

LINGUISTIC AND PRAGMATIC SPECIFICITIES IN TRANSLATING LEXICAL  
UNITS FOR EMERGENCY SITUATIONS  
(IN THE EXAMPLES OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18001748>

**Abstract.** This study investigates the translation of lexical units employed in emergency contexts, with particular emphasis on the English and Uzbek languages. Through a mixed-methods approach incorporating systematic literature review, comparative textual analysis of parallel corpora, and semi-structured interviews with professional translators, the research identifies key challenges inherent to crisis communication translation. The findings reveal that emergency lexicon is characterized by a high degree of functionality, semantic density, and imperative modality, necessitating translation strategies that prioritize functional equivalence over formal correspondence. Primary obstacles include conceptual gaps for terms like “shelter in place” and “triage,” cultural-pragmatic mismatches in directive force, and the tension between urgency and precision. The study proposes a model emphasizing collaborative translation, pre-established terminology databases, and multimodal adaptation to enhance the efficacy of risk communication in cross-cultural settings. This research contributes to the growing field of crisis linguistics and provides practical guidelines for translators and humanitarian organizations operating in Central Asia.

**Keywords:** emergency translation, crisis communication, functional equivalence, cultural adaptation, terminology management, English-Uzbek translation, disaster risk reduction.

**Annotatsiya.** Tadqiqotda tizimli adabiyotlar tahlili, parallel korpuslar asosida qiyosiy matn tahlili hamda professional tarjimonlar bilan o'tkazilgan yarim tuzilmali intervyularni o'z ichiga olgan aralash metodologiya qo'llanildi. Natijalar inqirozli vaziyatlarda qo'llaniladigan leksika yuqori funktsionallik, semantik zichlik va buyruq-istak (imperativ) modaliteti bilan tavsiflanishini ko'rsatdi. Bu esa tarjimada shakliy moslikdan ko'ra funktsional ekvivalentlikka ustuvor ahamiyat berishni talab etadi. Asosiy muammolar qatoriga “shelter in place”, “triage” kabi tushunchalar uchun konseptual bo'shliqlar, ko'rsatma va buyruqlarning madaniy-pragmatik nomuvofiqligi, shuningdek, tezkorlik va aniqlik o'rtasidagi ziddiyat kiradi. Tadqiqotda hamkorlikka asoslangan tarjima, oldindan shakllantirilgan terminologik bazalar va multimodal moslashtirishni o'z ichiga olgan model taklif etiladi. Ushbu yondashuv turli madaniy muhitlarda xavf-xatar haqida samarali axborot yetkazishni ta'minlashga xizmat qiladi. Tadqiqot inqiroz lingvistikasi sohasini rivojlantirishga hissa qo'shib, Markaziy Osiyoda faoliyat yurituvchi tarjimonlar va gumanitar tashkilotlar uchun amaliy tavsiyalar beradi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** inqirozli kommunikatsiya, funktsional ekvivalentlik, madaniy moslashtirish, terminologiyani boshqarish, ingliz–o'zbek tarjimasi, ofat xavfini kamaytirish.

**Аннотация.** В данном исследовании рассматривается перевод лексических единиц, используемых в условиях чрезвычайных ситуаций, с особым акцентом на английский и узбекский языки. В работе применяется смешанная методология, включающая систематический обзор научной литературы, сопоставительный анализ параллельных корпусов текстов и полуструктурированные интервью с профессиональными переводчиками. Результаты исследования показывают, что лексика чрезвычайных ситуаций характеризуется высокой функциональностью, семантической плотностью и императивной модальностью, что требует приоритета функциональной эквивалентности над формальным соответствием в процессе перевода. К основным трудностям относятся концептуальные лакуны для таких терминов, как «shelter in place» и «triage», культурно-прагматические несоответствия директивной силы, а также

*напряжение между срочностью и точностью передачи информации. В исследовании предлагается модель, основанная на коллективном переводе, предварительно сформированных терминологических базах и мультимодальной адаптации, направленная на повышение эффективности риск-коммуникации в межкультурном контексте. Данное исследование вносит вклад в развитие кризисной лингвистики и предоставляет практические рекомендации для переводчиков и гуманитарных организаций, работающих в Центральной Азии.*

**Ключевые слова:** кризисная коммуникация, функциональная эквивалентность, культурная адаптация, управление терминологией, англо-узбекский перевод, снижение риска бедствий.

