

“What do you want?” Pinched Fingers Emoji Proposal

By Adriano Farano, Jennifer 8. Lee and Theo Schear of Emojination

Date: 4/17/19

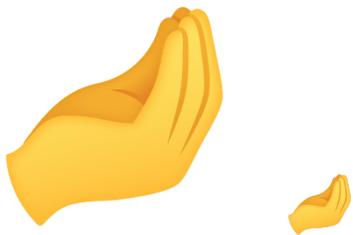
Sort location: Category: body. After folded hands.

Reference Emoji: Middle Finger, Handshake

1. Identification:

- CLDR short name: what do you want?
- CLDR keywords: interrogation | hand gesture | sarcastic question | pinched fingers

2. Images:



Credit: Aphelandra Messer. Free for use in context of discussion this proposal

Abstract

This proposal requests the addition of the “What do you want?” (in Italian: Ma che vuoi?) emoji, which is all the fingers and thumbs clustered into a point, into the Unicode emoji library.

Introduction

From opera music to Renaissance art, from beverages such as espresso to cuisine such as pizza, Italian culture has become increasingly popular abroad. It is also well known that “Italians speak with their hands” but that expressivity has yet to be codified in the lingua franca of the global cosmopolis -- emojis. This proposal aims at introducing the world of emoji to the tradition of Italian gestural expressivity, which is also widely prevalent in other Mediterranean countries.

According to research quoted by [The New York Times](#), Italians use around 250 gestures daily. Isabella Poggi, a professor at Rome Tre University, says that these signs comprise “a lexicon of gestures that is comparable in size and sophistication to the lexicon of sign language for the deaf.” It is a phenomenon particularly present in Southern Italy and the city of Naples in particular. It is also from these areas that the vast majority of Italian immigrants moved to the New World, taking with them their cuisine and traditions. Including gestures. While many Italian

Americans no longer master the language of their ancestors, most of them still keep some expressions, both linguistic and gestual.

In the great open-air theater that is every Italian town, the characters use their hands as much as their mouths to communicate. They do so by gesticulating with elegant coordination while they talk over the phone, smoke a cigarette or drive in often crowded streets.

Among the myriad of Italian gestures, one stands out: pinching your fingers against the thumb and moving your hand back and forth against your chest. With that gesture you will have communicated to your interlocutor an often sarcastic interrogation that may be grossly translated as: “what do you want?” The intensity of your inquisitive attitude can be communicated by the velocity of that movement. Coordinate both hands, and you will express an overwhelming sense of disbelief to your interlocutor.

While 60,589,445 people lived in Italy in 2016, people of Italian descent make it for over 130 million individuals in the world with [over 80 million](#) of full or part Italian descent live outside Europe. Of these, nearly 40 million live in South America (primarily Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela and Uruguay), about 19 million living in North America (United States and Canada) and 1 million in Oceania (Australia and New Zealand).

Beyond the Italian diaspora of the pinched fingers gesture, the symbol is also extremely common in other Mediterranean cultures. One blogger [writes](#) that the expression is used for “just about everything”, and in Israel it commonly expresses “Wait a minute.” “Hurry up!” “Relax!”. Surely, if you pay attention to gesticulation on the street or in the media, you will find people using this particular configuration of the fingers in most cultures. It is simply a universal form of signing.

Adding the “what do you want?” emoji would not only be a useful addition for the Italian diaspora abroad who is still proud of its origins. It would also, more broadly, offer users a much needed expression to engage in animated conversations by adding a touch of humour. In our increasingly globalized social climate, this gesture is no longer exclusively an Italian or even Mediterranean symbol.



