

Emoji Language Reference Grammar

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1 Introduction

The Emoji Language (🗨️) is a constructed language with a logographic writing system that consists solely of Unicode Emoji. It was created by Thomas Heller in 2021. The language exhibits an *agglutinative morphology* and *VSO syntax*.

More information about the Emoji Language can be found on the Emoji Language website at: <https://tmh.conlang.org/emoji-language/>

1.1 Goals

The goal of the Emoji Language project was to prove that Unicode Emoji can be used to build a fully functioning language that can potentially be used for everyday conversation.

At the same time, I wanted to make the language actually practical to use and avoid needless complexity in the grammar, so that people could actually have fun using the language.

Also, from a technical point of view, the language is supposed to work with any recent device that supports Unicode Emoji, without installing extra software.

1.2 Challenges

1.2.1 Abstract emoji

Unicode Emoji already contain a lot of symbols that can be used to represent specific, tangible concepts without having to tweak their definitions.

For example, the emoji 🍏 and 🎸 can be added to the dictionary straight away as nouns symbolizing “apple” and “guitar”, respectively.

However, due to their static visual nature, emoji make it difficult to express more abstract and dynamic concepts:

- Copular and modal verbs (e.g. “to be”, “must”)
- Verbs in general (e.g. “to give”, “to take”)
- Nouns for categories (e.g. “animal”, “fruit”)

There is a limited number of abstract emoji – such as arrows – that can be used to express abstract concepts, like tense or location. When defining the lexicon, I had to find a good balance in an attempt not to waste these rare symbols.

It quickly became apparent that identical emoji would have to be used for both noun and verbs meanings. Such homonyms prevent the reader from recognizing the lexical category of an emoji by just looking at it, but are necessary to express basic concepts with the limit set of Unicode Emoji.

1.2.2 Ambiguous emoji

Since emoji have been around several years, people already developed habits regarding their use, and not everyone agrees on the meaning of certain emoji.

The Emoji Language, however, must be quite strict when defining the meaning of some emoji, to ensure that basic concepts can be expressed unambiguously.

For very common emoji like 👍 and 😊 I tried to stick with their familiar meaning. Nonetheless, Emoji Language is a language in its own right. Like with other foreign languages, and even though it seems partially familiar, its vocabulary must be learned explicitly.

1.2.3 Rejected emoji

Several emoji proposals were already rejected¹ and thus must be represented using existing emoji.

1.2.4 "Twin" emoji

A few emoji exist in pairs with little or almost no discernible difference, such as:

- 📌 and 📍 (some fonts even depict both pins with the same angle)
- 🚗 and 🚙 (some fonts even depict both cars with the same color)

To avoid possible confusion for the readers, the best course of action was often to declare these emoji as synonymous, with the obvious downside of reducing the number of available emoji further.

¹See <http://randomguy32.de/unicode/misc/rejected-emoji-proposals/>

1.3 Foundation

The Emoji Language is currently based on the Full Emoji List (v13.0), available from the Unicode Consortium: <https://unicode.org/emoji/charts-13.0/full-emoji-list.html>

That list contains a total of 3,304 emoji when taking all possible combinations of gender, skin tone and other modifiers into account.²

Some emoji³ are available as both a black and white as well as a color variant. In such cases, the color variant should be used whenever possible, to keep the presentation of emoji consistent.

2 Phonology

As Emoji Language is primarily a *visual* language, there isn't any phonology per se, and, technically speaking, there are no phonemes or syllables.

2.1 Spelling Emoji Language

Even though Emoji Language doesn't have any pronunciation by itself there is a need to communicate individual emoji symbols verbally, like when teaching Emoji Language to others or discussing Emoji Language in general in another language.

In such instances, the *CLDR Short Name* from the Full Emoji List mentioned above should be used to refer to individual emoji symbols.⁴

3 Writing system

Emoji Language is written using Unicode Emoji and therefore does not make use of any other familiar glyphs such as letters of the Latin alphabet or punctuation.

(For more information about spelling names from the Latin alphabet, see the [Flag spelling](#) section.)

²See <https://unicode.org/emoji/charts-13.0/emoji-counts.html>

³See <https://unicode.org/emoji/charts-13.0/emoji-variants.html> for a complete list.

⁴Note that CLDR Short Names may change in the future. For more information about CLDR, see: <https://unicode.org/emoji/format.html#col-name>

3.1 Spacing

Each **word** is separated by horizontal spacing.

Because there is no emoji symbol that represents a full stop, each **sentence** must start in a new line. To increase readability, it is recommended to add one extra blank line between sentences, and two between paragraphs.

Emoji Language is typically written from left to right, however, if the default text direction of the writer’s input device is right to left and the reader expects it as well, this writing direction is by all means acceptable as well.

3.2 Punctuation

The gesture 🙌 is used for quotation marks, for example:

- (1) 🗣️ 👤🙌 🌞 🌞 🙌
say M.3SG “ shine sun[NOM] ”
‘He says: “The sun shines.”’

Aside from that, there are no distinct punctuation marks, although the symmetric subordinate clause emoji serve a similar purpose (see [Subordinate clauses](#)).

3.3 Digital input

To make Emoji Language work in practice, people need some way to input emoji quickly and easily. Current smartphone keyboards usually hold a history of recently used emoji for fast access, which is a step in the right direction, and they usually offer to search for emoji by *CLDR Short Name* as well.

As a rule of thumb, people should not need to type more keystrokes to enter an emoji than they would need to enter the corresponding word in English. To optimize emoji input on desktop devices further, I have created an experimental *Emoji Input Tool* that can be found here: <https://tmh.conlang.org/emoji-language/emoji-input.html>

4 Morphology

Technically speaking, a single emoji could be considered a single morpheme.

Looking at the Unicode Emoji standard, there are several emoji that consist of multiple emoji characters internally which are concatenated by invisible “zero width joiner” (ZWJ) characters to form a

These emoji would still be considered single morphemes, because they are intended to be displayed as single emoji. If such emoji show up as separate images, it is just due to technical limitations, not by design.

