

RECONSTRUCTING EMOTIONAL MEANING ACROSS LANGUAGES: TRANSLATING CULTURE-SPECIFIC EMOTIONAL CONCEPTS

Khasanova Dilnoza

Teacher of Uzbekistan State World Languages University.

Khasanova12noza@gmail.com

Abstract. Emotional meaning is one of the most challenging aspects of interlingual communication because emotions are not expressed solely through universally shared concepts but are also shaped by language, culture, social norms, and individual experience. Some emotion-related words and expressions have no direct lexical equivalents in another language, creating what is commonly described as a problem of “untranslatability.” However, the absence of a direct equivalent does not necessarily make translation impossible; rather, it requires the translator to reconstruct the emotional meaning through alternative linguistic and contextual resources. This article examines the challenges involved in translating culturally specific emotional concepts and explores the strategies translators employ to preserve their semantic, pragmatic, and cultural dimensions. Particular attention is given to cases in which a single source-language word conveys a complex combination of emotional, social, and cultural meanings that cannot be reproduced by a single target-language equivalent. The study considers such concepts within the framework of interlingual communication and translation equivalence, focusing on the interaction between lexical meaning, context, cultural associations, and the intended emotional response of the target reader. It argues that successful translation of emotional concepts should not be assessed solely in terms of lexical equivalence but also in terms of **emotional and pragmatic adequacy**.

Keywords: translation, emotional meaning, untranslatability, interlingual communication, cultural concepts, translation equivalence, pragmatic meaning, emotional adequacy.

Аннотация. Эмоциональное значение является одним из наиболее сложных аспектов межкультурной коммуникации, поскольку эмоции выражаются не только посредством универсальных концептов, но и формируются под воздействием языка, культуры, социальных норм и индивидуального опыта. Некоторые слова и выражения, обозначающие эмоции, не имеют прямых лексических эквивалентов в другом языке, что обычно рассматривается как проблема «непереводимости». Однако

отсутствие прямого эквивалента не обязательно делает перевод невозможным; напротив, оно требует от переводчика реконструировать эмоциональное значение посредством альтернативных языковых и контекстуальных средств. В данной статье рассматриваются трудности перевода культурно специфичных эмоциональных концептов и анализируются стратегии, используемые переводчиками для сохранения их семантических, прагматических и культурных компонентов. Особое внимание уделяется случаям, когда одно слово исходного языка передаёт сложную совокупность эмоциональных, социальных и культурных значений, которые невозможно воспроизвести с помощью одного эквивалента в языке перевода. Данные концепты рассматриваются в рамках межъязыковой коммуникации и теории переводческой эквивалентности с акцентом на взаимодействие лексического значения, контекста, культурных ассоциаций и предполагаемой эмоциональной реакции читателя перевода. В статье утверждается, что адекватность перевода эмоциональных концептов следует оценивать не только с точки зрения лексической эквивалентности, но и с точки зрения **эмоциональной и прагматической адекватности**.

Ключевые слова: перевод, эмоциональное значение, непереводаемость, межъязыковая коммуникация, культурные концепты, переводческая эквивалентность, прагматическое значение, эмоциональная адекватность.

Annotatsiya. Emotsional ma'no tillararo kommunikatsiyaning eng murakkab jihatlaridan biri hisoblanadi, chunki hissiyotlar nafaqat umumiy va universal tushunchalar orqali ifodalanadi, balki til, madaniyat, ijtimoiy me'yorlar hamda individual tajriba ta'sirida ham shakllanadi. Ayrim emotsiyani ifodalovchi so'z va iboralar boshqa tilda bevosita leksik ekvivalentga ega emas. Bu holat odatda "tarjima qilib bo'lmashlik" muammosi sifatida qaraladi. Biroq bevosita ekvivalentning mavjud emasligi tarjimoni mutlaqo imkonsiz qilmaydi; aksincha, tarjimondan emotsional ma'noni muqobil lingvistik va kontekstual vositalar orqali qayta tiklashni talab qiladi. Mazkur maqolada madaniy jihatdan o'ziga xos emotsional konseptlarni tarjima qilishda yuzaga keladigan muammolar ko'rib chiqiladi hamda tarjimonlar ularning semantik, pragmatik va madaniy xususiyatlarini saqlab qolish uchun qo'llaydigan strategiyalar tahlil qilinadi. Ayniqsa, manba tilidagi bitta so'z murakkab emotsional, ijtimoiy va madaniy ma'nolar majmuini ifodalab, ularni tarjima tilidagi yagona ekvivalent orqali to'liq ifodalashning imkoni bo'lmagan holatlarga alohida e'tibor qaratiladi. Mazkur