Italian national flag

Total population

c. 132 million

Italy: c. 55 million

Italian ancestry: c. 77 million

Regions with significant populations

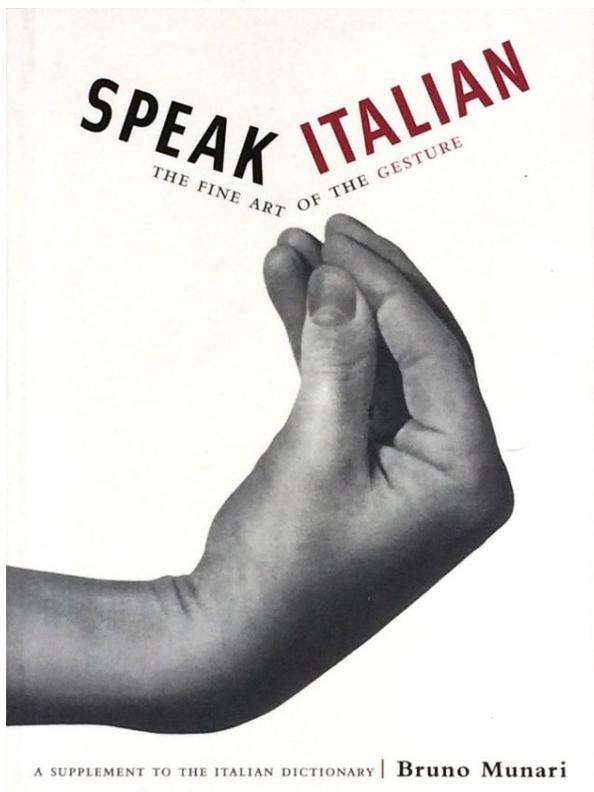
 Italy	c. 55,000,000
 Brazil	30,000,000 ^[1]
 Argentina	20,000,000 ^[2]
 United States	17,250,211 ^[3]
 Venezuela	1,736,766 ^[4]
 Canada	1,587,970 ^[5]
 France	1,530,563 ^[2]
 Peru	1,400,000 ^[6]
 Uruguay	1,055,220 ^[2]
 Australia	1,000,006 ^[7]
 Germany	861,000 ^[8]
 Belgium	451,825 ^[9]
 Spain	187,993 ^[10]
 Chile	184,997 ^[2]
 United Kingdom	130,000 ^[11]
 Mexico	85,000 ^[12]
 South Africa	77,400 ^[2]
 Russia	53,649 ^[13]
 Austria	29,287 ^[14]
 Ecuador	20,000-50,000 ^[15]
 Albania	19,000 ^[16]
 Croatia	17,807 ^[17]
 New Zealand	3,795 ^[18]
 Czech Republic	3,503 ^[19]
 Romania	3,203 ^[20]

LA
MIMICA DEGLI ANTICHI
INVESTIGATA
NEL GESTIRE NAPOLETANO
DEL CANONICO
ANDREA DE JORIO.



NAPOLI,
DALLA STAMPERIA E CARTIERA DEL FIBRENO
Largo S. Domenico Maggiore N.° 3.
....
1832

Italian gestures have first been studied by the renowned Neapolitan ethnographer Andrea De Jorio who, in 1832, published “The mimics of the ancients” where he traced a direct connection between the gestuality of ancient Romans and Greeks with the one of modern Italians in general and Neapolitans in particular.



De Jorio studied a wide array of gestures but the “what do you want” is by far the most popular. When deciding the cover of his “Speak Italian. The fine art of the gesture. A supplement to the Italian dictionary”, renowned artist and writer Bruno Munari didn’t hesitate to pick it as the quintessential representation of Italian gestures.

When both CNN and [NYT](#) had to cover the subject, the “what do you want?” was an integral part of their reporting

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Silvia Marchetti, for CNN • Published 29th May 2015

f t e



GAETANO VIRGALLITO

Widely used in the everyday life of Italians worldwide, the gesture also has its place in the history of theater and cinema.



The Neapolitan actor Antonio De Curtis, better known as “Totò” and commonly referred to as the most popular Italian comedian of all time (cf. [Wikipedia](#)) would often use the gesture which became a signature expression of his celebrated acting (see above, right).



Attend a session of the Italian Parliament and, along with more or less eloquent speeches, you will find local politicians widely using their hands to convey their feelings (see above former prime minister Matteo Renzi in 2015).

By adding the “what do you want?” gesture to the Emoji family, all lovers of human expressivity in general and Italian culture in particular, would find an entertaining and useful option to convey their emotions in a way that celebrates a widely popular tradition.