Examples:

- 🚀 A **single emoji** (rocket) that would be considered a single morpheme.
- 👨🍳 An emoji **ZWJ sequence**. Technically made up of multiple characters: “person” (👨) and “cooking pan” (🍳). Should be displayed as a single emoji on modern devices. Either way, it would be considered a single morpheme.
- 🐑🍲 Two **separate emoji** (sheep, bowl) which would be considered multiple morphemes.

Usually, Emoji Language words are made up of single morphemes. If they have prefixes and/or suffixes, or are compound words, they will consist of multiple morphemes.

Words in Emoji Language belong to one of the following word classes:

- Nouns (n.)
- Verbs (v.)
- Adjectives (adj.)
- Adverbs (adv.)
- Pronouns (pp., dem., int., rel.)
- Conjunctions (conj.)
- Interjections (interj.)
- Quantifiers (num.)

In addition, some emoji are used for the following purposes:

- Prefixes (possessive, demonstrative, locative, interrogative, negation, mood)
- Suffixes (tense, comparison, ordinality)
- Punctuation (“👉”)

All word classes are quasi-closed classes. Aside from noun compounding it is not possible to add new words to the language, because there is no straightforward technical way for us to include new emoji that would be available to all users without installing extra software on their devices.

The only way for new root words to be added to Emoji Language is for the Unicode Consortium to publish a new version of the Emoji standard, so definitions for them can be added in the Emoji Language dictionary. It is possible to submit proposals⁵ for new emoji directly to the Unicode Consortium though.

4.1 Nouns



Nouns are inflected for number, possession, and demonstrativeness by affixation.

Also, nouns can be modified using locative prefixes and the instrumental, benefactive, and equative prefixes.



Definiteness is not explicitly marked, however, the demonstrative prefixes can be used to convey a similar meaning if it's not obvious from context.

4.1.1 Number

Emoji Language distinguishes between singular and plural. By default, nouns are considered singular. Plural is indicated by reduplication:

Number	Example	Translation
singular		house
plural		houses

In compound nouns, only the last symbol is reduplicated:

Number	Example	Translation
singular		timezone
plural		timezones

⁵See <https://unicode.org/emoji/proposals.html>

4.1.2 Possession

There are six possessive prefixes – singular and plural for each of the three persons:

Person	Number	Example	Translation
first	singular		my camel
second	singular		your camel [sg.]
third	singular		his/her/its camel
first	plural		our camel
second	plural		your camel [pl.]
third	plural		their camel

By default, possessive prefixes are not gender-specific, however, if needed, the following gender prefixes can be used for third person possessive prefixes:

Person	Number	Gender	Example	Translation
third	singular	male		his camel
third	singular	female		her camel
third	plural	male		their [male] camel
third	plural	female		their [female] camel

Possession can also be indicated using the verb (to have sth., to own sth.), as in:

- (2)
have[PRS] 1SG[NOM] camel[ACC]
'I have a camel.'









There is no genitive case in Emoji Language to express possession. Instead, compounding or relative clauses are used (see the [Compound nouns](#) and [Relative clauses](#) sections, respectively).

4.1.3 Demonstrativeness

The demonstrative prefixes and can be used to refer to objects close to or far away from the speaker, respectively:

Distance	Example	Translation
proximal		this tree
distal		that tree





































































For plural nouns, the prefix is reduplicated as well:

Distance	Example	Translation
proximal	   	these dresses
distal	   	those dresses

Demonstrative prefixes can also be used to convey a sense of definiteness.
















































4.1.4 Locative prefixes



















































Emoji Language has a variety of locative prefixes that can be used to indicate the place or motion of an event:















Prefix	Description	Example	Translation
	at	  	at my house
	on top of	 	on the sofa
	to, towards	 	to church
	from	  	from the airport
	into, inside	 	into the river
	out of, outside	 	out of the train
 / 	up	 	up the mountain
	over, across, above	  	across the field
	down	 	down the sofa
	around	 	around the danger
	through	  	through the forest
	between, among	  	among the flowers
	behind	 	behind the fog
	below	  	below the clouds
	ahead, in front of	  	ahead of us
	close to, near	 	near the sea
	left of	 	to the left of the tree
	right of	 	to the right of the church
	opposite to	 	opposite to the school
	at a distance	 	far from home

The following examples sentences demonstrate the use of locative prefixes in context:

- (3)          
 see-FUT 3SG[NOM] REFL-3SG[ACC] at-1SG[POSS]-house
 ‘We will see ourselves [meet each other] at my house.’



















- (4)     
 sit-PST 3SG[NOM] on-sofa
 ‘We were sitting on the sofa.’
- (5)     
 go-FUT 1SG[NOM] to-church on.Sunday
 ‘I will go to church on Sunday.’
- (6)       
 take-FUT 1SG[NOM] 2SG[ACC] from-airport
 ‘I will take you [pick you up] from the airport.’
- (7)     
 throw-PST child-PL[NOM] stone-PL[ACC] into-river
 ‘The children were throwing stones into the river.’
- (8)        
 go-FUT 1SG[NOM] out-train at-next-train-place
 ‘I’ll get off the train at the next station.’
- (9)     
 climb-PST 1PL[NOM] up-mountain
 ‘We climbed up the mountain.’
- (10)       
 run-PST child-PL across-field from-lion
 ‘The children ran across the field away from the lion.’
- (11)     
 jump-PST cat[NOM] down-sofa
 ‘The cat jumped off the sofa.’

