



slack

VARIETY PACK

Episode 28: Hear Ye, Hear Ye Pack

Speaker 1: You are listening to the Slack

Speaker 2: Variety Pack.

Speaker 1: Brought to you by Slack.

Speaker 3: All kinds of people on all kinds of teams use Slack to do amazing things.

Speaker 4: Welcome to Episode 28 of the Slack Variety Pack. We're calling it the ...

Gretchen: Hear Ye, Hear Ye ...

Speaker 4: Pack because we've got some great news to share with you. First of all, it's been one year since we launched the Slack Variety Pack podcast. It's been a great year, but our next announcement is even bigger news than our birthday. We here at Slack love giving you this podcast so much that we're taking it up a notch. We're closing the book on the Slack Variety Pack so that we can bring you version 2.0 of the Slack podcast this fall. It'll be new, different, but still very Slack.

Right now we're squirreling away in development mode. Over the summer we'll be updating you with more information about our new podcast on the Slack blog and on our Twitter account @SlackHQ. Because this is the last ever episode of the Slack Variety Pack, we wanted to leave you with a smile, so we're dedicating this entire episode to that little piece of digital emotion, the emoji.

Anna: It's all about what's work appropriate in your company and in your culture. We do use ... I shouldn't say that ... We do use poop like most internal presentations and with an emoji poop saying thank you for your time. Aside from that it's not frequently used.

Speaker 4: That's Anna Picard, she's in charge of words at Slack. She knows the power of words when communicating inside her workplace. She knows how powerful her words are when talking with customers and the general public, and she knows the place emoji have in written conversations.

Anna: They're a very handy prop in helping us communicate better and faster and more like humans, I think. When we get a bit overexcited and start to use emoji instead of words rather than as well as words, that's when we start to stumble and ... I've recently had a crackdown on this in Slack because emoji, they're the frosting, not the food.

Gretchen: I think that it's becoming increasingly important to have a digital tone of voice and be able to convey important deep emotional expressions in your text.

Speaker 4: Gretchen McCullough is an internet linguist. She thinks that emoji of providing another layer to our communication that wasn't there before. She thinks that emoji should get more respect.

Gretchen: I also don't think that you can totally write off emoji as a frivolous thing because they

look like cute little pictures. I think people are doing subtle, expressive things with them.

Speaker 4: But if you want to be as clear as possible in your message, Anna and Gretchen both agree that you need to limit the amount of emoji use.

Anna: We're trying to express ourselves clearly when that falls down is when people start using emoji instead of words. Trying to use them as a kind of hieroglyphics or something and that is Kryptonite to me. You have to then take much longer to stumble through the sentence trying to work out what it was they were trying to say. What the emoji is that they're trying to use to represent that. It's like handing someone a legal document filled with redacted black strike-outs all the way through.

Gretchen: We could not have this conversation in emoji because emoji is just not very good at having abstract conversations.

Speaker 3: Our next story is the exception to this rule. Here's when pictures speak louder than words, many, many words.

Speaker 1: Channel change. Book channel.

Speaker 2: Hobbies. Many of us have them to fill our down time when we are not at work: gardening, model trains, jiu-jitsu. Some are simple, others are more epic. In this guy's case it was literally epic.

Fred: My name is Fred Benenson. I've been cultivating a shadow career as an emoji expert.

Speaker 2: Fred's regular job is working as a data expert. He ran the data team at Kick Starter for over 12 years. His days are filled with numbers and formulas. But on evenings and weekends he fills the hours translating literary classics into emoji.

Fred: The way in which Melville writes is so complex, nuanced and floral that I was like that's going to be impossible to put into emoji, but it will be fun to see people try.

Speaker 2: Fred Benenson rewrote the entire 700 page whale of a tale, Moby Dick into emoji and he called it, Emoji Dick.

But let's back up for a sec to a time oh, so long ago when Fred got a text message from a friend and the message contained an emoji. The first time he'd ever encountered one in real life.

