



ANALYSIS OF THE CONATIVE AND PHATIC FUNCTIONS IN MEDIA DISCOURSE HEADLINES (CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK)

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a comparative-typological analysis of the manifestation of conative (imperative) and phatic (contact-establishing) functions in English and Uzbek media discourse headlines, focusing on linguopragmatic and modality characteristics. Drawing upon R. Jakobson's theory of communicative functions and N. Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, the study examines headline materials from online media outlets published between 2025 and 2026. The findings indicate that while the conative function in English headlines is predominantly realized through explicit imperative structures and strong deontic modality, it relies more on cognitive dissonance, rhetorical questions, and implicit subtext in the Uzbek language. On the level of the phatic function, person-oriented syntactic models prevail in English, whereas highly emotional-expressive vocabulary and dramatic metaphors dominate in Uzbek. The study concludes that phatic and conative functions act as an interconnected dialectical linguistic-manipulative mechanism within the system of media headlines. The final results serve to enrich the fields of modern comparative media linguistics, pragmalinguistics, and text translation with new scientific data, providing an important practical basis for special university courses.

KEYWORDS: Media discourse, linguistics of headlines, conative function, phatic function, linguopragmatics, modality, quasi-interactivity, cognitive dissonance, comparative-typological analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Today, media discourse and issues of medialinguistics make up the majority of modern research in the field of linguistics. In researching the linguistic and cultural characteristics of media discourse in various languages, scholars have been studying different linguistic means within media discourse as well as its linguopragmatic features as objects of study. The communicative functions of the media discourse headlines we intend to analyze in this study also, in a sense, serve as a communicative bridge between the journalist and the audience.

In studies on media discourse and headline linguistics, scholars such as T. van Dijk, N. Fairclough, T. Dobrosklonskaya, M. Bednarek, and H. Caple have analyzed the communicative, cognitive, and pragmatic features of media texts. Currently, in modern linguistics, there is a substantial body of research focused on studying the role of headlines in media discourse. According to prominent researchers in the field, such as S. Borchmann and D. Dor, headlines not only serve as the initial element of a text but also emerge as an important communicative tool between the author and the reader [S. Borchmann, 2024; D. Dor, 2003]. Headlines have several



communicative functions in the communicative process between the reader and the author. T.van Dijk distinguishes the informative, persuasive, and expressive functions of headlines [T. Dijk, 1988]. From a pragmatic standpoint, headlines serve as a means for the journalist to achieve a specific communicative intent, elicit the desired emotional response from the reader, and spark interest in the article's content.

Another scholar who analyzed the communicative functions of headlines in media discourse, R.Jakobson, developed the theory of communicative functions and distinguished six functions of language (referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalinguistic, and poetic) [R. Jakobson, 1987]). Each of these headlines has its own distinctive means of manifestation and differs according to the specific function it performs. The purpose of this study is to identify and linguistically and pragmatically investigate the means by which the conative and phatic functions manifest in English and Uzbek media discourse materials, among the six functions distinguished by R. Jakobson. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by N.Fairclough, evaluates media language as a social practice that shapes ideological perspectives and power relations in society. From this perspective, R. Ramanathan and B.Tan propose a sociodiagnostic criticism methodology to uncover the overt or covert persuasive features of media texts. This serves to identify the conative (persuasive) purposes hidden behind the phatic communication in headlines.

A. O'Keeffe, who studied the sender-receiver relationship in media discourse, describes the connection between a media text and an indeterminate, distant reader as "quasi-interactive" (quasi-interactive) and emphasizes the creation of artificial intimacy through linguistic means [A.O'Keeffe]. At the headline level, this process is managed based on "audience design," and the implicatures that arise from the deliberate violation of P. Grice's maxims of conversation transform the phatical connection into a conative impulse.

In Uzbek linguistics, the nominative, informative, and communicative-marketing functions of journalistic text headlines are also in competition with each other, and the various implicative devices and psychological hooks (questions, solutions, and promise, personal experience, and digital types) activate the reader's background knowledge, thereby enhancing the text's persuasive effect. However, most of the research conducted to date has been limited either to a single language material or to the stylistic aspects of general journalism. headlines in the English and Uzbek media space specifically in the context of the interplay between their phatic (contact-establishing, attention-grabbing) and conative (action-inducing, manipulative) functions, The issue of researching their comparative-typological mechanisms and national-cultural factors has not been a specific object of study in linguistics and remains unexplored. Methodology. During the study, a comparative-typological analysis method and discourse analysis were used to identify the linguopragmatic and modality characteristics of the conative and phatic functions in the headlines of the English and Uzbek media discourse. According to R. Jakobson's theory, to analyze media headlines in English and Uzbek, The Guardian, BBC, The New York Post, CNBC, Daily Express, as well as Uza, Gazeta.uz, Headlines from online media publications such as Xabar.uz and Qalampir.uz, presented in 2025-2026, were selected as the research object.