- (12)      
 slowly-walk-PST 1PL[NOM] around-danger
 ‘We slowly walked around the danger.’
- (13)       
 go-PST elf-PL[NOM] through-forest
 ‘The elves went through the forest.’
- (14)        
 fly-PST many-bee-PL among-flower-PL
 ‘Many bees flew among the flowers.’
- (15)     
 be[PRS] gold-city[NOM] behind-fog
 ‘There is a golden city behind the fog.’
- (16)      
 fly-PST airplane[NOM] below-cloud-PL
 ‘The airplane flew below the clouds.’
- (17)     
 be[PRS] well[NOM] ahead.of-1PL
 ‘There is a well ahead of us.’
- (18)        
 build-PST 3PL[NOM] 3PL[POSS]-house[ACC] close.to-sea
 ‘They built their house near the sea.’
- (19)     
 stand-PST deer[NOM] left.of-tree
 ‘A deer stood to the left of the tree.’

- (20)     
 be[PRS] market-place[NOM] right.of-church
 ‘The market is to the right of the church.’
- (21)    
 go[PRS] student-PL[NOM] to-store opposite-school
 ‘The students go to the store opposite the school.’
- (22)     
 find-PST 3PL[NOM] baby-cat[ACC] far.from-3PL[POSS]-home
 ‘They found the kitten far from their home.’








4.1.5 Instrumental prefix











The instrumental prefix is used to express the means by which an action was carried out. In the narrow sense, this refers to some tool or device. However, the instrumental prefix can also be used to refer to people or abstract concepts.

- (23)    
 eat-PST 1SG[NOM] ice.cream[ACC] INS-spoon
 ‘I ate the ice cream using the spoon.’
- (24)    
 hit-PST metal-worker[NOM] sword[ACC] INS-great-strength
 ‘The blacksmith hit the sword with great strength.’
- (25)         
 go-PST 1SG[NOM] to-cinema INS-1SG[POSS]-grandmother when be[PRS] 1SG

 little-child
 ‘I went to the cinema with my grandmother when I was a little kid.’

4.1.6 Benefactive prefix






The benefactive prefix indicates the benefit or beneficiary of an action:








- (26)       
sell-PST 1SG[NOM] book-PL[ACC] BEN-1SG[POSS]-sister
'I sold the books for my sister.'

- (27)         
collect[PRS] 1PL[NOM] wood[ACC] BEN-SUB ABIL-start 1PL[NOM] fire[ACC]

BEN-SUB
'We're collecting wood so that we can start a fire.'




4.1.7 Equative prefix

The equative prefix shows how the action compares to another noun phrase:


- (28)     
beautiful-be[PRS] 2SG[POSS]-eye-PL like-blue-ocean
'Beautiful are your eyes, like the blue ocean.'

- (29)       
quickly-run-PST child.PL[NOM] to-birthday-cake like-lion-PL
'The children ran to the birthday cake as quickly as lions.'

4.1.8 Compound nouns

Multiple noun emoji can be used to form noun compounds, for example  (car) and  (key) can be combined to form  (car key).

In compounds, the left emoji narrows down the meaning of the right emoji. Technically speaking, compounds are “left grouping”.

Longer compounds can be formed as well, for example  (chocolate factory door), which means “the door of a factory that produces chocolate”⁶.

⁶Not “a door that is made from chocolate and leads to a factory”, which would be “right grouping”.

In theory, there is no limit to the length of compounds. In practice, compounds should probably be limited to three emoji. For more complex expressions, relative clauses are preferable (see [Relative clauses](#)).

4.2 Pronouns

Pronouns are very similar to possessive and demonstrative suffixes.

4.2.1 Personal pronouns

Person	Singular	Plural
first	👉 “I”	👉👉 “we”
second	👈 “you”	👈👈 “you”
third	👉 “he/she/it”	👉👉 “they”

The personal pronouns are loosely based on American Sign Language (ASL) gestures. Emoji don’t quite match the actual perspective, but are intended as an approximation: Imagine a bird’s eye view where the speaker is in the top center and the listener in the bottom center.

If needed, there are also gender-specific variants of the third person personal pronouns:

Person	Gender	Singular	Plural
third	male	👦👉 “he”	👦👉👉 “they” [male]
third	female	👧👉 “she”	👧👉👉 “they” [female]

4.2.2 Demonstrative pronouns







Distance	Singular	Plural
proximal	👉 “this”	👉👉 “these”
distal	👈 “that”	👈👈 “those”

Example:





- (30) 🛒➡️ 👉 👉👉
 buy.FUT 1SG[NOM] PROX-PL[ACC]
 ‘I’m going to buy these.’

4.2.3 Reflexive pronouns





Reflexive pronouns refer back to another noun phrase within the same clause.


Person	Singular	Plural
first	 “myself”	 “ourselves”
second	 “yourself”	 “yourselves”
third	 “himself/herself/itself”	 “themselves”





For the reflexive pronouns, gender-specific variants are also available:

Person	Gender	Singular	Plural
third	male	 “himself”	 “themselves” [male]
third	female	 “herself”	 “themselves” [female]

Example:

- (31)    
hit-PST child[NOM] REFL-3SG[ACC] INS-hammer
‘The child hit itself with the hammer.’



The reflexive pronouns must not be confused with their English use for emphasis. To stress that an action was carried out alone, the  emoji is used:









- (32)    
alone-write-PST F.3SG[NOM] book[ACC]
‘She wrote the book alone [by herself].’

4.3 Verbs








Verbs are conjugated for tense and mood.

4.3.1 Tense

Emoji Language distinguishes three tenses: present, past and future. While the present tense is unmarked, the past and future are indicated by appending the tense suffixes  and  respectively:







Tense	Example	Translation
present	 	I go.
past	  	I went.
future	  	I will go.

When a specific time is given, the verb is conjugated in the same manner, for example:

- (33)       
 go-PST 1SG[NOM] to-church on.Sunday
 ‘I went to church on Sunday.’




