IMPLICIT MANIPULATION IN ONLINE NEWS DISCOURSE: PRESUPPOSITION AND IMPLICATURE IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH HEADLINES

Nazarov Murodjon Maxsudbekovich
ORCID: 0000-0002-2846-5096
nazarov.murod84@gmail.com
Urgench state university
Bekberganov Avazbek Maqsud o'g'li
ORCID: 0009-0003-3746-2647
bekberganovavazbek@gmail.com
Urgench state university

Abstract. Manipulative meaning in news discourse is rarely asserted; it is conveyed by what the text takes for granted and by what it invites the reader to infer. This paper analyses two pragmatic mechanisms of implicit influence — presupposition and conversational implicature — in Uzbek and English online news headlines. Five recurrent devices are described: change-of-state and factive predicates, the iterative marker yana / again, wh-question headlines, scare quotes, and quantity-based number framing. The analysis shows that the devices are shared across the two languages, while the means of their realisation differ: Uzbek relies substantially on morphological evidential and inferential marking, English on lexical and syntactic resources. The paper argues that presupposition is manipulative not in itself but under specific conditions, and proposes three criteria for identifying those conditions in media texts.

Keywords: manipulation, presupposition, implicature, online news discourse, evidentiality, pragmatics, Uzbek, English.

1. Introduction

Studies of media influence have traditionally concentrated on what news texts assert. Pragmatic research, however, has repeatedly shown that the most consequential content of a text is often not asserted at all. Presupposed material is not presented for discussion: it is treated as already shared, and accepting the utterance entails accepting it (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). Implicated material is equally consequential and even less accountable, since the author can always deny having said it. Van Dijk (2006) therefore treats implicit meaning as the central resource of discursive manipulation, and Maillat and Oswald (2009) model manipulation as the restriction of the context that the addressee uses to interpret an utterance.

This paper applies that framework to the headlines of Uzbek and English online news publications. The aim is twofold: to describe the recurrent devices of implicit influence in the two languages, and to formulate criteria that allow a researcher to distinguish ordinary, communicatively necessary presupposition from its manipulative use.

2. Presupposition, implicature and the limits of manipulation

Presupposition is a normal condition of economical communication: no text can assert everything it relies on. It becomes a resource of manipulation when three conditions are met simultaneously. First, the presupposed proposition is itself contestable — it is a matter of dispute rather than of shared knowledge. Second, the reader is given no accessible position from which to challenge it, because the textual format (a headline) does not allow negotiation. Third, accepting the presupposition serves an interest that is not the reader's. These three criteria are used in the present analysis as an operational test.

Implicature differs in its accountability profile. A conversational implicature is cancellable and deniable (Grice, 1975): the author can claim that only the literal content

was communicated. In news headlines this deniability is exploited systematically, particularly in the framing of figures and in the use of quotation marks.

3. Material and method

The material consists of headlines from the Uzbek portals Kun.uz and Gazeta.uz and from British online outlets, collected in September 2026. Each headline was examined for presupposition triggers and for inferences that are not entailed by its literal content. The devices are presented below in decreasing order of explicitness.

4. Devices of implicit influence

4.1. Change-of-state and factive predicates. A predicate that reports a change presupposes the prior state. The headline «Sifatsiz tovar uchun elektron savdoda kim javob berishi belgilandi» (Kun.uz, 11 September 2026) asserts that responsibility has been assigned, and presupposes that substandard goods in e-commerce are an existing problem. The reader may disagree with the assignment of responsibility, but the existence of the problem enters the discourse without being open to disagreement. The same mechanism operates in English headlines built on verbs such as admit, reveal and confirm, which additionally mark the reported proposition as true.

4.2. The iterative marker. The adverb yana (“again”) presupposes a previous occurrence and, in headlines about negative events, constructs a pattern out of a single instance: «Toshkentda havo sifati vaqtincha keskin yomonlashdi. Bu holat kechasi yana takrorlanishi kutilmoqda» (Gazeta.uz, 19 September 2026); «Bo‘stonliqdagi tog‘larda yana yong‘in chiqdi» (Gazeta.uz, 31 July 2025). English again functions identically. The pragmatic effect is an implicit evaluation of institutional performance — repetition implies that the problem is unresolved — while the text itself makes no such claim and cannot be held to it.

