SEMANTIC-PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF GRAPHEMIC AND PARALINGUISTIC DEVICES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: This study examines the semantic and pragmatic features of graphemic and paralinguistic devices used in English and Uzbek digital communication. Particular attention is paid to such elements as emojis, emoticons, repeated letters, capitalization, punctuation, abbreviations, and other visual markers that contribute to the interpretation of online messages. The research explores how these devices express emotions, attitudes, emphasis, politeness, irony, and interpersonal relationships in digital discourse. It also compares the ways English- and Uzbek-speaking users employ non-verbal and graphic means to compensate for the absence of facial expressions, gestures, and intonation in written online interaction.

Key words: digital communication, graphemic devices, paralinguistic devices, semantics, pragmatics, English language, Uzbek language.

The rapid development of digital technologies has significantly transformed the ways in which people use language. Social networking sites, instant messaging applications, online forums, e-mails, and other forms of computer-mediated interaction have created a communicative environment in which written language frequently performs functions that traditionally belonged to spoken communication. In face-to-face interaction, speakers can rely on intonation, facial expressions, gestures, pauses, voice quality, and other non-verbal signals to clarify their intentions. In digital written communication, however, most of these signals are physically absent. As a result, users employ various graphic and visual resources to express emotional attitudes, strengthen or soften statements, indicate irony, and maintain interpersonal relationships.

David Crystal considers Internet communication a distinctive linguistic environment in which characteristics of both written and spoken language interact. He emphasizes that digital technologies do not simply reduce or simplify language; they also encourage new forms of linguistic creativity. Features such as unconventional spelling, repeated letters, capitalization, punctuation, abbreviations, and graphic symbols can therefore acquire communicative functions extending beyond their traditional orthographic roles [1]. Crystal's *Language and the Internet*, second edition, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2006.

Within the present study, graphemic devices refer to visually marked features of written digital discourse, including capitalization, letter repetition, unconventional punctuation, deliberate spelling modification, abbreviations, and other manipulations of written form.

Paralinguistic devices, in contrast, include emojis, emoticons, stickers and similar visual elements that accompany verbal messages and contribute additional information about the writer's emotions, attitudes and communicative intentions. The study of these phenomena is particularly relevant from a comparative perspective. English functions as one of the dominant languages of international digital communication and has contributed numerous abbreviations, slang expressions and communication conventions to online discourse. Uzbek digital communication develops within the same technological environment but simultaneously reflects the orthographic, pragmatic and sociocultural characteristics of the Uzbek language. Consequently, similar digital devices may perform universal communicative functions while acquiring language- and culture-specific interpretations.

The purpose of this research is to examine the semantic and pragmatic characteristics of graphemic and paralinguistic devices in English and Uzbek digital communication and to identify their similarities and distinctive functions.

1. Linguistic Approaches to Computer-Mediated Discourse. One of the major theoretical approaches to digital interaction is Susan C. Herring's model of Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA). Herring views online interaction as discourse that can be systematically examined through linguistic methods. Her approach focuses on recurring patterns of language use and considers the relationship between linguistic choices, technological conditions and social contexts. In her 2004 study, Herring describes CMDA as an approach for investigating online communicative behaviour and demonstrates that electronically mediated discourse should be treated as a legitimate object of linguistic analysis [2]. The chapter appeared in *Designing for Virtual Communities in the Service of Learning*, published by Cambridge University Press, on pages 338–376. Herring's approach is important for the present research because graphemic and paralinguistic elements cannot be adequately interpreted in isolation. Their meanings usually depend on the surrounding verbal message, relationships between participants, communication platform, topic and communicative purpose. For instance, the message *"Fine."* may appear neutral or even distant, whereas *"Fine* 😊*"* can suggest friendliness or reassurance. Similarly, *"FINE!!!"* may communicate a considerably stronger emotional attitude. The lexical meaning of the word remains essentially unchanged, but its pragmatic interpretation is modified by visual features.

Such examples demonstrate that digital discourse is not simply traditional writing transferred to an electronic screen. Instead, users develop strategies for representing emphasis, emotion and interpersonal attitudes through available graphic resources. This principle can be applied to both English and Uzbek communication.

2. Studies of Emoticons and Non-Verbal Meaning. A particularly influential contribution to the analysis of digital paralinguistic resources was made by Eli Dresner and Susan C. Herring. Their study of emoticons challenges the assumption that emoticons function exclusively as representations of emotions. The researchers argue that emoticons can also provide information about the illocutionary force of an utterance, that is, about how a verbal

message is intended to be understood in a particular communicative situation [3]. Their article was published in *Communication Theory*, Volume 20, Issue 3, in 2010, pp. 249–268.

This approach is especially significant for semantic-pragmatic research because the same visual sign can perform different functions depending on context. A smiling symbol may indicate genuine happiness in one message, politeness in another, or soften a request in a third. A wink can signal that a preceding statement should not be interpreted literally. Thus, the semantic content of a visual element is relatively flexible, while its pragmatic function is strongly context-dependent. The same principle can be observed in contemporary English and Uzbek digital interaction. For example:

English: "You did a great job 😂"

Depending on the communicative context, the laughing emoji may reinforce amusement, express playful irony or change an apparently serious compliment into a humorous statement.

