TRANSLATING EMOTIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AI AND HUMAN RENDERING OF ENGLISH–UZBEK AFFECTIVE EXPRESSIONS

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Annotation. *This article investigates how artificial intelligence (AI) and human translators render affective expressions in English–Uzbek translation. Translating emotions requires not only semantic accuracy but also pragmatic competence and cultural sensitivity. Drawing on emotion linguistics, pragmatics, and translation studies, the research compares AI-generated translations with human renderings of emotional expressions such as gratitude, empathy, anger, politeness, irony, and indirectness. The findings indicate that while AI excels in speed and lexical consistency, human translators outperform AI in preserving emotional nuance, pragmatic intent, and cultural appropriateness.*

Keywords: *emotion translation, affective expressions, AI translation, human translation, pragmatics.*

Annotatsiya. *Mazkur maqolada ingliz–o'zbek tarjimasida affektiv ifodalarni sun'iy intellekt va inson tarjimonlari tomonidan qayta ifodalash masalalari tahlil qilinadi. Emotsional ma'noni tarjima qilish semantik aniqlik bilan bir qatorda pragmatik kompetensiya va madaniy sezgirlikni ham talab etadi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, inson tarjimonlari emotsional noziklikni saqlashda AI tizimlariga nisbatan ustunlikka ega.*

Kalit so'zlar: *emotsiya tarjimasi, affektiv ifodalar, sun'iy intellekt tarjimasi, inson tarjimasi, pragmatika.*

Аннотация. *В статье анализируются способы передачи аффективных выражений в английско-узбекском переводе с использованием искусственного интеллекта и человеческого перевода. Передача эмоционального смысла требует прагматической и культурной компетентности, что пока недоступно современным системам машинного перевода.*

Ключевые слова: *перевод эмоций, аффективные выражения, искусственный интеллект, человеческий перевод, прагматика.*

Introduction.

Emotion plays a crucial role in human communication by shaping interpersonal meaning beyond literal semantics. In translation studies, emotional meaning presents a particular challenge because it is deeply embedded in cultural norms, pragmatic conventions, and social relations (Kövecses, 2010; Brown & Levinson, 1987). In English–Uzbek translation,

emotional expressions frequently undergo pragmatic shift or loss due to differences in politeness strategies, indirectness, and sociocultural expectations.

In translation studies, emotional meaning presents a particular challenge because it is deeply embedded in cultural norms, pragmatic conventions, and social relations (Kövecses, 2010; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Unlike referential meaning, emotional meaning is often implicit, metaphorical, and context-dependent, making it resistant to direct lexical equivalence. Translators must therefore interpret not only what is said, but how and why it is said, taking into account culturally specific emotion scripts, politeness norms, and expectations regarding expressiveness or restraint.

In English-Uzbek translation, emotional expressions frequently undergo pragmatic shift or loss due to differences in politeness strategies, indirectness, and sociocultural expectations. English discourse, particularly in informal contexts, tends to favor explicit emotional articulation and individualized expression, whereas Uzbek communication often prioritizes relational harmony, respect for hierarchy, and indirect emotional display. Consequently, English expressions of empathy, disagreement, or frustration may appear overly direct or inappropriate when rendered literally into Uzbek, while Uzbek emotionally nuanced expressions may seem understated or ambiguous in English.

These divergences increase the risk of pragmatic mismatch, where the translated message preserves semantic content but fails to convey the intended emotional force or interpersonal effect. Such mismatches can lead to misinterpretation, reduced pragmatic adequacy, or unintended shifts in tone. Addressing emotional meaning in English–Uzbek translation therefore requires not only linguistic competence but also deep intercultural awareness and sensitivity to emotion-related pragmatic norms.

Literature Review.