Back to 2008 ...

Fred: I was like, "How did you do that?" Because this was at the time the iPhone was super locked-down and nobody had really known about it until that point and I think the only reason he knew about it was his wife was Japanese and emoji had been in their culture basically a decade at that point. Then, once I figured how to do it, you get this weird app, your iPhone awakens the idea of an emoji keyboard and you can send emoji to

people and their phone supported it but they didn't necessarily have the keyboard so it was a really great way to troll my friends in the beginning. I was send them these strange emoji which they had never seen before. That's how it all started.

Speaker 2: Fred was hooked. A year later he set himself a challenge, part hobby, part art project, part experiment, part crowd sourcing. He put his eyes on the prize. Moby Dick.

Fred: I did the math and the book is like, 10,000 sentences. I want to do it where multiple people translate the same sentence and we choose the best one.

Speaker 2: Fred turned to Amazon Mechanical Turk. That's an online marketplace where you can crowd source people to perform tasks that computers can't do.

Fred: I had each of the 10,000 sentences translated 3 times by 3 different people. I did another Mechanical Turk job to say, "Here's the english sentence, here's 3 emoji translations of it, which one is the best one." There were 4 people voting on the best emoji translation. Which ever one garnered the most number of votes would make it to the final edit.

Speaker 2: About 800 people participated.

Fred: You're not even told who they are, so in the acknowledgements in the book I put every one of their Mechanical Turk worker IDs in the back of the book.

Speaker 2: And the results look something like this ...

Fred: The whale emoji comes up a lot. Queequeg, who is one of the characters in Moby Dick, gets cast as a man with turban a lot. One out of ten times you're like, "That is brilliant," and somebody really put some thought into this and the rest of the time you're like, "I have no idea what's going on" (laughs).

Speaker 2: It's kind of like trying to decipher a Rebus puzzle, or playing a really long game of Pictionary. Not everyone's favorite game play but Emoji Dick certainly found it's niche.

Fred: It's kind of a novelty thing. I have a friend who runs a crowd sourcing company and he's got a copy on his shelf. It's something that people talk about and it has this weird internet cache where it's got a fan base now.

Speaker 2: The Nantucket Whaling Museum owns one. It's even part of the collection at the Library of Congress. The one group that's not too crazy about Fred's work?

Fred: Melville fans aren't always into Emoji Dick, that's one thing I've found.

Speaker 2: No matter. The release of Emoji Dick has spawned a ton of other literary translations into emoji. Even Disney is on board the emoji train with the release of Emoji Star Wars, The Force Awakens. Fred is setting trends.

- Fred: There's no trends casting. Whatever part of me, this just seems like a wild thing to do. It's like this weird little early emoji history moment, I guess.
- Speaker 2: Now Fred's got another book out, How to Speak Emoji. It's a how-to on writing useful emoji phrases. It's also a bit of an explain-er for newbies and, you know, parents.
- Fred: It's everything from day-to-day life to office life, to pick-up lines, to what I was talking over with my editor and the publisher. They were like, "Best case scenario, Urban Outfitters chooses to stock this during the holiday season." I was like, "Sounds good to me" (laughs).
- Speaker 2: Despite all his success as an emoji expert, Fred still keeps his day job in data. Emoji are still close to his heart, but he prefers the balance between his left brain and his right brain.
- Fred: The only way I've been able to justify putting this much thought and time into it is that it helps balance out the more serious work that I get stuck into doing. I was running a team of people, I was doing a lot of managing how to build infrastructural project behind the scenes of Kick Starter. You kind of get in the weeds in some really technical stuff and when you're doing research it can be stressful to get stuff right and I want to get stuff right. It's fun to have this quirky thing that makes sure I don't take myself too seriously about life. I would be extremely hesitant to forge a career in emoji even though it's been very good to me. I'll say that.
- Speaker 1: Slack Variety Pack. Tweet us in emoji @SlackHQ. Channel change. Research channel.
- Gretchen: Definitely don't use the eggplant emoji in a professional setting. That's a lawsuit waiting to happen. Just don't do it. You can look it up if you want to. Don't use the peach. There are a couple of face emoji that are ambiguous that show up on Apple devices versus Android devices. So the grinning smile that kind of looks like a grimace on some devices and it looks kind of like a grin on other devices. I would generally avoid that emoji because you don't know what device the other person is using and they might receive the wrong message from you.
- Speaker 4: That's internet linguist, Gretchen McCullough. The Unicode Consortium is the group that decides which emoji should be released into the world. They don't design them, they assign them names. It is up to the messaging platforms to decide what the emoji look like. That's why that happy smile on your Android looks like a grimace on an iPhone. It's no wonder people misinterpret the messages they receive.
- There's a research group at the University of Minnesota who took a closer look at the way emoji get misinterpreted. Here's what they found.
- Hannah: My name is Hannah Miller and I'm a third year PhD student at the University of Minnesota. We study human computer interaction.
- Jake: My name is Jake Seabalt-Speaker. I'm a fifth year PhD student in the Group Lens Lab at