konseptlar tillararo kommunikatsiya va tarjima ekvivalentligi nazariyasi doirasida, leksik ma'no, kontekst, madaniy assotsiatsiyalar hamda tarjima matnini o'quvchida yuzaga kelishi ko'zda tutilgan emotsional ta'sirning o'zaro munosabati nuqtayi nazaridan o'rganiladi. Maqolada emotsional konseptlarni tarjima qilish sifatini faqat leksik ekvivalentlik nuqtayi nazaridan emas, balki **emotsional va pragmatik adekvatlik** nuqtayi nazaridan ham baholash lozimligi ta'kidlanadi.

Kalit so'zlar: tarjima, emotsional ma'no, tarjima qilib bo'lmashlik, tillararo kommunikatsiya, madaniy konseptlar, tarjima ekvivalentligi, pragmatik ma'no, emotsional adekvatlik.

Translation is often understood as the transfer of meaning from one language into another. However, meaning is not always organized in the same way across languages. This becomes particularly evident in the translation of emotions, where linguistic meaning intersects with cultural experience, social norms, metaphorical conceptualization, and individual perception. An emotion word in one language may refer not simply to an internal psychological state but to a culturally recognizable way of experiencing, evaluating, and expressing that state. Research in multilingualism demonstrates that the relationship between language and emotion is considerably more complex than a simple correspondence between emotional experience and lexical labels. Pavlenko argues that multilingual speakers may have different emotional repertoires associated with different languages and that emotional experience and expression can be influenced by linguistic and sociocultural experience [Pavlenko, 2005]. This observation has important consequences for translation. If languages categorize and verbalize emotional experience differently, the translator cannot always rely on direct lexical substitution. A dictionary may provide an approximate equivalent, but such an equivalent may reproduce only one component of the source concept while leaving other semantic or cultural dimensions unexplained.

For this reason, the present study uses the concept of **reconstruction** rather than *untranslatability*. The absence of a direct equivalent does not mean that an emotional concept cannot be translated. Rather, it means that its meaning may have to be reconstructed through several linguistic and contextual resources. Studies of cross-lingual emotion terminology similarly demonstrate that apparent translation equivalents may differ in their semantic scope and conceptual structure [Ogarkova, 2021]. Thus, the central problem can be formulated as follows: **How**

can a translator reproduce the emotional meaning of a culture-specific concept when the target language does not possess an equivalent lexical category?

Although human beings experience many broadly recognizable emotional states, languages do not necessarily divide the emotional domain in identical ways. The same general experience may be categorized differently, while a particular language may lexicalize distinctions that another language leaves implicit. Emotion vocabulary therefore represents more than a collection of labels for universal psychological states. Words acquire additional meanings through repeated use within particular cultural and social environments. They may encode culturally shared expectations concerning appropriate emotional behavior, interpersonal relationships, morality, social status, and self-control.

Pavlenko's work on emotions and multilingualism emphasizes that languages can provide speakers with different ways of conceptualizing and expressing emotional experience. Her analysis includes semantic, conceptual, discursive, and sociocognitive dimensions of the relationship between language and emotion [Pavlenko, 2005]. This means that the translator is dealing with at least two levels of meaning. The first is the **referential or basic emotional meaning**, such as sadness, fear, happiness, anger, or shame. The second is the **culturally constructed meaning** associated with the emotion in a particular linguistic community.

For instance, an emotional expression may simultaneously communicate:

- an emotional state;
- an evaluation of a situation;
- an attitude toward another person;
- a culturally determined behavioral expectation;
- a social relationship;
- a metaphorical image;
- and an implied judgment.

A target-language equivalent may reproduce the first component while failing to communicate the others. Consequently, translation adequacy cannot be determined solely by asking whether the translator has selected an equivalent dictionary word. One of the most persistent difficulties in translating emotional concepts is the assumption that words in different languages can be matched on a one-to-one basis. Translation theory has long recognized that lexical equivalence is problematic because words rarely have exactly identical semantic ranges in

different languages [Baker, 2018]. Baker's discussion of non-equivalence at word level is particularly relevant because she demonstrates that lexical meaning must be considered within larger linguistic and communicative structures rather than as an isolated dictionary definition. This problem is especially visible with emotion vocabulary. Consider the English word *sadness*. Its apparent equivalents in another language may overlap with sadness but may also include meanings associated with grief, longing, loneliness, disappointment, melancholy, or emotional suffering. Conversely, a word in another language may encompass several of these meanings simultaneously.