4.3.2 Mood

The modality of a statement changes depending on the mood prefix of the verb:




Mood	Prefix	Description
indicative	(none)	What actually was/is/will be
imperative	!	Commands
hortative	!	Encouragement
jussive	!	Strong wishes
interrogative	?	Questions
subjunctive		What could be
permissive		What someone is allowed to do
obligative		What someone must do
abilitive		What someone is able to do
desiderative		What someone wants (desires) to do
negation		What hasn't happened/won't happen

The following example sentences illustrate the use of subjunctive, permissive, obligative, abilitive, and desiderative mood:







Subjunctive:

- (34)   
 SBJV-go.by.bike 1SG[NOM] to-store
 ‘I would go to the store by bike.’




Permissive:

- (35)   
 PERM-eat 2SG[NOM] chocolate[ACC]
 ‘You may eat the chocolate.’





Obligative:

- (36)      
 OBLI-NEG-wear 2PL[NOM] dirty-shoe-PL[ACC] in-house
 ‘Y’all must not wear dirty shoes in the house.’

Abilitive:

- (37)   
 ABIL-repair 1PL[NOM] PROX-car[ACC]
 ‘We can repair that car.’






Desiderative:

- (38)    
 DESI-drink 1SG[NOM] tea[ACC] now
 ‘I want to drink some tea now.’

Negation will be explained in the next section. See also [Yes-no questions](#) and [Imperative, hortative, jussive](#) for examples with those prefixes.




4.3.3 Negation


An indicative sentence can be negated by prepending  to the verb:

- (39)     
NEG-like[PRS] 1SG[NOM] shark-PL[ACC]
'I don't like sharks.'









4.4 Adjectives/Adverbs

Adjectives are directly prepended to nouns, for example:



- (40)   
love[PRS] 1SG[NOM] red.house[ACC]
'I love the red house.'
























In noun compounds, the adjective modifies only the first part of the noun, for example  (blue shoe factory) is a factory where blue shoes are produced. The color of the factory building itself is not specified in this expression. A good way to state such details are subordinate clauses (see [Subordinate clauses](#)).

Adjectives can also be prepended to verbs, serving as adverbs, for example:

- (41)  
fast.drive[PRS] 3PL[NOM]
'They drive fast.'
- (42)      
happily-play-PST F-3SG[NOM] drum-PL[ACC]
'She happily played the drums.'










4.5 Numerals

The so-called “keycap”⁷ emoji  to  can be used as **absolute quantifiers** before nouns. If a specific number is given, plural nouns are reduplicated as usual, as the following table illustrates:






Example	Translation
 	no flower
 	one flower
  	two flowers
   	three flowers
  	ten flowers
   	twelve flowers
    	four hundred twenty-seven flowers

As a special case,  can be used as a shorthand for , but that is not mandatory.





The **ordinal suffix**  marks ordinal numbers:

- (43)         
 take-FUT 1SG[NOM] three-ORD-dish from-dish-list
 ‘I’ll take the third dish from the menu.’






In addition to absolute numerals, the following quantification prefixes can be applied to nouns:

Emoji	Translation
	more
	fewer, less
	many, most
	few, some
	all







Example sentences:







- (44)    
 OBLI-drink 1SG[NOM] more-water[ACC]
 ‘I must drink more water.’

⁷See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keycap> regarding the etymology of “keycap”.





(45) *     
 be[PRS] fewer-danger-PL[NOM] at-PROX-road
 ‘There are fewer dangers on this road.’

(46)     
 ABIL-read most-people[NOM] emoji-PL[ACC]
 ‘Most people can read emoji.’

(47)      
 dwell[PRS] few-fish-PL[NOM] at-desert
 ‘Few fish live in the desert.’

(48)      
 dream[PRS] all-squirrel-PL[NOM] nut-PL[ACC]
 ‘All squirrels dream of nuts.’



The quantifiers can also appear as verb prefixes to indicate how often repeated actions happen:

(49)    
 ten-read.PST 1SG[NOM] story[ACC]
 ‘I read the story ten times.’

Note that quantifiers always go *before* the expression that they modify.

4.6 Comparison




Comparative expressions are formed using the suffixes  (“more”) and  (“less”).

Superlative expressions are formed using the suffixes  (“most”) and  (“least”).




The suffixes can be used in several places, such as with adjectives, adverbs and verbs.




Note, however, that comparative and superlative suffixes always go *after* the expression that they modify, which is what distinguishes them from quantifiers.

4.6.1 Comparing adjectives




Example	Translation
	small shoes
	small er shoes
	small est shoes

Example sentences:






- (50)   
 read-PST 1SG[NOM] small-most-book[ACC]
 ‘I read the smallest book.’

- (51)   
 be[PRS] 1SG[NOM] lazy-least-person[NOM]
 ‘I’m the least lazy person.’

4.6.2 Comparing adverbs

Example	Translation
	run fast
	run faster
	run fastest

Example sentence:

- (52)     
 fast-RUN[PRS] 1SG[NOM] but fast-more-run[PRS] 2SG[NOM]
 ‘I run fast, but you run faster.’
 ‘You run faster than me.’

4.6.3 Comparing verb phrases

Example sentences:

- (53) 🎵📺 👉 🎸
play-more 1SG[NOM] guitar[ACC]
'I play guitar more [often].'

- (54) 🎤📺 👉
sing-most 1SG[NOM]
'I sing mostly.'

5 Syntax

5.1 Basic statements

The basic word order is VSO (verb–subject–object). This syntax makes it particularly easy to spot which part of the sentence is actually the verb, since many emoji can be used as both nouns *and* verbs.





Because nominative and accusative case are not marked on the nouns, word order is very important for deciphering the relationship between noun phrases.

Compare the following two examples:

- (55) 👁️ 👉 👈
see 1SG[NOM] 2SG[ACC]
'I see you.'

- (56) 👁️ 👈 👉
see 2SG[NOM] 1SG[ACC]
'You see me.'

Hence, the subject of a sentence can never be omitted. If the subject is meant to be unspecified, the person symbol 🧑 is used:





- (57)    
eat-PST person[NOM] cake[ACC] previous-day
‘Someone ate the cake yesterday.’