the University of Minnesota.

Hannah: This project, we studied how people interpret emoji and found that they don't always interpret them the same way which could lead to miscommunication. We had personally noticed emoji rendered differently on different platforms. For example, I would look at a post on Facebook on my computer and later I would see the same post on my phone and it would render differently. I thought that was strange to see the same exact post looking different on different platforms.

Speaker 11: It's crying and laughing at the same time, obviously it's the hilarious emoji.

Jake: That's the Google tear-eyed smiley face. Can you describe this one for me?

Speaker 11: That one's also emotional. Really, really sad emotional. I don't get happy out of this at all.

Hannah: We don't actually have the insight into the companies and the Unicode Consortium for how this actually works. We do think that there could be an effort made to converge on the designs so they are more similar across platforms or possibly add to what's required in the standard.

Jake: Describe this emoji.

Speaker 12: Jazz hands.

Jake: Can you describe it in two words? Use two words.

Speaker 12: Jazz hands.

Jake: Do you consider this a hugging emoji. Before I said the Apple hugging emoji did you think that?

Speaker 13: Sort of because not very many emoji held their hands really close to their face are hugging emoji, usually their arms are out.

Jake: I never thought of it as hugging emoji I thought it was a guy doing jazz hands.

Speaker 13: That sounds kind of weird.

Jake: Thank you.

Can you describe this one for me?

Speaker 12: That looks like someone's really satisfied with their meal.

Jake: Can you put it in a sentence?

Speaker 12: I just ate so much brisket I feel like I'm full and satisfied.

Jake: We were just looking at the hugging emoji.

We certainly do think that emoji use can lead to miscommunication. We also think that English can lead to miscommunication and communication leads to miscommunication. In some ways, sure, we think emoji could be risky but it's risky in an analogous way to regional terms.

In Wisconsin, or at least some sections of Wisconsin, people refer to water fountains as bubblers. Or in England there are terms that are used for various things that don't get translated easily into American English, for instance. Some people understand them a certain way, other people understand them a different way and that's true across all communication and language.

Sure, yes, it is risky but we also don't think it's going to start World War III in any way.

Speaker 1: Slack. Making work less work-y. Channel change. Design channel.

Anna: When we have a good announcement about something that is appealing to us as that diverse team you can see thumbs up and raised hands of all skin tones underneath the message. It's something that feels like it represents us and it feels like it's a uniquely and happily Slack way of doing things.

Speaker 4: That's Anna Picard, Slack's resident grammarian. This episode of the Slack Variety Pack is all about emoji. Not too long ago the Unicode Consortium offered up different skin tone emoji. For a group of students at Madonna High School in Toronto that wasn't enough. They designed their own emoji to show the world what's missing. The results may surprise you.