Results. In R. Jakobson's theory, the conative function is distinguished from the function of directly influencing the reader. Here, through the headline, the author calls on the reader, gives orders, and urges them to take action. This type of function manifests its most complete form

through imperatives and exhortations. Below, we analyze a headline from the Daily Express online edition for the analysis of an English media headline:

“Would Angela Rayner be a better PM than Keir Starmer? Vote here.” - This headline is a perfect example of the conative function in action. Here, the conative function is achieved in two ways: through the question form and a direct command. The “Would... be better?” question form directly invites the reader to think and debate. It is a rhetorical question, intended to elicit the reader's personal opinion. The command “Vote here” in the second part prompts the reader to take a specific action—voting. Modally, the phrase “would be better” expresses epistemic modality speculation, possibility, and assessment. The modal verb “would” indicates a hypothetical situation and relies on the reader's evaluation. Pragmatically, the headline combines two purposes: first, to engage the reader in an intellectual discussion, and second, to prompt a specific action (to vote). Such interactive headlines are a typical example of headlines in English media discourse involving the conative function.

“Sadiq Khan should be stripped of control of the Met Police says damning new report” – in this headline, the emergence of the conative function is strongly manifested through the modal verb “should.” The phrase “should be stripped of” in the headline expresses deontic modality. Here, “should” is used not in the sense of suggestion or recommendation but as a firm demand or obligation. The phrase “damning new report” serves as a strong negative evaluation, reinforcing the basis for this demand. From a pragmatic standpoint, the headline's purpose is to persuade the reader of a specific idea namely, that Sadiq Khan must step down from power and to foster a negative opinion.

“Britain and US must send an astronaut to the Moon again- before China does it” - this headline, as we have noted above, can also serve as a fitting example of the combined conative function and modality. The use of the modal verb “must” in the headline strongly expresses the conative function, indicating a more emphatic obligation and necessity than “should”. The phrase “must send” conveys the highest level of obligation—it is not just a recommendation, but an imperative action. In terms of modality, the phrase “before China does it” creates a geopolitical context and expresses international competition. It indicates the reason for the necessity—the importance of speed and victory.

In Uzbek media discourse, the conative function is also manifested in headlines according to national-cultural characteristics. Analyzing this through examples further enhances the significance of our research:

“Havoni tozalashda jahon tajribasi: bizda ham joriy etish mumkinmi?” (“Global Experience in Air Purification: Can We Implement It Here Too?”) - This headline is a clear example of the conative function in Uzbek media discourse. The use of a question in the headline encourages the reader to think and engage in discussion. In terms of modality, the word “mumkin” is an instance of epistemic modality, expressing possibility, and its use with the interrogative particle –mi? directly engages the reader. From a pragmatic standpoint, the headline piques the reader's interest and encourages them to read the article.

“Raqamlar o'sishda davom etyapti”. O'zbekistonda narkojinoyatchilikka qarshi qanday kurashilmoqda?” (“The numbers continue to grow.” How is drug crime being fought in Uzbekistan?”)- This headline from Uzbek media discourse also directly expresses the conative function. The use of a question in the headline directly prompts the reader to think and engage in a discussion. It encourages the reader to read the article with interest, as the topic is a



significant social issue today. In terms of modality, there are no modal elements in this headline, but the classic conative function is evident. The pragmatic goal of the headline is to alert the reader and urge them not to be indifferent to the social problem of drug crime in Uzbekistan. "So'zda ittifoqchi, amalda begona". Rossiya nega Markaziy osiyoliklarni siqib chiqarib, hind ishchilarini tanlamoqda?" ("An ally in words, a stranger in practice." "Why is Russia squeezing out Central Asians and choosing Indian workers?") – from this headline we can see that the journalist has skillfully chosen his words and directly urges the reader to think and reflect. Here, the conative function is not expressed in a direct imperative form, but is achieved through provocation (psychological arousal) by means of a cognitive conflict. Upon reading the headline, the reader's eye is drawn to the antithesis—the juxtaposition of the concepts "ally" and "stranger" captures their attention. From a pragmatic perspective, this headline evokes in the reader a sense of "being deceived" or "reality differing from expectations."

