

PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES OF NEGATIVE EMOTION VERBALIZATION IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK MEDIA DISCOURSE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This article examines pragmatic strategies through which negative emotions are verbalized in selected English and Uzbek media discourse. The study is grounded in authentic television, interview, podcast and social-media examples collected for a comparative PhD investigation. A qualitative discourse-pragmatic procedure identifies emotion domains, linguistic realization, pragmatic modification and communicative function. The analysis shows that negative affect is constructed not only by emotion lexemes but also by mitigation, intensification, metaphor, evaluative wording, phraseology and discourse markers. In the English material, conversational mitigation, gradation and indirect contextual loading are recurrent; in the Uzbek material, relatively direct nomination frequently combines with figurative and culturally salient evaluation. These are corpus-based tendencies rather than categorical properties of the languages.

Keywords: Negative emotions; media discourse; pragmatics; English; Uzbek; mitigation; intensification; evaluation; verbalization.

Introduction

Emotion in public discourse is not simply an inner state transferred into words. It is selected, graded, framed and strategically positioned in relation to an audience. Media discourse is therefore a productive environment for examining how negative affect becomes linguistic action. Research on the emotionalisation of contemporary media emphasizes that emotions are constructed through semiotic and pragmatic resources and may contribute to persuasion, evaluation and

audience positioning (Zappettini, Ponton, & Larina, 2021). A word such as sad, afraid or terrible consequently cannot be interpreted through lexical polarity alone: its communicative value depends on context, stance, intensity and the relationship between participants.

The comparative dimension is particularly relevant for English and Uzbek. Both languages verbalize experiential domains such as fear, anger, sadness, anxiety, regret, shame and disappointment, but they do not necessarily package these experiences through identical lexical, phraseological or pragmatic choices. The dissertation material underlying this article reveals a recurrent contrast: the English media samples frequently employ gradation, mitigation and indirect framing, whereas the Uzbek samples often combine relatively direct naming with evaluative, figurative and culturally salient expressions. This observation is treated as a tendency within the analysed material, not as an absolute typological rule.

The purpose of the article is to identify and compare pragmatic strategies used to verbalize negative emotions in selected English and Uzbek media discourse. It asks which linguistic resources modify the force of negative emotion, which pragmatic functions are performed by negative-emotion units in context, and what comparative tendencies emerge from the selected samples. Negative-emotion vocabulary is treated as part of a discourse-pragmatic system in which nomination, evaluation, mitigation, intensification, metaphorization and audience orientation interact.

2. Theoretical Background

Appraisal-oriented approaches provide a useful foundation because evaluation is distributed across lexical and grammatical resources. Martin and White (2005) describe attitude, engagement and gradation as interacting systems of evaluation, while Bednarek (2008, 2009) connects evaluative meaning with context, stance and affect. A speaker may name an emotion explicitly, invoke it indirectly, increase or decrease its force, or attribute it to another participant. Analysis must therefore extend beyond inventories of emotion words.

Cognitive linguistic research adds conceptual structure. Kövecses (2000, 2014) demonstrates that emotion concepts are organized through embodied, metaphorical and cultural models. Phraseological and figurative expressions can

compress emotional scenarios into culturally intelligible images. Schwarz-Friesel (2015) likewise stresses that emotion and evaluation can be conveyed explicitly or implicitly and that implicit affective meanings rely on inference and culturally shaped knowledge.

A discourse perspective treats emotion as process rather than static content. Alba-Juez and Mackenzie (2019) emphasize emotional meaning in social and interactional processes. In media communication, speakers negotiate credibility, solidarity, blame, vulnerability and social judgement before a public audience. Mitigation can soften commitment or interpersonal force (Caffi, 2007), whereas intensification increases salience and evaluative pressure.

3. Materials and Method

The empirical basis consists of authentic examples collected for a PhD dissertation on the cognitive-pragmatic properties of negative-emotion lexical units in English and Uzbek media materials. The broader material includes television programmes, interviews, podcasts, print media and social-media discourse. Representative fragments were selected because they display identifiable pragmatic modification of negative affect. English examples include kind of, bittersweet sad, freaked out, very nervous, freaking out, stressing out, nightmare, embarrassing and really tough. Uzbek examples include e'tiborsizlik, tashvish, adolatsizlik, nohaqlik, mehrsizlik, uyat and the figurative construction "o'zini dardiga, o'zini muammosiga qovurilib yuribdi".