‘The cake was eaten yesterday.’






Such constructions can be used to translate passive voice constructions from other languages.

5.2 Place, manner and time

After subject and direct object, additional information may be given about location/motion, manner and time:

- (58)    
drive.FUT 1SG[NOM] to-town next-day
‘I will drive to town tomorrow.’





- (59)    
buy 3PL[NOM] pizza[ACC] all-time
‘They always buy pizza.’

- (60)     
build-PST child-PL[NOM] hut[ACC] INS-branch-PL previous-day
‘The children built a hut from branches yesterday.’

5.3 Verbal adjunct fronting

In some cases, the default word order of Emoji Language leads to ambiguity.

Consider the following – admittedly contrived – example:







- (61)    
drink-PST 1SG[NOM] water[ACC] BEN-plant-PL
‘I drank the water for the plants.’

The statement can be interpreted in two ways:

First: “I drank {the water for the plants}”, in the sense that someone drank the water that was originally meant for the plants. Perhaps due to some kind of dementia, perhaps because no other water was available in an emergency situation.






Second: “I {drank the water} for the plants”, in the sense that someone drank water believing it would somehow help the plants. Perhaps because they thought that regularly drinking water themselves would remind them to water the plants.

This kind of ambiguity can be resolved by moving such additional information about place, manner and time towards the front of the sentence, directly behind the verb:

- (62)      
drink-PST BEN-plant-PL 1SG[NOM] water[ACC]
‘For the plants, I drank water.’


This version of the statement makes it clear that the adjunct “for the plants” indeed belongs to the verb, i.e. the speaker drank the water because they believed it would somehow help the plants (second interpretation above).





In contrast, if a speaker wanted to emphasize that they actually drank the water that was meant for the plants (first interpretation above), they could in this case use noun compounding for clarification:

- (63)     
drink-PST 1SG[NOM] plant-water[ACC]
‘I drank the plant-water.’

Note that subject and direct object cannot be moved as freely. Their order must always stay the same, so that their role in the sentence remains recognizable.

5.4 Yes-no questions

To form a yes-no question, the interrogative suffix  is appended to the conjugated verb. The word order remains unchanged:

- (64)    
INT-go 2SG[NOM] to-town
‘Are you going to town?’

(65) ? 📖 ➡️ 👉 📖
 INT-read-FUT 2SG[NOM] book[ACC]
 ‘Will you read the book?’

(66) ? 🏠 ➡️ 👤 👉
 INT-marry-FUT person[NOM] 1SG[ACC]
 ‘Will someone marry me?’

5.5 Wh-questions

The interrogative symbol ? also functions as a stand-alone interrogative pronoun, when it is put in the position of subject or object:

(67) 👤 ➡️ ? 🥔 🥔
 cook-FUT what[NOM] potatoe-PL
 ‘Who will cook the potatoes?’

(68) 📖 👉 ?
 read 2SG[NOM] what[ACC]
 ‘What do you read?’

Or it can be used to ask for clarification about a given noun:

(69) 💡 👉 ? 🎵
 listen 2SG what-music
 ‘What music do you listen to?’

(70) 🧑🏠 👉 📖 📖 📦 ?
 OBLI-put 1SG[NOM] book-PL[ACC] into-what-box
 ‘Into which box should I put the books?’

(71) 🌿 🚽 ? 📍
 be toilet[NOM] what-place
 ‘Where is the toilet?’

- (72) 🍔➡️ ? 👉👉 ?🕒
eat-FUT 1PL[NOM] what-time
‘When will we eat?’

- (73) ✳️ ?🕒
be what-time
‘What time is it?’

The interrogative prefix can also be combined with locative prefixes to form interrogative words regarding **places and motion**:

- (74) 🚶👉 ?🔄
go 2SG[NOM] what-to
‘Where are you going?’

- (75) 🛍️🔙 👉 💧 ?🔄
bring-PST 2SG[NOM] water[ACC] what-from
‘From where did you bring the water?’

The above type of question is also possible with all the other locative prefixes described in the [Locative prefixes](#) section.

The special **possessive** prefix ?👉 can be used to ask for the possessor of a noun:

- (76) 🚗➡️ 👉👉 ?👉🚗 🔄🏟️
drive-FUT 1PL[NOM] whose-car[ACC] to-stadium
‘Whose car are we going to take to the stadium?’

The interrogative prefix ?+ (how, literally “what-with”) is used to ask for **manner**:

- (77) 🛠️🔙 👉 🍰 ?+
make-PST 2SG[NOM] PROX-cake[ACC] how
‘How did you make this cake?’

The interrogative prefix can be combined with the emoji for “cause” (👉) and the benefactive prefix emoji (👤) to ask for the **cause** or **purpose** of something, respectively. Both questions are expressed in English with the interrogative pronoun “why?”.

- (78) 🏴‍☠️👉👤🍪👉👤🔑👤?👉
steal-PST 2SG[NOM] cookie-PL[ACC] from-old-lady what-cause
‘What made you steal the old lady’s cookies?’

- (79) 📁👉💰?👤
collect[PRS] 2SG[NOM] money[ACC] what-purpose
‘For what purpose are you collecting money?’

The interrogative prefix ?👉 (literally “what-like”) is used to ask for **similarity**:

- (80) 👁️👤👉👤👉👉?👉
show-PST M-3SG[NOM] M-REFL-3SG[ACC] what-like
‘What did he look like?’

The interrogative prefix ?👉 is used to ask for the **quantity** of a noun:

- (81) * ?👉👉
be[PRS] INT-number-bucket
‘How many buckets are there?’

- (82) 🖍️👉 ?👉👉
draw-PST 2SG[NOM] INT-number-picture
‘How many pictures did you draw?’






When asking for quantity, the noun appears in singular form.