**Introduction.** In an era marked by increasing climate-related disasters, global pandemics, and complex humanitarian emergencies, effective communication is a cornerstone of public safety and crisis management [1, p. 214]. The efficiency of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and emergency response often hinges on the accurate, timely, and culturally appropriate translation of warnings, protocols, and guidelines for linguistically diverse populations [2]. While the field of crisis communication has expanded significantly, the specific domain of translating emergency-related lexical units remains under-researched, particularly for language pairs involving languages of limited diffusion like Uzbek [3].

This gap presents a critical operational challenge. Materials produced by international bodies such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO) are primarily authored in English, requiring translation for local implementation. A literal or culturally insensitive translation can lead to misunderstandings, non-compliance, and ultimately, increased vulnerability [4, p. 112]. This study focuses on the English and Uzbek languages, examining the unique linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic hurdles faced when translating the specialized lexicon of emergencies. The primary research objectives are to: (1) systemically identify the defining features of emergency lexicon that complicate translation; (2) analyze recurrent translation problems in parallel English-Uzbek crisis texts; and (3) propose a strategic framework for effective translation in this high-stakes domain.

The translation of terminology in specialized domains presents a significant challenge, requiring not only linguistic equivalence but also cultural and contextual adaptation. This is particularly acute in the field of emergencies, where precise and unambiguous communication can be a matter of life and death. Terms related to disasters, crisis response, medical emergencies, and public safety form a distinct lexical subsystem within any language, characterized by standardization, immediacy, and often, legal or procedural precision.

When bridging English and Uzbek, the translation of emergency-related lexical units reveals unique linguistic and extralinguistic features. English, as a global lingua franca of science, technology, and international aid, has a highly codified and often borrowed (from Latin, Greek, or French) emergency lexicon. Uzbek, a Turkic language with its own historical development and influences from Arabic, Persian, and Russian, has developed and continues to develop its terminology through various means. The process is dynamic, driven

by “extralinguistic factors” such as modernization, reforms, and the need to integrate new concepts from global discourse into the national language.

This study aims to investigate the specific characteristics of translating emergency-specific lexical units from English into Uzbek. It will analyze the predominant translation strategies, identify challenges related to semantic fields and cultural frames, and examine the role of standardization. The central hypothesis is that the translation of this lexicon goes beyond direct equivalence, involving active processes of semantic adaptation, loan translation (calquing), and the creation of new native terms to fit the conceptual world of the Uzbek language and its administrative and social systems.

**Methodology.** This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to triangulate findings from multiple data sources [5].

1. Systematic Literature Review: A comprehensive review was conducted using Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases (2015-2024). Search terms included: “emergency communication translation,” “disaster lexicon,” “crisis linguistics,” “risk communication,” and “cultural adaptation.” From an initial pool of 235 articles, 52 were selected based on relevance to translation studies, crisis communication, or the Central Asian context.

2. Comparative Corpus Analysis: A specialized parallel corpus of approximately 60,000 tokens was compiled, consisting of:

- Source Texts: Official COVID-19 guidelines from WHO and the U.S. CDC; disaster preparedness pamphlets from FEMA and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

- Target Texts: Their officially published Uzbek translations by the Ministry of Health of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Emergency Situations.

- Analysis: Using qualitative content analysis, key lexical units (n=120) were extracted and compared across the language pair. Focus was placed on terms related to directives (“evacuate,” “shelter”), warnings (“imminent threat,” “critical danger”), and procedural terminology (“quarantine,” “triage”).

3. Expert Elicitation via Semi-Structured Interviews: To gain practical insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 professional translators accredited by the government of Uzbekistan and with experience translating emergency materials. Interviews, lasting 45-60 minutes each, explored decision-making processes, encountered difficulties, and perceived strategies for handling culture-specific concepts.

4. Data Integration and Analysis: Thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts, while the corpus data underwent both qualitative analysis for pragmatic function and simple quantitative analysis for term frequency and translation consistency. Findings from all strands were integrated to develop a cohesive understanding of the translation challenges and strategies.

This research employs a descriptive and comparative linguistic analysis. The primary method is a contrastive study of lexical units within the semantic field of emergencies, drawn from authentic parallel texts.

Corpus: The analysis is based on a compiled bilingual corpus consisting of:

- Official documents: Translated emergency procedures, disaster management guidelines from international organizations (e.g., UN, Red Cross) and Uzbek government agencies.
- Public awareness materials: Brochures, websites, and announcements related to fire safety, earthquake preparedness, and medical first aid.
- Media reports: Coverage of natural disasters and accidents from international news agencies and their Uzbek counterparts.
- Procedure: Lexical units (single words and multi-word terms) were extracted from the English source texts. Their Uzbek translations were then identified in the parallel texts. Each pair was analyzed according to the following parameters:

1. Translation Strategy: Categorization as direct borrowing, transliteration, calque (loan translation), descriptive translation, or the use of a native synonym.