According to R. Jakobson's theory, in the phatic function the author directs attention to establishing contact with the reader directly and maintaining that contact throughout the entire article. This function requires a greater number of words, but this characteristic does not meet the requirements for article and journal titles. For this reason, we can see this function being more actively used in various blog posts and online article headlines.

We will examine how this phatic function is realized in media discourse in English and Uzbek through several real headline examples. In both languages, the phatic (contact-establishing) features of headlines rely on specific linguocultural and cognitive models.

"Simply can't wait!". Demand grows for emergency census after immigration rockets." - this English media discourse headline is a clear example of the expression of the phatic function. The exclamation mark in the headline, the emotionally colored quotation, quickly captures the addressee's attention and signals, as if to say, "Listen to this". Subjective modality dominates the headline, and the quotation-marked phrase "Simply can't wait!" evokes feelings of impatience and anxiety in the reader. From a pragmatic perspective, the first part of the headline serves a purely phatical function, that is, it stops the reader, while the second part manifests a referential function. Here, the phatic component serves as a "compelling" force that urges the reader to read the rest of the headline.

"Trump says 'Housing First' Failed the Homeless. Here's what the Evidence says." – this example of media discourse directly corresponds to the classic form of the phatic function. In the phatic function, the primary priority is to engage the reader and establish communication. In this example, the phrase "Here's what..." serves to establish contact with the reader and prepare them for the following information. In terms of modality, modality is almost absent in the phatic function, because the journalist uses this function not to express an attitude toward any information, but rather to establish contact and address the reader. From a pragmatic standpoint, this headline directly serves to present an alternative viewpoint and to draw the reader into the article's content. This type of phatic function is actively used in political and debate-oriented topics.

"The beautiful UK seaside village where you can spot dolphins and orcas from the beach" – in this media-discourse headline, the pronoun "you" directly addresses the reader, inviting them into a virtual conversation. From a modal perspective, the modal verb "can" in the headline appears in the indicative form. From a pragmatic standpoint, it arouses the reader's curiosity—"where is this?"—and prompts them to read the text. This method, common in English media



discourse, transforms the reader from a passive information recipient into a potential participant in reality. This serves to keep a long-term channel of communication with the reader open from a pragmatic standpoint and to personalize their interest.

Examining several examples in Uzbek after analyzing English-language media headlines further strengthens our research: “Daxshat! Toshkentda maktab o‘quvchisining qo‘li pirotexnika portlashi oqibatida og‘ir shikastlandi-bola barmoqlarisiz qoldi.” (“Horror! In Tashkent, a school student’s hand was severely injured by a pyrotechnic explosion—the boy was left without fingers.”) - As the example of the Uzbek media discourse headline shows, the phatic function serves to attract the reader’s attention through the lexical device “Daxshat” and to establish a bridge of communication between the addressee and the addressor. From a pragmatic standpoint, the phatic connection is reinforced by evoking empathy and social fear in the reader. Through this message, the author calls the reader to be vigilant and urges caution.

“Kosmosga uchadigan o‘zbek va jinoiy to‘dalarga eslatma: prezident murojaatida nimalar dedi?” (“Uzbek to be sent into space and criminal gangs: what did the president say in his address?”) - this headline uses two completely opposing groups to grab the reader's attention. “Uzbek who will fly to space” (positive/future) and “criminal gangs” (negative/crime) are placed side by side and have successfully served to capture the addressee's attention. In this headline, the phatic function is realized through lexical contrast and rhetorical devices. From a pragmatic standpoint, it sharply directs the addressee's attention to the text and, in a state of emotional astonishment, prompts them to seek an answer to the question and to read the article.

“Ko‘rinmas dushman: Is gazi qachon uyga kirib keladi?” (“Invisible Enemy: When Will the Gas Come Home?”) - in headlines of this type, the phatic function is manifested in an extremely powerful way through a metaphorical marker and a rhetorical question. The headline's opening with the “invisible enemy” metaphor is designed to pique the reader's interest and draw their full attention to the article. From a pragmatic standpoint, the phatic contact here is built on the reader's personal safety, and the question in the second part of the headline does not expect an answer from the reader but rather urges them to be vigilant. In terms of modality, there are no evaluative devices in this heading, which indicates that the primary goal of the phatic function is to establish and maintain contact with the reader.

