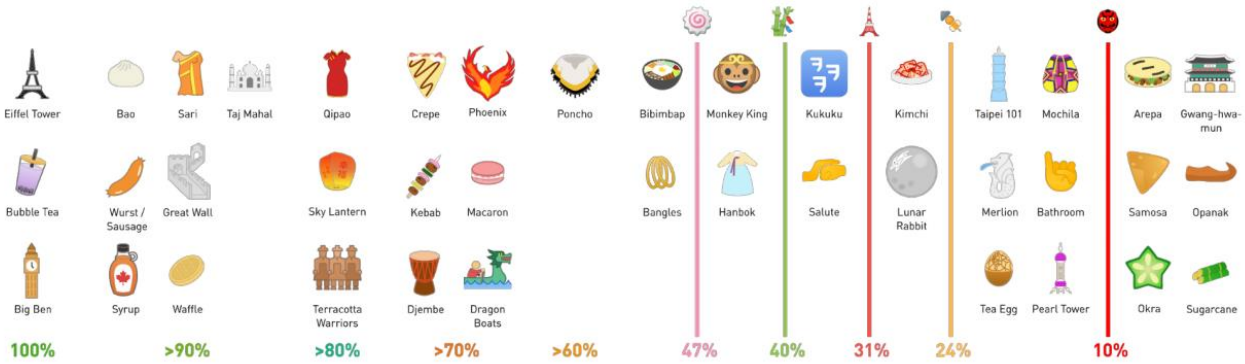

Figure 3: Figure 9 screenshotted in the paper. Percentages of recognition for the self-designed emojis with examples of Japanese emojis already included (Kimura-Thollander & Kumar, 2019, p. 10).

Afterwards, the authors interpret the list of selection criteria of TUC as a barrier to emoji submission, noting how it disadvantages many from making emoji proposals (Kimura-Thollander & Kumar, 2019, p. 11). They further argue that through this barrier, TUC effectively ensures that emojis conform to its unconscious bias. This is to an extent supported by the participant observation of a TUC meeting regarding the release of Unicode Standard 13 in 2020. Here, the authors give an example from the meeting regarding a pick-up truck emoji, and in this example, the participants are noted as older, white men, while the discussion was noted as centring around only how the name of the emoji would carry over to UK, ignoring the rest of the world in the process (Kimura-Thollander & Kumar, 2019, p. 6).

2.1.3 Conclusion: Emojis are power

As such, one of the primary conclusions derived from this literature review is what Kimura-Thollander & Kumar draw attention to regarding "[…] how opaque the process of emoji design and development currently is, and that although technically it is possible for anyone to submit their designs, for all intents and purposes emojis are developed by technology companies in a top-down way." (Kimura-Thollander & Kumar, 2019, p. 9). As such, the way that the selection criteria require emojis to have *interpretive flexibility* according to Berard (2018) is of key interest, as this could arguably be a way for TUC to problematise selecting emojis with more specific meanings and indirectly for its members to exert power over the selection process.

The power to affect the selection of emojis also influences our everyday life, as emojis are used to signal elements like emotive effect, semantic clarity, social norms, gender, humour, politeness, disambiguation and more (Kelly & Watts, 2015; Miller et al., 2015; Novak et al., 2015; Tigwell & Flatla, 2016; Ai et al., 2017; Riordan, 2017a; Riordan, 2017b; Li & Yang, 2018; Beißwenger & Pappert, 2019; Butterworth et al., 2019;

Coyle & Carmichael, 2019; Franco & Fugate, 2020; Boutet et al., 2021; Erle et al., 2021; Gantiva et al., 2021; Pfeifer et al., 2021; Shah & Tewari, 2021). The nature and control of emojis can further be problematised when discussing IP protection and crimes being committed (Goldman, 2018; Danesi, 2021).

However, despite emojis being compared to language, it is contested whether it should be denoted as a paralanguage or a natural language, while there are still semantic 'gaps' to be found within TUC emojis, and emojis have been found to be more difficult to retrieve meaning from than with words (Alshenqeeti, 2016; Lee et al., 2019; Tang et al., 2020; Danesi 2021). Globally, variations in emoji usage do appear across different countries according to Ljubešic & Fišer (2016) and Lu et al. (2016), while emojis to some degree have the same usage across different languages according to Barbieri et al. (2016). This is why a discussion of racial bias regarding representation exemplifies TUC's power over emojis. As such, while the introduced skin-tone variants of emojis are used by users to self-represent, the origins of emojis and the scale used for the skin-tone variants inherently perpetrates colour-blindness and belief in technological neutrality, which ultimately strengthens white supremacy (Coats, 2018; Stark & Crawford, 2015; Sweeney & Whaley, 2019; Miltner, 2020).

Ultimately, TUC's standard may be technically superior to local fonts (Liao, 2017), but this view may also be a result of technological determinism (Wacjman, 2002), and due to its widespread adoption, the power of TUS creates a precarious heterogeneity for digital users (John, 2013). This is exemplified by emojis in their myriad of different uses, interpretations, and misinterpretations, but most importantly in their myriad of inherent biases perpetrated by TUC. Therefore, while some of TUC's selecting of emojis have been commented on and interpreted to some degree by different researchers, an in-depth examination of TUC's selecting of emojis from 2010-2023 as well as an analysis of its many policy documents concerning the selecting of emojis serves to highlight how exactly TUC problematises and silences aspects of emoji selection, governing the emoji use of us all.

2.2 Theory: Emojis are policy

What's The Problem Represented To Be (WPR) is an approach to policy analysis coined by Carol Bacchi and Susan Goodwin, explicated fully in 2016 through their work called Poststructural Policy Analysis: A Guide to Practice. WPR is used as a methodological framework for the analysis in this paper, and the specific analytic strategy as well as the concrete implementation of WPR is detailed in chapter 3.1.3. Due to WPR being used as a method in this paper, it is regarded as necessary to describe and discuss some of its theoretical assumptions here. These descriptions and discussions are primarily used to argue for the applicability of the WPR approach regarding The Unicode Consortium's criteria and selection of emojis.

First, it is found relevant to engage in a short explanation of the founding principles of what came to be known as structuralism through the lens of Saussure in order to (1) further discuss emojis as a language, a discussion begun in section 2.1.2, and (2) note how the subject of this paper concerning selection criteria and emojis expands itself beyond linguistic analysis. Then Foucault's notion of governmentality is described and discussed in relation to the mechanisms of The Unicode Consortium's power. This argues for the applicability of WPR in this case due to WPR's emphasis on governmentality. Lastly, WPR's expansive view of 'texts' is described regarding what is seen as objects permissible for analysis, and this is then related to emojis in the context of analysing The Unicode Consortium's criteria and selection thereof.

2.2.1 Shortly on emojis from a Saussurean perspective

From Saussure's semiology arose linguistic structuralism, which has been a point of departure for both structuralists and poststructuralists, such as Foucault (Chandler, 2017, p. 5). As such, the assumptions of Foucault do not negate Saussure's ideas as much as they build upon them and call for a different focus than language itself (Williams, 2014, p. 115-116).

Saussure's notion of a sign can therefore be relevant both for understanding the difficulty of interpreting emojis and for understanding why this paper takes the theoretical departure from viewing emojis as a linguistic system or structure to instead view emojis as an expression of power and, as is argued later in this chapter, of policy.

For Saussure, language is a system, where linguistic signs are made from the connection between purely psychological meanings and psychological 'sound-images' (Saussure, 2011a, p. 15). This means that a sign only happens through psychological connections, and it is not connected to a written word, but to a notion of a sound that creates a sensory impression in the mind (Saussure, 2011b, p. 66). This impression in the mind may come from such sound, or even a written word being read, but it is only the mental sense or impression itself that is the sound-image or the 'signifier'. The signifier is connected intimately with a concept, which is also psychological (Saussure, 2011b, p. 66). For example, the concept of a tree is not the tree itself but merely a mental representation of it, while the sound-image is what one recollects as the sensory impression of said tree – its visual characteristics and so on.

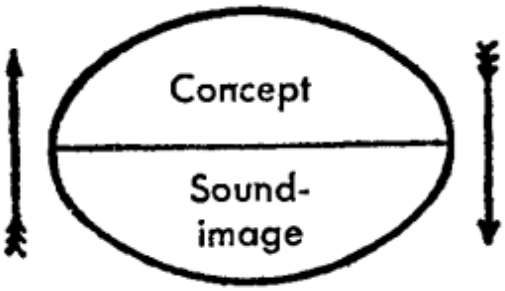

Figure 4: The Saussurean Model of the sign comprised of the signified (concept) and the signifier (sound-image), screenshot (Saussure, 2011b, p. 66).

One of the main points of this conceptualization is to show how a sound-image and a concept is *not intrinsically connected* by other than convention – the concept of a 'tree' and the connected sound image is not denoted as 'tree', because the word 'tree' itself shows a tree, it is only connected by the linguistic convention that the sensory notion of what we call a 'tree' and the concept of a tree are correlated (Saussure, 2011b, p. 67-68). This shows the *arbitrariness* of linguistic signs (Saussure, 2011b, p. 67). Saussure does recognize that signifiers are not independently exchangeable by individuals due to language being a social convention made through and by history, while language also does change over time and therefore, one particular signifier may through linguistic development and a myriad of factors differ slightly in the future (Saussure, 2011b, p. 73-74).

Saussure also argues that language shows the arbitrariness of the sign better than any other modes of expression. This is due to the signifier being unmotivated by the signified in the sense that there is no natural connection between the two – ie. the sensory impression evoked from a specific sound has very little to do with the concept of a 'tree', as both the concept of the tree (signified) and the sensory impression of the tree (signifier) also is not the tree itself (Saussure, 2011b, p. 68-69).

This is where the relation between the Saussurean model of the sign and emojis as signs is relevant. In section 2.1.1, I asserted that emojis cannot conclusively be viewed as a language based on current research due in part to the many different interpretations and uses of emojis both locally and cross-culturally. However, as the Saussurean model is a model of the linguistic sign, it can to an extent be used as a framework to discuss the possibility of emojis being a language, and thereby show why emojis may have inherent limitations that make them 'linguistically unfit' so to speak.

Firstly, Saussure does not like calling the signifier in a linguistic sign a 'symbol', because he views symbols as "[…] never being wholly arbitrary; it is not empty, for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the signified. The symbol of justice, a pair of scales, could not be replaced by just any other symbol, such as a chariot." (Saussure, 2011b, p. 68). In this sense, one could argue that Saussure would view

emojis as symbols and thereby claim that emojis too are not wholly arbitrary like the linguistic sign ‘tree’ is. Saussure also calls this a “rational relationship with the thing signified” (Saussure, 2011b, p. 73), and he emphasises again that in a language there is no reason to prefer one signifier over another to signify any particular signified – which would be like preferring one language’s word for tree over the other – while he does regard there to be some reasons to prefer specific signifiers when discussing symbols (Saussure, 2011b, p. 73).

Here, it is notable that emojis are given specific names by TUC, and as such, they are not just universally agreed upon, as would have been the case for ordinary symbols in Saussure’s time. These emoji names can arguably correspond to the concept that TUC is aiming at conveying with the emojis' depictions, their signifiers. However, these names do not have to be learned in order to communicate with emojis. A specific example with the emoji 😃 shows that its concept, which is denoted as “laughing face” on my operating system, may not be universally agreed upon. To me, it looks not like a laughing face but more like a smiling face, for example, which is what I would try to convey by sending it.

In a linguistic system, “linguistic signs are numberless” (Saussure, 2011b, p. 73), and any individual such as J. R. R. Tolkien can create languages, because the building blocks are, in a sense, endless due to their phonetic quality as well as the possibility of signifying these building blocks through writing. While emojis are created already, such as most words, their quality as symbols seems not to be in depicting a signifier, such as a sensation of laughter, better than words, despite their visual quality. Emojis instead depict concepts, the signified, as signifiers of the average or the *normalized* impressions of sensations connected to concepts such as ‘laugh’ and ‘face’.

Fundamentally, one could argue that while emojis are signifiers, the relation between the signified and the signifier is here skewed towards the signified, because the emoji’s purpose is to depict the average notion of a concept rather than to initiate an individual’s own mental impression of a sensation.

Therefore, emojis are on one hand a less arbitrary sign than altogether linguistic signs, because their signifiers are visually depicted, and as Saussure noted the ‘rudiment of a natural bond’ (2011b, p. 68), those visual depictions can arguably ensure that I, nonetheless, do not question an emoji’s conception as a ‘face’ for example. On the other hand, an emoji can arguably be even more arbitrary than altogether linguistic signs, because its nature as a normalized depiction of a concept subjects the user to both acknowledge its intended concept, decided by The Unicode Consortium, and it forces the user to independently ‘invent’ their own concept from the signifier, creating ambiguity for emoji users. This is where the polysemic nature of emojis become apparent (Berard, 2018), and despite language also being polysemic, the above discussion arguably shows how emojis to a degree burden emoji users with both meaning creation and interpretation, rather than with learning the connection between a signifier and a signified.

As Saussure noted language to be a system, one can therefore conclude that the above mechanisms of emojis, discussed through the Saussurean model of linguistic signs, are not systematic insofar as the signified part of emojis is not unequivocally decided upon for every single emoji. Despite The Unicode Consortium's privilege and power to name the emojis, such as the "laughing face" emoji 😀, the users of emojis have never been subject to learning these names, effectively keeping emojis ambiguous and their meanings often quite personalized.

This lends to the conclusion that emojis are not a language, and if an investigation into emojis should intend to be meaningful, one could argue that it should focus on why and how these normalized concepts of emojis come about. This is also due to the influence that both the emoji names and the depiction thereof have on our use and understanding of them. As such, the above shows why an investigation of emojis should move beyond the so-called 'linguistic turn' (Fairclough, 2013 in Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 18) to instead uncover the notions and presumptions regarding, among other things, normality in the signs of emojis. The Unicode Consortium is the primary curator of emojis, and as we take the leap beyond linguistics, it is necessary to explore how this organization's power can be described in terms of governmentality when related to emojis, as done in the next subsection.

2.2.2 Shortly on Foucault's Governmentality and The Unicode Consortium

As we take a turn beyond the purely linguistic perspective, notions of power become important to clarify how this paper views the dynamic between The Unicode Consortium, emojis as normalized depictions of concepts, and the ubiquitous nature of them. Here, Foucault's perspective on power is considered appropriate because it expands the notion of power further than a juridical model focused on law and consent does (Lemke, 2012, p. 11-12). Exemplified in the present case of The Unicode Consortium, the consortium's practices are lawful and therefore not problematic in a juridical sense. However, these practices can arguably be unethical to an extent because of the selective norms created, and it is these norms (normalisations) as well as selection practices that are the focus of this paper.

Foucault views power not as a measurable substance but rather as a set of complex relations and strategies to be analysed through points of conflict between said strategies (Foucault, 1982, p. 780). In this view, an organisation or a state does not retain a certain amount of power, instead they can be seen as a "[…] condensed form of power." (Lemke, 2012, p. 11).

Foucault hereby displaces power as something that originated from a certain place in society like the state to instead apply everywhere and to "immediate everyday life" (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). In turn, Foucault negates the negative conception of power that relies on solely viewing a reality of oppressors and oppressed, and he argues that "In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth"

(Foucault, 1977, p. 194 in Lemke, 2012, p. 11). The dynamics of power therefore constitute reality, and these dynamics are present throughout society, but are in some instances condensed when considering for example states. Some criticism of this view on power, as Foucault presented it prior to his lectures on governmentality in 1978 and 1979, was that he had not accounted for how one became a subject to these power relations, and how these power relations shaped society outside of very specific locations like the prison (Lemke, 2012, p. 12).

This is where Foucault's notion of governmentality bridges the gap in terms of subjectivation to power relations and the application of power relations in everyday life. Explaining the foundation of governmentality, Foucault reaches back to the 16th century for a broader definition of the word:

> *"Government" did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick. It did not only cover the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection but also modes of action, more or less considered or calculated, which were destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others.*
>
> (Foucault, 1982, p. 790)

As such, elements like consensus and coercion are therefore more like instruments of power rather than the origins of it (Lemke, 2012, p. 17). This broad notion of government can be readily applied to an organisation like The Unicode Consortium in relation to emojis, as the organisation effectively structures the possible fields of action of others when it selects the emojis that can be used among the general public. Here, the term governmentality does not automatically imply senseless direction or coercion but instead practices that are both regulated and systematic while considering the rationality of the governed (Lemke, 2012, p. 18). A government does in this sense not directly influence actions but determines a range of possible actions for the governed instead (Lemke, 2012, p. 18). Lemke also describes how Foucault expressed governmentality as the conduct of conducts, and here it is important to note that Foucault refers to the meaning of the verb conduire and se conduire in French which respectively means to lead or to behave (Lemke, 2012, p. 18; Foucault, 1982, p. 789). Both TUC's selection criteria and the specific emojis selected throughout the existence of Unicode Emoji are examples of (1) a systematic and regulated practice and of (2) determining a range of possible actions (emojis) for the public. As such, TUC's conduct of the public's conduct with emojis.

Foucault details three forms of power that designate how power relations can be expressed: (1) *strategic games*, where he argues that all social interaction involves power relations, (2) *government*, which is the systematized modes of power, also called technologies, that go beyond spontaneity in their exercise of power, and finally (3) *domination*, which is an extremely rare, fixed type of asymmetrical power that is reserved for when

subordinates have very little room for any kind of action (Lemke, 2012, p. 20). Due to the focus of this paper, the power best applied to The Unicode Consortium's connection to emojis would be the second form of power related to government, but here it is important not to neglect the effects of *technologies of government* that through the systematic stabilization of power dynamics can lead to a state of domination (Lemke, 2012, p. 20). Therefore, the technologies of government can arguably be an intermediary form of power between strategic games and a state of domination (Lemke, 2012, p. 20).