The method is qualitative comparative discourse analysis. Each fragment is examined according to four parameters: the negative-emotion domain activated in context; linguistic realization, including lexical, phraseological, grammatical, metaphorical and discourse-marker resources; pragmatic modification, especially mitigation, intensification, indirectness and evaluative framing; and communicative function, such as self-disclosure, empathy elicitation, criticism, warning, blame, self-protection or social evaluation. No frequency claims are made because the examples are analytical selections rather than a statistically balanced corpus.

4. Results and Discussion

In an English television interview, a host asks whether a guest is “kind of, bittersweet sad” that a programme is over. Bittersweet sad constructs a blended emotional state rather than a simple negative category. The marker kind of reduces the categorical force of the host’s attribution. Pragmatically, it protects the guest’s epistemic authority over her own feelings: the host proposes an interpretation without presenting it as definitive. The negative emotion is therefore negotiated rather than imposed.

The guest’s response, “I was just like, yeah, freaked out,” moves toward stronger affect. Freaked out encodes anxiety or agitation, while the conversational frame presents the disclosure as spontaneous. Mitigation and intensification thus coexist in the same exchange: one participant softens an emotional attribution and the other selects a forceful colloquial expression for self-description. This pattern supports a dynamic view of emotional meaning.

Intensification is visible in “I was very nervous to present.” Nervous locates the experience within anxiety, while very grades its intensity. The intensifier makes the remembered experience more salient and the speaker’s vulnerability more accessible to the audience. In “This is really tough,” really similarly strengthens a negative assessment of difficulty. Degree modification therefore connects semantic intensity with pragmatic prominence.

The pair “freaking out” and “stressing out” in a discussion of getting older illustrates contextual differentiation within an anxiety-related field. Freaking out suggests acute agitation or temporary loss of emotional control, whereas stressing out profiles sustained worry or pressure. The expression getting older is comparatively neutral in isolation, yet within the exchange it acquires negative affective loading. Emotional evaluation can therefore emerge from contextual construal even when a lexical item is not inherently negative.

Metaphorical evaluation is evident in “He must have been a nightmare to fight.” Nightmare does not refer to a literal dream; it construes the opponent as an extremely difficult and unpleasant experience. The subsequent “he’s embarrassing me” introduces shame and loss of face, while “really tough” intensifies the negative assessment. A response such as “Terrible” functions as affiliative alignment, validating the preceding evaluation. Emotional meaning is distributed across metaphor, evaluation, intensification and interactional uptake.

Context may also reframe expected negativity. In another media fragment, failure is described as “a wonderful teacher.” Failure normally activates disappointment or defeat, but the predicative metaphor re-construes it as a source of learning. This illustrates why automatic positive/negative polarity is insufficient for discourse analysis: the pragmatic function of an emotion-related unit may diverge from its default evaluative association.

The Uzbek material frequently names the source or type of negative experience directly: e’tiborsizlik “lack of attention”, tashvish “worry”, adolatsizlik “injustice”, nohaqlik “unfairness”, mehrsizlik “lack of affection”, and uyat “shame”. Direct nomination, however, is often followed by figurative or evaluative expansion. In “Hamma odam o‘zini dardiga, o‘zini muammosiga qovurilib yuribdi,” the image of a person metaphorically being consumed by personal pain and problems intensifies the description of social and emotional burden. An abstract observation becomes an embodied image of prolonged inner suffering.

The same discourse contains xudbinlashib ketdi, an evaluative expression describing a movement toward selfishness. Its function extends beyond reporting emotion: it criticizes a social tendency and explains perceived e’tiborsizlik. Negative-emotion discourse thus connects personal affect with moral evaluation. Similarly, adolatsizlik and nohaqlik activate resentment and hurt through the frame of violated fairness, while mehrsizlik evokes emotional deprivation. Their pragmatic force arises from lexical meaning together with culturally intelligible expectations about justice, attention and interpersonal care.