Discussion. The results obtained within the framework of the linguopragmatic and modality characteristics of the conative and phatic functions in the headlines of English and Uzbek media discourse indicate that both language systems have their own specific linguistic and cognitive models for influencing the addressee. When the pragmatic potential of headlines is analyzed in the context of the theories of R.Jakobson and N.Fairclough, significant typological and sociocultural differences are identified between the tactics of English and Uzbek media publications for capturing the reader’s attention and prompting them to take a specific action. The realization of the conative function in English media discourse headlines often relies on a system of explicit, imperative, and strong modal elements. The practical part of the article analyzes the headline “Would Angela Rayner be better PM than Keir Starmer? Vote here” and “Britain and US must send an astronaut to the Moon again...” such examples confirm that in the English headline system, “audience design” is based directly on a dialogic relationship. In English, grammatical devices (the question + imperative form) and deontic modality elements (should, must) bring linguistic manipulation to the open surface and transform the reader from



a passive observer into a participant in the interactive process. In particular, the geopolitical context, realized through the modal verb 'must,' serves as a powerful pragmatic impulse aimed at activating the reader's national pride and security instincts.

In Uzbek media discourse headlines, however, the conative function takes on an implicit character, not in the form of an explicit imperative (command), but rather through cognitive contradiction, implicature, and rhetorical-questioning structures. The analysis of the headline "An Ally in Words, a Stranger in Deed..." shows that in Uzbek journalism, antithesis and contextual contradictions (provocations) play a leading role in prompting the reader to think and respond.

The analysis of the phatic function also reveals the specific linguocognitive mechanisms of both languages. The "quasi-interactivity" (artificial intimacy) proposed by A.O'Keeffe is manifested in English through the second-person pronoun 'you' or the expression "Simply can't wait!" are achieved, in Uzbek media space, phatico-contact (a bridge for establishing contact) is primarily realized through extremely strong emotional-expressive lexicon ("Horror!") or dramatic metaphors ("Invisible enemy") are used to sharply distract the reader's empathy and personal safety instincts.

Thus, the results of the discussion show that the conative and phatic functions do not occur separately at the headline level, but are instead linked in a chain: Initially, a prompt connection (contact) is established with the reader through phatic devices, and their attention is captured, after which the headline is transformed into a conative impulse (an appeal to action or thought) through syntactic and modal elements.

Conclusion. A comparative-typological study of the lingvopragmatic and modal characteristics of headlines in the media discourse of English and Uzbek languages in terms of their conative and phatic functions led to a number of important scientific conclusions. First and foremost, in the language of modern mass media, headlines are not simply a text's thematic, informative or nominative unit, but rather a powerful communicative tool that establishes a hidden bridge of communication between the addressor and addressee, defining a sphere of persuasive and manipulative influence. One of the most significant findings of the study — that the phatic and conative functions in R. Jakobson's classification are not separate phenomena at the headline level, but rather manifest as a single linguistic mechanism, interconnected in a chain and forming a dialectical unity.

The comparative analyses conducted revealed significant linguistic and sociocultural differences in the realization of the conative function in the English and Uzbek media spaces. The headlines of English media discourse rely on more explicit imperative devices, interactive offers, and elements of strong deontic and epistemic modality to directly prompt the reader to take action or express an opinion, it was found that it brings the dialogic relationship to the surface. In contrast, Uzbek media discourse headlines rely primarily on rhetorical-question structures for conativity, lexical antitheses, and cognitive contradictions (psychological provocations) that influence the reader's background knowledge, it assumes a hidden (implicit) character and secures its manipulative impact through an internal subtext.

The results obtained at the level of the phatic function also clearly demonstrated the specific linguocognitive models of both languages. In English, establishing initial contact with the reader and guiding them into the text's content often takes place through a special system of phatical phrases that serve to create an individual interpretation using personal pronouns and to keep

the communication channel open. In Uzbek media headlines, however, the phatic communication bridge is built on a foundation of dramatic conceptual metaphors that appeal to the reader's personal safety instinct and empathy, using highly emotional and expressive lexicon and expressions of danger, is constructed on the basis of dramatic conceptual metaphors that appeal to the addressee's personal safety instinct and empathy.

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