Speaker 14: Tell me about how this project came about.

Speaker 15: We were learning about Illustrator in class and our teacher Mr. Pooplin came across an article a author wrote about emojis and how they aren't really directed to females. Then we got an assignment to create an emoji of our own that we think should exist.

Speaker 14: Had you thought about all this before it was brought to your attention?

Speaker 15: Probably not, no. It was good to know ... It opened my eyes, I was like, "Wow, female emojis are wearing pink t-shirts, where's the blue, where's the black?" I barely wear pink. I only own one pink shirt.

Speaker 16: I noticed that there wasn't much diversity it was generic type emoji.

Speaker 17: Women always have to be a bride or a dancing woman. Why can't they be a nurse or something like that?

Speaker 14: And what did you design?

Speaker 17: I created a zombie emoji that would represent how you feel when you're tired or if you feel like a zombie.

Speaker 14: Amazing. I love that. Can you name your emoji? Give it a name.

Speaker 17: I named mine A Zombmoji.

Speaker 14: A Zomb ...

Speaker 17: Moji.

Speaker 15: I designed the Flash logo.

Speaker 14: I saw that one. I love that. Why did you design that?

Speaker 15: I'm a big fan of super heroes. I don't see any emoji that have anything related to super heroes.

Speaker 16: I created a Harry Potter emoji.

Speaker 14: Why?

Speaker 16: I'm a huge fan of Harry Potter. I've recently been rereading the books. I know that it's such a huge character in pop culture. A lot of people who have read Harry Potter have been impacted by the characters, the movies, everything so I thought that would be a good idea.

Speaker 14: What did you design?

Speaker 18: I did the girl emoji but that looks like me.

Speaker 14: What do you look like?

Speaker 18: I have straight hair and I wear glasses and I usually wear black shirts with band logos on them so that's what I did.

Speaker 14: I think the only emoji with glasses is a boy.

Speaker 18: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 14: That's annoying. If you had to give your emoji a name, what would you name it?

Speaker 18: Miss Judgement.

Speaker 14: Miss Judgement. Yo, can I get the Miss Judgement emoji. Oh my god, I would drop your

emoji a lot, actually. I think I would use that emoji a lot. Thank you so much. That's it. Cool.

Speaker 1: Channel change. [inaudible 00:18:48] channel.

Gretchen: I think emoji have become more versatile but whether they are the last word in digital nuance or whether they'll get replaced by something else ... I'm thinking things like Snap Chat and Instagram where someone else has this reaction for you. Maybe custom pseudo emoji that aren't in Unicode. There's a whole bunch of different things that I think have potential to continue along the emoji spectrum.

Speaker 1: Internet linguist Gretchen McCullough believes that emoji types will evolve to get more personalized. One country is already ahead of the game. They've designed their own set of emoji that reveal their true patriotic selves, warts and all.

Petra: My name is Petra Theman. I'm the Director of Public Diplomacy at the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Basically it's quite a lot about country branding, the content of the work.

Speaker 4: We usually associate branding with the marketing and PR of modern companies, not our staugy old government. But governments have to stay relevant too whether it's on the world stage or at home with it's own citizens.

Back in the fall of 2015 the Finnish government came up with a branding idea that was anything but staugy.

Petra: The thought behind the whole project was we wanted to renew the Christmas calendar. We wanted to do something that would work better on mobile devices and in social media. The idea of the emoji came up when we got to know that one of the really good emoji designers lives in Finland. We wanted to show both Finnish strengths and Finnish weaknesses.

Speaker 4: Most governments would be very reluctant to admit that their country's even had a weak side. That wouldn't work too well for national pride but Finland isn't a typical country.

Petra: Finns are very honest and straightforward people. You have a hard time finding a Finn that would only praise their country, they usually also bring up some weird stuff and weaknesses and that's a very Finnish way of talking. It made sense to us.