The same interrogative prefix can be used with verbs to ask for how many times something happens:


- (83) ?👉👉👉👉👉👉👉👉
INT-number-see-PST 2SG[NOM] M-3SG[ACC]
‘How often did you see him?’

5.6 Imperative, hortative, jussive






To form an imperative expression (command), the verb is put in imperative mood (see also [Mood](#)). The subject of the sentence specifies to whom the command is directed:

- (84)     
IMP-carry 2SG[NOM] trash[ACC] outside-house
'Take the trash out of the house!'





- (85)             
IMP-clean “Ann”-girl[NOM] and “Bob”-boy[NOM] 2PL[POSS]-place-PL[ACC]
'Ann and Bob, clean up your places!'




(Note that the second person pronoun  cannot be omitted.)

When the subject is in the first person plural, the mood becomes hortative, and the sentence is meant to encourage an action:

- (86)     
HORT-go 1PL[NOM] to-camp-place
'Let's go to the camping ground!'

The use of this verb prefix can be extended to form jussive mood constructions that express strong wishes in a more general way:

- (87)    
JUSS-help M-3SG[NOM]
'Let him help!'

- (88)   
JUSS-be light[NOM]
'Let there be light!'

5.7 Subordinate clauses









Word order in subordinate clauses is also VSO (verb–subject–object).



5.7.1 Relative clauses

Relative clauses are one method of embedding subordinate clauses into main clauses.

Relative clauses are *enclosed* by the relative pronoun $\overline{\sigma}$, which means a second $\overline{\sigma}$ is required to mark the end of the subordinate clause, like a comma at the end of subordinate clause.

Simply put, relative clauses allow to make two statements about the same entity, without repeating it in another sentence, for example:

- (89) *   $\overline{\sigma}$    $\overline{\sigma}$   
 be[PRS] blue-factory REL make[PRS] blue-shoe-PL[ACC] REL at-1SG[POSS]-city
 ‘There is a blue factory, that makes blue shoes, in my city.’





The argument immediately before the relative pronoun, in this case  , is implicitly inserted into the subordinate clause at the **subject** position.

The relative clause construction is essentially a shorter way of saying the following two separate sentences:




- (90) *     
 be[PRS] blue-factory at-1SG[POSS]-city
 ‘There is a blue factory in my city.’





- (91)      
 make[PRS] PROX-blue-factory[NOM] blue-shoe-PL[ACC]
 ‘This blue factory makes blue shoes.’


It is also possible to use the relative pronoun $\overline{\sigma\sigma}$ instead, which implies the **object** position, for example:










- (92)  *  $\overline{\sigma\sigma}$   $\overline{\sigma\sigma}$
 beautiful-be[PRS] dress[NOM] REL wear[PRS] 2SG[NOM] REL
 ‘The dress that you wear is beautiful.’

That is a simpler way of saying:






(93)   
 beautiful-be[PRS] dress[NOM]
 ‘The dress is beautiful.’






(94)    
 wear[PRS] 2SG[NOM] PROX-dress[ACC]
 ‘You’re wearing this dress.’

Finally, the **locatives** prefixes, as well as the **instrumental**, **benefactive** and **equative** prefixes, can be combined with the relative pronoun  to form the following relative pronouns:

(95)         
 be[PRS] banana-PL[NOM] at-store REL go[PRS] 1SG[NOM] REL
 ‘There are bananas at the store to which I’m going.’




This is a simpler way of saying the following two sentences:














(96)     
 be[PRS] banana-PL[NOM] at-store
 ‘There are bananas at the store.’

(97)     
 go[PRS] 1SG[NOM] to-PROX-store
 ‘I’m going to this store.’










This type of construction is possible with all other locative prefixes as well, see the [Locative prefixes](#) section for a complete list.

The following examples illustrate the instrumental, benefactive, and equative relative pronouns:


(98)         
 fear-PST dog[NOM] INS-REL walk-PST 1SG[NOM] INS-REL ambulance-noise[ACC]
 ‘The dog, with whom we went for a walk, was afraid of the ambulance’s noise.’








- (99)      
 leave-PST woman[NOM] BEN-REL come-PST 1PL[NOM] BEN-REL
 ‘The woman, for whom we came, left.’
- (100)      
 wear[PRS] woman[NOM] beautiful-dress[ACC] like-REL sew-PST elf[NOM]
 
 3SG[ACC] like-REL
 ‘The woman wears a beautiful dress, like an elf sewed it.’

In general, relative clauses of the same type cannot be nested by themselves, but content clauses or other types of relative clauses may appear within a relative clause, for example:




- (101)         
 found-PST 1PL[NOM] key[ACC] REL own man[NOM] REL dwell near-lake REL
 REL
 ‘We found the key that is owned by the man who lives near the lake.’

5.7.2 Content clauses

Another way of embedding subordinate clauses are content clauses. In this case, the whole subordinate clause – enclosed by the conjunction  – takes the place of what would otherwise be a simple noun or pronoun:

- (102)      

 SUB[ACC]
 ‘I thought that you might like this present.’

This is a clearer way of saying:

- (103)   
 SBJV-like 2SG[NOM] PROX-present[ACC]
 ‘You might like this present.’

- (104) 🤔👉👉
 think-PST 1SG[NOM] PROX[ACC]
 ‘I thought that.’

Content clauses are often used in the context of cognition, perception etc.

Another example that demonstrates this:

- (105) 💡👉👉👤👉👤🏠👉
 hear-PST 1SG[NOM] SUB[ACC] go-PST person[NOM] into-house SUB[ACC]
 ‘I heard that someone went into the house.’

(See also [Direct speech](#).)

Like with relative clauses, the locative prefixes as well as instrumental, benefactive and equative prefixes can be used to introduce content clauses:

- (106) 🏃👉👉👤👉👉🔥👉👉🔥👉
 quick-run-PST firefighter-PL[NOM] to-SUB burn-PST fire[NOM] to-SUB
 ‘The firefighter rushed to where the fire was burning.’