2. Morphological Adaptation: How borrowed terms are adapted to Uzbek phonology and morphology (e.g., suffixation).

3. Semantic Analysis: Examination of semantic narrowing, broadening, or shift in the translated term compared to the source.

4. Terminological Consistency: Observation of variation or standardization in the translation of key terms across different text types.

This approach allows for the systematic identification of patterns and predominant trends in the cross-linguistic transfer of emergency terminology.

**Results and Discussion.** 1. Defining Features of Emergency Lexicon and Translation Challenges. Analysis identified three core features of emergency lexicon that directly impact translation:

- High Functional Load and Imperative Modality: Lexical units primarily function to instigate immediate action. For example, the phrase “Evacuate now!” carries an illocutionary force of a command. A direct translation into Uzbek (“Darhol evakuatsiya qiling!”) may be semantically accurate but can be perceived as overly abrupt. Interview data suggested a preference for mitigated directives that align with local communicative norms, such as “Vaziyat zudlik bilan evakuatsiya qilishni talab qiladi” (“The situation requires immediate evacuation”) [6, p. 118].

- Conceptual Gaps and Asymmetries: Several key English emergency concepts lack direct lexical equivalents in Uzbek. The term “shelter in place” exemplifies this. A literal translation (“o‘rinli boshpana”) is meaningless. Corpus analysis revealed the adopted strategy was explanatory translation: “Uyingizda (yoki binoda) qoling va tashqariga chiqmang”

(“Stay at home (or in the building) and do not go outside”), which conveys the procedural meaning effectively [7].

•Cultural-Pragmatic Embeddedness: The acceptability of communication styles varies. O’Brien and Cadwell (2021) note that direct imperatives common in Anglo-American crisis communication may reduce compliance in cultures valuing collective harmony and less confrontational discourse [4]. Translators interviewed consistently reported “softening” directives by using plural forms, collective appeals (“Keling, birgalikda...”. “Let’s together...”), or framing actions as communal responsibilities.

## 2. Analysis of Specific English-Uzbek Translation Problems.

•Case 1: “Triage.” This medical emergency concept was initially translated as “saralash” (sorting), which is too generic. The official Uzbek COVID-19 protocol later used an explanatory clause: “Bemorlarni davolash ustuvorligi bo‘yicha tezkor ko‘rikdan o‘tkazish” (“Rapid examination of patients to determine treatment priority”) [8]. This demonstrates a shift from a single-term equivalence to a functional-definitional approach.

•Case 2: Risk Level Modifiers. Terms like “critical,” “severe,” and “elevated” pose problems of semantic granularity. The Uzbek translation for a “Critical fire danger” warning initially used “jiddiy” (serious).

Post-interview analysis with meteorologists led to the adoption of a more explicit, numerically-anchored translation: “Yong‘in xavfi eng yuqori darajada (5-darajali)” (“Fire danger at the highest level [Level 5]”) supplemented with a prescribed action [9].

•Case 3: “Maintain social distancing.” The WHO guideline was translated as “Ijtimoiy masofani saqlang.” However, feedback indicated that “ijtimoiy” (social) was misinterpreted. A subsequent, more effective translation specified the measurable action: “Boshqalardan kamida 1 metr (ikki qadam) masofani saqlang” (“Maintain a distance of at least 1 meter (two steps) from others”) [10], incorporating a familiar cultural metric.

## 3. Toward a Strategic Framework for Emergency Translation.

Based on the integrated findings, a three-pillar strategic framework is proposed:

•Pillar 1: Functional Equivalence as the Core Principle. Translators must prioritize the intended perlocutionary effect (the action or understanding prompted in the receiver) over word-for-word accuracy. This often necessitates syntactic restructuring, explication, and the use of familiar cultural schemas.

•Pillar 2: Collaborative and Pre-emptive Terminology Management. Translation should not be an isolated task. Establishing glossaries of key emergency terms – developed collaboratively by translators, subject-matter experts (e.g., epidemiologists, seismologists), and cultural consultants – before a crisis strikes is essential for consistency and speed.