A well-known example is the Russian word *мечта*. Depending on context, it may be rendered in English through words such as *sadness*, *longing*, *melancholy*, *yearning*, or other expressions. The fact that several target-language words may be required to represent different contextual aspects of one source-language concept illustrates that the issue is not simply “translation versus non-translation.” Instead, it concerns **differences in semantic categorization**. Research on cross-linguistic emotion terminology confirms this point. Ogarkova notes that languages display different patterns of lexicalizing emotion concepts and that apparent translation equivalents may differ in their semantic properties [Ogarkova, 2021].

Therefore, the translator's task is not necessarily to find *the* equivalent but to determine **which aspects of the source emotional concept are relevant in the particular context**. Context is one of the most important resources available to translators when direct lexical equivalence is unavailable. An emotional word rarely functions independently from the sentence, discourse, speaker, situation, and relationship between participants. For example, a source-language emotional term may express sadness in one context but *longing* or *emotional attachment* in another. Translating the word identically in every occurrence could therefore produce an inaccurate representation of the source text. This supports the view that emotional meaning should be analyzed at the level of **discourse rather than isolated vocabulary**. Baker's treatment of pragmatic equivalence emphasizes the importance of coherence, implicature, and contextual interpretation in translation [Baker, 2018].

The translator may therefore reconstruct emotional meaning through:

1. **contextual substitution** — selecting a target-language word appropriate to the particular situation;
2. **descriptive translation** — explaining the emotional state through a phrase rather than a single word;

3. **explicitation** — making implicit emotional information more explicit;
4. **modulation** — expressing the same emotional situation from a different conceptual perspective;
5. **paraphrase** — reproducing the meaning through several linguistic units;
6. **compensation** — reproducing an emotional effect elsewhere when it cannot be preserved at the original point.

These strategies demonstrate that translation is not necessarily a process of replacing individual words. It is a process of **reconstructing communicative meaning**.

Another major difficulty arises when emotions are expressed metaphorically. Many languages conceptualize emotions through images associated with the body, movement, temperature, physical force, space, or natural phenomena.

For example, English expressions such as:

- *burst with joy*;
- *consumed by anger*;
- *broken-hearted*;
- *deeply moved*;
- *burning with jealousy*

Cognitive linguistics has demonstrated that metaphor plays an important role in structuring abstract concepts, including emotions. Lakoff and Johnson's work on conceptual metaphor established that metaphor is not simply an ornamental feature of language but can reflect deeper patterns in human conceptualization [Lakoff & Johnson, 1980]. Consequently, translating an emotional metaphor requires more than identifying the words involved. The translator must determine whether the same conceptual metaphor exists in the target culture and whether it produces a comparable emotional effect. Research on Persian-English emotion metaphors, for example, shows that culturally specific metaphorical expressions can reflect different conceptual systems and that metaphor translation therefore involves movement between cultural models rather than simple linguistic correspondence [Safarnejad, Abdullah & Awal, 2014]. This is particularly important when translating between languages with significantly different cultural traditions. A metaphor that appears natural and emotionally powerful in the source language may sound strange or emotionally weak when translated literally.

The problem becomes particularly interesting when examining Uzbek emotional vocabulary because a number of Uzbek concepts combine emotional, interpersonal, moral, and cultural meanings. Consider concepts such as *ko'ngil*, *andisha*, *oriyat*, *mehr*, *hasrat*, and *uyat*. These words can certainly be translated into English or Russian. However, their meanings cannot always be fully represented by one lexical equivalent. For example, *ko'ngil* may refer, depending on context, to the heart, feelings, emotional state, affection, inner disposition, or a person's emotional sensitivity. Translating it consistently as *heart* or *feelings* would therefore risk reducing its semantic range.

Similarly, *andisha* can involve notions of consideration for others, social restraint, modesty, sensitivity to social expectations, or concern about inappropriate behavior. A translation such as *modesty* may capture one aspect while excluding others. The important point is that these concepts should not automatically be classified as “untranslatable.” They are better understood as **culture-specific conceptual structures that require contextual reconstruction**. This distinction is supported by research showing that many supposedly culture-specific emotion terms are nevertheless linguistically translatable when appropriate contextual renderings are used. Ogarkova's review, for example, notes that emotion words regarded as culturally specific can often be rendered through different target-language expressions depending on context.

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