As Foucault took a turn to describe subjectivation, he argued for an analysis where technologies of government could, however, be divided into two different 'techniques' as well (Lemke, 2012, p. 22):

> *[…] I think that if one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in Western civilization, he has to take into account not only techniques of domination but also techniques of the self. Let's say: he has to take into account the interaction between those two types of techniques - techniques of domination and techniques of the self. He has to take into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely, he has to take into account the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination. The contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what we can call, I think government. Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word, governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants, it is a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself.*
>
> (Foucault, 1993, p. 203-204)

To apply the above to The Unicode Consortium, one could for example argue that their selection and organisation of emojis is a *technique of domination* which also ensures that individuals use these emojis in a *technique of self*, where individuals construct or modify themselves through their use of specific emojis. Due to this interaction between techniques of domination and of the self, this paper's analysis of The Unicode Consortium's criteria also focuses on the criteria's emphasis on emoji usage, because that can arguably exemplify a technology of government, where the users' emoji use (technique of self) to some extent affects the emoji selection (technique of domination).

Based on these arguments, it is the 'versatile equilibrium' of The Unicode Consortium's governance of emoji users that this paper seeks to critique through the analysis of the consortium's specific techniques of domination as well as emojis as techniques of the self, explicated through both selection criteria, specific

emoji selection and emojis. In the next subsection, policy as a notion for data analysis is shortly discussed through the lens of the WPR framework.

2.2.3 What is policy according to the WPR approach by Bacchi & Goodwin (2016)?

The foundation of the WPR approach by Carol Bacchi and Susan Goodwin is Foucault's notions of power and governmentality: "Foucault's understanding of power as relational and productive underpins the WPR approach where the focus is on the practices and relations that produce "problems", "subjects", "objects", and "places"" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 29). However, Bacchi & Goodwin do contend that their "Foucault-influenced poststructural approach" (p. 28) does not make their theoretical perception of meanings of notions such as power objectively correct. Instead, their stance is that the terms used in their text, such as power, are simply a way to denote 'things', and they suggest that "the task becomes understanding *particular usages of concepts and their purposes*." (emphasis in original, Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 28).

Therefore, as the WPR approach does not only convey a method of analysis, but also requires a specific understanding of both concepts, the usages of these concepts and their purposes, the WPR approach can be called a theoretical framework as much as a method of analysis. However, Bacchi & Goodwin's theoretical apparatus is so heavily underpinned by Foucault's notions of power and governmentality that I do not regard it as necessary to repeat the previous subsection's points, other than to point out that Foucault's notions regarding power in relational, strategic, and governmental terms are agreed upon by Bacchi & Goodwin (2016).

Yet, Bacchi & Goodwin do specify that "[t]he critical task, therefore, becomes tracing and assessing the *specific forms* of reality that power creates." (emphasis in original, 2016, p. 29). They assert that a WPR analysis challenges the conventional view of policies addressing problems that 'exist', and instead "[…] the WPR approach describes policy as *productive*, creating or constituting "problems" as particular sorts of problems […]" (emphasis in original, Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 29). One can arguably discuss how directly and perhaps whether it is reductive for Bacchi & Goodwin to seemingly replace the word power with the word policy in Foucault's original sentiment of power being a producing force instead of a negative force (see subsection 2.2.2). However, the framework of power as policy is an important notion in order to distinguish what can be looked at when attempting to analyse Foucault's technologies of government such as techniques of domination and techniques of the self (see subsection 2.2.2).

Bacchi & Goodwin refer that Foucault recommended to analyse 'practical texts' as "objects of a 'practice'" (Foucault, 1986, p. 12-13 in Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 34) which "constitute the eventual framework of everyday conduct" (Foucault, 1986, p. 12-13 in Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 34). Bacchi & Goodwin then

designate WPR's objects of analysis as "prescriptive texts" (2016, p. 34) instead, but explains this notion further:

> *It targets the full range of governmental practices, including instruments, techniques, programs and policies. "Government" is understood in the broad sense associated with a governmentality approach (see later) to embrace the wide gamut of agencies, professionals, and experts involved in conducting conduct.*
>
> (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 34)

As such, to analyse Foucault's power relations adequately, one can argue that Bacchi & Goodwin adopts nearly as broad a definition of the object for analysis as the definition of power itself. Concretely, they determine policy texts as such:

> *Thus policy texts can include documents, such as organizational files and records, legislation, judicial decisions, bills, speeches, interview transcripts (see Appendix), media statements, organizational charts, budgets, program contracts, research reports, even statistical data. In particular policy sites, written texts could include institutional records, organizational reports, syllabi, etc. "Texts" can be understood expansively to include images, videos and forms of digital communication (e.g., websites, hyperlinks across websites; see Marshall 2012b).*
>
> (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 18)

As such, the term 'policy' in the perspective of the WPR approach equals power, because it is an expression of the relational power that is involved in the 'conduct of conduct' so to speak. Due to Foucault's term of relational power being present in everyday life, policy texts that can be analysed to uncover the strategies of relational power are therefore many, many different 'things' including but not limited to texts and images.

The term 'problem' as well as the implications of this paper as policy and me as a policy worker is detailed further in subsections 3.1.2 and 3.1.3. Instead, the next subsection will conclude on the above discussions and arguments to describe how this paper can view emojis as policy.

2.2.4 Conclusion: Emojis are policy

Through Saussure's model of the linguistic sign, the emoji linguistic notions of emojis have been discussed, exemplified with the "😜" emoji, and it has been argued that emojis are normalised depictions of concepts which as signs are not systematic enough to be a language. I therefore argue that the rules of emojis cannot be

uncovered through this structuralist lens, and what should instead be uncovered is how these emojis or normalised depictions of concepts come about (see subsection 2.2.1).

In a turn to Foucault, I have summarized his view on power and related it to The Unicode Consortium's connection to emojis, highlighting how The Unicode Consortium effectively governs the public's use of emojis through their curation of emojis. I also argue how Foucault's view on power is appropriate because The Unicode Consortium's practices are lawful but can be discussed ethically. Foucault's conceptualization of power as governing or 'the conduct of conduct' therefore allows for a critique of such practices through analysis of elements such as techniques of domination and techniques of self (see subsection 2.2.2).

As a method of policy analysis, I further argue that the WPR approach by Bacchi & Goodwin (2016) shows how broadly their concrete conceptualization of Foucault's concept of power allows their concept of policy to be. As Bacchi & Goodwin (2016) state that an object of analysis can be concrete policy texts or even videos and images, I hereby argue that emojis themselves can also be objects of analysis in this framework (see subsection 2.2.3).

Considering the above arguments, I propose a 'reading' with the WPR approach of emojis as 'policy' *in themselves*, but where such emoji policy has been expressed through the decisions of The Unicode Consortium to select certain emojis over the course of the past decade or so. As such, it is important to distinguish between the already selected emojis and the process of the selection of the emojis. As noted by Foucault, power produces, and as The Unicode Consortium's relation to emojis to some extent equals power, I will argue that it is in the *selection of specific emojis* that we see the expression of this power most clearly, not in the emoji themselves. Therefore, I will call it the *selecting of emojis* to emphasize the producing part of the selection process itself. The selecting of emojis is arguably separate from both (1) the selection of emojis, which is the emojis already available, and (2) the selection policy of emojis, which is the selection criteria. This is due to these two corresponding arguments:

(1) The selection of emojis available is not itself a system of language to be analysed with clear linguistic values or even concepts insofar as the emojis may not even be used to show the concept intended with them, despite them having been named by The Unicode Consortium (see subsections 2.1.1; 2.2.1).
(2) The selection policy of emojis is arguably showing mostly what The Unicode Consortium wants to portray as being part of their selecting of emojis. As such, it does not show directly why certain emoji proposals were included or omitted historically.

This is therefore the framework from which I will analyse The Unicode Consortium's selecting of emojis regarding specific historical examples and in consideration of knowledge such as the racial and cultural bias of TUC's emoji selection described in subsection 2.1.3.

Chapter 3

3.1 Methodology

In this chapter, the paper's relationship between research and theory as well as the most important ontological and epistemological notions are detailed first. Then the concrete method is described, including the specific way that the analysis has been conducted with the WPR approach (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016), and a detailed account of the data that has been gathered and analysed.

3.1.1 Relationship between research and theory

The research of this paper is qualitative in its nature, as it aims at both understanding the nature of the subject – the problems represented by TUC in its selecting of emojis – and making the meanings of these problematisations visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3 in Porta & Keating, 2008, p. 28; Yin, 2011, p. 7-10).

However, despite an inductive relationship between research and theory being readily associated with qualitative research by Bryman (2012, p. 380), I will argue that the process of this paper's research has followed more of an iterative relationship between research and theory. Bryman describes the iterative process as "[…] a repetitive interplay between the collection and analysis of data. This means that analysis starts after some of the data have been collected, and the implications of that analysis then shape the next steps in the data-collection process." (2012, p. 566). The concrete process of the paper has been for me to first be acquainted with TUC's main policy documents, such as the selection criteria, while choosing the method of WPR as an appropriate method for data analysis, then write the literature review, finding out more contextual knowledge, then to write the theory, and then to conduct the analysis, wherein the reading of many documents led to new relevant documents that became included as data.

The above iterative process can also be related to abduction, which Blaikie & Priest (2018, p. 99-101+116) describe as being a logic that seeks detailed accounts of how social actors, such as TUC, view the world, and then derives concepts from these detailed accounts – such as TUC's emphasis on 'building blocks' and emoji 'customers' described in chapter 4. Blaikie & Priest (2018) call attention to the abductive logic's focus on the researcher checking in with the social actor to ensure that the researcher's understanding corresponds to the understanding of the social actor. This has not been done in the present paper – rather, the interpretation of TUC's view on selecting emojis has been qualified through the iterative process of data collection, as the extensive process of including further documents allowed a multitude of different TUC sources to 'correct' conclusions that could possibly have been wrong, should only the selection criteria have been included, for example. As such, the research in this paper follows the process that Blaikie & Priest also describe as an "iterative process of immersion" (2018, p. 101) into TUC's representation of its selecting of emojis, where understanding regarding how TUC itself viewed matters has been sought.

3.1.2 Ontological and epistemological notions

Ontological notions can sometimes also be epistemological notions, as is the case with constructionism (Bryman, 2012, p. 33). Here, Bryman (2016, p. 33) describes constructionism as the viewpoint that social phenomena and the meanings hereof are continually shaped and produced by social actors. Blaikie & Priest (2018, p. 93) connects constructionism to its epistemological notion when relating it to abduction, and constructionism's epistemological side is noted by Bryman to mean the "[…] indeterminacy of our knowledge of the social world […]" (2012, p. 34).

For the ontological position of this paper, constructionism is an appropriate, if non-descriptive, label. Far more important is my conceptualisation of the social phenomena and how its meanings come about. As such, my perspective is poststructuralist in the sense that I apply Foucault's conceptualisation that power is present in everything – no society without power relations, no social relations without power (see subsection 2.2.2). As Porta & Keating (2008, p. 21) describe the ontological question to be what we study, one can say that I study social phenomena, but I would rather answer that I study power relations as social phenomena and vice versa, social phenomena as power relations, because I view power relations and social phenomena as intrinsically connected.

Regarding the epistemological position of this paper, the label most appropriate is arguably interpretivism, wherein interpretation is used to study the meaning of the actors themselves, while subjectivity is regarded as a core condition of the research (Blaikie & Priest, 2018, p. 24-25). This epistemological position acknowledges the parts of my poststructural position that regard how knowledge comes about and is produced rather than fixed. Here, Bacchi & Goodwin argue that "Since "things" are not "natural", since they are made to be, they involve politics" (2016, p. 16).

The consequence of this interpretivist stance that objectivity is not possible and that 'things' are made to be, is the acknowledgement of subjectivity in this paper's own conclusion. Bacchi & Goodwin (2016, p. 17) contend with this consequence, as they describe this role of a policy-analyst to inherently mean that I also assume the role of a policy worker. This is because of the way that all the choices and interpretations in this paper have created a specific conclusion, wherein these methods and theoretical lenses have produced specific problems and problematisations of TUC's representation of its selecting of emojis, which would otherwise not have come about in this exact way. Therefore, while it is arguably impossible to research TUC's representation of the problems with selecting emojis without interpretation, this epistemological position together with my poststructuralist perspective necessitates transparency and critical discussion of not only methodological choices but also of the blind spots in my perspective as a white cis male, living in one of the richest, most secure countries in the world (see section 3.1.4).

3.1.3 Method – Analysis with the WPR approach

As power produces, policy also produces according to the WPR approach (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 14). Policy produces problematisations or problems according to Bacchi & Goodwin, and essentially, this posits that policies are fundamentally not 'answers' to a 'fixed' reality wherein one finds 'obvious' problems that can be fixed accordingly (2016, p. 17). Instead, policies produce problems implicitly through proposing solutions – An example could be that implementing restrictions for smoking during school-time produces the problem of young people smoking and by extension the health of youth, while banning the sale of cigarettes entirely produces the problem of smoking in general and by extension the health of the population as a whole. This shows how different policies produce different problems that may stigmatise certain people or consciously ignore perspectives or issues. As such, we are "[…] *governed through* these constituted "problems", meaning that governing takes place through problematizations." (emphasis in original, Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 17).

Outlined by Bacchi & Goodwin, the WPR approach incorporates seven different but interrelated forms of analysis and questioning (2016, p. 16-20). These seven forms help researchers to 'work backwards' from policies and "*examine* the "unexamined ways of thinking" on which they rely, to put in question their underlying premises, to show that they have a history, and to insist on questioning their implications." (emphasis in original, Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 16). These seven forms of analysis and questioning pertain to:

1. The problem as it is represented to be in a specific policy or policies.
2. The presuppositions underlying this specific policy's representation of the problem.
3. The way this specific problem representation has come about.
4. The unspoken elements, those that are then made 'unproblematic' in this representation.
5. The produced effects of this specific representation of the problem.
6. The spaces where the representation of the problem has been produced as well as possible disruptions or replacements of the problem.
7. Self-critique of the six prior forms applied to one's own representation of the problem(s) in the analysed policies.

(Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 20)

These seven forms of questioning overlap to some extent, and Bacchi & Goodwin concede that "[…] their listing as separate "steps" serves a heuristic function and ought to be treated accordingly." (2016, p. 19). Since the goals of the WPR approach are to identify, reconstruct, and interrogate problematizations (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 19), the analysis of this paper is not conveyed or even conducted in a step-by-step fashion. This allowed for freely incorporating important perspectives and comparisons in the analysis without much repetition, which was therefore considered the most effective way to fulfil the goals of the WPR approach

without sacrificing neither understanding nor complexity in the identification and interrogation of the wide array of TUC policy documents together with the in-depth historical selecting of emojis performed by TUC that is also read and regarded as policy.

3.1.3.1 The process of WPR analysis

WPR analysis is not strictly text based, as already described in subsection 2.2.3. Concretely, this means that texts or other objects of analysis are mere starting points, as they are used as 'levers' for policy analysts to reflect upon governing forms and the effects thereof (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 18). However, to use a text as a 'lever', one needs "[…] familiarity with other texts that cover the same or related topics or circumstances." (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 18). The process of using policy documents as 'levers' while incorporating contextual and theoretical knowledge is illustrated below:

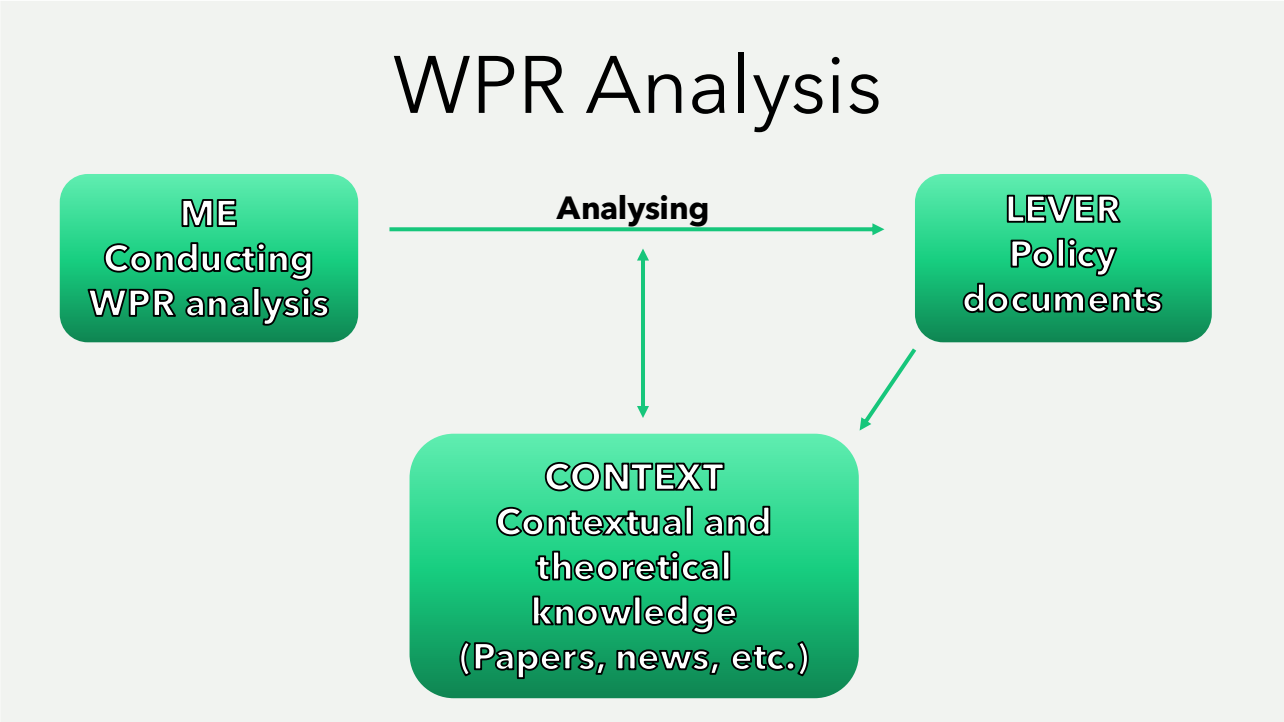

Figure 5: Depiction of the WPR analysis process in this paper, inspired by Bacchi & Goodwin (2016).