•Pillar 3: Multimodal and Audience-Centered Adaptation. Textual translation must be complemented by format adaptation. This includes integrating visual symbols (pictograms),

adapting information for radio/SMS alerts, and ensuring readability for populations with varying literacy levels.

The analysis revealed several key features characterizing the translation of emergency lexicon from English to Uzbek.

#### 1. Prevalence of Calquing and Descriptive Translation.

A dominant strategy is the use of calques, where the morphemic structure of the English term is translated literally. This is often complemented by descriptive phrases to convey complex concepts.

Example: “First responder” is frequently translated as “birinchi javob beruvchi” (birinchi javobgar shaxs) (first + answer + giver), a direct calque. A term like “search and rescue (SAR)” is often rendered descriptively as “qidiruv-qutqaruv ishlari” (search-rescue operations).

#### 2. Strategic Use of Borrowing and Transliteration.

International technical terms, especially acronyms and names of technologies, are often borrowed or transliterated, sometimes followed by a gloss.

Example: “GPS” remains “GPS”, but is explained as “Global Positioning System” or described as “joylashuvni aniqlash tizimi”. Medical terms like “defibrillator” are commonly transliterated as “defibrillator” and enter professional jargon.

#### 3. Activation of Native Lexical Resources.

Uzbek actively utilizes its native lexical stock or older loanwords integrated into the language to create new terminological meanings.

Example: The concept of “emergency” itself can be rendered by the native word “favqulodda” (extraordinary), the Arabic-derived “tavqif” (stopping, i.e., a halt to normalcy), or the Russian-derived “avariya” (accident, breakdown), depending on the context (administrative, general, technical).

#### 4. Variation and Instability.

For many core concepts, multiple translation variants coexist, indicating an ongoing process of terminological standardization.

Example: “Disaster risk reduction” may appear as “ofat xavfini kamaytirish”, “falokat xatarini qisqartirish”, or “tabiiy ofatlar xavfini minimallashtirish”, reflecting different choices for the words “disaster,” “risk,” and “reduction.”

#### 5. Morpho-Phonological Adaptation.

Borrowed terms are systematically adapted to Uzbek phonetic patterns and grammatical rules, such as agglutination.

Example: An English borrowing like “informer” becomes “informatorga” and can take Uzbek case endings: “informatorga” (to the informer), “informatorlar” (informers).

The findings confirm that the translation of emergency terminology is a complex process of intercultural mediation. The prevalence of calquing and descriptive translation

suggests a tendency to domesticate foreign concepts by fitting them into familiar Uzbek syntactic and morphological structures. This enhances comprehensibility for the general public but can sometimes lead to elongated phrases that lack the conciseness of the English original.

The coexistence of native terms, older loanwords, and new transliterations (e.g., “favqulodda,” “tavqif,” “avariya”) highlights the layered nature of Uzbek’s lexical history and the context-dependent nature of term choice. The observed variation and instability point to a current lack of full standardization in this domain. While this may be typical for a dynamically evolving field, in emergency contexts, a lack of consistency can potentially lead to confusion.

Ultimately, the translation of emergency lexicon in Uzbek is being shaped by two powerful forces: the pressure of global English-language discourse and the internal drive to express new concepts through the resources and patterns of the Uzbek language. The resulting terminology is hybrid, pragmatic, and still in a state of formation.

**Conclusion.** This study demonstrates that translating for emergencies is a distinct, high-responsibility specialization within translation studies. The English-Uzbek analysis underscores that challenges extend beyond linguistics into the realms of cultural pragmatics, conceptual mapping, and behavioral psychology. Effective translation in this context requires a paradigm shift from a text-centric to a communication-effect-centric model. The proposed framework of functional equivalence, collaborative terminology work, and multimodal adaptation offers a pathway to more resilient and effective cross-cultural crisis communication. Future research should explore the application of this framework to other language pairs and assess the impact of standardized, pre-translated emergency protocols on actual community response times and compliance rates during disasters.

This study has outlined the distinctive features of translating emergency-related lexical units from English into Uzbek.

The process is characterized by a strong reliance on calquing and descriptive translation, selective borrowing of international technical terms, the creative activation of native and integrated lexical resources, and a current state of variation that signals ongoing terminological development.

The implications are significant for translators, terminologists, and state language planners. There is a clear need for developing standardized glossaries and style guides for emergency management to ensure clarity and consistency in public communication, training materials, and official documentation. Future research should expand the corpus to include spoken discourse (e.g., emergency service radio communications) and conduct reception studies to gauge the actual comprehensibility of different translation choices among the Uzbek speaking population.

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