Speaker 4: Petra and her team came up with 30 emojis to represent Finland which divided up into 3 categories.

Petra: There's the famous people category, then there's the symbols category, and then the feelings. In the famous people category, my favorite one is the former President of Finland, called Martti Ahtisaari, he has won the Nobel Peace Prize. He's showing the peace sign and it's quite a handy emoji in the heated up social media discussions now-a-

days.

In the feelings category we're basically exploring the whole range of Finnish feelings from how it feels to win our dear neighbor Sweden in ice hockey for example. One of my favorites, also, is called Stuck. It's an emoji of a small child with his or her tongue stuck to a metal pole. Your parents tell you not to put your tongue in wintertime on something that's cold metal. You do that anyway.

Speaker 4: And then there's one emoji of some guy in an undershirt sitting on an outdoor porch swing.

Petra: That's a hard one for non-Finns. It comes from a meme that was circulating a lot. One winter when we had really a lot of snow. There was this guy sitting in a rocking chair or swing just calmly taking his morning coffee basically with very little clothes on in the middle of that cold scenery. That meme is called "Meanwhile in Finland," and it's quite used in really bad winter weather in New York and the whole city is completely shut because of the weather, and then the Finns would just brag meanwhile in Finland.

Speaker 4: The range of these Finnish emojis is pretty wide from a bus stop to a sleeping bear to an empty highway at night. We asked Petra which ones were the most popular.

Petra: By far it was the hard rocker, the heavy rock emoji. I think the reason must be that community took it very close to their heart. Another one that has been very popular has been the Girl Power emoji that shows off female strength. Or the sauna one, of course. I think also the Nokia emoji, Nokia 3310 that has been quite widely the most durable phone. The internet has quite a lot of videos of people trying to break that phone and they can't do it. That emoji was called Unbreakable.

Speaker 4: This batch of emojis wasn't just a hit in Finland. They went viral reaching almost 200 million people. Other countries took notice.

Petra: The most interesting part for me was these discussions in different countries about, "How should our emojis look like." I think that's a fascinating thought because all of us live in nations that are multi-cultural and it's really hard to find something that is unique and something that describes a certain nation. It's an interesting discussion about stereotypes and nations.

Speaker 4: Finland has launched a whole new batch of emojis for the summer. Just like their winter collection, the summer collection is quirky, tongue-in-cheek, and quintessentially Finnish. Among others there's a baby in a box emoji to represent the famous Finnish maternity box. The four seasons of barbecue because if it's melting outside it's barbecue season, and white sport socks with sandals to show how stylish Finns can be.

Petra: The image of different countries is born in your head when you are young. For example, geographical location and the weather and the history of the country. Can't really change that. That is also kind of part of the country brand, the way people perceive it, the image they have of that country. With the emojis I think that's a drop in the sea how

the image of Finland is born in certain people's heads. Hopefully it's an addition that talks about sense of humor and technologically savvy people.

Speaker 4: To check out Finland's emojis, go to Finland.fi. You can also download the summer and winter sets of emojis for free in the App Store or Google Play.

Speaker 1: Slack. Working better together.

Back in our very first episode we made an audio tribute to emoji by asking people in the street what their favorite emoji would sound like. Now we're coming full circle. We're concluding our podcast series with the item that started it all. If emoji were sounds, here is what they would sound like.

Speaker 20: An emoji with a zipper around it's mouth like, can't talk right now.

Speaker 14: If that emoji had a sound, what would it sound like?

Speaker 20: [MM-mm-MM-mm-MM 00:26:42] (laughing).

Speaker 14: Thank you.

Speaker 21: It's like the [zzzp 00:26:46] of a zipper.

Speaker 14: What would it sound like?

Speaker 22: Like, just a zipper.

Speaker 14: So what does it sound like?

Speaker 22: Can I do it like this?