An obvious example of the above for the current analysis is this: The TUC policy proposal for the encoding of emojis in 2009 represented a problematisation of technical limitations regarding the possibility of adding more emojis than the 719 original ones. Yet, my current contextual knowledge of there being more than 3000 emojis in the emoji 'lexicon' disrupts the arguments of this represented problematisation significantly, prompting more in-depth reflection on what led this representation to come about in this way (see section 4.1.1). This example uses very basic contextual knowledge, but in-depth contextual knowledge of specific historical emoji inclusions has been crucial in conducting the analysis.

Another important element of the analysis process in this paper is the usage of different policy texts as 'levers' compared to each other. Just like my contextual knowledge can disrupt the represented problematisation, comparing different Unicode policy documents allow the uncovering of specific problematisations that would not be possible without doing so. One example of this is TUC's selection of specific emojis on a historical year-by-year basis, where I then compare those included emojis against the requested emojis of the given year in the historical analysis. This process is repeated whenever the representations of different TUC policy documents align regarding problematisations while also adding further information or nuance to my analytic reflection upon TUC's governance.

As already argued in chapter 2, the concrete analysis concerns both the historical selecting of emojis performed by TUC and an analysis of TUC's policy documents such as the selection criteria. Some policy documents do also play a large role in the historical selecting of emojis, where the inclusions of emojis are viewed as amendments to the original emoji policy by TUC. Additionally, the more text-focused analysis of policy documents also switches between different documents due to overlapping problematisations, including a slideshow about Unicode emojis, the selection criteria, and the more specific strategy documents by TUC. The full extent of TUC policy documents, contextual knowledge and external sources included in the analysis is described below.

3.1.3.2 Data collection and sampling

As relayed in section 2.2.3 regarding the WPR approach to objects of analysis, data collection in this paper takes on quite a broad meaning. This is especially the case, as I consider contextual knowledge to be a part of the data collection, since policy documents are only 'levers', and reflection on TUC's governance of emojis comes about both on behalf of contextual information, external sources, and the specific policies.

This is shown in the figure called 'Data Categories' below, where the different data sources are highlighted – contextual and theoretical information from the literature review, Unicode.org documents that convey Unicode policy, and other sources such as Emojipedia, petitions, and newspaper articles which are designated as external sources:

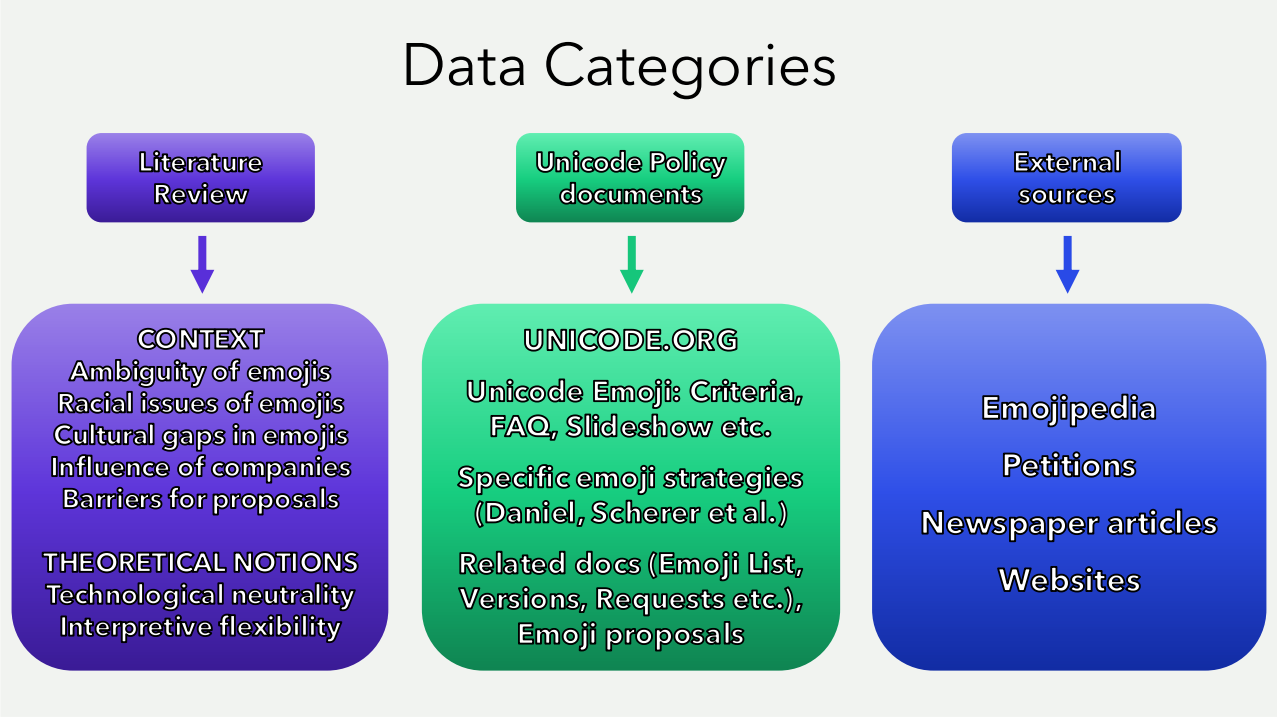

Figure 6: Overview of data categories included in this paper.

What is important to note about the above figure and about the data in this paper is TUC's sprawling array of emoji documents as well as their availability or lack of such. The extensive array of Unicode policy documents gathered as data in this paper is therefore illustrated in the figure below:

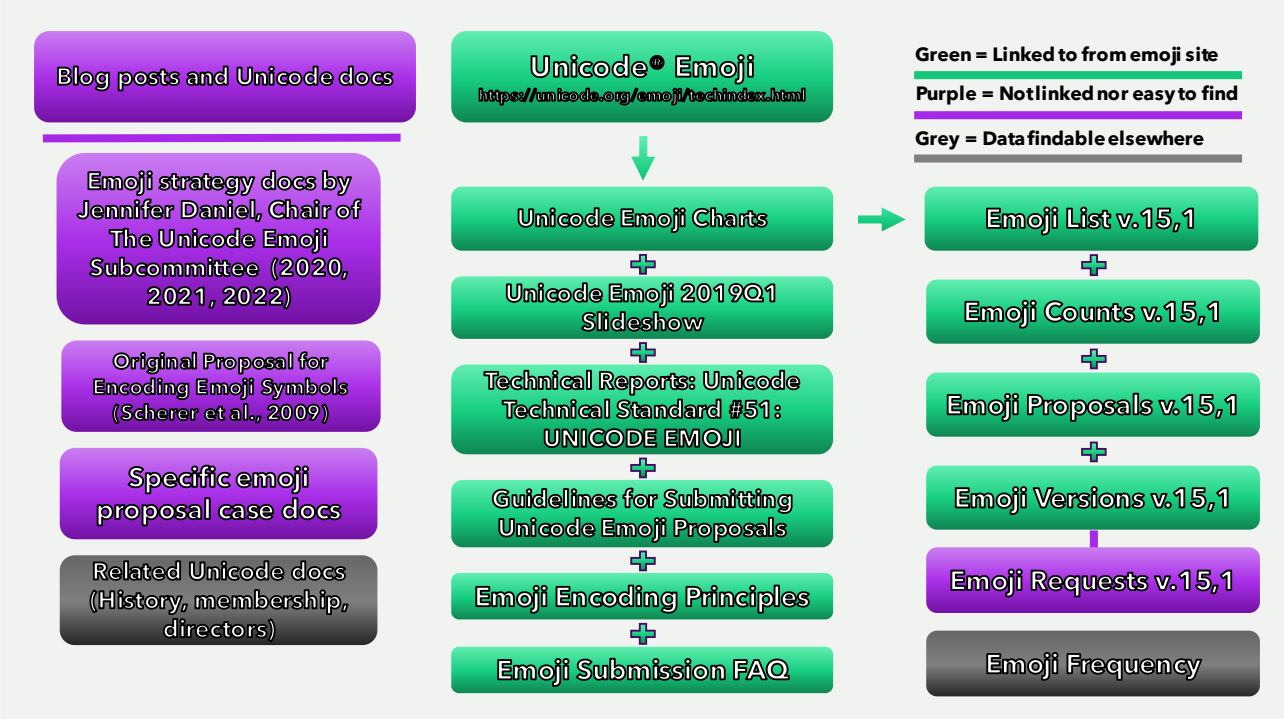

Figure 7: Overview of TUC policy documents gathered as data, here categorized in colour depending on availability.

In the above, the dataset is shown to consist of some contextual information, gathered not only in the literature review but also in relevant newspaper articles and so on. The primary data category, Unicode emoji documents, is shown to be an extensive category, where most of the documents regarded as policy were found on what I consider to be the main Unicode emoji site - https://unicode.org/emoji/techindex.html.

However, it is important to mention that this main Unicode emoji site is *not* the one that you will find if you go to the main Unicode site, which is https://home.unicode.org/. The home.unicode.org site is a more user-friendly site, where one can click on the category 'Emoji' (The Unicode Consortium, Frontpage, 2023h). When clicking on this category, one is directed to a part of the website, where some information is present, but the Unicode.org emoji site as noted above is here only described at the bottom of this page with the text "Other questions? For more technical information see: https://unicode.org/emoji/techindex.html" (The Unicode Consortium, About Emoji, 2023a).

As such, the main point of this data collection process is that TUC has a sprawling array of emoji documents which have been uncovered and gathered as data for this paper's analysis. However, these emoji documents have not been readily available on the main site, where they are even labeled 'technical' information, and this echoes an important point in the analysis regarding how obscure TUC's policy of emojis effectively is.

Regarding sampling, one can readily label both the choice of TUC as an organization and the data as purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012, p. 418), where TUC as an organization is mentioned in my problem formulation, and my data has been chosen based on the relevance of each document, paper, article and webpage to the problem formulation in question.

However, I want to point out a specific choice in the analysis – that of focusing on flag emojis for the historical selecting of emojis by TUC. The choice of focusing on flag emojis in the emoji policy of TUC is arguably critical case sampling, as Bryman describes such to allow for "[…] a logical inference about the phenomenon of interest […]" (2012, p. 419). The literature review showed that there were cultural gaps in emojis (Kimura-Thollander & Kumar, 2019; Lee et al., 2019, see chapter 2), and here, the flag emojis are arguably the most direct case of possible cultural gaps in the emoji 'lexicon'. Furthermore, Jennifer Daniels' blog post in 2022 about the end of flag emoji inclusion by TUC shows that the emoji policy concerning direct representation in the form of flag emojis is now 'complete' and therefore arguably one of the most appropriate points of departure for critique of the emoji policy. Finally, flag emojis can represent other elements than countries and areas, most significantly exemplified with the Transgender and Rainbow flags, but also apparent with the pirate flag. This shows that some flag emojis connect to causes and other elements in pop culture in a way that may arguably be closer to most other types of emojis, and this allows the inquiry into flag emoji inclusion to also retain some inference about TUC's selecting of emojis in general.

3.1.4 Critical discussion of privilege and trustworthiness

As argued in section 3.1.2, my poststructuralist viewpoints and my interpretivist epistemological position necessitate transparency and discussion – which is also noted to be the final part of WPR analysis by Bacchi & Goodwin in section 3.1.3. However, due to this part critiquing this paper's own central arguments instead of adding to them, it will be conveyed here as a discussion of methodological transparency, primary choices, and possible blind spots of privilege to appropriately situate the analysis in such frameworks.

Trustworthiness is described through four criteria by Bryman, based on the propositions of researchers Guba and Lincoln in papers from 1985 and 1994, listed as being credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (2012, p. 390-393). These four criteria draw attention to the way that multiple accounts of social phenomena may be concurrently correct, rather than the belief that a single account is ultimately correct, as is arguably assumed with the terms of validity and reliability (Bryman, 2012, p. 390).

Credibility concerns the canons of good practice and showing research findings to the members of the social world that the research pertains to, while confirmability regards the researcher's attempt at analysing and interpreting as neutrally as possible without allowing personal values or theoretical inclinations to overtly sway judgement (Bryman, 2012, p. 390+392-393).

For confirmability, one could argue that situating my paper as critique in the first place already 'overtly sways judgment' by replacing a supposedly 'neutral' view of social phenomena such as emojis with a 'political' view of the social phenomena, 'injecting' power relations where there may be none. However, such critique of my Foucaultian viewpoint of emojis is partly disrupted by my argument based on Saussure's theory of linguistic signs, where I argue that emojis are not a language, and instead should be seen as signs intentionally created and managed by TUC. Yet, if one disregards the Foucaultian viewpoint of power relations as elements that are important to uncover, such a stance would arguably view my theoretical viewpoint as 'overtly' swaying my judgment and therefore, my theoretical inclination would in this case show me to not have acted in good faith when observing TUC's representation of its selecting of emojis.

On a more surface-level basis of confirmability, one could argue that my theoretical and contextual knowledge gathered in the literature review also affected my point of departure for the analysis regarding racial and cultural implications, heightening my focus on cultural diversity in the historical selecting of emojis by TUC. However, this is part of the iterative process also found in the abductive logic of enquiry, where the theoretical and contextual knowledge helps to 'read' and conceptualize the selecting of emojis by TUC, while the extensive number of TUC policy documents arguably serve to negate any ill-conceived interpretation (see section 3.1.1).

Furthermore, as for example Miltner (2020) was a member of TUC when conducting research, such membership would arguably risk lowering her confirmability, as she may risk being overtly swayed by inside

perspectives from TUC. I can disclose the information that I have never been and do not plan on becoming a member of TUC now nor in the future. On the other hand, my lack of insider perspectives from TUC may arguably lower my credibility, as both the concrete process of meetings in TUC and possible comments from TUC on this paper's representation has not been included. However, both Kimura-Thollander & Kumar (2019) as well as Miltner (2020) have included TUC mails, an interview with a TUC member, and one participant observation in their studies, which is knowledge that did influence part of the conclusions in this paper. Regarding possible corrections from TUC regarding interpretations, my emphasis on texts as departure points and on the producing part of power and policy does negate the need for the viewpoint of the creator of the texts, as the intentions of TUC do not disrupt the representation of problems that their policies produce – rather, TUC clarifying intentions may instead produce new representations of problems.

My specific privileges arguably pertain to both credibility, confirmability, and in a WPR sense to my ability to represent the problems of TUC's selecting of emojis appropriately through lenses of cultural diversity and racial issues. In this context, it is important to reiterate that as a white cis male residing in Denmark with the prospects of finishing a master's degree and hopefully getting a close-to middle-income job after graduating, I acknowledge that there may be blind-spots in my arguably culturally affected perception and interpretation of data. Here, the viewpoints of researchers of both other colours, other genders, and other cultures would possibly affect this paper's credibility and confirmability to better represent the problems with TUC's selecting of emojis from racial and diversity perspectives.

Finally, transferability relates to describing the social phenomena being studied in a way where others can assess whether the findings can be transferred to other cases, while dependability is about keeping as complete record of the research process as possible for other researchers to assess the degree of 'proper' conduct in the research process (Bryman, 2012, p. 390-391). In this paper, I have sought to conduct the research with a focus on good practices such as highlighting and relaying data as directly as possibly, while also extensively describing my argumentation for what is being done with each element of the paper and why specific elements are included, which hopefully serves to make transferability easier to assess for other researchers. Regarding dependability, Bryman concedes that the process of auditing research based on complete records of the research process has not become popular due to the demanding parts of it (2012, p. 392). Nevertheless, the processes of research have been relayed where relevant (as seen in section 3.1.1), and records of all documents collected as data have been 'printed' to pdf files, copied onto at least two computers, serving to increasing the dependability as much as possible.

Chapter 4

In this chapter, the analysis of the data material described in section 3.1.3 is relayed. Firstly, an account of the history of Unicode emojis is conveyed with a focus on flag emojis as a case of possible cultural and political bias. Secondly, the general policy documents of emoji selecting by TUC are analysed, including but not limited to TUC's Guidelines for Submitting Unicode Emoji Proposals, the Unicode® Technical Standard #51 UNICODE EMOJI, the Emoji Submission FAQ and more.

4.1 Analysis

This analysis has been conducted with the WPR methodology as per section 3.1.3. However, the analysis is not conveyed through explication of each question and step from the WPR method. Instead, the WPR steps and questions are incorporated implicitly alongside the narration of the analysis conveyed below.

4.1.1 A 'flagged' history of Unicode emojis

The original intention of TUC with the encoding of emojis was to ensure interoperability with three cell phone carriers in Japan (Scherer et al., 2009). In the 'rationale' of the proposal document from 2009, they outline that the inclusion of emojis in the Unicode Standard is not only done for the cell phone carriers and their clients, but also for data to be handled without loss or corruption across mail systems, search engines and more, with the emojis being supported by Google Mail, Yahoo! Mail and in Apple's Iphone (Scherer et al., 2009). At surface level, what was problematised with the proposal of encoding emojis were then interoperability issues in terms of TUS compatibility with the emojis present on Japanese phones.

Importantly, however, this 2009 proposal also considers the possibility of emojis beyond this core set of Unicode Standard characters that according to the proposal 'complete' the standard's representation of a 'fixed' emoji set (Scherer et al., 2009). Here, TUC writes that "[…] there is no demonstrated need for encoding of Emoji beyond the proposed core set. The core set cannot be further extended to support additional Emoji without creating interoperability problems even within the cell phone carrier' own networks." (Scherer et al., 2009). Here, the reason for creating emojis in the first place – interoperability – is also represented as the reason for limiting TUC's selection of emojis to only this 'core' set of characters. Therefore, TUC arguably problematises both supposed interoperability issues and the lack of 'demonstrated need' for more emojis in their policy proposal for the encoding of emojis.

As such, the 2009 proposal consisted of 674 new Unicode Standard characters proposed to represent emojis, with 114 existing Unicode Standard characters also supposed to represent emojis (Scherer et al., 2009). It is important to note that TUC counts emoji characters differently than what a layman would consider an emoji,

because several Unicode Standard characters in some cases combine to make only one emoji (The Unicode Consortium, UTS #51: Unicode Emoji, 2023q).

4.1.1.1 2010-2014 emojis: The 'core' set of (flag) emojis

Therefore, the final count of emojis in the first core set, released in 2010 by TUC, differs a little depending on whether a document or a total count is aimed at conveying specific issues or general matters of emoji. However, I will use the total numbers and depictions of emojis as seen in the document 'Emoji Versions, v15.1' by TUC. Here, a screenshot of the 719 emojis released in 2010 looks like this:

Figure 8: The 719 emojis released by TUC in 2010 (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Versions, 2023i).

