

Meaning Construction through Text and Emoji in English and Uzbek Digital Communication

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how verbal text and emoji jointly construct meaning in English and Uzbek digital communication. A theory-led qualitative contrastive method combines a critical review of published research with six families of explicitly constructed bilingual examples. Deletion, substitution and contextual paraphrase distinguish contributions to propositional content, interpersonal stance and conversational action. The analysis identifies reinforcement, lexical substitution, request mitigation, ironic reorientation, contextual anchoring and turn-level acknowledgement. Similar communicative functions can be represented in both languages, while their interpretation interacts with word order, request forms and the preceding conversational turn. Identical emoji therefore do not by themselves establish pragmatic equivalence.

Keywords: Emoji, text–emoji interaction, meaning construction, multimodal discourse, contrastive pragmatics, English, Uzbek

INTRODUCTION

An emoji accompanying a message can contribute an object, express an attitude or indicate how the recipient should understand an utterance. Its contribution is consequently not reducible to a positive or negative emotional value. Linguists organise emoji research around several communicative and interpretive functions, showing why meaning must be examined beyond the isolated

symbol [1]. For an English-Uzbek comparison, the central problem is the relationship between the visual sign, the verbal construction and the communicative situation. Dresner and Herring argue that emoticons can indicate illocutionary force, the action performed through an utterance, as well as emotion [2]. Their account concerns emoticons and provides a conceptual precursor rather than direct evidence about contemporary emoji. Na'aman, Provenza and Montoya distinguish emoji that replace linguistic material from multimodal uses associated with attitude, topic or gesture in English Twitter data [3]. Together, these approaches motivate separate analysis of what a message refers to and what its sender is doing.

Empirical findings also discourage a simple disambiguation account. Miller et al., in a controlled study involving 2,482 participants, found that textual context did not substantially remove variability in emoji interpretation [4]. Holtgraves and Robinson nevertheless found that emoji facilitated recognition of certain indirect negative replies, particularly opinions and disclosures, with effects depending on the communicative situation [5]. These studies address different tasks such as an emoji may guide a particular inference without acquiring a single stable interpretation. Cross-linguistic evidence further complicates claims of universality. Zhou et al. examined English, Portuguese and Chinese definitions and contextual interpretations of emoji. Disagreement varied across symbols, while its patterns were relatively consistent across the languages, figurative use was associated with contextual sentiment [6]. Their study does not include Uzbek. It supports distinguishing language, context and interpretive variation instead of assuming that each language possesses an entirely separate emoji vocabulary. For Uzbek, Rabbimov, Mporas, Simaki and Kobilov investigated emoji in opinion classification of movie-review comments. In their emoji-containing subset, Random Forest accuracy increased from 80.69% without emoji features to 85.25% with them [7]. This establishes predictive value within that dataset, but classification accuracy does not explain whether an individual symbol expresses gratitude, mitigates a request or marks irony. Complementarily, Neel et al. show that positive and negative

emoji can shift the perceived valence of otherwise neutral English messages [8]. The present article therefore compares contributions to content, stance and conversational action rather than sentiment alone. The objective is to develop a transparent framework for comparing meaning construction in English and Uzbek text-emoji combinations. The contribution is an explicit set of contrastive diagnostics and analysed examples, not a claim about the frequency of particular behaviours among either language community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study uses qualitative contrastive semantic–pragmatic analysis informed by the publications reviewed above. Six case families were constructed to hold the broad scenario and communicative purpose comparable across English and Uzbek. They cover gratitude, object reference, a routine request, an unfavourable evaluation, the contextual interpretation of folded hands and a minimal reply. All examples in Table 1 and the accompanying analysis are constructed analytical material, none is presented as a quotation from a private conversation or as a token collected from social media.