Names (Suggested short name and keywords, as in the [Emoji List](#)).

- CLDR short name: what do you want?
- CLDR keywords: interrogation | hand gesture | sarcastic question | pinched fingers

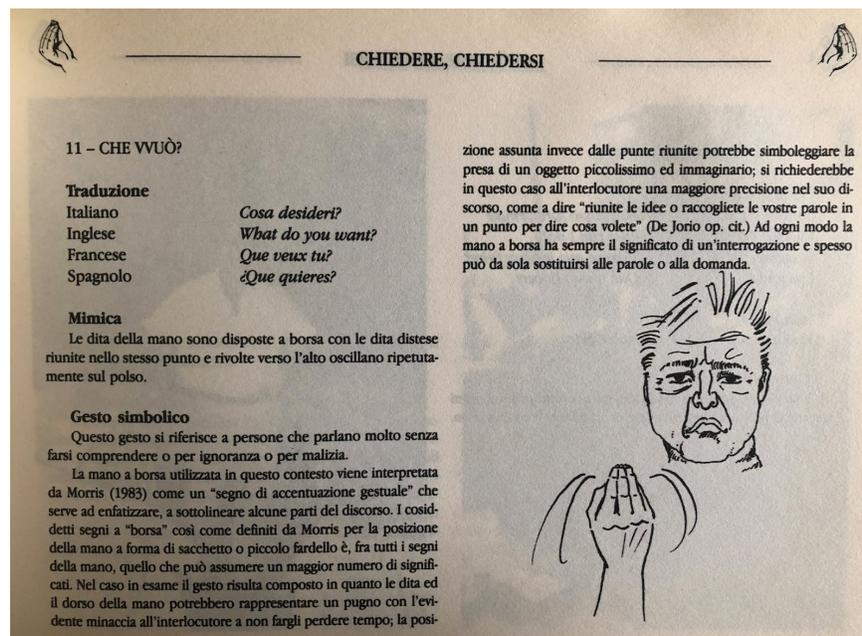
Selection Factors Inclusion

Compatibility:

While the “what do you want?” emoji corresponds to a widely used real world hand gesture, none of the most popular messaging platforms have included it to date. This proposal aims to rectify that. Note that there are stickers which have popped up, including Neapolicons.

Expected Usage Level:

- Frequency: we expect this emoji to be widely used not only in Italy and other Mediterranean countries, but also, more broadly, worldwide because of the increasing popularity of Italian culture and way of life.



In terms of comparable metrics, it is a bit difficult to do metrics around hand gestures, but we have chosen to call it “Italian hand” and compared it with “middle finger,” a very popular hand emoji, and “handshake”, a median reference emoji per the Unicode guidelines:



"italian hand"



[All](#) [Images](#) [Shopping](#) [Videos](#) [News](#) [More](#) [Settings](#) [Tools](#)

About 941,000 results (0.48 seconds)



"middle finger"



[All](#) [Images](#) [Videos](#) [Shopping](#) [News](#) [More](#) [Settings](#) [Tools](#)

About 18,900,000 results (0.43 seconds)



handshake



[All](#) [Images](#) [News](#) [Videos](#) [Books](#) [More](#) [Settings](#) [Tools](#)

About 160,000,000 results (0.32 seconds)

Understandably, our gesture does not fare so well in Instagram under this term:



#italianhand

3,163 posts

Follow



#middlefinger

490,910 posts

Follow



#handshake

126,096 posts

Follow

On YouTube and Bing, “Italian Hand” gets less results than “Handshake” but less results than “Middle Finger”:



"italian hand" site:youtube.com



All Images Shopping Videos News More Settings Tools

About 5,270 results (0.41 seconds)



"middle finger" site:youtube.com



All Images Videos Shopping News More Settings Tools

About 128,000 results (0.43 seconds)



handshake site:youtube.com



All Images News Videos Books More Settings Tools

About 8,290,000 results (0.47 seconds)



"italian hand"



All Images Videos Maps News Shopping | My saves

11-24 Of 518,000 Results Any time ▾



"middle finger"