Since that proposal in 2009, TUC has added several thousand emojis more than displayed above, counting for a total of 3770 emojis to be depicted through the Unicode Standard (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Counts, 2023c). This disrupts the problematisation of the first Unicode emoji proposal both regarding the supposed lack of need for more emojis as well as the lack of technical ability and presence of interoperability issues when adding further emojis, as there clearly were both capability and a need for more emojis.

Since the meaning of emojis is more difficult to retrieve than words, many of the above emojis are difficult to 'read' in terms of the specific reference or function (Tang et al., 2020, see sections 2.1.1; 2.2.1). This is at least the case in terms of reading these emojis as policy, which is why as per section 3.1.3, the focus will be on flag emojis as a case of cultural representation in this visual emoji policy. However, what is noticeable in this 'core' set of emojis is the inclusion of only yellow face emojis, some very specific Japanese emojis such as Tokyo Tower, as well as a very limited number of flags with only China, Germany, Spain, Russia, The United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, South Korea, France, and The United States of America being represented. These inclusions should according to the proposal be considered in terms of TUC's aim for interoperability "[…] with existing data generated by Japanese cell phone users" (Scherer et al., 2009). TUC does claim that characters were added for "complete round-tripping to and from a source set, *not* because they were inherently

of more importance than other characters." (emphasis in original, The Unicode Consortium, UTS #51: Unicode Emoji, 2023q). However, the choice to designate a source set is still a decision to select what emojis can and cannot be used for user representation within TUS. These included emojis constitute an intended non-changeable set of emojis, and therefore they can also to a degree be viewed as the core emoji policy by TUC, with the later additions being, in this sense, 'amendments' to said policy.

Of the significant trends culturally and racially in this core set, the choice of even including flag emojis is an important one. By including not only these but simply any 10 flags, TUC has chosen to engage in a selecting of which countries and to an extent which cultures that are to be directly represented in their emoji 'lexicon'. Solely including these specific county flags, whether they were originally used by the Japanese cell phone carriers or not (which could also be a circular argument – Japanese users likely used simply what was available), arguably serves to represent the core cultural focus of TUC and its members. This argument may especially have merit, when the 2009 policy proposal explicates that TUC sees no 'demonstrated need' for more emojis, despite there only being included 10 flag emojis amongst the many, many cultures, nations, countries, regions, and flags present in the world.

As such, this core set of emojis represented a policy to deal with the 'problem' of interoperability with specific Japanese cell phone carriers for TUC, but the selection of emojis and especially flag emojis on display also effectively represented a 'problem' with the rest of the potential flags not included. The 'problem' with the rest of the potential flags is indirectly referred to the use of emojis by Japanese users, and as such, the represented problem of those missing flags could be explicated to simply be (perceived) non-use among the intended userbase. Conclusively, the problematisation of the core set of emojis signal the intended userbase to be Japanese cell phone users, but I will argue that it also signals the intended userbase of TUC emojis to be the citizens of the countries, whose flags have been represented – mostly Western countries as well as Russia, South Korea, Japan, and China.

In 2014, 139 new emojis were added to this emoji 'lexicon' by TUC:

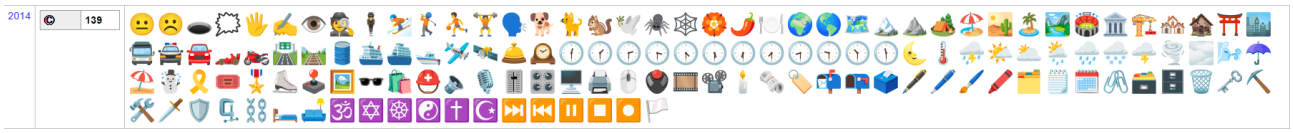

Figure 9: The 139 emojis added in 2014, screenshot (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Versions, 2023i).

There were not many emojis added in 2014, and the most significant event here is arguably not the specific emojis added, despite the inference that these selected emojis also meant the continued absence of additional skin colours, cultural landmarks, and food as well as other flags. Here, TUC shows that the problems of both no 'demonstrated need' for new emojis and interoperability issues when including new emojis were not as problematic as first represented to be. As such, it can be argued that the reason for the representation of 'need'

and interoperability as issues back in 2009 was to ensure that the 'core' set of emojis was seen as unproblematic in terms of the silences that it represented in terms of its lack of diversity.

According to the technical standard, the additional characters for emoji inclusion have since 2014 been "[…] based on the *Selection Factors* found in Guidelines for Submitting Unicode Emoji Proposals" (emphasis and link in original, The Unicode Consortium, UTS #51: Unicode Emoji, 2023q). It is therefore fair to assume that all emojis until 2015 have been added without any participation of the public at all, and most importantly, that TUC after these 2014 inclusions claim to have followed the selection factors explicated in the 'Guidelines' document (see section 4.1.3).

4.1.1.2 2015 emojis: Skin-tone variants and many more (flag) emojis

In 2015, 776 new emojis were added to the emoji 'lexicon' by TUC:

Figure 10: The 776 emojis added in 2015 by TUC, screenshot (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Versions, 2023i).

This is where TUC included the skin-tone variants of face emojis described and discussed through relevant papers in the literature review. Stark & Crawford (2015) argued that the scale used for the skin-tone colours, the Fitzpatrick scale, exemplified the "indebtedness to established hierarchies of gendered and racialized authority and inequality." (2015, p. 7). Furthermore, Sweeney & Whaley (2019) argued that even the yellow face emojis before this set of emojis showed the colour-blindness of TUC by virtue of being 'assumed' white – a factor that to some extent can be supported by the fact that flags of nations with primarily white populations were focused on by TUC in their core set of emojis. Regarding the concrete selecting of the skin-tone variants in terms of racial considerations, Miltner (2020) shows how TUC presupposed their inclusion of emojis to be a pragmatic task rather than a political one, believing in their own technological neutrality. Miltner (2020) also shows how TUC was aware of racial implications like those Stark & Crawford (2015) draw attention to regarding the Fitzpatrick scale, but Miltner highlights how these arguments of racial inequality were explicitly undermined in the decision-making process of TUC before the release of the new skin-tone modifiers in 2015. One can argue that TUC's representation, selecting this scale for its skin-tone variants of emojis, thereby problematises the complexity of the racial and diversity issues by simplifying them into a five-step scale with a default 'colourblind' option in the yellow face emoji. This effectively governs the use of emojis to

continuously represent ‘whiteness’ as the default option, just like the ten flag emojis were the chosen as the ‘non-negotiable’ options of user representation in the core set of emojis.

Another significant inclusion to the emoji ‘lexicon’ in 2015 were the new flag emojis. 247 separate flag emojis were included, and this meant that most countries and nations on all continents were represented by a flag emoji. According to Jennifer Daniel, Unicode Emoji Subcommittee Chair, TUC chose ISO 3166 as the standard, and therefore the specific country codes from ISO 3166-1 alpha 2 are the source of country flag designations (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). This is an international standard that defines which codes of letters to be used when referring to countries as well as subdivision (Statistics Denmark, 2023). ISO uses the names of countries that UN designates (Statistics Denmark, 2023).

Among the additions were flags of countries, nations, and areas like Taiwan, Hong Kong, Palestinian Territories, Vatican City, Greenland, Samoa, and separate flag emojis for American Samoa and ‘U.S. Outlying Islands’. An example of how this selecting of flag emojis depending on ISO is, however, still a specific choice of representation, is Tibet. Tibet has a flag and a so-called Parliament-in-exile (Central Tibetan Administration, 2023). However, in ISO, Tibet has the designation of being an ‘autonomous region’ with the code of CN-XZ, previously CN-54, marking it as being solely a Chinese region (ISO, 2023). Yet, places like Greenland and the U.S Outlying Islands have their own country codes in ISO, ‘prompting’ TUC to represent them with flag emojis, while such places are arguably regions of their respective countries as much as Tibet is. As such, considering the inclusion of flag emojis as signalling the intended userbase of TUC emojis, this exclusion of the Tibet flag may show how the Han Chinese population is likely to be one of the intended userbases of TUC emoji, as TUC avoids the contentious Chinese political issue of Tibet by referring to ISO.

Furthermore, the emoji flags included in 2015 are all called “country-flags” (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji List, 2023f), despite this designation depending significantly on the political frame which areas are viewed from. As such, despite including many flags representing many areas, nations and countries, TUC’s selection of these 247 flags has arguably been affected by bias, albeit somewhat indirectly through ISO. TUC’s representation of ISO as the framework for their flag emoji selection is thereby arguably another attempt at producing their selection of emojis as being as unproblematic as possible.

4.1.1.3 2016-2017 emojis: A smaller inclusion of (flag) emojis

In 2016, 755 emojis were added to the emoji ‘lexicon’:

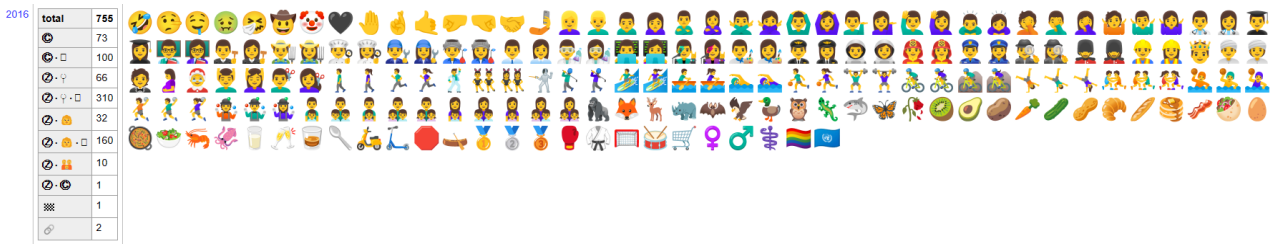

Figure 11: Screenshot of the 755 emojis are not all depicted separately due to them being combinations of different characters (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Versions, 2023i).

As noted, emojis are in some cases combinations of characters, and therefore many of the 'new emojis' in the above emoji count are skin-tone variants of the depicted faces or people. TUC stuck to the Fitzpatrick scale for those emojis, while two flags were added (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji List v15.1, 2023f). The additional flags were the rainbow flag, which was included under the flag category, and the United Nations flag under the country-flag category (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji List, 2023f). According to a news article from Quartz, a business news website aiming at covering a global worldview, the rainbow flag emoji was called for as early as in June 2015 as a symbol of queer pride in light of the US Supreme Court legalizing same-sex marriage that month (Bhattacharya, 2016). More than a year later, Mark Davis, both a software engineer at Google since 2006 and president of TUC since 1991 (The Unicode Consortium, Board of Directors, 2023s), submitted a proposal that urged TUC to use combinations of characters in order to have the rainbow flag released in 2016 instead of 2017 (Bhattacharya, 2016). Bhattacharya (2016) relays that the rainbow flag emoji was among the 30 most requested emojis of 2016 according to Emojipedia, an emoji reference site, which is also a member of TUC and is owned by Zedge Inc. (Emojipedia, 2023a). Outside of the rainbow flag emoji being requested and there being some pressure politically, it is difficult to know specifics of what made TUC consider and implement the rainbow emoji, because no statements are released regarding these inclusions. This non-disclosure of concrete reasons for inclusions are arguably another way for TUC to 'unproblematise' their selecting of emojis, creating ambiguity regarding reasons and processes.

Other top requested emojis by Emojipedia users in 2016 were the Aboriginal flag, the Kurdistan flag, and the Hindu Tamil flag (Burge, Top Emoji Requests 2016, 2016).

In 2017, 239 emojis were added to the emoji 'lexicon':

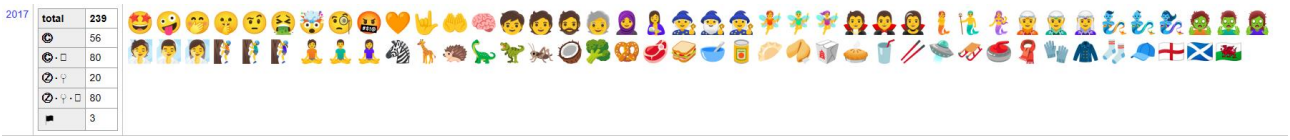

Figure 12: The 239 new emojis added through combination of characters in 2017, screenshot (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Versions, 2023i).

Most notably, three new flag emojis were added. At the time of writing, they reside under the category "subdivision-flag", as the only three emojis in the whole emoji 'lexicon' (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji

List, 2023f). The three new flag emojis represent the flags of England, Scotland, and Wales. The reason for putting these three flags in a different category than all other flags is that these places are not included in the ISO 3166-1 alpha 2 country codes, but are instead included in ISO's 3166-2 codes, which cover 'subdivision regions' (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). As such, the inclusion of these three flag emojis was "the impetus for adding a general mechanism to make all ISO 3166-2 codes be valid for flags" (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). Yet, these three emojis are in 2023 still the only flags in this category of TUC's emoji 'lexicon' (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji List, 2023f). Curiously, Emojipedia lists a placeholder 'emoji' for the Tibet Flag with the ISO 3166-2-code CN-54, which shows how the ISO 3166-2 codes are supported by TUC as Daniel claims, but the emoji itself has not been created and included, so there is nothing but the black placeholder flag for Tibet on Emojipedia (Emojipedia, 2023b).

The choice by TUC to engage in an inclusion of flag emojis representing subdivisions in the ISO standard in this way is arguably another clear sign of TUC's focus on the West. Prior to this, TUC could refer to the ISO standard to 'unproblematise' their selecting of emojis to a degree. With this inclusion, TUC now flagged all 5000 subdivisions in ISO 3166-2 to be possible flag emojis in the emoji 'lexicon'. However, as TUC has still only included those three Western regions in the subdivision-flag category, it indicates TUC's presupposed userbase for its emojis to be even more heavily biased, as the left-out subdivision-flags like Tibet are now an even more direct problematisation of regions that may be conflicting with TUC's intended userbase, like Tibet in China. As such, using Tibet as an example again, one could argue that TUC's emoji policy through its selection of flags in this instance reproduces and reinforces China's strategies of power, becoming a technique of domination (Foucault, 1993; see subsection 2.2.2) on behalf of TUC's presupposed userbase in China, appeasing the Chinese Communist Party.

It is also worth noting that the proposal of the three included flag emojis is designated by TUC to have been submitted in the Emoji Requests list on 7th of July 2016, while also being noted as 'Expired' on the list (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Requests, 2023h). Yet in the 'Emoji Proposals v.15.1' list, two proposals are noted for these three emojis, and while it is likely that the proposal which was accepted is the one that is designated as 'revised', it is still not explicitly stated (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Proposals, 2023g).

This hints at a larger issue for the handling and selection of emoji proposals by TUC. The only reason that I can find the proposals for these flags and see that there were two different proposals is *because the TUC accepted the final proposal*. In the Emoji Requests list, there are no explanations for the rejection of proposals, and there are no people listed as submitting the proposals (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Requests, 2023h). Furthermore, if I just went by this Emoji Requests lists, I would only see that the original proposal of the three flags expired, requiring me to cross-reference to know that they were included. There are also no emojis in the Draft Emoji Candidates at this time of writing, where emojis are only shown if they were already proposed to TUC, reviewed by The Unicode Emoji Subcommittee, and selected, supposedly based on the selection factor

in the ‘Guidelines for Submitting Unicode Emoji Proposals’ document (The Unicode Consortium, Draft Emoji Candidates, 2023b). This shows the point shortly described in subsection 3.1.3.2 regarding the multitude of TUC emoji policy documents. As such, not only does TUC’s array of policy documents arguably serve to disrupt critique as much as possible without directly obstructing it, the non-disclosure of what requests are accepted and the representation of these documents as ‘technical documents’ arguably serve two elements. Firstly, to problematise critical inquiry itself through silence and ambiguity. Secondly, to problematise the representation of these documents as policy, instead enforcing the technological neutrality narrative, which can be labelled a technique of domination.

As such, it is impossible to know the reasonings for rejecting the flag emojis proposed in 2017, which were designated as such in the Emoji Requests list: Basque flag, Berber flag, Britanny flag, Catalonia flag, Esperanto flag, Flag of Northern Cyprus, Northern Ireland flag, Sami Language flag, US state/other flags (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Requests, 2023h). It is also unclear exactly when TUC declined these proposals, meaning they could have been declined later than 2017.

The high number of different flag emoji proposals in 2017 is also reflected among the top 30 requested emojis at Emojipedia in 2017, with more flags being requested: Aboriginal flag (again), Catalonia’s flag, Kurdistan’s flag (again), Northern Ireland’s flag, Pan-African flag, Pansexual flag, Sami flag, Texas flag, Torres-Strait Islander flag, and Transgender flag (Burge, Top Emoji Requests 2017, 2017). To a degree, the increase in many different flag requests to Emojipedia could also point to an increased awareness of emojis or even an increased need for emojis as means to represent or identify oneself. As such, users may have become aware of emojis as a technique of their self (Foucault, 1993; see subsection 2.2.2).

4.1.1.4 2018-2019 emojis: The absence of new (flag) emojis

In 2018, 161 emojis were added to the emoji ‘lexicon’:

Figure 13: The 161 new emojis added in 2018, screenshot (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Versions, 2023i).

Only one new flag emoji was added in 2018, and it was the pirate flag emoji in the ‘flag’ category (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji List, 2023f). Yet, as mentioned above, many different flags had been both proposed to TUC and on Emojipedia’s most requested list in 2017. In 2018, only four flags were on Emojipedia’s most requested list, repeating from the previous years: Transgender flag, Catalonia flag, Kurdistan flag, and the Aboriginal flag (Burge, Top Emoji Requests 2018, 2018).

