# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EMOJI, GIF, AND STICKER USAGE IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION

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## ABSTRACT

The rapid development of social media platforms has introduced new forms of visual communication such as emojis, GIFs, and stickers. These elements function as digital paralinguistic tools that enhance emotional expression and clarify meaning in text-based interaction. This study investigates the differences in the usage of emojis, GIFs, and stickers among English and Uzbek social media users. The research analyzes communicative examples collected from Telegram, Instagram, and Twitter in order to identify cultural and pragmatic differences in visual communication practices. The results indicate that while English-speaking users tend to use GIFs and reaction memes more frequently, Uzbek users rely heavily on stickers and emojis to express emotions and politeness. The study demonstrates that cultural norms, platform preferences, and communication styles significantly influence the use of visual elements in online discourse.

**KEYWORDS:** Emoji, GIF, sticker, digital communication, pragmatics, social media discourse, cross-cultural communication.

## INTRODUCTION

Digital communication has undergone significant transformation with the emergence of visual elements such as emojis, GIFs, and stickers. These visual tools function as paralinguistic features, helping users convey emotions, tone, and pragmatic meanings that are often difficult to express through text alone (Danesi, 2016). Social media platforms such as Telegram, Instagram, and Twitter have contributed to the increasing integration of these elements into everyday communication.

Emojis, GIFs, and stickers serve as important components of computer-mediated communication (CMC) because they compensate for the absence of nonverbal cues like facial expressions and gestures (Dresner & Herring, 2010). However, their usage may vary significantly across cultures and languages. Cultural norms, communication styles, and platform preferences influence how users integrate visual elements into online interaction.

This study explores the comparative usage of emojis, GIFs, and stickers among English and Uzbek social media users, focusing on frequency, pragmatic functions, and communicative purposes. Understanding these differences provides insight into how digital discourse reflects broader sociolinguistic and cultural patterns.

## Literature Review

Recent research has highlighted the role of emojis as a new form of digital semiotics, functioning similarly to gestures in face-to-face communication (Danesi, 2016). According to Evans (2017), emojis contribute to meaning construction by modifying or reinforcing textual messages. They can signal emotions, clarify intentions, and prevent misunderstandings in online communication.

Studies have shown that emojis are widely used to express emotional states such as happiness, sarcasm, or empathy (Riordan, 2017). In addition, emojis may serve pragmatic functions such as softening criticism, reinforcing politeness, or indicating humor (Kelly & Watts, 2015). Research by Miller et al. (2016) suggests that emojis help convey intended tone, reducing ambiguity in text-based communication.

GIFs and stickers represent another important form of visual communication. Unlike emojis, which are small symbolic icons, GIFs often convey dynamic emotional reactions or humorous responses (Herring & Dainas, 2017). Stickers, particularly popular on messaging platforms like Telegram, function as expressive images that combine emotional expression with cultural references (Ge & Gretzel, 2018).

Cross-cultural research indicates that digital communication patterns differ between linguistic communities. For example, some cultures rely more heavily on visual expressions to demonstrate politeness and friendliness (Gawne & McCulloch, 2019). Similarly, emotional expression through emojis may vary depending on cultural expectations and communication norms (Bai et al., 2019).

In Central Asian digital environments, messaging platforms such as Telegram play a dominant role in daily communication. Uzbek users frequently employ stickers and emoji combinations as a way of expressing reactions and emotions in informal conversations. In contrast, English-speaking users often rely more heavily on GIFs and reaction memes, particularly on platforms like Twitter and Instagram (Li & Yang, 2018).

## Methodology

This study adopts a comparative qualitative and quantitative approach. A dataset of 300 social media messages was collected from three widely used platforms:

• Telegram
• Instagram
• Twitter/X

The dataset included messages written by English-speaking users (150 messages) and Uzbek-speaking users (150 messages).

The analysis focused on three categories of visual communication elements:

1. Emoji usage
2. GIF usage
3. Sticker usage

Each message was examined to identify:

• frequency of visual elements
• communicutive function
• emotional expression

The results were categorized into pragmatic functions such as emotional expression, humor, agreement, and politeness.

## Results and Analysis

The findings demonstrate clear differences between English and Uzbek users in their use of visual communication elements.

**Frequency of Visual Elements**

| Visual Element | English Users | Uzbek Users |
|---|---|---|
| Emojis | 65% | 72% |
| GIFs | 40% | 15% |
| Stickers | 10% | 55% |

The results show that Uzbek users rely heavily on stickers, especially on Telegram, while English users prefer GIFs, particularly on Twitter and Instagram.

Pragmatic Functions

Emojis were used primarily for emotional expression in both groups. The most frequent emojis included:

• 😊 (happiness)

• 😂 (laughter)

• ❤️ (affection)

These findings support earlier research showing that emojis function as emotional markers in online communication (Novak et al., 2015).

In Uzbek communication, emojis were frequently used to soften statements and show politeness, especially in responses such as:

"Rahmat 😊"

In contrast, English users often used emojis to intensify emotional reactions, for example:

"That's amazing! 🔥😍"

GIFs were mostly used by English users to convey humor or sarcasm. Reaction GIFs often referenced popular media or cultural memes. This supports previous studies suggesting that GIFs function as shared cultural references in digital communication (Herring & Dainas, 2017). Stickers, however, were significantly more common among Uzbek users. Many Telegram sticker packs include culturally recognizable characters or humorous expressions, making them an important part of informal digital interaction.

## Discussion

The findings demonstrate that cultural and technological factors influence digital communication styles. Uzbek users appear to rely more on visual expressiveness through stickers, possibly because messaging platforms like Telegram dominate the regional communication ecosystem.

English users, on the other hand, tend to use GIFs and reaction memes, which are widely integrated into global social media culture. These patterns illustrate how digital communication evolves within specific cultural contexts.

Furthermore, emojis function as a universal visual language, but their pragmatic interpretation may still vary across linguistic communities (Stark & Crawford, 2015). This highlights the importance of considering sociolinguistic factors when analyzing digital discourse.

## Conclusion

The study reveals notable differences in the use of emojis, GIFs, and stickers between English and Uzbek social media users. While emojis are widely used by both groups to express emotions and clarify meaning, GIFs are more common among English users, whereas stickers play a more prominent role in Uzbek digital communication.

These findings emphasize the role of culture, platform preferences, and communication norms in shaping digital interaction. Future research could expand the dataset and explore additional variables such as gender differences, age groups, or the influence of artificial intelligence on emoji prediction and usage.

Understanding these patterns contributes to the broader field of digital linguistics and cross-cultural communication, providing insight into how visual language is reshaping modern online discourse.

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