All Shopping Images Videos Maps News | My saves

6,560,000 Results Any time ▾ Near San Francisco, California · [Change](#)



"handshake"



All Images Videos Maps News Shopping | My saves

24,900,000 Results Any time ▾

Multiple Usages

- the emoji can be used in a wide spectrum of situations to express a general sense of interrogation. According to professors Bruno Paura and Maria Sorge, authors of “Comme te l’aggia dicere? The gestual art in Naples” (see above), the gesture of pinching the fingers against the thumb would call our interlocutor to bring together his/her ideas to explicitly say what he/she wants from us. More in detail, the “what do you want?” emoji can be used to express:
 - Disbelief to what our interlocutor is pretending us to do or be, unless our interlocutor clarifies his/her intentions
 - Modesty towards a compliment, as to say: what are you saying, it’s not true?
 - Sarcastic surprise when our interlocutor is exaggerating his/her arguments and we ask him/her to come to the point
- **Examples:**
 - When somebody is asking us to do something illegal or crazy, we may just reply with WHAT DO YOU WANT emphasizing our disbelief that he/she could even think about such a thing.
 - A recent example found on Twitter: person A is at the airport waiting in line with her bag. Person B puts on his glasses to read what’s written on her bag’s tag. Person A reacts with a WHAT DO YOU WANT. Such real world example can be replicated online when somebody does something inappropriate intended to embarrass us.
 - After any performance such as singing by person A, person B offers extended compliments. Person A: “Congrats for MICROPHONE BOUQUET”. Person B: “what do you want?”
 - When somebody is making a point we strongly disagree with, we may just reply with WHAT DO YOU WANT in which case we are rhetorically asking “how dare you say that”.

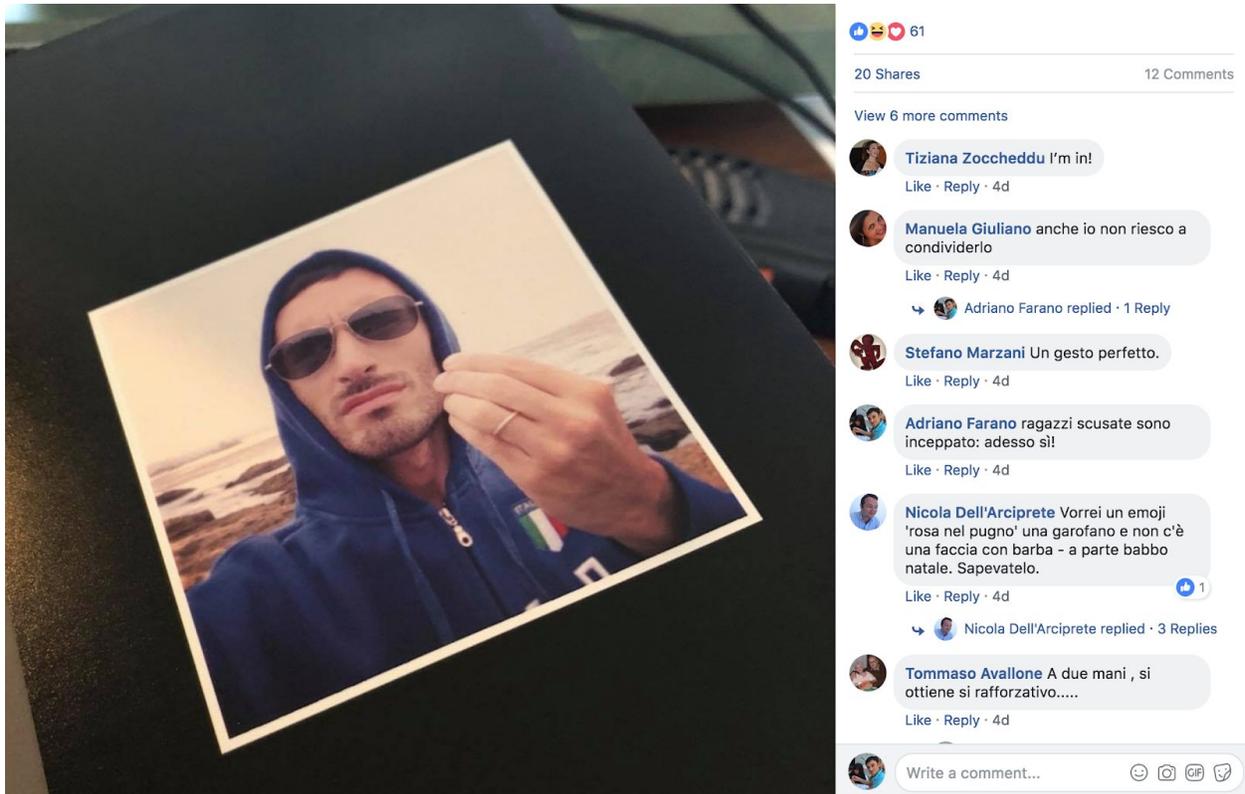
Uniqueness: several parts of the human body are widely used among emojis with 29 hand gestures currently available. None of these, though, can be remotely confused with the “what do you want?” gesture because of the unique bag-like shape of the fingers pinched towards the thumb.