The pirate flag emoji does not figure at all on the list of Emoji Requests by TUC, but it does feature on the list of Emoji Proposals, where Jeremy Burge from Emojipedia and Bryan Haggerty from Twitter proposed it on the 5th of January 2018 (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Requests, 2023h; Emoji Proposals, 2023g; Burge & Haggerty, L2/18-059 Proposal for new RGI Emoji Sequence: Pirate Flag Emoji, 2018). It is once again unclear exactly why this emoji was included. At the same time, both a NATO flag emoji, a Flag of Brittany emoji (another one), and a Frisian flag emoji were proposed in 2018 and declined (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Requests, 2023h). The NATO emoji was called a duplicate proposal and declined twice on the list (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Requests, 2023h). From an outside point of view, it is also impossible to assess for example on what grounds the NATO flag emoji was called a duplicate proposal, and whether that is the primary reason for declining it, due to the non-disclosure of this process of emoji selecting conducted by TUC.

In 2019, 398 emojis were added to the emoji 'lexicon':

Figure 14: The 398 new emojis added in 2019, screenshot (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Versions, 2023i).

As seen above, no new flag emojis were included by TUC this year. On the list of Emojipedia's 30 most requested emojis this year, there were even more different flags: Aboriginal flag (again), Bisexual flag, Bretagne flag, Catalonia flag (again), Kurdistan flag (again), Native American Tribes flag, NATO flag, Northern Ireland flag (again), Pan-Africa flag (again), Texas flag (again), Tibet flag, Torres-Strait Islander flag (again), and the Transgender flag with new design (Burge, Top Emoji Requests 2019, 2019).

Regarding proposals to TUC for new flag emojis, both the Aboriginal flag, a Quebec flag, and the Transgender flag were proposed in 2019 (Emoji Requests, 2023). The Aboriginal flag and the Quebec flag were declined, while the Transgender flag was accepted for inclusion by TUC, not in 2019 but in the following year (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Requests, 2023h).

4.1.1.5 2020 emojis: The Transgender flag emoji

In 2020, 334 new emojis were added to the emoji 'lexicon':

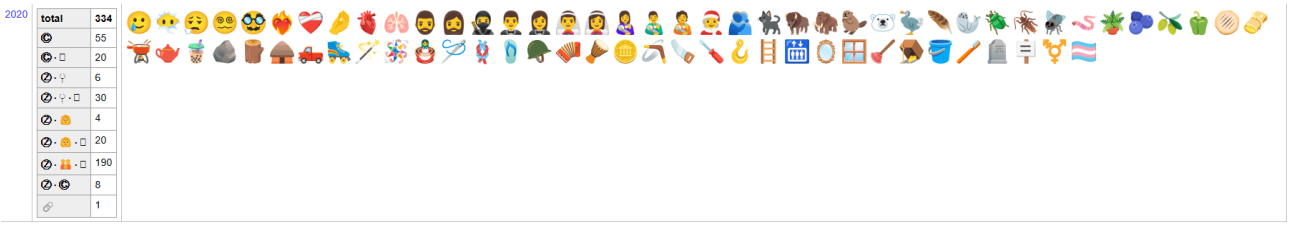

Figure 15: The 334 new emojis added in 2020, screenshot (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Versions, 2023i).

This year, the sole flag emoji being included was the Transgender flag emoji, proposed in 2019 (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Requests, 2023h). It had, however, also been proposed in 2017, where it had been marked as declined and a 'Duplicate Proposal', which does seem odd, considering the second Transgender flag was listed as proposed only two years later in 2019 (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Requests, 2023h). This serves to further obscure the meaning of the marking called 'Duplicate Proposal' on the Emoji Requests list and makes it more difficult to know why TUC declined the Transgender flag emoji in 2017.

However, the history of the Transgender flag emoji explicates some of TUC's silences that serve to 'unproblematise' their selecting of emojis. In 2018, as visible on figure 13, TUC included a lobster emoji in the emoji 'lexicon'. The lobster emoji was proposed by two parties on the 30th of June 2017: Frederik Fredslund Lassen with Katrine Kammeyer-Andersen as cowriter, and Dylan Sherry from Emojination, which was an activist organisation that helped people go through the process of proposing new emojis to TUC (Emojination, 2023; Lassen & Kammeyer-Andersen, 2017; Sherry, 2017). Both these proposals and one additional one from 2014 were referenced by the Senator of Main, Angus King, in his direct letter to Lisa Moore, chair of the Unicode Technical Committee, in September 2017. Here, King expressed his support for the lobster emoji and cited amongst others a petition signed by more than 4000 people for the lobster emoji on Change.org (Angus King, 2017). The 2014 proposal referenced by Senator King is not featured on the Emoji Proposals list, likely due to emoji proposals not being processed in the same way before 2015. King also referenced the use of a hashtag called #NoLobsterEmoji on Twitter as being a case of the "thousands of examples of likely users of a new character […]" (Angus King, 2017). Dylan Sherry's proposal also cited Twitter messages that "demonstrate the frustration and confusion of having to use the shrimp and crab emojis in place of a lobster emoji" (Sherry, 2017).

On the 7th of February of 2018, Senator Angus King applauded the decision by TUC to include the lobster emoji (Angus King, 2018). It is in this context that Charlie Craggs from the trans community launched a petition on the 19th of July 2018, asking the question: "What's more important: the trans community or a lobster?" (Craggs, 2018). The petition has been signed by 10.174 people at the time of writing, and it saw the trans community adopting the lobster emoji for themselves as trans representation, because lobsters are able to be Gynandromorphs with both female and male characteristics (Craggs, 2018). Regarding this, the journalist Cara Curtis in an article for The Next Web, a tech news website owned by the Financial Times, stated that "The

biggest issue here, and an important one to ponder, is why a lobster emoji was released before Unicode ever thought of representing the trans community with their flag." (Curtis, 2018).

As the Transgender flag emoji was included in the emoji 'lexicon' in 2020, the trans community did not need to adopt the lobster emoji for their cause any longer. However, when TUC declined the Transgender flag emoji proposed in 2017, while the lobster emoji was adopted in 2018, and the Transgender flag finally got included in 2020, it is impossible to know whether both the lobster emoji or the Transgender flag emoji would have been included without petitions, and especially in the case of the lobster emoji, without significant political pressure on TUC. This shows how TUC's selecting of emojis may be biased towards political pressure despite TUC's claim of a process that is "[…] fair, balanced, and open to anyone, from individuals to non-profits to companies to governments." (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Submission FAQ, 2023k). Contrary to this, TUC's non-disclosure of emoji selection arguably produces a position from which the organisation can both 'unproblematise' its selecting of emojis, and more importantly, it can to an extent include and exclude the emojis that it wants to, depending on factors such as political pressure. This can once again be directly likened to a technique of domination, where TUC effectively problematises critique itself through non-disclosure and 'unproblematisation' of its emoji policy.

Examples of flag emojis proposed in 2020 but declined at some point afterwards by TUC were also the Pan-African flag emoji, the Bisexual flag emoji, the Assyrian flag emoji, the Sami Language flag emoji (new design), a Peace flag emoji, and none other than a Karen flag emoji (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Requests, 2023h).

4.1.1.6 2021-2023: Selecting the end of (flag) emoji inclusion

In 2021, 112 new emojis were added to the emoji 'lexicon':

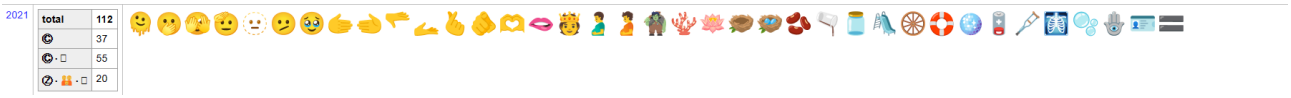

Figure 16: The 112 new emojis added in 2021, screenshot (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Versions, 2023i).

This year, no flag emojis were included, despite examples like the Pan-African flag, the Bisexual flag, and the Peace flag emojis being proposed in 2020 (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Requests, 2023h). In 2021, an Asexual flag emoji and a Gypsy flag emoji were also proposed (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Requests, 2023h). As such, the inclusion of the 112 emojis in 2021 can therefore be interpreted to be a deliberate problematisation of the proposed flag emojis like the Pan-African flag emoji and the Asexual flag emoji, but once again without any explanation in the Emoji Request list.

Due to TUC's non-disclosure regarding its selection of emojis, however, the represented problematisation by TUC of its selection criteria is regarded as important to analyse for more concrete nuance in terms of TUC's problematisation of potential emoji proposals. This is done in section 4.1.3.

The general trend from 2021 and onwards have been that much fewer new emojis have been approved, as there were only 31 new emojis included in 2022:

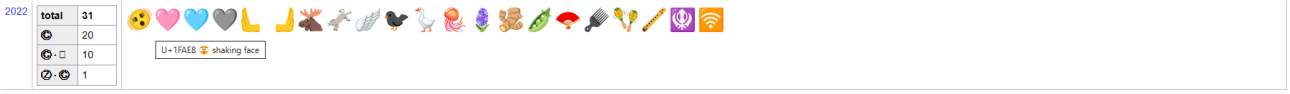

Figure 17: The 31 new emojis added in 2022, screenshot (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Versions, 2023i).

Just like in 2021, no new flag emojis were included by TUC in 2022. This year, there were also no new proposals for flag emojis.

However, on the 28th of March 2022, the post called "The Past and Future of Flag Emoji", authored by the chair of the Unicode Emoji Subcommittee, Jennifer Daniel, was published on TUC's blog. The main message of this rather lengthy post was that TUC would no longer accept proposals for new flag emojis. In doing so, Daniel produces a problematisation of flag emojis and more specifically the inclusion of more flag emojis into TUC's emoji 'lexicon'. Her argument regards both (1) TUC's recognition of regions, (2) the use of flag emojis, and (3) the goal of emojis for TUC.

Regarding (1) the recognition of regions, she outlines the history of why flag emojis were included in TUS in the first place, referring to both the Japanese mobile phone carriers and the issue of interoperability, as well as TUC's choice of using the ISO region codes, particularly the ISO 3166-1 alpha 2 codes, to designate countries (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). Specifically, Daniel writes that "The Unicode Consortium isn't in the business of determining what is a country and what isn't." (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022).

The ISO standard is here explicitly used to argue against the main implication of TUC's selection of specific flags, namely the problematisation of these flags and these areas, as Daniel argues that "anyone could make a font of 5,000 flags using these sequences. They are valid sequences. They are legit sequences. […] The significant difference here is that valid doesn't mean they are recommended for implementation." (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). However, once again, this 'unproblematisation' is silencing the fact that TUC is still choosing not to include more flag emojis in TUS. The included country-flag emojis are solely those in the ISO 3166-1 standard, consisting of 249 countries, while only the England, Scotland and Welsh flags are included as emojis from the ISO 3166-2 standard with 5,000 recognized region codes (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022; The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Versions, 2023i). Relating this to a 'use' perspective, Daniel writes that only these three regional flags of England, Scotland, and Wales "[…] have

widely adopted emoji" (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). However, if any of the other geographically recognized regions with ISO 3166-2 codes had been included in the emoji 'lexicon', perhaps they would also have 'widely adopted' emojis. Such focus on use of emojis once again problematises non-use, but without acknowledging the fact that those excluded regional flags have not been 'tested' regarding emoji usage, nor would users be likely to know that they existed, even if they were included hereafter, which would also lower the usage of them.

Daniel shows awareness of TUC's lack of consistency when including those 3 UK flags with the ISO 3166-2 codes, noting the use of these flags in sports, while ultimately calling the inclusion 'short-sighted' (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). She directly acknowledges that "The inclusion of new flags will always continue to emphasize the exclusion of others" (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). Here, the inclusion of new flag emojis are represented as problematic *because* of the nature in which selection will always cause de-selection, and this essentially problematises exclusion of flag emojis. However, selecting to stop including any more flag emojis does not dispel the exclusion of flag emojis and 'fix' the problem. Instead, it ensures that all other regional territories than the currently represented ones are excluded from TUC's emoji 'lexicon', enforcing TUC's bias of user representation.

What TUC's representation of regional recognition is effectively producing here is an 'unproblematisation' of TUC's curation of emojis – markedly TUC's current techniques of domination.

For the argument regarding the use of flag emojis (2), Daniel describes how flags are the least used emoji category, referencing her own blog post that also appears on the Unicode webpage called Emoji Frequency, where a graph shows emojis ranked in terms of use in 2021 and 2019 (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Frequency, 2023e; Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). The most used flag emojis in 2021 were the triangular flag at rank 212, the US flag at rank 236, the rainbow flag at rank 377, the Brazil flag at rank 406, the U.S Outlying Islands at rank 413, and so on:

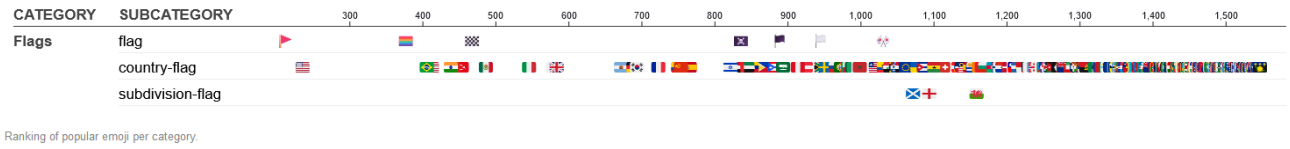

Figure 18: Ranking of flag emojis usage per subcategory in 2021, screenshot (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Frequency, 2023e).

Regarding why usage matters, Daniel explicates: "Any emoji additions have to take into consideration usage frequency, trade-offs with other choices, font file size, and the burden on developers (and users!) to make it easier to send and receive emoji." (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). This widens the problematisation of non-use in a significant way, representing emojis that are not used as being a 'burden' on firstly developers and only secondly on users. This representation arguably refers not only to non-use as

problematic but to developers' use of resources on emojis as problematic, which can be called an argument of resource allocation.

What is unspoken here is that including more flags takes up more resources both for TUC and likely also for its members such as Apple, Google, and Microsoft. These corporate members of TUC will also possibly be the ones tasked with the challenge of implementing more user-friendly solutions for users to have an easier time selecting flag emojis, should all 5000 ISO 3166-2 codes be included as flags for example. Such argumentation echoes Stark & Crawfords (2015) perspective of emojis to be a tool for capitalist interests to for example gather more data about users rather than grant more freedom of expression (see section 2.1.1). In the end, when such a heavy emphasis on emoji usage is present, it signals a fundamental viewpoint of emojis and their ease of use as being a *product* or a *service* that TUC and its members are *offering* users. The most fundamental issue with this viewpoint is that users cannot practically opt out of using Unicode emojis because of Unicode's widespread adoption. Therefore, TUC is not so much offering a product as it is effectively governing the conduct of emoji users as per Foucault's governmentality (see subsection 2.2.2).

To a degree, one could also argue that the usage of emojis have already been affected by first by the core set of emojis being released, and then the subsequent focus on usage by TUC, because the mechanism of emojis having been included for longer means that more people are familiar with the option of using that emoji. New emojis do not have the same awareness for users to begin using them. At the same time, emoji keyboards already place the most used emojis first with flag emojis being placed last, which makes them apt for being used the least. Therefore, the argument of usage is also to a degree a circular argument that points all the way back to the intended userbase for the emojis selected by TUC, biasing all further usage and therefore also all further emoji policy. The intended userbase's technique of self in terms of emojis therefore ends up affecting TUC's governance of emojis almost directly, creating a dynamic of power relations where the intended userbase indirectly produces TUC's 'unproblematisation' of specific emoji usage in the first place.

For the concrete uses of flag emojis, Daniel argues that flag emojis are 'specific' in their meaning, and that "they don't represent concepts used multiple times a day or even multiple times a year. You could say flag emoji have transcended the messaging experience and are primarily found in more auto-biographical contexts" (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). Here, non-use in daily contexts is problematised, while use of emojis in messaging is represented as non-problematic. As such, TUC's bias regarding specific uses of emojis becomes apparent in this regard, where emojis are effectively represented as elements made for use primarily in frequent messaging, and only secondly to represent one's regional identity. This reflects a capitalist viewpoint of only measurable outcomes, such as frequent inputs, being reliable and therefore profitable.

The third part of Daniel's argument relates to TUC's goals with all emoji, where Daniel writes that "The more emoji can operate as building blocks, the more versatile, fluid, and useful they become!" (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). Here, she further states that TUC cannot add new emojis "for every concept under

the Sun (this is simply not attainable" (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). Instead, she argues that 'the citizens of the world' can use the colours of heart emojis in combination to signify colours of specific flags for self-expression (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022).

Here, Daniel represents the notion of using emojis as 'building blocks' to be a solution to the problem of adding more emojis, exemplifying it with colours of heart emojis 'showing' flag colours. However, an argument that disrupts this representation is the fact that just like with Legos, the more emojis one has, the more communicative elements and messages one can 'build'. Therefore, what Daniel's representation presupposes and 'unproblematises' is that if emojis are building blocks, then TUC will not have to add more emojis, because the current emoji 'lexicon' gives users enough 'tools' for them to represent themselves without TUC needing to oversee the governance of emoji selection in the future.

This is a goal of having emojis be unspecific, however, and it arguably serves TUC's other goal of allocating as few resources as possible to handling and selecting emojis. Therefore, while this representation problematises the burden for developers, it arguably 'unproblematises' the concrete burden for 'the citizens of the world'. As discussed in section 2.2.1, emojis are not a language because one does not learn a system for connecting depictions to specific concepts when using them. This ambiguity of emojis affords users creative freedom, just like Daniel emphasises, but the concrete effect is that it produces the users as being responsible for managing fewer emojis than elsewise to express themselves appropriately. Users are therefore burdened by TUC withholding 'Lego pieces' of communication, which thereby limits users in building their preferred expressions, and ultimately increases the risks of misinterpretation for users worldwide. This is arguably part of what limits TUC emojis from also becoming a language, with the emoji 'lexicon' still lacking some concepts compared to Chinese radicals according to Lee et al. (2019).