Research in emotion linguistics demonstrates that emotions are encoded through lexical choices, metaphors, modality, and discourse markers (Kövecses, 2010). Translation scholars emphasize functional and dynamic equivalence when dealing with emotionally loaded texts (Nida, 1964; Baker, 2018). Recent studies on AI translation indicate persistent limitations in handling pragmatic meaning and emotional nuance (Castilho et al., 2019; Pym, 2021).

Within translation studies, scholars have long emphasized the importance of functional and dynamic equivalence when translating emotionally loaded texts. Nida's (1964) theory of dynamic equivalence argues that a successful translation should elicit a response in the target audience that is functionally comparable to that of the source text audience, even if this requires structural or lexical modification. Building on this perspective, Baker (2018) highlights the role of pragmatic meaning, discourse context, and sociocultural norms in shaping how emotions are expressed and interpreted across languages. From this viewpoint, translators are required to prioritize communicative effect over formal correspondence, especially in texts where emotional meaning plays a central role.

More recent research has turned to the role of artificial intelligence in translation, particularly neural machine translation systems, and their capacity to process emotionally

and pragmatically complex language. While AI-based translation has achieved notable improvements in fluency and lexical consistency, studies indicate persistent limitations in handling pragmatic meaning, implicature, and emotional nuance (Castilho et al., 2019). AI systems often rely on statistically frequent patterns and surface-level correspondences, which can result in emotionally flattened translations or inappropriate shifts in tone. Pym (2021) further argues that although AI translation tools are effective for efficiency and information transfer, they lack the interpretive and contextual sensitivity required for nuanced emotional communication, especially in culturally distant language pairs.

Taken together, existing scholarship suggests that emotional meaning in translation operates at the intersection of language, culture, and pragmatics. While human translators draw on contextual knowledge and intercultural competence to negotiate emotional equivalence, AI systems remain constrained by their limited ability to model social relations and culturally embedded emotion norms. This gap in the literature underscores the need for comparative research examining how AI and human translators render emotional expressions in language pairs such as English and Uzbek.

Methodology.

The study employs a qualitative comparative methodology to examine how affective expressions are rendered in English-Uzbek translation by artificial intelligence and human translators. The corpus consists of selected English source texts that contain a range of emotionally charged expressions, including markers of empathy, politeness, gratitude, frustration, and evaluative stance. These texts were translated into Uzbek using AI-based neural machine translation systems as well as by professional human translators with experience in English–Uzbek translation.

The analysis focuses on three key evaluative dimensions: semantic accuracy, pragmatic adequacy, and cultural appropriateness. Semantic accuracy refers to the extent to which the propositional content and emotional meaning of the source text are preserved in the target language. Pragmatic adequacy is assessed by examining whether the translated expressions convey the intended interpersonal function, including politeness level, indirectness, and speaker attitude. Cultural appropriateness involves evaluating the degree to which translations align with Uzbek sociocultural norms governing emotional expression, hierarchy, and relational harmony.

A qualitative contrastive analysis is conducted to identify recurring patterns of divergence between AI-generated and human-produced translations. Particular attention is paid to instances of pragmatic shift, emotional attenuation, or amplification, as well as cases where cultural norms are either successfully accommodated or inadequately represented. This methodological approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how emotional nuance is negotiated in translation and highlights the strengths and limitations of AI-assisted translation in comparison with human expertise. Pragmatic adequacy is assessed by examining whether the translated expressions convey the intended interpersonal function, including politeness level, indirectness, and speaker attitude.

Results and Discussion.

The analysis reveals that AI-generated translations consistently preserve propositional meaning, ensuring lexical and grammatical accuracy, yet they often neutralize or attenuate the emotional tone of the source text. Emotional markers such as intensifiers, hedging devices, and culturally embedded expressions of politeness are frequently rendered in a more neutral or literal form, resulting in translations that are semantically accurate but pragmatically weakened. This tendency reflects the limitations of neural machine translation systems in capturing context-sensitive emotional and interpersonal meaning.