Each family was examined through three operations. First, deletion asks what content or interpersonal cue is lost when the emoji is omitted. Second, substitution replaces it with a word or another emoji while keeping the relevant wording constant. Third, contextual paraphrase states a plausible interpretation after specifying the preceding event or turn. The distinction between lexical replacement and additional multimodal contribution adapts the functional perspective of Na’aman et al. [3]. These operations are interpretive diagnostics, not validated measures of recipient responses. The comparison tracks propositional content, interpersonal stance, speech act and sequential position. English and Uzbek forms are matched by the action they can perform in the stated situation rather than by identical word counts. Polite request forms are retained where relevant. The five selected characters are 😊 (slightly smiling face), 🙄 (face with rolling eyes), 🙏 (folded hands), 👍 (thumbs up) and ☹️ (hot

beverage). Unicode identifies characters and presentation conventions, while contextual pragmatic meanings remain a separate question [9]. No participant recruitment, corpus sampling or statistical testing was undertaken for this article. The published Uzbek findings supply external empirical context, whereas the constructed pairs permit controlled examination of possible readings. The six relations are not mutually exclusive: a single emoji can simultaneously intensify an attitude and support an interpersonal action. This design can establish analytically plausible contrasts and formulate hypotheses, but cannot estimate their prevalence or demonstrate cross-linguistic differences in comprehension.

RESULTS

The comparison distinguishes six relations between verbal and visual contributions. Table 1 presents the central pairs and specifies the context needed for their proposed readings. The subsequent analysis separates shared functional possibilities from differences in linguistic realisation.

Table 1. *Constructed English-Uzbek contrasts in text – emoji meaning*

Relation	English example	Uzbek example	Context and possible reading
Reinforcement	Thank you 🙏	Rahmat 🙏	A favour has been completed, appreciation with a friendly stance.
Lexical substitution	I bought 🍷	Men 🍷 sotib oldim	A purchase is being reported, the pictogram supplies a beverage referent.
Request mitigation	Please send the file 🙏	Iltimos, faylni yuboring 🙏	A routine collegial request, a potentially affiliative cue accompanies the directive.
Ironic reorientation	Well done 🙏	Barakalla 🙏	A colleague has repeated an avoidable mistake, apparent praise can convey criticism.
Contextual anchoring	Thank you 🙏 / Please help 🙏	Rahmat 🙏 / Yordam bering 🙏	Completed assistance versus assistance sought, the same sign accompanies gratitude or an appeal.
Turn-level response	Can we meet at six? → 🙏	Soat olida uchrashamizmi? → 🙏	A proposal precedes the reply, the gesture can express agreement.

Reinforcement and lexical substitution

In Thank you 🙏 and Rahmat 🙏, the verbal expression already performs gratitude. Deleting the emoji preserves that action but removes a possible cue to friendliness. The image is therefore supplementary to the action rather than a missing noun. Replacing the smile with folded hands maintains a gratitude-compatible reading under the same scenario, but changes the visual presentation of that stance. Neither combination proves that the sender experiences the emotion depicted by the image.

The beverage pair has a different structure. In *I bought ☕*, the pictogram occupies the object position following the verb, in *Men ☕ sotib oldim*, it precedes the Uzbek predicate. Replacing the image with *coffee* or *qahva* yields a plausible verbal completion when coffee is the intended referent. The character itself is named hot beverage, however, so coffee is a contextual specification rather than its only possible denotation [9]. Deletion removes the overt object in both examples without necessarily making the utterance uninterpretable: the object may still be recoverable from earlier discourse. Thus, the relevant diagnostic is the loss of explicit reference, not obligatory ungrammaticality.

1. *Request mitigation and grammatical form*

The file request combines a directive with an interpersonal cue. “Please” and *iltimos* explicitly frame the requested action, *yuboring* also encodes the selected polite/plural imperative form. Adding a smile can support a friendly reading between colleagues, but does not remove the request or determine its politeness independently. A demand sent after repeated reminders might retain pressure despite the same smiling face. Changing Uzbek *yuboring* to *yubor* while keeping the emoji constant changes the verbal address form. A corresponding English contrast may involve the choice between “Please send the file” and “Send the file.” These are useful functional comparisons, not claims that the forms have identical social force. The result is a distributed account of interpersonal meaning: wording and morphology contribute cues that an emoji accompanies but does not automatically replace.