Finally, Daniel's post addresses some questions with a small FAQ, where she writes an answer to the question of why flag emojis for both asexuality, bisexuality, pansexuality, and non-binary people are excluded together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flag emojis, when Wales and Scotland flag emojis are included. Her answer is this:

> *[…] this question is not one we take lightly. In the course of world history, groups have used flags as a rallying cry to be seen, heard, recognized, and understood. In the Unicode Consortium's mission to digitize the world's languages, improve communication online, and achieve meaningful interoperability between platforms, the requests for flags have become a lightning rod for these rallying cries.*
>
> *When people ask for a new flag emoji, we recognize that the underlying request is about more than simply a new emoji. And when we say, "We aren't adding more flags," we are only saying changing the Unicode Standard is not an effective mechanism for this recognition.*

(Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022)

Here, Daniel's representation leaves a lot unspoken. What Daniel seems to presuppose but not state outright is that requests for new flag emojis are about political causes. Importantly, by stating that such requests are about 'more' than a new emoji, Daniel leaves nuances out of her argument and arguably represents those flag emoji requests to *only* regard her presupposed notion – that flag emoji requests are about political causes. She then represents TUC's decision to exclude all other flags from becoming emojis to 'only' problematise the 'effectiveness' of changing TUS as a 'mechanism' to recognise these supposed causes. These terms echo the language of technological neutrality that TUC has employed before (Miltner, 2020; Sweeney & Whaley, 2019), and they along with this representation are once again part of not only 'unproblematising' TUC's decision, but also problematising the view that TUC's choice here is a political one. A political choice by TUC which is effectively as much of a cause in itself as those proposals represented by Daniel as 'causes'.

Therefore, Daniel's closing remarks arguably show that TUC regards the emojis in TUS not as a mechanism to express all causes or identity, but as a mechanism to express only the causes or identities selected by TUC for use amongst the 'citizens of the world' and thereby campaigned by TUC in the years 2010-2022.

In 2023, only 118 new emojis were added to the emoji 'lexicon':

Figure 19: The 118 new emojis added in 2023, screenshot (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Versions, 2023i).

True to form, TUC included no new flag emojis for regions, sexualities or otherwise in 2023. But they did exclude them.

4.1.2 Subconclusion on a 'flagged' history of Unicode emojis

In accordance with the WPR approach by Bacchi & Goodwin (2016), the texts used as levers in the above analysis are primarily the different sets of included emojis, with a focus on flag emojis, in the Emoji Versions document as well as the blog post on flag emojis by Jennifer Daniel and incorporating a slew of other documents. The most significant problems represented in these texts are (1) non-use among the intended userbase, and (2) politically connotated critique of both the emoji selection and the emoji selecting. Below, these problematisations are summarised through the six forms of analysis and questioning by Bacchi & Goodwin (2016, p. 20).

TUC's problematisation of non-use among the intended userbase comes about in the original proposal for encoding emojis in 2009, where a lack of 'demonstrated need' for more emojis was represented through an emphasis on the emoji usage of Japanese cell phone users. One main presupposition in this original proposal for emojis was that no more emojis were supposed to be included in TUS. Together with the problematisation of non-use, the included flag emojis in the original set are therefore interpreted to represent the intended userbase of TUC emojis as an unspoken element of the presupposition that no more emojis were to be included. The intended userbase of TUC emojis is therefore interpreted to be represented by those ten countries, whose flags were included as emojis in the original proposal: China, Russia, Germany, Spain, France, The United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, South Korea, France, and The United States of America. To a degree, the represented problematisation regarding a lack of 'demonstrated need' and the presupposition of not adding more emojis in 2009 were disrupted by the addition of many more emojis in the years 2014-2023.

One of the produced effects of this emphasis on usage is shown in the 2022 blog post written by Jennifer Daniel, where she uses this 'problem' of flag emojis being the least 'used' emojis to argue for TUC's decision to end flag inclusion indefinitely. As Daniel argues for the end of flag emojis through the 'problem' of non-use, she notes how flag emojis are used in biographies rather than in messaging (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). This also shows one of TUC's unspoken presuppositions when representing the 'problem' of non-use, as specific usage is arguably prioritised.

As the represented problematisation of non-use thereby produces the problematisation of flag emoji inclusion as well, Daniel represents the inherent nature regarding the selecting of flag emojis as being problematic due to the inevitable exclusion of some emojis. However, the produced effect of this specific problematisation is that all other flag emojis than the included flag emojis from 2010-2022 are excluded. Therefore, this representation of the 'problem' of exclusion is interpreted to be a way for TUC to avoid engaging with the actual produced effects of this problematisation and thereby as an attempt to 'unproblematise' TUC's selecting and problematisation of specific emojis which has come about since 2009. This 'unproblematisation' of TUC's selecting of emojis is interpreted as an attempt to avoid the frame of 'politics', where political critique is effectively being produced as a 'problem' by TUC.

Political critique being a 'problem' for TUC is consistent with how the organisation governs (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 17). As analysed, the 'problem' comes about in the historical selecting of emojis. In 2015, TUC added 247 flag emojis in an emoji category called "country-flags", which were selected to align with the ISO 3166-1 alpha 2 standard (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Versions, 2023i; Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022). The representation of ISO as unproblematic can be critiqued regarding politically contentious cases like the Tibet flag being excluded, when simultaneously flags representing places like U.S Outlying Islands, and Greenland were included. TUC also added skin-tone variants in 2015 but has been critiqued for ignoring racial implications when basing them on the Fitzpatrick-scale as well as incorporating

the belief of technological neutrality during its process and in its documents (Miltner, 2020; Sweeney & Whaley, 2019; Stark & Crawford, 2015). As such, the 'unproblematisation' of the ISO standard by TUC is arguably also connected to the idea of technological neutrality.

In 2016-2020, notable flag emoji additions were the Rainbow flag emoji in 2016, the flags of England, Scotland, and Wales in 2017 as the only regional flags included at all, and the Transgender flag in 2020. In roughly the same time-frame from 2016-2021, many flag emojis were requested and proposed, including but not limited to the Aboriginal flag, the Sami-language flag, the Pansexual flag, the Catalonian flag, the Northern Ireland flag, the Pan-African flag, and the NATO flag. This selecting of flag emojis represents a problematisation of the excluded flags, and at the same time, the three regional flags included in 2017 technically 'opened the door' to future flag emoji inclusions, but TUC shut this 'door' in the 2022 blog post about flag emojis. There was no disclosure in 2017 regarding why TUC chose to include and exclude these specific flags when selecting emojis, and only in the 2022 blog post, arguing for the end of flag inclusion, is there given some explanation pertaining to usage in 'sport' for the three UK flag emojis. This is arguably due to the 'problem' of political critique. The general non-disclosure regarding TUC's specific reasons for selecting emojis produces not only ambiguity regarding the possible biases in TUC's process of selecting emojis but also the 'problem' of having any inquiry at all into the reasons for specific emojis to be included and excluded.

Furthermore, an additional problematisation is represented in conjunction with the 'problem' of non-use, as new emojis are represented to be a burden on the developers by the 2022 blog post. As such, the presupposition that underlies the represented emphasis on usage is arguably about the cost of adding emojis. These problems are discussed in terms of TUC's governance of emojis, which is argued to produce emojis as a 'product' that TUC 'offers' emoji users. In relation to TUC not 'offering' any additional emojis in its emoji 'lexicon', Daniel proposes for users to see emojis as 'building blocks'. However, this proposition produces users as being responsible for representing their own regional identity with already available emojis, increasing risks of misinterpretation, and effectively puts part of TUC's governance responsibility on the users. Ultimately, these decisions by TUC to effectively exclude all other regional flags despite including regional flags from Wales, Scotland, and England shows how TUC selects emojis not as products for everyone, but primarily for the intended userbase already represented in its flagged history of 2010-2022.

4.1.3 The problematisation of emoji proposals by TUC

In this section, the Guidelines for Submitting Unicode Emoji Proposals by TUC are analysed in order to further explore and nuance TUC's representation of its emoji selecting, especially in terms of possible non-disclosure and problematisation of non-use of emojis.

Firstly, TUC represents the selection criteria in this way: "The Unicode Emoji Subcommittee has developed Guidelines for Submitting Unicode Emoji Proposals so the committee can be as objective as possible when evaluating emoji proposals." (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Submission FAQ, 2023k). Here, the selection criteria themselves are represented as 'objective', which is arguably part of a technological neutrality frame. This is frame is reinforced in the shape of the 'selection factors' with 'inclusion factors' and 'exclusion factors' being present, while submissions meeting the criteria are called "well-formed" (The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). As such, this is a way to 'unproblematise' TUC's governance choices by representing 'neutrality' with these 'guidelines'. Furthermore, since non-disclosure of TUC's specific reasons for rejecting emoji proposals is still present despite TUC having created these selection criteria, this once again arguably produces an indirect problematisation of critique for TUC. This problematisation of critique can also be seen in the nature of the criteria themselves, as the long list of criteria create a barrier between users and the act of producing proposals, disadvantaging "[…] those who do not read or write English well, those who do not have regular access to a computer, those who are not skilled at graphic design, and those who in general are not computer savvy." (Kimura-Thollander & Kumar, 2019, p. 11). This effectively produces emoji proposers to only be those with a specific skill-set and specific linguistic capabilities to create 'well-formed' proposals as opposed to ill-formed proposals, while critique is problematised by the factors being represented as 'objective'.

Secondly, TUC claims that no single 'Selection Factor' decides 'eligibility' and that all the factors are considered when viewing the proposal (The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). However, with the extensive list of selection factors spanning points A-P including several specifying subcategories together with other rules outlined throughout the Guidelines-document as well, this effectively affords TUC total freedom in their actual selecting of emojis, especially as TUC is not being required to disclose any specific reasons. As such, the elements of the Guidelines-document arguably produce emoji proposals as problems in themselves by creating a list incorporating exclusion factors, explicitly representing elements of emoji proposals as problematic.

Despite the representation of selection factors being divided into factors of 'inclusion' and of 'exclusion', however, all the listed factors are arguably reasons for exclusion since inclusion factors are used to exclude proposals, if they do not meet them sufficiently. The selection factors are thus:

'Inclusion' Factors:

A. Compatibility.
B. Usage Level.
    1. Frequency.
    2. Multiple usages.
    3. Use in sequences.
    4. Breaking new ground.

C. Distinctiveness.
D. Completeness.

‘Exclusion’ Factors:

E. Petitions or “frequent requests”.
F. Overly specific.
G. Open-Ended.
H. Already Representable.
I. Logos, brands, other third-party IP rights, UI icons, signage, specific people, specific buildings and landmarks, deities.
J. Transient.
K. Faulty Comparison.
L. Exact Images.
M. Region flags without code.
N. Lack of required rights or license for images.
O. Variations on direction.
P. Includes text.

(The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l)

Some of these selection factors problematise non-usage, while others serve to nuance the the goal of emojis in the terms that Daniel also used to describe emojis in her blog post as ‘building blocks. The factors that represent usage are subcategory 1 of factor B, factor E regarding petitions, and factor J regarding transience of potential emoji symbols. These will be touched upon first. The factors that represent emojis as ‘building blocks’ to different degrees and with different approaches are most of the other factors – Subcategories 2,3 and 4 of factor B, factor C, factor D, factor F, factor G, factor H, and factor L. Outside of these two themes of usage and ‘building blocks’, factor A regarding compatibility arguably represents the same problematisation of interoperability as the original proposal of emojis, but the description notes systems like Snapchat and Twitter, where compatibility is likely not an issue any more (The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). Factors M-P regard either very technical specifications or the decision to enforce special criteria for flag emojis, which has been extensively analysed in the previous section. Factors K and I regard a different problematisation of cultural representation, which is touched upon last.

Subcategory 1 of factor B regards usage level and serves to problematise non-usage. The subcategory has its own separate section on the Guidelines page, where it is described as ‘evidence’ of frequency, and the proposer is instructed to gather ‘data’ through Google Search, Bing Search and more – ‘data’ which is required to be reproducible and supplied through screenshots (The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). The

representation of usage frequency as ‘evidence’ serves to further problematise emoji proposals in a technological neutrality lens, but here the emphasis on the proposer’s responsibility is so direct that it nearly produces proposers as suspects of a ‘crime’ – that of proposing an emoji that would not be used – and it is proposers who have to ‘defend’ the proposal by presenting ‘evidence’ of emoji usage.

In general, however, factor B’s subcategory 1 regarding ‘evidence’ of usage frequency is comparable to factor D regarding petitions, and factor J regarding transience of potential emoji symbols. Factor B’s subcategory 1 and factor J similarly problematise non-use, while factor D refutes the notion of petitions as being ‘evidence’ of usage frequency, because they are “too easily skewed” (The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). In subsection 4.1.1.5, Angus King was noted to reference a petition in his letter to argue for the lobster emoji, and Charlie Craggs was noted to have created a petition for the Transgender flag emoji. Both emojis were included in TUC’s emoji ‘lexicon’, but the Transgender emoji was proposed in both 2017 and 2019, and only finally accepted in 2020. Connected to the representation of petitions is therefore the representation of causes elsewhere on the ‘Guidelines’ page. There, TUC notes for proposers to refrain from justifying their emoji “because it furthers a “cause,” no matter how worthwhile.” (The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). TUC also notes that proposals can be advanced despite cause arguments but not due to cause arguments (The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). This representation of causes, even putting quotation marks around the word, serves to not only problematise but question the legitimacy of such proposals. As discussed in previous section, TUC’s choices of emojis – including specific regional and representative flags like the Rainbow flag - effectively problematises the causes that TUC chooses to exclude from the emoji ‘lexicon’. It is arguably the lens of technological neutrality which enables TUC to put quotation marks around the word causes in this representation, producing causes as illegitimate while simultaneously reinforcing and legitimizing the view of technological neutrality, enabling TUC’s political biases by reinforcing the technique of non-disclosure and the problematisation of non-use.

The problematisation of non-use arguably carries over to the representation of how TUC then views the use of emojis, primarily in terms of ‘building blocks’. Subcategory 4 of factor B called ‘breaking new ground’ directly explicates that “Emoji are building blocks, consider how this character represents a collection/group/family instead of a very specific breed or species.” (The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). Factor C furthers the distinction, describing that “Emoji images are *paradigms*, semantically representing a class of entities much larger than a specific image.” (emphasis in original, The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). This can be related to Berard’s (2018) notion that interpretive flexibility of emojis is shown as a requirement for TUC in these selection factors, which at the same time leaves responsibility for curating emoji selecting entirely to the social reality and interpretation of emojis happening within TUC’s emoji subcommittee.

Factor D regarding completeness arguably bridges the gap between the arguments for emojis as ‘building blocks’ and the unproblematised elements of the representation: “The goal is iconic representation of large

categories, not completeness in the sense of filling out the categories of a scientific or taxonomic classification system." (The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). Here, TUC's representation of the selection factors explicates that what is sought is not actually completeness, despite the technical Unicode Emoji standard explicating the original intent to be a sort of completeness in relation to a source set (The Unicode Consortium, UTS #51: Unicode Emoji, 2023q). Instead 'iconic' representation of 'large' categories is sought, where the case of flag emojis arguably highlights that TUC represents what is 'iconic' for a mostly Western and East Asian userbase with categories and representation tailored accordingly (see section 4.1.1).

Regarding factor D, TUC writes that "This factor has a small weight, compared to other countervailing factors, especially low expected frequency." (The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). At the same time, 'Exclusion' factors F, G, and H arguably regard mostly the same as this factor D as well as factor C and subcategories 2-4 of factor B. However, these 'exclusion' factors just directly represent a problematisation that the 'inclusion' factors indirectly did regarding the specificity of emoji-concepts, the lack of open-endedness of proposed emoji-concepts, and whether already included emojis can represent the proposed emoji-concept. Therefore, on the basis of factor D's small weight and equivalence to many other factors, it can to a degree be deduced that expected usage is represented as more important in emoji proposals than the semiotic elements of emojis. As such, non-usage of emojis is represented as a bigger problem than the problem of emojis not being 'building blocks'.

However, a third problematisation is represented in 'exclusion' factors I and K. 'Exclusion' factor I problematises not only logos and brands but also what is denoted as "specific buildings and landmarks" in emoji proposals, and TUC asks a rhetorical question in this factor: "*Are the images unsuitable for encoding as characters*?" (emphasis in original, The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). Conversely, in 'exclusion' factor K denoted as 'Faulty Comparison', TUC asks another rhetorical question: "*Are proposals being justified primarily by being similar to (or more important than) existing compatibility emoji?*" (emphasis in original, The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). TUC exemplifies this with different emojis, notably: "The Tokyo Tower 🗼 (a specific building) does not justify adding the Eiffel Tower." (The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). In these two factors, TUC first represents the concept of specific buildings as being 'unsuitable' for encoding, while TUC then represents Tokyo Tower as a 'compatibility' emoji, thereby 'unproblematising' the inclusion of the emoji through the lens of technological neutrality, and then representing the Eiffel Tower as 'unjustifiable' in this context. Here, TUC implies that only 'specific' emojis included for compatibility are 'unproblematic', producing all other 'specific' emojis as fundamentally problematic.

However, TUC unproblematising the Tokyo Tower begs the question of why TUC has not removed certain emojis, if these emojis make TUC's argument of technological neutrality more difficult to represent, and they are not recognized by many users (Kimura-Thollander & Kumar, 2019). The reason for non-removal of emojis is because TUC's policy for characters in TUS contains the rule that once a character is encoded, it cannot be

removed (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Submission FAQ, 2023k). Different reasons are cited for this – in the Unicode Technical Standard for emojis, formal Unicode names are cited as permanent identifiers that cannot be changed for example (The Unicode Consortium, UTS #51: Unicode Emoji, 2023q). In the Guidelines-document itself, licenses are referred regarding vendor implementation of emojis in products worldwide, which is then argued to be the reason for the encoding of emojis to be permanent (The Unicode Consortium, Guidelines, 2023l). As such, it is represented as highly problematic to remove emojis once encoded.

Yet, this does not explain the reasoning for TUC to problematise emoji proposals so thoroughly as analysed in the selection criteria. On the page called Emoji Encoding Principles, TUC writes that "[…] if a proposed emoji is not going to be used often by millions of people, then it is taking a slot in the budget that could be occupied by a more popular emoji." (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Encoding Principles, 2023d). Here, TUC represents the relationship between themselves, emojis and users as pertaining to popularity, referring what I have denoted as an emoji 'lexicon' to entail an emoji 'budget' when selecting new emojis. This representation echoes the problematisation of non-use analysed in subsection 4.1.1.6. It ultimately represents emojis in capitalist ways that emphasise the notion of emojis as being products offered to users, with burdens of encoding being problematic for developers while burdens of non-representation, emojis as 'building blocks', and misinterpretation are 'unproblematic', despite being on the user end.