In contrast, human translations demonstrate a greater capacity to preserve emotional equivalence through the use of pragmatic compensation strategies. These strategies include reformulation, where emotional expressions are rephrased to better suit Uzbek communicative norms, and explicitation, whereby implicit emotional or pragmatic meanings in the source text are made more explicit in the target language. This is especially important for emotionally sensitive genres such as interpersonal communication, literary texts, public discourse, and educational materials, where emotional nuance plays a central role in meaning-making. Human translators also adjust levels of directness and politeness in accordance with sociocultural expectations, thereby maintaining the intended interpersonal effect of the original message.

These findings align with previous research on pragmatic failure in machine translation, which argues that machine-generated translations often succeed at surface-level accuracy while failing to reproduce deeper pragmatic and discourse-level meanings (House, 2015). The observed divergence between AI and human translations further supports the view that emotional meaning in translation cannot be reduced to lexical equivalence alone, but instead requires interpretive judgment, cultural knowledge, and pragmatic awareness. Consequently, while AI translation tools offer efficiency and consistency, their effectiveness in handling emotionally nuanced discourse remains limited in comparison to human translators.

Pedagogical Implications.

The findings suggest that translator training programs in Uzbekistan should incorporate both AI literacy and pragmatic awareness as core components of the curriculum. As AI-based translation tools become increasingly integrated into professional translation workflows, future translators must develop the ability to understand how these systems function, as well as their strengths and limitations in handling emotionally and pragmatically complex texts. AI literacy in this context involves not only technical familiarity with machine translation tools, but also critical awareness of their potential impact on meaning, tone, and interpersonal relations.

In particular, students should be trained to critically evaluate AI-generated translations rather than accept them as fully adequate outputs. Instruction should emphasize the identification of pragmatic shifts, emotional attenuation, and culturally inappropriate renderings that may arise in machine-translated texts. This is especially important for

emotionally sensitive genres such as interpersonal communication, literary texts, public discourse, and educational materials, where emotional nuance plays a central role in meaning-making.

Furthermore, translator education should place greater emphasis on post-editing strategies aimed at restoring emotional and pragmatic equivalence. Students should be taught how to apply techniques such as reformulation, explicitation, modulation of politeness levels, and cultural adaptation to improve AI-generated translations. Integrating comparative analysis tasks where students contrast AI outputs with human translations can foster reflective decision-making and enhance intercultural pragmatic competence.

By combining AI-assisted translation practice with explicit training in pragmatics and intercultural communication, translator training programs in Uzbekistan can better prepare students for contemporary translation environments. Such an approach not only equips learners with practical technological skills but also reinforces the enduring importance of human judgment in preserving emotional meaning across languages.

Conclusion.

The study concludes that the translation of emotions extends beyond semantic transfer and requires a high level of cultural competence and pragmatic awareness that current AI-based translation systems are unable to fully replicate. Emotional meaning is deeply embedded in sociocultural norms, interpersonal relations, and context-dependent pragmatic conventions, all of which demand interpretive judgment that exceeds algorithmic pattern recognition.

While AI translation systems contribute significantly to efficiency, speed, and lexical consistency, their tendency to neutralize emotional tone limits their effectiveness in emotionally sensitive communication. In contrast, human translators demonstrate the ability to negotiate emotional equivalence through pragmatic compensation strategies, cultural adaptation, and contextual awareness. These qualities enable human translators to preserve the intended interpersonal impact of the source text, particularly in cross-cultural language pairs such as English and Uzbek.

Rather than positioning AI and human translation as competing alternatives, the findings support an integrative model of AI-human collaboration in translation practice. In this model, AI serves as a supportive tool for initial draft production, while human translators apply critical evaluation and post-editing to ensure emotional, pragmatic, and cultural adequacy. Future research should further explore hybrid translation workflows, investigate emotion-sensitive AI training models, and develop pedagogical frameworks that prepare translators to work effectively at the intersection of technology and human expertise.

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