Uzbek: "Juda yaxshi qilibsiz 😂"

The lexical content of the Uzbek sentence expresses positive evaluation, but the emoji can introduce humorous, ironic or informal shades of meaning. Consequently, accurate interpretation requires attention to the relationship between participants and the preceding discourse rather than analysis of the emoji as an isolated symbol. The reviewed studies demonstrate a transition from understanding digital graphic elements merely as decorative additions toward treating them as meaningful components of discourse. Nevertheless, comparative investigation of English and Uzbek digital communication remains important because communicative conventions are affected not only by technological possibilities but also by linguistic and cultural norms.

Graphemic modification is one of the most accessible methods for compensating for the absence of voice in written digital communication. Users can manipulate letters, punctuation marks and visual form to indicate intensity, rhythm, emphasis or attitude. A common example is capitalization. In standard writing, capital letters perform grammatical and orthographic functions. In informal online interaction, however, writing an entire word or sentence in capital letters may represent additional emphasis. Compare:

English: *I am happy.*

I am VERY happy.

Uzbek: *Men xursandman.*

Men JUDA xursandman.

In both languages, capitalization increases the prominence of the selected element. When a whole message is capitalized, the effect may become stronger and can sometimes be interpreted as shouting, urgency or emotional excitement. Therefore, capitalization possesses not only a visual function but also a pragmatic one. Another widespread feature is expressive letter repetition:

English: *soooo beautiful*, *noooo*, *heyyy*

Uzbek**:** *judaaa yaxshi*, *haaa*, *yo'qeee*, *salooom*

Such repetition visually represents the prolongation that would normally be produced through voice in spoken communication. Semantically, the basic lexical meaning remains recognizable, while pragmatically the repeated letters may express enthusiasm, surprise, affection, dissatisfaction or insistence. Thus, digital graphemics enables users to imitate certain prosodic characteristics of oral speech.

Punctuation repetition performs a related function. Consider the difference between:

Really?

Really???

or: *Zo‘r!*

Zo‘r!!!

The additional punctuation does not create a new dictionary meaning. Instead, it intensifies the communicative force of the utterance. Multiple question marks can represent disbelief, impatience or strong curiosity, while repeated exclamation marks may indicate excitement, approval, anger or urgency.

Digital Uzbek also displays considerable variation in the graphic representation of characters specific to the Latin-based Uzbek alphabet. Forms such as *o‘* and *g‘* may appear with different apostrophe signs depending on the user's keyboard or device. Informal digital writing can therefore include graphic variation that arises from both communicative choice and technological convenience. Such variation should be distinguished from deliberate expressive spelling: the former may result from keyboard limitations, whereas the latter usually carries additional pragmatic meaning. Emojis and emoticons constitute some of the clearest examples of paralinguistic communication in digital discourse. They can supplement, modify or occasionally substitute for verbal expressions.

For example: **English:** *Thank you* 😊

Uzbek: *Rahmat* 😊

In both cases, the smiling emoji reinforces the positive interpersonal tone of the message. It can make a short expression of gratitude appear warmer and more personal.

The pragmatic function becomes even more evident in requests:

English: *Could you send it today?* 🙏

Uzbek: *Bugun yuborib bera olasizmi?* 🙏

The folded-hands emoji does not change the propositional content of the request. However, it can strengthen the impression of politeness, appeal or personal involvement. Thus, emojis often operate at the level of interpersonal pragmatics rather than merely adding lexical information. Emojis are also important in the interpretation of Uzbek-language digital material. Rabbimov, Mporas, Simaki and Kobilov investigated emoji-related features in Uzbek movie-review comments collected from YouTube. Their study demonstrates that emojis carry information relevant to the classification of opinions expressed in Uzbek online texts [4]. The research was published in the proceedings of SPECOM 2020 by Springer, pp. 435–445. This provides empirical evidence that visual symbols are not peripheral elements

of Uzbek digital writing but can contribute meaningful information about users' evaluations and attitudes.

English and Uzbek digital discourse share a number of general tendencies because speakers use many of the same platforms, devices and visual resources. Capitalization, repeated characters, emojis and expressive punctuation can convey emotional intensity in both languages. Their fundamental pragmatic functions include emphasis, evaluation, humour, irony, politeness and the regulation of interpersonal distance. At the same time, their actual realization is influenced by the linguistic structures and communicative traditions of each language. English online interaction contains a large number of conventional digital abbreviations such as *LOL*, *OMG*, *IDK* and *BTW*. Some of these forms may also appear inside Uzbek conversations as a result of contact with global Internet culture. Uzbek communication, meanwhile, may combine international digital symbols with culturally familiar forms of address and politeness.

For instance:

English: *Thanks* 😊

Uzbek: *Rahmat, opa* 😊

The emoji contributes positive affect in both examples, but the Uzbek form *opa* additionally indicates a socially meaningful form of respectful or familiar address. Therefore, pragmatic interpretation emerges from the interaction between verbal and visual resources.

Code-switching may further increase the complexity of Uzbek online messages:

Bugungi meeting juda yaxshi o‘tdi 👍.

Here the English lexical item *meeting* is incorporated into an Uzbek grammatical environment, while the thumbs-up emoji provides an additional positive evaluation. Consequently, one digital utterance may simultaneously contain Uzbek grammatical structures, an English lexical element and a non-verbal visual symbol.

Another important feature is the contextual flexibility of emojis. The symbol 😂 generally relates to laughter, but its precise meaning is determined by the surrounding interaction. It can signal genuine amusement, friendly teasing, exaggeration or irony. Likewise, 💔 may communicate romantic affection, friendship, gratitude, approval or emotional support. These examples demonstrate why a purely semantic description of digital symbols is insufficient. Pragmatic analysis is necessary to explain how speakers use them to achieve particular communicative effects.

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