- (107) 💪🎯👉👉👤👉👉🏹👉👉👤👉👉
 ABIL-exact-hit M-3SG[NOM] INS-SUB daily-shoot M-3SG[NOM] INS-SUB
 ‘With him shooting daily, he can hit exactly.’

- (108) 😍👉👉👤👉👉👤👉👉👤👉👉👤👉👉👤👉👉
 love[PRS] F-3SG[NOM] F-3SG[POSS]-friend[ACC] like-SUB love[PRS]
 daughter[NOM] F-3SG[POSS]-sister[ACC] like-SUB
 ‘She loved her friend, like a daughter loves her sister.’

Content clauses of the same type cannot be nested by themselves, but relative clauses or other types of content clauses may appear within a content clause, for example:

- (109) 🎵🔙 👤 🗨️🔙 🖥️ 😊 👉 🇨🇦 🇨🇳 🇮🇳 🇵🇰🇳🇵 👤
 play-PST woman[NOM] REL say-PST SUB like F-3SG “Chopin”-man
 🖥️ 🗨️ 🎹 📍🎵🔙 🎵🔙
 SUB REL piano[ACC] at-concert last-night
 ‘The woman who said that she likes Chopin played the piano at the concert last night.’

5.8 Conjunctions

The conjunction ➕ can be used in a **cumulative** sense, to join multiple verb, subjects, objects or subordinate clauses:

- (110) 🛒🔙 ➕ 📖🔙 👉 📖
 buy-PST and read-PST 1SG[NOM] book[ACC]
 ‘I bought and read the book.’

- (111) 🏆🔙 👉 ➕ 👉 🎲
 win-PST 2SG[NOM] and 1SG[NOM] game[ACC]
 ‘You and me won the game.’

- (112) 👁️🔙 👉 👤 ➕ 👤
 see-PST 1SG[NOM] man[ACC] and woman[ACC]
 ‘I saw the man and the woman.’

- (113) 🧠 👉 👤 🗨️ * 👤 🗨️ ➕ 🗨️ 😊
 know[PRS] 1SG[NOM] woman[ACC] REL be[PRS] teacher.F REL and REL like[PRS]
 🦓🦓 🗨️
 zebra-PL REL
 ‘I know a woman who is a teacher and who likes zebras.’

In the same way, the conjunction 🔵 works in an **alternative** sense:

- (114) ? 🗨️ 😊 👉 ☕ 🔵 🍵
 INT-SBJV-like 2SG[NOM] coffee[ACC] or tea[ACC]
 ‘Would you like coffee or tea?’

- (115) 🧠🔙 🟡📖🔙 👉 👈
 hear-PST or read-PST 1SG[NOM] DIST[ACC]
 ‘I heard or read that [somewhere].’

The conjunction **!!** is used in to join sentences in an **adversative** way:

- (116) 😞 👉 **!!** ✖️🌟 🍲
 hunger[PRS] 1SG[NOM] but NEG-be[PRS] food[NOM]
 ‘I am hungry but there is no food.’

It is also comonly used in the context of comparison (see [Comparison](#)).

The conjunctions **▶** (then) and **◀** (because) form **illative** constructions:

- (117) 😊 👉 🍦 ▶ 😊 👉
 eat[PRS] 1SG[NOM] ice.cream[ACC] then be.happy[PRS] 1SG[NOM]
 ‘If I eat ice cream, then I’m happy.’

- (118) 👕 👉 🕶️ ◀ 🌞 🌞
 wear[PRS] 1SG[NOM] sunglasses[ACC] because shine[PRS] sun[NOM]
 ‘I wear sunglasses because the sun is shining.’

If the statements are of hypothetical nature, the verb appears in subjunctive mood:

- (119) 🧠📖 👉 💰 ▶ 🧠🛒 👉 📖📌
 SBJV-have 1SG[NOM] money[ACC] then SBJV-buy 1SG[NOM] library[ACC]
 ‘If I had money, I would buy a library.’

- (120) 🧠👁️🔙 👉 👈 ▶ 🧠🔙🔙 👉
 SBJV-see-PST 1SG[NOM] 2SG[ACC] then SBJV-stop-PST 1SG[NOM]
 ‘If I had seen you, I would have stopped.’

6 Pragmatics

6.1 Greetings

The emoji 🤝 is used as a universal **greeting**, on meeting and parting.

To ask someone how they feel, one may use:

- (121) ❤️ 🤝 ?
feel 2SG[NOM] what[ACC]
‘How do you feel? [lit. “What do you feel?”]’

(Note that this can be understood as a prompt for a literal response, and is not necessarily part of an idiomatic greeting.)

6.2 Affirmation/Denial

The emoji 👍 (good, yes), 🆗 (okay) and sometimes 🙌 (enough) are used to signal affirmation.

Likewise, 👎 (bad, no) is used to deny a statement or request.

6.3 Courtesy







To show courtesy when asking for a favor or to thank someone for something, the 🙏 emoji is used.

When asking for something politely, this can be combined with the subjunctive mood:





- (122) 🙏 ? 🗝️ 🤝 🪟
please! INT-SBJV-open 2SG[NOM] window[ACC]
‘Would you open the window, please?’

6.4 Direct speech

The standard word order for direct speech is as follows:








- (123)   “    ” 
 say-PST M-3SG[NOM] “ be[PRS] PROX beautiful-present ” to-F-3SG
 ‘He said to her: “This is a beautiful present.”’

The speech in quotation marks can also be a noun, as in the following example:

- (124)    
 tell-PST M-3SG[NOM] story[ACC] to-F-3SG
 ‘He told the story to her.’








‘He told her the story.’

Or a content clause:








- (125)      
 say-PST M-3SG[NOM] SUB[ACC] arrive-PST F-3SG[POSS]-package[NOM] SUB[ACC]

 to-F-3SG
 ‘He told her that her package has arrived.’