The selected English material demonstrates recurrent conversational mitigation, degree marking and indirect contextual loading: kind of reduces categorical commitment, very and really increase intensity, and metaphorical items such as nightmare package evaluation indirectly. The Uzbek material also uses intensification and figurativity, but the analysed examples more often begin with direct naming of a negative condition or social cause and then expand it through metaphor, evaluation or culturally resonant wording. This contrast is a material-based tendency rather than an essential difference between the languages.

Despite these differences, pragmatic functions overlap substantially. In both languages negative-emotion expressions can construct vulnerability, elicit empathy, criticize behaviour, evaluate a social problem, protect interpersonal face

or align with another speaker. The same lexical item can perform different functions across contexts. An emotion word may name a personal state in one exchange and become a resource for blame, persuasion or social judgement in another. Pragmatic interpretation must therefore be anchored in the communicative event.

The findings are consistent with approaches that view evaluation as context-sensitive (Bednarek, 2009) and emotion in discourse as socially situated (Alba-Juez & Mackenzie, 2019). They also support the media-emotionalisation agenda of Zappettini et al. (2021): media emotion is not only expressed but organized for communicative purposes. The comparative contribution is to show how similar negative experiential domains are pragmatically recalibrated through different combinations of directness, gradation, metaphor and cultural evaluation.

Another important result concerns the relationship between explicit emotion and invoked emotion. Explicit items such as nervous, uyat or tashvish directly categorize an affective state, whereas expressions such as getting older, failure or social neglect may invoke negative affect only after contextual interpretation. This distinction matters in media discourse because speakers often avoid direct psychological labels while still constructing a strongly emotional frame. The analyst must therefore separate lexical denotation from discourse-induced affect and identify the contextual cues that license an emotional reading.

Phraseological and colloquial forms also carry register information that contributes to pragmatic meaning. Freaked out and stressing out are not neutral technical labels for anxiety; they belong to conversational English and create immediacy between speaker and audience. In Uzbek, figurative wording can similarly make an abstract emotional burden more concrete and socially recognizable. Register and imagery therefore participate in interpersonal positioning: they can make a speaker sound more vulnerable, familiar, emphatic or culturally aligned with the audience.

A further comparative observation concerns evaluation of causes. Several Uzbek fragments foreground socially interpretable causes of negative affect—lack of attention, injustice, unfairness and lack of affection—so that emotional discourse becomes simultaneously moral discourse. English fragments in the selected conversational media more often foreground the speaker's experiential state and its degree. The contrast is not universal, but it suggests a useful direction for larger

corpus research: whether media genres differ cross-linguistically in their preference for state-focused versus cause-focused emotional framing.

5. Implications and Limitations

The analysis has implications for comparative linguistics, translation and language teaching. Translation of negative-emotion discourse requires attention not only to lexical equivalence but also to intensity, interpersonal force, figurative imagery and the cultural assumptions that make an expression pragmatically effective. A literal equivalent may preserve denotation while altering mitigation, evaluation or emotional impact. Authentic media fragments can also demonstrate to learners how apparently simple words change meaning through discourse markers and context.

The study is qualitative and does not claim statistical representativeness. The selected fragments support analytical generalization about mechanisms, not population-level frequency statements. Future research should annotate a larger balanced English-Uzbek media corpus and test whether the tendencies identified here remain stable across genres, speakers and communicative settings.

6. Conclusion

Negative-emotion verbalization in English and Uzbek media discourse is a multi-level process in which lexical semantics interacts with pragmatic modification and cultural framing. The English examples analysed here make frequent use of mitigation, gradation and contextual indirectness, while the Uzbek examples frequently combine direct naming with figurative and evaluative expansion. Both languages nevertheless use negative-emotion resources for a shared range of communicative purposes, including self-disclosure, empathy, criticism, alignment and social evaluation.

The central conclusion is that negative-emotion meaning cannot be reduced to the dictionary value of an isolated word. It is produced through the relationship among linguistic form, intensity, conceptual framing, speaker intention, interactional position and discourse context. A comparative cognitive-pragmatic approach is therefore necessary for explaining how similar emotional experiences acquire different linguistic profiles in English and Uzbek media communication.

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