These notions are supported by what TUC writes in the Emoji Submission FAQ: "Emoji are useful only if they are broadly deployed by major vendors. If they are not, the Unicode Standard should not be burdened with emoji-like pictographic symbols that are never "emojified" by major vendors." (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Submission FAQ, 2023k). Here, the question is for whom emojis are presupposed to be 'useful' for. As the page 'Emoji Submission FAQ' is presumably written for users with questions, the presupposed element is that emoji are only useful for users if they are deployed by vendors. However, as it is a presupposed and therefore unspecified notion, an alternative interpretation would be that emojis are also only useful for TUC if they are deployed by major vendors.

Significantly, the argument that an emoji could 'occupy' a slot for a potential future emoji shows an important presumption. The presumption that emoji slots are finite. This is technically true, as Berard (2018) notes there to be 1,114,112 code points in total in TUS. However, at the time of writing only 149,813 code points are occupied by TUS characters including 3782 emoji characters and components (The Unicode Consortium, Version 15.1 Character Counts, 2023x; Emoji Chart Format, 2023u). This amounts to only 13,44% of the total code points in TUS being occupied, despite the standard being globally adopted and the most used encoding standard from 2005 to the present day (Davis, Slide 9, 2023; w3techs.com, 2023). For all intents and purposes, it is difficult to imagine TUC needing almost a million more code points in the coming decades, and with

emojis occupying only 3782 slots of the 149,813 slots already occupied, more slots allocated to new emojis do seem possible.

Therefore, TUC's problematisation of emojis 'occupying' slots for other emojis seem to primarily serve the ever-present purpose of 'unproblematising' TUC's quite prominent notions of which emoji proposals are 'problematic' and which are not. As analysed, TUC's notions of problematic emoji proposals form a wide range. From causes represented by TUC as illegitimate reasons for emoji inclusion, to 'specific' concepts such as the Eiffel Tower that are represented as incompatible, and most importantly those 'low usage frequency' emoji concepts seen as problematic, when search engines do not provide enough 'evidence' for how the intended userbase will use a specific emoji even before its concept is implemented.

4.1.4 The future of Unicode emojis

According to a TUC slideshow linked on the central Unicode Emoji webpage, TUC only uses 0,1% of its resources on emojis:

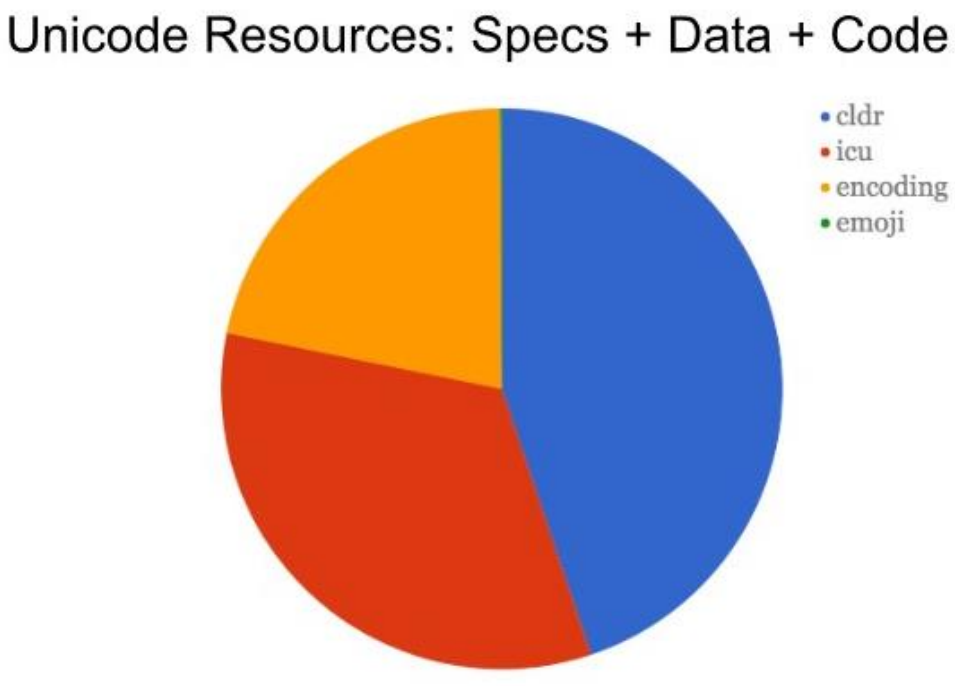

Figure 20: The circle diagram on slide 24 of the slideshow, screenshot. According to the slide text, the proportions are 45% for CLDR, 33% for ICU, 22% on encoding and 0.1% on emoji (Davis, Slide 24, 2023).

CLDR is the data that regards sorting and formatting as well as the processing of number and dates, while ICU is what allows integration into operating systems and services, and encoding pertains to the characters from

the world's languages (Davis, Slide 7, 2023). This percentage of resources allocated align somewhat with the allocation of the 149,813 TUS code characters, where the 3782 emoji characters amount to only 2,5% of these characters. However, despite the low priority of emojis in terms of resource and character allocation, TUC does acknowledge that "Surprisingly, the rise of emoji has helped Unicode's primary goal, which is that computers handle every human language. The pressure to fully support emoji has many "lagging" implementations to flesh out their Unicode support, and stay current each year." (Davis, Slide 32, 2023).

This prompts an important question regarding not only how emojis have been selected by TUC so far, but also how TUC represents its curation of emojis for the future regarding both resource allocation, goals of emoji usage, and measurements of emoji usage.

Firstly, one could argue that the future of emojis can be seen in the fewer emojis included in the emoji 'lexicon' in 2021-2023, where only 112 emojis in 2021, 31 emojis in 2022, and 118 emojis in 2023 were included. This selecting of fewer emojis is alluded to on the Emoji Encoding Principles page: "[…] The major vendors have indicated that they want to hold to an emoji "budget" each year of about 70 new characters (and limits on emoji sequences as well)." (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Encoding Principles, 2023d). The reasons cited are memory impacts on devices in emerging markets, user interface challenges and cost of development (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Encoding Principles, 2023d). Again, the emoji inclusion is represented as a 'budget', where more emojis are problematised due to what are fundamentally questions of resources or lack thereof, and the 'unproblematic' part is the 0,1% resources allocated to emojis by TUC. This reinforces TUC's overall representation of emojis in a way that presupposes them as a product or a service that TUC is offering users.

TUC nuances this representation of emojis in the document titled Clarifying Emojification Strategies and Strengthening ESC Processes, which was written by Jennifer Daniel on behalf of TUC's emoji subcommittee, sent to TUC's technical committee in August 2019 and then last revised in April 2020. Here, the goal of TUC's emoji subcommittee is described as such:

"1. Craft a strategy to be more focused on what is useful

2. Reduce the number of emoji we encode per year

3. Slightly modify our process in support of these goals"

(Daniel, L2/20-132: Clarifying Emojification Strategies, 2020)

Again, non-use is heavily emphasised as problematic, which Daniel further describes under the 'Background' subheading:

> *While the demand for emoji drives frequent vendor upgrades and improved language support we seem to emojify concepts that are not frequently used [SEE TABLE 1], are at a great cost to vendors who surface this content [SEE TABLE 2]. As a result, users seem to have little use for what has recently been emojified.*
>
> (Daniel, L2/20-132: Clarifying Emojification Strategies, 2020)

What is unspoken in this representation is how TUC measures not only usage, but also the demand for emoji mentioned above. These two elements arguably clash to a degree, since a high demand would possibly lead to high usage, and it is impossible for me to assess how any of it is measured. Additionally, the usage data that is referred to on the Emoji Frequency webpage is not raw data but instead already filtered rankings of emojis, and concrete usage values are therefore not possible for me to retrieve (The Unicode Consortium, Emoji Frequency, 2023e). As argued, the problematisation of non-use shows a focus on emojis as products, and here, the value proposition of emojis for TUC is significant as it arguably regards the benefits of demand against the costs of emoji inclusions for itself and vendors.

The focus on emojis as products with the consideration of value propositions is also shown in the subheading 'Tighter Quota', where Daniel writes that "Our current cadence of 50-60 new emojis a year is reducing their semiotic function." (Daniel, L2/20-132: Clarifying Emojification Strategies, 2020). The semiotic function of emojis is not described further in the document, but regarding TUC's priorities indicated both in the selection factors and in Daniel's 2022 blog post, it is clear that the semiotic function of emojis is presupposed to be something along the lines of 'building blocks', where emoji users are supposed to 'build' their own meaning and representation, if no existing emojis convey a specific intention, identity, or thought already. The ability of emojis to even have this semiotic 'function' of combining multiple meanings in effective communication can be discussed, but here TUC shows the thinking that this 'function' is therefore lessened when including more 'specific' emojis that could 'occupy' some of those meanings. As such, TUC arguably represents inclusion of new emojis not only as a problem of costs but also as a problem of value propositions for itself and to an extent its intended userbase, as the already included emojis are viewed as having *less* of a semiotic function if more emojis are included.

With the above goals of TUC, the organisation is generally shown to weigh vendor costs higher than the benefits of demand, despite these benefits of emoji demand aiding Unicode's represented primary goal through the support of additional emojis as noted in the slideshow (Davis, Slide 32, 2023).

Therefore, TUC's representation of its primary goal can to a degree be questioned on the basis of TUC's concrete prioritisation of emojis – instead of representing the lack of representation and diversity in emojis as problematic, which TUC's primary goal to a degree indicates that it would, the costs of vendors are represented as the most problematic elements of emoji inclusions both directly and through a focus on emoji usage.

Therefore, despite the goal of vendors being described in terms of 'globally relevant' emojis that are 'communicative', the effective goal is arguably what TUC itself is proposing in the document – cutting the costs of the 'measurably' taxing emoji implementations by reducing the number of emojis to be included (Daniel, L2/20-132: Clarifying Emojification Strategies, 2020).

Additionally, these vendor costs are also highlighted as a marketing 'burden', where "customers want the new emoji is as soon as they are announced in March, while major Vendors release in September" (typo in original, Daniel, L2/20-132: Clarifying Emojification Strategies, 2020). It is important to note here that TUC is a non-profit organisation, and for emoji users to be denoted as 'customers' along with emoji 'budgets' and emoji 'costs' in relation to its emoji strategies arguably points out two elements of TUC: Firstly, TUC's concrete priority in selecting emojis implicitly regards profit, and secondly, TUC's identity can be discussed as effectively being more of an extension of its vendors than that of an independent organization. As such, TUC is arguably a way for its members to represent their governance of not only globally used emojis but also the dominant encoding standard of the world in the 'unproblematic' way of 'only' having 'membership' in a 'non-profit' organisation. To put it more concisely, TUC's governance of emojis through its goals and strategies of dominance are more likely an aggregate of the goals of Apple, Google, Microsoft and so on, than it is about benefitting the world through increased representation.

4.1.5 Subconclusion: The cost of emojis

In accordance with the WPR approach by Bacchi & Goodwin (2016), the primary texts used as levers in the above sections 4.1.3 and 4.1.4 regard the 'Guidelines for Submitting Unicode Emoji Proposals' document and the 'Clarifying Emojification Strategies and Strengthening ESC Processes' document written by Jennifer Daniel in 2020 as well as several other webpages and documents by TUC. Here, the problems represented continue to be the (potential) non-use of emojis and political critique of TUC's selecting of emojis. However, the additional problematisation of the cost of emojis is also represented to be significant. Below, these problematisations are summarised through the six forms of analysis and questioning by Bacchi & Goodwin (2016, p. 20).

In the 'Guidelines' document, the problematisation of non-use comes about through the emphasis on the selection factors that regard potential usage of proposed emojis. Through the notion of expected emoji usage as 'evidence', proposers are being produced as 'guilty' of submitting potential non-use emojis, which is reinforced by the selection criteria incorporating a slew of exclusion factors that also serve to problematise emoji proposals directly. Importantly, exclusion factor E problematises petitions in terms of them not presenting proper 'evidence', and in line with this, causes are produced as illegitimate elements of emoji proposals, despite TUC previously including emojis such as the Transgender flag and petitioned-for emojis such as the lobster emoji.

Related to the ‘problem’ of non-use is the goal of emoji usage, where the ‘Guidelines’ document directly defines emojis as ‘building blocks’, reproducing Daniel’s representation in the 2022 blog post. Here, inclusion factor D represents this goal to be ‘iconic’ representation of ‘large’ categories, while factors K and I amongst others problematise ‘specific’ emojis. However, the specific implementation of ‘iconic’ and ‘large’ categories is unspoken, and thereby the presuppositions of this representation are likely to be the analysed Western and East Asian biases of TUC, represented by the originally included flag emojis. Factor D is however noted as having less weight than the ‘evidence’ of usage, and thereby non-use is represented as more problematic than the ‘specificity’ of emojis in proposals.

Most importantly, the ‘Guidelines’ document is found to produce TUC’s governance choices as ‘unproblematic’ and unspoken by representing them as ‘objective’ and fact-based in a technological neutrality narrative. The long list of selection factors and complicated requirements also serve to produce emoji proposers to be only those with a specific skill-set and specific linguistic capabilities, disadvantaging others.

The effects of the emphasis on usage are once again conflated with the cost of emojis in various ways throughout additional documents such as ‘Encoding Emoji Principles’ and the Emoji Submission FAQ. These representations of non-use and cost also presuppose the main problem of adding more emojis, and this representation also comes about in the ‘Clarifying Emojification Strategies and Strengthening ESC Processes’ document. Here, costs of encoding new emojis are repeatedly noted as a ‘problem’ not only for TUC but primarily for its vendors – Apple, Microsoft, Google, etc. Ultimately, the represented notions of ‘budgets’ for new emojis, emoji ‘customers’, non-used emojis ‘occupying’ slots for potentially used emojis, emojis ‘losing’ their semiotic ‘function’ of signifying many different concepts if new ‘specific’ emojis are included all show TUC’s emphasis on value and profit, despite it being a non-profit organisation.

An unspoken part of the ‘problem’ of the cost of emojis is that TUC uses only 0,1% of its resources on emojis. The effect of this ‘problem’ of the cost of emojis is that TUC produces emojis as inherently being ‘problems’ that do not contribute to TUC’s goal. Contradictorily, TUC has noted that emojis have furthered TUC’s represented goal regarding standardisation across all computers and systems. Conclusively, TUC’s represented goal and its unspoken goal are interpreted to be different entities, where TUC’s unspoken endgame of emojis is argued to be about reducing the costs of emojis for its vendors. The role of TUC is therefore reflected upon as being a way for its members to represent their profit-oriented governance of not only emojis but also the dominant coding standard of the world in an ‘unproblematic’ way, where these corporations ‘only’ retain ‘membership’ in this ‘non-profit’ organisation. Yet, they are effectively the primary factors in TUC’s decision-making.

Chapter 5

5.1 Discussion

In a way, The Unicode Consortium can be framed as a device of capitalistic ventures to control free speech and expression which secures profit primarily for mega-corporations. On the other side, The Unicode Consortium can be framed as mostly a technical, needed, practical solution that makes worldwide communication doable, easier, and allows you to send both emojis and letters within and across cultures. This second frame is the one that TUC continually represents throughout its emoji policy, both in its written documents and its selecting of emojis, where a primary goal of emojis is stated to have these pictographs as 'building blocks'.

This chapter will first discuss what the problems can be regarding the narrative of emojis as 'building blocks'. Secondly, the broader notion of TUC, viewed through the lens of the emoji policy, is discussed further regarding the purpose of the 'non-profit' organisation.

5.1.1 Selecting emojis to be 'building blocks'

Throughout the analysis, TUC has represented emojis as being 'building blocks'. This representation has been nuanced to some degree throughout the different documents, where the inclusion of emojis that are too 'specific' in meaning, such as flag emojis, have been problematised in different ways. This problematisation connects to both the 'usefulness' of emojis and to the 'impossibility' of encoding emojis for "every concept under the Sun (this is simply not attainable)" (Daniel, The Past and Future of Flag Emoji, 2022).

However, the function of emojis as 'building blocks' is arguably a controversial representation because it insinuates a way to 'build' new meanings with several emojis being put together. As noted in section 2.2.1, Saussure's theoretical stance on linguistic signs is that they are wholly arbitrary, and contrary to this, Saussure noted symbols to have a "rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the signified" (Saussure, 2011b, p. 68). This natural bond is arguably shown in the way that a face emoji 🙂 easily conveys a face in general. However, when combining several emojis like 🙂🐝🎶, these natural bonds between the signifiers, depictions, and the signified concepts like face, bee, and music becomes a much smaller part of the combined meaning of the message. In fact, even for these emojis, one could argue that while the face emoji 🙂 functions as a symbol to show a face, the emoji's semiotic ability to unambiguously convey the intended emotion can differ greatly within different contexts (Miller et al., 2016; Tigwell & Flatla, 2016). As such, even with an emoji that contains a relatively clear and 'natural' connection between the signifier and parts of the signified, such as that of a face, the exact sum of what is concretely signified may still be ambiguous enough to be interpreted differently. For other emojis such as 🎶, one could argue that the "rudiment of a natural bond"

(Saussure, 2011b, p. 68) is even thinner and the arbitrariness even greater, because the connection between this depiction of three notes and the signifying of music relies on a string of conventional knowledge-connections, regarding the sounds associated with music being annotated with notes like the ones depicted. Thereby music can only be signified through them if one knows these conventions. As such, some emojis may be more like the symbols that Saussure imagined having natural bonds to what they depicted, while other emojis may be much more arbitrary in nature, relying almost entirely on arbitrary but sometimes untaught conventions for users to understand them.

This is where the combination of emojis becomes difficult, because not only do emojis require different levels of conventional knowledge, but there is also no set rule for what they mean when combined. The arbitrariness of linguistic signs regarded the connection between the signifier and the signified for Saussure (2011a; 2011b), but not only is the connection between emoji depictions and emoji concepts not taught like in language, there are also varying levels of arbitrariness within this connection for emojis, and finally, the applied meaning of an emoji is arguably polysemic just like specific words can have different meanings depending on their use within social groups (Berard, 2018).