Completeness:

The “what do you want?” emoji represents a major category of expressions which is not represented in the current emoji list. It conveys a radically different meaning than the raised fist or the OK hand with which it shares a similar although distinct shape.

Frequently Requested:

Italians have a passive relationship with technology that results in a low level of inclusiveness. That said, once encouraged, they tend to get excited about new ideas. A recent proposal to share ideas about “what do you want?” got the highest number of shares for the Facebook user below.



That said, a side project called Neapolicons has emerged in the past few years to represent a wide array of Italian gestures.



Selection Factors Exclusion

Overly Specific

As explained above, there are 132 million people with Italian descent in the world; furthermore, Italian is the 4th most learned language in the world and Italian way of life is on the rise. There is no other typically Italian gesture among the emojis while there are hundreds of those that have been studied by

Open Ended

Thanks to Italian immigration and the growing popularity of its way of life, Italian gestures are unique and bear a cultural meaning both in Italian speaking areas and worldwide such as to deserve a place as an emoji. There is larger set of Italian hand gestures that could be made into emoji, but it is limited. And this one, by far, is the most important and visually distinct.

Already Representable

There is no other hand gesture remotely usable to convey the same meaning.

Transient

This emoji represents an ancient and well established gesture that has its roots in centuries of cultural heritage in the Italian peninsula from Ancient Romans and Greeks to modern Italians. Such a rich heritage has been spread out in the whole world by tens of millions of relentless Italian immigrants over the decades.

Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

There is no logo such as the “what do you want?” not can it be associated with any other existing intellectual property given its ancient historical and cultural roots.

Sort location (Proposed sort location for the emoji in [Emoji Ordering](#))

- Category: body
- Emoji before it in that category: folded hands

Other Character Properties

The other character properties are suggested to be defined as follows.

General Category: So

Canonical Combining Class: 0

Bidirectional Class: ON

Decomposition Type: Decomposition Mapping:

Numeric Type:

Numeric Value:

Bidirectional Mirrored: N Unicode 1 Name:

ISO Comment:

Simple Uppercase Mapping: Simple Lowercase Mapping: Simple Titlecase Mapping:

Adriano Farano (adriano.farano@gmail.com) is a former journalist, Stanford’s JSK journalism fellow and media startup entrepreneur, currently CEO of a crowdfunding platform for journalists. He lives in the San Francisco Bay Area but is originally from Cava de’ Tirreni, Italy in the region of Naples and the Amalfi Coast.

Jennifer 8. Lee (jenny@emojicon.co) has been tutored in the extensive vocabulary of Italian hand gestures by Adriano Farano, and thus encouraged him to work on this proposal. She hopes that this will give her legit street cred with Italians when she visits and eats their delicious pasta.

Theo Schear (theosemail.com@gmail.com) is the following: author of the juice box emoji proposal, film critic iconoclast, online dance tutor, trilingual videographer, Anti-Chipotle activist, and experimental Wikipedian.