

SMALL WORDS, DIFFERENT TASKS: RESTRICTION AND QUANTIFICATION IN ENGLISH–UZBEK AI PROMPTS

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Abstract. *This paper examines how restrictive and quantitative expressions determine the conditions of task completion in English and Uzbek generative AI prompts. Particular attention is given to only, at least, at most and exactly, together with their Uzbek counterparts faqat, kamida, ko‘pi bilan and aynan. Through qualitative analysis of explicitly constructed bilingual examples, the discussion distinguishes restrictions on content, operations and output quantity. It demonstrates how apparently minor changes can alter the set of acceptable responses, especially when a numerical requirement interacts with limited source material. The paper also differentiates formal compliance from evidential adequacy: producing the requested number of examples does not establish that those examples are distinct or supported by the source. A procedure for examining the operator, its domain and its conditions of satisfaction is proposed. The contribution is conceptual and methodological; the examples have not been tested experimentally across models.*

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The meaning of a prompt depends partly on expressions that appear too small to attract sustained attention. A request containing only, at least or at most may resemble another request in vocabulary and sentence structure while defining a different task. These expressions determine what must be included, what must be excluded and how many output items can satisfy the instruction. Their omission in translation can therefore change the conditions of successful task completion without substantially changing the apparent topic.

This problem is especially relevant to academic uses of generative artificial intelligence. Researchers ask systems to select examples, identify arguments, extract terminology and organise evidence. Such activities require decisions about the boundaries of the requested material. An answer can be fluent and informative while exceeding an expressly restricted domain. It can also contain the requested number of items while failing to establish that those items are separate, relevant or textually supported.

The present discussion uses constructed English–Uzbek examples to isolate these distinctions. The examples are analytical material rather than documented user interactions. Their purpose is to make differences in interpretation explicit, not to demonstrate how frequently a particular model succeeds or fails. The analysis proceeds by identifying the restrictive or quantitative expression, the material it governs and the response conditions that follow from their combination.

David I. Beaver and Brady Z. Clark’s account of focus provides a theoretical basis for examining expressions whose interpretation depends on the alternatives made relevant in context. For prompt analysis, this directs attention to the relationship between a restrictive expression and the constituent with which it is associated. Merely recording the presence of only does not explain which alternatives the request excludes. [1]

Consider the request “Translate only the examples into English.” A corresponding Uzbek formulation is “Faqt misollarni ingliz tiliga tarjima qiling.” Under its ordinary reading, the restriction concerns the material selected for translation. The examples are included, while surrounding commentary, headings or other passages are excluded from that operation. Translating the whole document would therefore fail to respect the stated boundary even if every sentence were translated accurately.

A different request is “Translate the examples into English without adding commentary.” Its Uzbek counterpart is “Misollarni ingliz tiliga tarjima qiling, izoh qo‘shmag.” Here, the instruction explicitly excludes an additional response component. The first request restricts what is translated; the second restricts what accompanies the translation. These conditions can coincide in a particular interaction, but neither should be assumed to express the other completely.

The distinction becomes less transparent in “Only translate the examples.” Depending on context and emphasis, the request may contrast translation with explanation, or it may be understood as limiting attention to the examples. In written prompting, the prosodic information available in speech is absent unless represented through additional wording or formatting. A careful analysis should therefore distinguish a preferred reading from an interpretation established beyond reasonable ambiguity.

The Uzbek formulation “Misollarni faqt tarjima qiling” can foreground the operation: translate the examples without performing an additional activity. By contrast, “Faqt misollarni tarjima qiling” more directly foregrounds the selection of examples as the material to be translated. These constructed contrasts illustrate interpretive tendencies rather than an absolute rule that position alone determines scope. Context remains relevant, and a corpus-based study would be required to establish how consistently readers interpret the alternatives.

For practical purposes, an explicit second clause can make the intended restriction easier to inspect. “Translate the examples; leave the explanation unchanged” corresponds to “Misollarni tarjima qiling, izohni o‘zgartirmang.” The request identifies both the operation and the material protected from that operation. Its clarity comes from specifying the boundary, rather than from making the prompt longer for its own sake.