Despite emojis not being a language, TUC's representation of emojis as being 'building blocks' arguably attempts to make them into a kind of language. However, as noted in section 2.2.1 and discussed further above, emojis are unfit as a language due to the high variability in connections between their depictions, their 'original' meanings and especially their intended meanings in specific contexts. As such, while TUC represents the inclusion of more emojis as lessening the semiotic 'function' of emojis, the current number and nature of emojis means that in themselves they are unfit as 'building blocks'. To further the analogy of 'building blocks', one could imagine that every Lego block you encountered had a slightly different shape with different numbers and sizes of dots as well as oddly mixed colours. If you then received such a Lego set for Christmas, but the manual was missing, and your only clue to go on was the picture in front of the box, would you be able to build an accurate replica that precisely conveyed the depicted construction without room for misinterpretation?

In the technical standard for emojis, TUC writes that "[Emojis] also add useful ambiguity to messages, allowing the writer to convey many different possible concepts at the same time. Many people are also attracted by the challenge of composing messages in emoji, and puzzling out emoji messages." (The Unicode Consortium, UTS #51: Unicode Emoji, 2023q). Such may be true, but allowing users to convey many different possible concepts at the same time also arguably lessens the 'function' of emojis in writing altogether, as the primary goal of written communication is in most contexts to be understood – not challenged enough to have to puzzle out the meaning of emojis on top of all other possible communication issues.

As for the 'impossible' notion of encoding further emojis expressed by Daniel in her blog 2022 blog post, this arguably contradicts the goal of having emojis function as 'building blocks'. As also noted in section 2.2.1 regarding Saussure's view on linguistic signs, a significant element herein is the fact that "linguistic signs are

numberless" (Saussure, 2011b, p. 73). If emojis functioning as 'building blocks' in any way approximates their function to be linguistic-like, the notion of there being too many at only 3770 emojis is not conducive to this goal.

In fact, furthering this comparison and analogy of emojis to language, there are hundreds of thousands of words in the English language compared to the low number of emojis. To continue the analogy of Lego pieces, what TUC asks of the emoji users by not including more emojis is akin to you only having received one Lego set for Christmas, but suddenly you are expected to be able to build both a well-defined castle and a boat with the same pieces, despite the original set only having what looked like a space-station on the box cover of the set. That space-station which was also the one you have also not been able to replicate fully yet due to the lack of a manual in the box.

Additionally, defining emojis regarding whether they should be compared to words is in itself an immense task. In fact, the counting of words in the English language and the counting of Lego pieces made by Lego run into some of the same difficulties, as defining what counts as separate words and what counts as separate Lego pieces is very difficult (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016; Eaton, 2016). Here, the defining of emojis as a whole and in terms of 'building blocks' is what TUC is responsible for, but by limiting the number of building blocks and reinforcing the nature of emojis as ambiguous depictions, TUC's representation of having emojis function as 'building blocks' is disrupted, at least regarding the usefulness and concrete applicability for users.

As the selecting of emojis to be 'building blocks' is not effectively what is happening with TUC's current governance of emojis, the overall representation and problematisation of 'specific' and 'non-usable' emojis points to back to TUC's own purpose and its role as a curator of TUS. This is discussed in the subsequent section.

5.1.2 The role of The Unicode Consortium

However conspiracy-like the discussion of TUC as being a representation of the capitalist interests harboured by its members may seem, it is an important part of the discussion regarding the governance of emojis in general.

Here, it is worth noting that TUC claims in its technical standard that the "[…] longer-term goal for implementations should be to support embedded graphics, in addition to the emoji characters. Embedded graphics allow arbitrary emoji symbols, and are not dependent on additional Unicode encoding." (The Unicode Consortium, UTS #51: Unicode Emoji, 2023q). Here, TUC does acknowledge that for such a solution to be effective and simple enough for users, it would require fundamental infrastructure changes, and TUC concedes that "There will always, however, be places where embedded graphics cannot be used—such as email headers, SMS messages, or file names." (The Unicode Consortium, UTS #51: Unicode Emoji, 2023q). As such, emojis

may go from ubiquitous to entirely user-generated in the future, depending on the advancement in technology regarding embedded graphics, but until TUC emojis are effectively replaced by user-curated alternatives, TUC's profit-oriented representations show a consortium that governs emoji users not for the benefits of the users but for the benefits of the corporate members of TUC.

This is where the benefits and disadvantages of an organization like TUC can be discussed. To a degree, these benefits and disadvantages are expressed through emojis specifically and TUS more generally. As shortly described in section 2.1.2, Liao (2017) shows the benefit of TUS as being able to include more minority languages than even the local font in Myanmar. However, John (2013) discusses such claims of TUS being inherently better than other standards, as Liao's (2017) assertion arguably becomes part of a technologically determinist (Wacjman, 2002) narrative. John (2013) views TUS as a standard that affords users only precarious heterogeneity, because while it enables communication in one's own language, it is ultimately owned and controlled by American corporations. This highlights the conflicts of interest for different groups regarding the differing purposes of encoding standards such as TUS: "For one group Unicode is a way to simplify software internationalization and thus increase profit margins, while for another it is a means of preserving endangered languages and narrowing the digital divide." (John, 2013, p. 329). Ultimately, the dilemma of Unicode is expressed succinctly by John: "Indeed, the success of Unicode has been dependent on precisely those mechanisms so often critiqued as transmitting cultural imperialism, while enabling the use of non-English languages based on a quintessentially global technology." (2013, p. 333).

Ultimately, TUS is something that has been thrust upon the world in the same way as capitalist interests are omnipresent, arguably colonizing our language-use through elements such as emojis. Stark & Crawford describes this as such: "Emoji offer us more than just a cute way of "humanizing" the platforms we inhabit: they also remind us of how informational capital continually seeks to instrumentalize, analyze, monetize, and standardize affect." (2015, p. 8). Furthermore, the disadvantages of TUC are arguably embodied in the organisation's goal of standardization, where the views of technological neutrality, colour-blindness, and racist implications are thrust upon users as these elements affect the design and selection of emojis (Miltner, 2020; Sweeney & Whaley, 2019). As such, emojis may give users the option to represent themselves, as Coats' (2018) research suggests, but there is no way to know if emoji users would use emojis differently if they had alternatives to TUC selected emojis, skin-tone variations, and emoji categories put forth by the organisation's governance of emojis.

Despite such critique of TUC's governance of emojis, there is also a discussion to be had regarding what would otherwise have happened if TUC had not been created by Apple, Microsoft, IBM, and other corporations in 1991. Would different encoding standards have divided the web into several separate paradigms, akin to the consumers' options when buying smartphones with Google and Apple competing or for gaming consoles with Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo competing? In such a scenario, different options would perhaps have encouraged

the competing corporations to have included more or different emojis than what is currently the case, as the value proposition of emoji inclusion for these corporations would regard the value proposition of the entire corporate offering for consumers. Here, TUC's claim that they encode emojis which are not used much would be tested, not only in terms of how to measure 'use', but most importantly in terms of how much value additional emojis would carry for possible 'new' users. If users, as effectively argued by TUC's representation of its emoji usage, do not care much about additional emojis because the current number of emojis satisfies user needs, then even in the scenario with competing corporations, the number of emojis 'offered' would likely not be much higher. If, on the other hand, emoji users do want more emojis, as shown to an extent through the requests of flag emojis both in proposals to TUC and in Emojipedia's publications of top requested emojis, the corporation that poured the most resources into both adding emojis and addressing user interface challenges would gain more users. This is in principle only, as there would of course be confounding factors due to the value proposition of any tech ecosystem likely including several other elements than the number of emojis included in its encoding font.

However, the above discussion highlights how TUC's governance of emojis is close to being an example of what happens when capitalist structures are thrust into the government-like construct of monopolies, where the incentive to satisfy consumers is lessened. Then, the same capitalist structures that usually ensure competition become the constraining factors of further development and arguably restricts representation of a diverse userbase significantly.

On the other hand, the role of TUC has likely been facilitating both cooperation and compromise between the large corporations of Apple, Microsoft, Google and so on. The most concrete benefit of this is arguably the fact that TUS works like it does, despite it being impossible to know whether other standards, given the global outreach and massive support by large corporations, would perform the same. In the same vein, however, emojis would likely not be as easy to send and as ubiquitously used without one standard 'enforcing' them and the different operating systems supporting this version of them. Without TUC's governance of emojis, one could argue that the depictions of emojis would also likely differ even more than they currently do across operating systems. In such a scenario, the experience of the Android operating system on smartphones in the early 2010s, where emojis sent by other systems would not be displayed correctly, could arguably be much more prevalent in the current media landscape.

Such argumentation does reflect technological determinism to a degree, and the view that standardisation provides benefits like uniformity can also be viewed as emphasising technological neutrality to a degree. The dilemma here therefore regards how desirable simplification and unification is, not just from the standpoint of corporations for profit, but also from the standpoint of users for both use and representation. This standpoint has arguably been entirely neglected in TUC's emoji selecting, which to a degree represents emoji use as the

implicit ‘voice’ of users, and TUC seems to consciously refrain from disclosing how emoji use is concretely measured as well.

Conclusively, the role of TUC in the governance of emojis seems to have been filtering the selection of emojis into selecting emojis that are useful, not for users, but for the corporations that retain membership and voting rights within the ‘non-profit’ organisation. Here, TUC may have added to the simplification and unification of emoji depiction and use, but the organisation has done so without acknowledging its power and its responsibility of governance throughout its selecting of emojis. Thereby the ‘voices’ of users, other than the most intense and influential ones residing in the correct Western and Asian countries, have been neglected throughout the whole process of emoji creation, proposals, and the concrete selection of them.

Chapter 6

6.1 Conclusion

As control of emojis is power, selecting emojis is therefore argued to be policy (see chapter 2). The Unicode Consortium's (TUC) emoji policy is labelled as the selecting of emojis in this paper, which encompasses both the selection of emojis available, the concrete process of selecting emojis based on emoji proposals, and the selection criteria as well as strategy documents concerning emojis. This conceptualisation emphasises the paper's Foucaultian view of power as being a producing force, and TUC's selecting of emoji is here argued to fundamentally produce a problematisation of all those emoji concepts proposed to TUC in the years 2010-2023 but excluded from TUC's emoji 'lexicon' until the time of writing.

TUC's most prominently represented 'problem' through its selecting of emojis is found to be the addition of further emojis. This was problematised in the original TUC proposal for the encoding of emojis in 2009, as the 719 emojis released in 2010 were presupposed to be the final set of emojis, and it was once again represented as problematic to add more emojis in the most recent blog post and interview in 2022 by Jennifer Daniel, chair of TUC's emoji subcommittee.

TUC has represented the 'problem' of adding more emojis through a variety of arguments, each one representing what can be coined as 'subproblems'. The most prominent subproblems of adding more emojis for TUC, represented by its selecting of emojis, are (1) the (potential) non-use of emojis, (2) the cost of adding new emojis, and (3) political critique for excluding emojis. These three subproblems can be viewed as TUC's reasons for both excluding specific emoji proposals and refraining altogether from including more emojis than what has already been done. However, the subproblems are not analysed as separate entities as much as they are shown to be intersecting elements of TUC's overall endgame of emojis.

For the 'problem' of (potential) non-use of emojis, the original proposal in 2009 emphasised the emoji usage of Japanese cell phone users when arguing for the concrete selecting of emojis that resulted in the 719 emojis released in 2010. Here, the inclusion of only 10 flag emojis representing The United States of America, The United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Russia, China, South Korea, and Japan is argued to represent the primarily intended *userbase* of TUC emojis, as this 'core' set of emojis was supposed to be the final one. The reasons represented in 2009 for not adding more emojis were the 'problems' of a lack of 'demonstrated need' for more emojis and supposed interoperability issues when adding more emojis. The subsequent additions of emojis in the years 2014-2023 disrupted those 'problems', showing that the need for more emojis was evidently present, and that the supposed interoperability issues were overcome.

This disruption of the original 'problems' for TUC in terms of adding more emojis serves to question TUC's current problematisation of non-use as well. TUC's emphasis on the usage of emojis arguably only reinforces the position of the already-included emojis, which users are accustomed to, while disadvantaging any new

emojis in the first place. This trend of disadvantaging potential emojis is shown in the selection criteria, where the long list of selection factors A-P designates both ‘inclusion’ factors and ‘exclusion’ factors. Here, one of the most important factors is represented to be the ‘evidence’ of frequency. A whole separate part of the selection criteria page is dedicated to detailing how proposers are supposed to gather this ‘evidence’ of frequency through Google and Bing searches, where the number of search results is represented as one of the most important factors determining whether an emoji proposal ‘meets’ the criteria. This representation of usage produces emoji proposals as potentially ‘guilty’ of proposing emojis that may not be used, and the supposed method of gathering ‘evidence’ is represented as unproblematic.

Regarding the ‘problem’ of the cost of adding new emojis, a Unicode slideshow shows that TUC used 0,1% of its resources on emojis in what is likely 2019 but still displayed on the Unicode Emoji site today (Davis, Slide 24, 2023). This resource allocation is echoed throughout the representation of the ‘subproblem’ of costs, where non-use and the costs of adding more emojis are connected in a 2020 strategy document written by Jeniffer Daniel. The strategy outlined by Daniel and TUC is to add fewer emojis year on year, representing the problems of memory impacts on emerging market devices, user interface challenges, costs of development as well as a ‘marketing burden’ towards ‘customers’ for the vendors of emojis. At the same time, Daniel also notes that the semiotic ‘value’ of emojis is lessened the more emojis are included, and in other policy documents, TUC notes how vendors indicate a ‘budget’ of 60-70 emojis a year. All these elements show a profit-oriented approach to emojis by TUC, where emojis are represented as a ‘product’ that TUC ‘offers’ emoji users, despite TUC technically being a non-profit organisation. While TUC concedes that emojis have furthered its main goal of standardisation and implementation of Unicode, the prioritisation of TUC to not invest further resources into emojis arguably shows that TUC’s goal for emojis reflects its representation of vendor priorities, which is primarily to cut costs by adding fewer emojis.

The representation and emphasis of emoji usage is interpreted as a way to ‘unproblematise’ TUC’s goal of adding fewer emojis, because the selected emojis in 2010-2023 arguably still reflect and bias the originally intended userbase of the 10 aforementioned countries. The ‘unproblematisation’ of TUC’s selecting of emojis is done through a variety of representations and elements that regard both usage, costs and more, where the problematisation of political critique for excluding emojis is produced.

Firstly, the ‘subproblem’ of political critique is represented through TUC’s narrative of technological neutrality, where biases such as colour-blindness regarding racial implications of emojis are reproduced (Miltner, 2020; Sweeney & Whaley, 2019). The frame of technological neutrality can be seen throughout TUC’s textual policy documents, where elements such as the selection criteria are represented as objective, while arguments for emoji inclusion pertaining to causes or petitions are not only problematised but delegitimized.

Secondly, this ‘subproblem’ is also represented through TUC’s non-disclosure of its reasons for including or excluding specific emojis. Many flag emojis have been proposed without being included, while other emojis

like the lobster emoji was included in 2017 after a senator wrote a public letter to TUC. Yet, the Transgender Flag emoji, proposed in 2017, was denied, and the flag emoji was only added in 2020 after a petition and adoption of the lobster emoji by the transgender community. However, these inclusions were done by TUC without any concrete explanations for them. As such, the selection criteria are a way for TUC ensure further non-disclosure with the extensive list of 'objective' selection factors, where proposers are left 'telling themselves' what excluded their emoji, and TUC is not required to commit unequivocally to any one selection factor.

Thirdly, the 'subproblem' of political critique is represented by Daniel in her 2022 blog post concerning the end of flag emoji inclusion and by the selection criteria regarding the 'problem' of emoji exclusion due to inclusion. As such, TUC is shown to be acutely aware of the political implications of excluding certain emojis, and yet TUC decided to end further flag inclusion in 2022. The historical inclusion of flag emojis include the 10 original flag country-flag emojis in 2010, the 247 'country-flag' emojis that TUC reference to the ISO 3166-1 alpha 2 standard in 2015, the Rainbow flag emoji and the UN flag emoji in 2016, the three flag emojis of England, Scotland and Wales referenced to the ISO 3166-2 standard in 2017, the pirate flag emoji in 2018, and the Transgender flag emoji in 2020. The historical exclusion and thereby focus of TUC's selecting is shown clearly in the flag inclusion of 2017, as the ISO 3166-2 standard includes 5000 territories, but only those three of the UK have been added, while many different flag emojis such as Catalonia's flag, the Aboriginal flag, the Pan-African flag, the Asexual flag, and a Sami Language flag were proposed, some even twice, and excluded with non-disclosure of reasons for why.

To 'solve' the 'subproblem' of political critique without adding to the main 'problem' of including more emojis, Jennifer Daniel proposes for emoji users to use emojis as 'building blocks' in her blog post of 2022. This representation of emojis as 'building blocks' is repeated throughout the selection criteria, where 'specific' emoji concepts in proposals are problematised, and in the 2020 strategy document, where 'communicative' emojis are represented as a goal of the vendors. In the discussion, this notion of emojis as 'building blocks' is argued to be contradictory to TUC's decision to not include many more emojis while problematising 'specific' emojis. This is because the specificity of emoji meanings is arguably *required* for emojis to be able to 'build' meanings in any practical, communicative way, as ambiguous 'building block' emojis only diffuse the meanings of messages further.

Lastly, TUC itself is discussed regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the organisation and its purpose. The advantages regard TUS' ability to enable local languages to be displayed on digital hardware, while the disadvantages can be characterised as cultural imperialism (John, 2013). As such, the standardisation goal of TUC has enabled the simple and easy-to-use nature of emojis while simultaneously enabling TUC biases such as technological neutrality, colour-blindness, and reproduction of racial issues in TUC's selecting of emojis. Ultimately, TUC is discussed as having neglected the users' voice in its selecting of emojis, and TUC's effective

role is argued to have been the filtering of emojis, so emojis that serve purposes for its corporate members are included, while all other emoji concepts are excluded.

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