2. *Ironic reorientation*

Under the repeated-mistake scenario, positive “Well done” and *Barakalla* conflict with the unfavourable event. The rolling-eyes symbol supports a critical or exasperated interpretation of the apparent praise. Without the emoji, the scenario can already license irony, consequently, the visual sign strengthens a contextual reading rather than necessarily creating it. With the event withheld, the recipient would have less evidence for distinguishing criticism, playful teasing and irritation. Weissman & Tanner found neural processing effects associated with ironic wink emoji and related those effects to participants’ interpretations [10]. Their experiment concerns a different character and does not directly validate the rolling-eyes examples here. It nevertheless supplies independent evidence that emoji can participate in pragmatic reinterpretation. In the bilingual pairs, equivalence depends on the relation between praise, shared knowledge and the visual cue, not on assigning the symbol a fixed negative score.

3. *Contextual anchoring and conversational sequence*

The folded-hands contrasts reverse the direction of explanation. “Thank you” and *Rahmat* favour a gratitude-related interpretation, whereas “Please help” and *Yordam bering* favour an appeal. The same code point participates in different speech acts because the verbal expression identifies the relevant action. A prayer interpretation would require supporting discourse, it cannot be assigned simply because one message is Uzbek. Both language versions demonstrate why cultural identity should not substitute for contextual evidence. A thumbs-up reply to a meeting proposal can communicate agreement without repeating the proposed time. If the preceding message changes to “I have sent the file” or *Faylni yubordim*, the same reply can instead acknowledge receipt of the information. Here the relevant textual anchor lies in a previous turn. Analysing only the emoji-bearing message would lose the distinction between accepting a proposal and acknowledging a report. Emoji-only replies therefore remain part of text-emoji interaction at the conversational level.

DISCUSSION

The six families support a relational account of meaning construction. A useful analysis first determines whether the image supplies a referent, qualifies a proposition or helps perform an interpersonal action. It then examines the verbal material and the discourse that make this contribution plausible. This approach accommodates overlapping functions: folded hands may accompany gratitude and intensify its presentation, while a smile may express affiliation during a request. Such combinations should not be forced into a single sentiment label. The comparison also separates functional similarity from linguistic identity. The object-substitution pair follows different linear arrangements, and the request pair distributes interpersonal cues across lexical and morphological forms. By contrast, gratitude and minimal acknowledgement offer comparable functional possibilities under matched scenarios. These findings concern the constructed examples, they do not establish that Uzbek speakers use more deference or that English speakers use more irony. Such population-level claims require independently sampled evidence.

The framework helps reconcile the published findings on comprehension. Situation-specific facilitation in Holtgraves & Robinson [5] is compatible with the persistent interpretive variability reported by Miller et al. [4]. A cue can support one inference without eliminating all alternatives. Likewise, the benefits of emoji features in the Uzbek classification study [7] do not entail that a positive image always produces a positive utterance. The ironic praise case illustrates how sentiment, speech act and evaluative target can diverge. For translation, preserving the character should follow an assessment of its function. A referential emoji may require repositioning when the surrounding syntax changes, a request should preserve the intended relationship as well as the requested action. For corpus annotation, each record should retain the preceding turn, original script, verbal address forms, character sequence and proposed function. Recording these features makes it possible to compare

pragmatic relations without treating every occurrence of the same pictogram as semantically equivalent.

The small, constructed set cannot establish actual usage frequencies, processing effects or community-wide conventions. It excludes code-switching, repeated emoji, platform variation and extended conversations. Independent English- and Uzbek-speaking assessors may also propose different readings. A subsequent empirical study should sample comparable interaction types, retain necessary conversational context and obtain more than one interpretation per item. Separate labels for reference, stance and action would allow the present hypotheses to be tested without equating disagreement with annotation error.

CONCLUSION

Meaning in English and Uzbek text-emoji combinations emerges from interaction among verbal content, the visual sign and discourse context. The analysis distinguishes six useful relations while allowing them to overlap. Shared characters permit comparable functions, yet differences in word order, address forms and sequential context affect their realisation. The principal methodological implication is to compare contextual contributions rather than isolated emoji labels. The proposed examples and diagnostics provide a reproducible analytical starting point for an empirical English-Uzbek study of multimodal meaning construction.

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