Speaker 14: Sure.

Speaker 23: That's a scary, hairy weird creature.

Speaker 24: It's like a devil thing, like a mask, maybe.

Speaker 14: If that devil thing mask was a sound, what sound would it be?

Speaker 24: [Rrrrrr 00:27:02]

Speaker 25: [Grrr 00:27:03]

Speaker 26: [Lldldld 00:27:05]

Speaker 23: It's a really weird looking hand and it's moving in an awkward manner.

Speaker 14: If the floppy had was a sound, what would it be?
That's clapping. That's two hands.

Speaker 27: Flap, flap, flap.

Speaker 28: How you doing?

Speaker 29: High five.

Speaker 14: And if it was a sound, what would it sound like?

Speaker 30: Clap.

Speaker 31: It looks like a hand shaking back and forth.

Speaker 14: If that emoji was a sound, what would it sound like?

Speaker 31: [Uh-uh-Uu 00:27:34]

Speaker 32: Clenched teeth and angry eyes. [Mmmmm 00:27:43]

Speaker 33: It would sound something like this, [Ehhh 00:27:47] (laughing)

Speaker 14: I was thinking about my very offensive aunt who asks offensive questions like, "So how's your divorce going?" [Ehhh 00:27:58]
Describe this emoji for me.

Speaker 34: The thumbs up?

Speaker 14: If that was a sound what would it sound like?

Speaker 34: Yeah.

Speaker 35: Ooh I like that one. It's super happy, I'm in love, big beating eyeball hearts.

Speaker 14: If it was a sound what would it sound like?

Speaker 35: Hubba hubba.

Speaker 36: Emoji with the crying. He's laughing really hard so that he's crying. [Ki-ki-ki-ki 00:28:21]

Speaker 14: Put that in a sentence.

Speaker 36: Ha, ha, you're so funny, [Ki-ki-ki-ki 00:28:25] (laughing).

Speaker 14: Some people think that it's someone crying. Do you see that or no?

Speaker 37: Definitely not.

Speaker 14: If that emoji had a sound, what would it be?

Speaker 37: Ha, ha, ha!

Speaker 1: You are listening to the Slack ...

Speaker 2: Variety Pack.

Speaker 38: They say I'm a winner-keeper. They say have you seen The Shining?

Speaker 39: To be able to reach a million girls of color. Teach them how to [inaudible 00:29:05] by the year 2040.

Speaker 40: In this article you wrote for The Guardian where did you get this word, podcast?

Speaker 41: I am roped up to my lead developer who's behind me. The lightning storm is over us switching between hail, snow and rain.

Speaker 42: It's deep thoughts on food trucks.

Speaker 43: And I looked at it so long until all of a sudden I saw a horse's behind in there.

Speaker 14: Do you know what social media is?

Speaker 44: It's a communications thing.

Speaker 14: Thursday, Amador works outside of the office too. Motivated me to tackle the laundry pile. And not just flip through my book but focus on deep reading. I'm tempted to apply the time here to sex but 25 minutes is a little on the long side.

Speaker 45: People are not doing their won work on what it is that gets in the way of fully showing up as the kind of people we need in teams and the kind of leaders we need.

Speaker 46: I don't wake up every morning on Earth and say, "Today I might die." I'm not planning on going to Mars to die. The plan is to live as long, as happily, and as healthfully as possible.

Speaker 4: That's a wrap for the Slack Variety Pack. We hope you've enjoyed listening to our podcast. We've certainly loved making it for you. Stay tuned over the summer for news about our new podcast launching this fall. Follow us @SlackHQ or go to Slack.com/podcast for more information. From all of us here at the Slack Variety Pack, have a great summer and see you in the fall.

Speaker 47: Thank you for listening.

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Speaker 50: Thank you for listening.

Speaker 51: Thank you for listening.

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Speaker 53: Thank you for listening.

Speaker 54: Thank you for listening.

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