4.3. Wh-question headlines. Question-form headlines are the most productive presupposition carrier in the Uzbek material. «Nega Toshkentda uylar narxi qayta baholandi?» (Kun.uz, 14 September 2026) presupposes that the revaluation took place; «Nimaning hisobiga Vetnam Xitoyni ortda qoldirib AQShning yangi "fabrikasi"ga aylandi?» (Kun.uz, 12 September 2026) presupposes both that Vietnam has overtaken China and that this has a single identifiable cause. Because the presupposition survives under questioning, a wh-headline places its content beyond negotiation while appearing to open a dialogue. Measured against the three criteria formulated in Section 2, such headlines are not automatically manipulative: they become so when the embedded proposition is contested, as in the second example, where a complex economic process is reduced to a single cause.

4.4. Scare quotes. Quotation marks around a term — "yashil" energiya (Gazeta.uz, 19 September 2026) — implicate that the term is not to be accepted at face value, without stating what is wrong with it. The device is maximally deniable: the marks can always be presented as a simple citation. English headlines use the same resource, frequently in combination with a distancing reporting verb such as claim, which shifts responsibility for the proposition onto the cited source.

4.5. Number framing and quantity implicature. Figures in headlines are rarely neutral. Selecting one measure rather than another generates an implicature of relevance: the chosen figure is presented as the one that matters. "Household energy bills to rise by 6.4% from April 1, Ofgem says" foregrounds a percentage; an alternative framing in absolute terms would produce a different evaluative effect from identical data. In the Uzbek material, «Qoraqalpog'istonda oilaviy tadbirkorlik kreditlari stavkasi 17,5 foizdan 12 foizga tushiriladi» (Gazeta.uz, 19 September 2026) constructs positive evaluation entirely through the arithmetic of the two figures, with no evaluative

lexis whatsoever. The evaluation is implicated by the direction of the change, and the author remains formally neutral.

4.6. Evidential marking as an Uzbek-specific resource. Uzbek encodes the source and reliability of information morphologically. Forms in -ibdi, -ekan and -(i)nishicha mark a proposition as inferred or reported and thereby transfer epistemic responsibility away from the author. English achieves a comparable effect analytically, through reportedly, according to and modal verbs. The contrast is not one of presence versus absence but of coding level, and it has a practical consequence for contrastive analysis: an Uzbek suffix and an English adverbial may be functionally equivalent while belonging to different levels of the language system.

5. Discussion

Two conclusions follow. First, the inventory of implicit devices is shared: both media spaces presuppose through change-of-state predicates, iterative markers, question forms and scare quotes, and both implicate through the framing of figures. What differs is the level of realisation — morphological in Uzbek, lexical and syntactic in English. Second, the manipulative status of a device cannot be read off its form. The same wh-headline may be an efficient summary or a manipulative reduction, depending on whether the embedded proposition is contested and whose interest its acceptance serves. Analytical categories for media discourse should therefore be formulated in terms of conditions of use rather than of inventories of forms.

6. Conclusion

Implicit influence in online news headlines operates through a small set of stable pragmatic mechanisms that are available in both Uzbek and English. The three criteria proposed here — contestability of the presupposed proposition, absence of a position

from which to challenge it, and divergence of interest — offer a workable test for distinguishing manipulation from ordinary informational economy. The description is based on a limited set of headlines and requires verification on a larger balanced corpus; it nevertheless indicates that the contrastive study of media manipulation should proceed from pragmatic function to form, and not the reverse.

References

Austin, J. L. (1962). How to do things with words. Oxford University Press.

Bell, A. (1991). The language of news media. Blackwell.

Fairclough, N. (1989). Language and power. Longman.

Fairclough, N. (1995). Media discourse. Edward Arnold.

Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), Syntax and semantics: Vol. 3. Speech acts (pp. 41–58). Academic Press.

Hall, E. T. (1976). Beyond culture. Anchor Books.

Levinson, S. C. (1983). Pragmatics. Cambridge University Press.

Maillat, D., & Oswald, S. (2009). Defining manipulative discourse: The pragmatics of cognitive illusions. International Review of Pragmatics, 1(2), 348–370.

Reah, D. (2002). The language of newspapers (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Safarov, Sh. (2008). Pragmalingvistika. O‘zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi.

Saussure, L. de, & Schulz, P. (Eds.). (2005). Manipulation and ideologies in the twentieth century: Discourse, language, mind. John Benjamins.

van Dijk, T. A. (1988). News as discourse. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Discourse and manipulation. Discourse & Society, 17(3), 359–383.

Yule, G. (1996). Pragmatics. Oxford University Press.