Quantitative expressions introduce a related but distinct problem. Compare “Give at least three examples”, “Give at most three examples” and “Give exactly three examples.” Their Uzbek counterparts are “Kamida uchta misol keltiring”, “Ko‘pi bilan uchta misol keltiring” and “Aynan uchta misol keltiring.” The shared numeral does not make these requests equivalent. The first establishes a lower bound, the second an upper bound, and the third fixes the requested cardinality.

Bart Geurts and Rick Nouwen’s study of scalar modifiers demonstrates that expressions such as at least and at most require semantic analysis beyond treating them as interchangeable numerical accessories. Their broader account concerns natural-language interpretation. The present application focuses on how these expressions establish permissible quantities in a directive context, without assuming that every inference associated with their use in assertions transfers unchanged to requests. [2]

Under the relevant numerical condition, four examples satisfy a minimum of three but exceed a maximum of three. Two examples remain below the maximum but fail the minimum. Exactly three satisfies the cardinality requirement in all three formulations. These relationships concern quantity alone. They do not establish that the examples are accurate, relevant or sufficiently distinct.

An upper bound also does not remove the communicative purpose of the request. Although zero is mathematically no greater than three, an empty response to “Give at most three examples” would ordinarily fail to perform the requested activity when relevant examples are available. The numerical restriction and the directive must be interpreted together. Treating the upper bound as the complete instruction would overlook the requirement to provide useful examples.

The corresponding distinction matters when numerical operators interact with source restrictions. Consider “Find at least three examples of metaphor in this paragraph.” The Uzbek formulation is “Shu abzasdan kamida uchta metafora misolini toping.” The request establishes both a minimum quantity and a search domain. If the paragraph supports only two defensible examples, the two conditions cannot both be fulfilled through faithful extraction.

A response that invents a third example would satisfy the visible count while violating the source boundary. A response that divides one occurrence into two entries might produce the same misleading appearance of compliance. The relevant issue is therefore not simply

whether the answer contains three numbered lines, but whether those lines correspond to three independently supportable instances of the requested phenomenon.

An alternative request could state: “Find up to three clear examples of metaphor in this paragraph. If there are fewer, report only those you can support.” Its Uzbek counterpart is “Shu abzasdan ko‘pi bilan uchta aniq metafora misolini toping. Kamroq bo‘lsa, faqat asoslash mumkin bo‘lganlarini keltiring.” This formulation is a proposed revision, not a direct translation of the preceding minimum requirement. It deliberately changes the task so that limited evidence does not conflict with an obligation to reach a fixed count.

Conditional instructions add another relation. “If the paragraph contains a definition, quote it” can be rendered as “Abzasda ta’rif bo‘lsa, uni iqtibos qilib keltiring.” The existence of a definition is left open. Rewriting the request as “Quote the definition in the paragraph” removes the overt condition and ordinarily presents a relevant definition as available. This change may encourage an answer where the appropriate outcome should instead acknowledge that the condition has not been met.

Conditionality must therefore be distinguished from incompleteness. A request may intentionally permit different responses depending on the evidence. Reporting that no definition was found can fulfil the task when the instruction makes quotation conditional on its presence. It should not automatically be treated as a failure to follow instructions merely because no quotation appears.

These distinctions are relevant to the evaluation of language models. Jeffrey Zhou and colleagues introduced IFEval around instructions with verifiable properties, including length and keyword-frequency requirements. Their approach shows the value of specifying conditions that can be checked consistently. However, the existence of a countable output feature does not make every part of an academic task automatically verifiable. [3]

The next check concerns the unit being counted and the evidence required for membership in that unit. A bilingual pair cannot be evaluated adequately if one version requests distinct arguments and the other requests sentences. Finally, the reviewer should examine what the prompt permits when the source lacks enough qualifying material. Silence on this point should not be converted into an invented instruction to manufacture additional evidence.

The proposed analysis does not establish that longer prompts are generally preferable or that particular operators reliably improve model performance. Its narrower claim is that small restrictive and quantitative expressions can change the conditions under which an answer counts as successful. Experimental validation would require controlled bilingual materials, independently checked interpretations and separate assessment of numerical compliance and evidential adequacy.

The central conclusion is that restriction and quantification belong to the semantic structure of the task. They should not be treated as optional wording that can be removed during translation or stylistic revision. In English–Uzbek prompting, preserving the action verb and the numeral is only part of preserving the instruction. The operator, its domain, the counting unit and the treatment of insufficient evidence jointly determine what the response is being asked to achieve.

References:

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