In practice, however, the syntactic position of **quoted** statements is rather free.

Usually, they appear at the very end of main clauses:

- (126)    “    ” 
 say-PST M-3SG[NOM] to-F-3SG “ be[PRS] PROX beautiful-present ”
 ‘He said to her: “This is a beautiful present.”’

However, for aesthetic reasons in narrations, they might as well appear *before* the actual main clause:

- (127)     ”   
 “ enjoy-PST 1SG[NOM] ice.cream[ACC] ” say-PST F-3SG[NOM] to-M-3SG
 “‘I enjoyed the ice cream”, she said to him.’

6.5 Date and time

A simple way to indicate time of day is using the clock emoji:

- (128) 🍽️👉👉🌞🍳🕒
eat-PST 1SG[NOM] 1SG[POSS]-breakfast[ACC] at.six.o'clock
'I ate my breakfast at six o'clock.'

- (129) 😴👉👉🕒
sleep-FUT child-PL[NOM] at.eight.o'clock
'The children will sleep at eight o'clock.'

Age is expressed through possession:

- (130) 🗓️👉👉📅📅🌸🌸🌸🌸🌸🌸🌸🌸🌸🌸
have[PRS] 1SG[NOM] twenty-one-year-PL[ACC]
'I have twenty-one years.'

'I'm twenty-one years old.'







- (131) 🗓️👉👉?📅📅🌸🌸🌸🌸🌸🌸
have[PRS] 2SG[NOM] what-number-year[ACC]
'How many years to do you have?'

'How old are you?'

6.6 Remote past and future

In literary works, the past and future tense markers may appear twice to indicate more distant events:

- (132) ⭐️👉👉👉👉👉👉👉👉👉
be-REMOTE-PST 1SG[NOM] student
'A long time ago, I've been a student.'








- (133)      
 explode-REMOTE-FUT 1PL[POSS]-sun
 ‘In the very far future, our sun is going to explode.’





7 Lexicon





The official Emoji Language dictionary can be found on the website: <https://tmh.conlang.org/emoji-language/>

7.1 Derivational morphology

There are a few common patterns to derive new vocabulary from existing emoji definitions.

Country flags are choronyms that refer to **states and regions**, for example   (France) or  (Scotland). These flags can be used to derive names of **languages** spoken in these regions (linguonyms) and **people** living in these regions (demonyms), for example   (Spanish language) and   (Swedish people).

The suffix  typically denotes a person working in a specific field if there is no single emoji to refer to the concept, for example  (teacher) exists, but the **profession**   (banker, literally bank-worker) must be expressed by compounding.

In general, the **abstraction** suffix  can be used to refer to the abstract category of something. For example, while  refers to a specific fruit (apple),   refers to any type of fruit. This is sometimes necessary, when the meaning of a specific emoji would otherwise be too narrow.

7.2 Flag spelling

Proper names that do not appear in the emoji lexicon, can be spelled using flag emoji. In this case, the flag emoji are used to represent letters of the Latin alphabet, which are not available as emoji.

In proper names, flags stand for the first letter of their country's name, according to the following table:




Flag	Letter	Country name
	A	A merica
	B	B razil
	C	C anada
	D	D enmark
	E	E ngland
	F	F rance
	G	G hana
	H	H ong Kong
	I	I celand
	J	J amaica
	K	K enya
	L	L aos
	M	M exico
	N	N epal
	O	O man
	P	P akistan
	Q	Q atar
	R	R ussia
	S	S witzerland
	T	T urkey
	U	U ruguay
	V	V ietnam
	W	W allis & Futuna
	X	(no country available)
	Y	Y emen
	Z	New Z ealand

When a name is spelled using flags, it is usually assumed that it is a person's name, unless something else can be assumed from context.


To remove this ambiguity, a flag name is typically suffixed with a “class noun” emoji that represents a person, country, animal etc., for example:

Flag spelling	Translation	Class
	“Kathy”	woman
	“Helsinki”	city
	“Times”	newspaper

Note that the Emoji Language has undergone a “spelling reform” in June 2021. In the original version, “G”, “I”, and “J” were represented using the country flags of **G**reece

()⁸, India ()⁸, and Japan (), respectively, so you might still encounter them in early Emoji Language texts.

The spelling has been changed because the names of these countries start with different letters in their native language (**Elláda**, **Bhārat**, and **Nippon**, respectively) compared to their English names.

The goal is to use country names with matching endonym and exonym⁸ instead, to make the corresponding letters more easily recognizable and avoid any ambiguity. For the letter “O”, currently no country matching this criterion is available, so the flag of Oman ()⁸, ‘Umān) has been kept.

8 Appendix

8.1 Morphosyntax overview

Sentence: Verb (Subject (Object)) (Place/Motion ...) (Time)

Noun: (Interrog..)(Loc.|Ins.|Ben.|Equ.)(Dem.)(Poss.)(Quant.)(Adj.)Noun Stem(Pl.)

Verb: (Imp.|Interrog.)(Mood)(Neg.)(Quant.)(Adverb)Verb Stem(Tense)

Adjective/Adverb: Stem(Comparison)

Noun Stem: Root | Pers. Pronoun | Dem. Pronoun | Name | Compound

Name: Flag(...)(Class Noun)

Compound: Noun Stem ...

For more details, see also the sections about [Subordinate clauses](#) and [Conjunctions](#).

9 Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

⁸See the article “List of countries and dependencies and their capitals in native languages” on the English Wikipedia, for example.

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
ABIL	abilitive
ACC	accusative
BEN	benefactive
DESI	desiderative
DIST	distal
FUT	future
HORT	hortative
IMP	imperative
INS	instrumental
INT	interrogative
JUSS	jussive

NEG	negative
NOM	nominative
OBLI	obligative
ORD	ordinal
PERM	permissive
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PROX	proximal
PRS	present
PST	past
REFL	reflexive
REL	relative
SG	singular
SUB	subordinate (content) clause