

Structural-Semantic and Functional-Pragmatic Aspects of News Discourse in the English Language: Positive and Negative News

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ABSTRACT

The study of news discourse in the English language encompasses its structural-semantic and functional-pragmatic aspects, with particular attention to the division of news into positive and negative categories. News headlines serve as a crucial element in shaping the narrative, often reflecting the emotional and informational tone of the content. Maria Pia Buono and Jan Schneider have categorized news importance into 11 distinct types using a dendrogram format, focusing on the informational characteristics of headline vocabulary. However, the semantic features of these categories remain underexplored, creating a gap in understanding their impact on audience perception. Through a detailed analysis of headlines and corresponding texts, the research identifies how key lexemes and their semantic fields contribute to shaping the overall tone and meaning of news narratives. The findings reveal that the positive or negative nature of news can often be presupposed from the semantic and grammatical features of key lexemes in the headline. By bridging gaps in existing research, this analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the linguistic mechanisms underlying positive and negative news.

Keywords: News discourse, positive news, negative news, structural-semantic analysis, functional-pragmatic features, headline vocabulary, key element, semantic fields.

INTRODUCTION

Several researchers in European linguistics have conducted an analysis to determine the ratio of positive to negative news headlines (Iurii Melnyk, Andrey Melnyk, Yaryna Pryshliak, Olesia Melnyk, Anastasia Soroka, Viktoria Churevych, Rasha Elibiary, Delfina Ertanowska, and Huayu Sun). This study, conducted in three phases, analyzed weekly periods using the localized versions of Google News from 16 different countries. The results, based on the examination of approximately half a million news headlines, revealed that 70.54% of the headlines carried a positive tone [8, 244]. These findings challenge the widely held stereotype that the global news cycle is dominated by negative agendas. The study demonstrates that the proportion of positive and negative news is influenced by factors such as the language used (for example, versions of Google News in the same language showed similar outcomes) and the day of the week (Sundays were observed to feature relatively more positive news). However, the results suggest that this ratio is not significantly impacted by factors such as the degree of press freedom, cultural norms, or geographical characteristics.

According to the findings of Yu. Hailing and Zhu. Yuzhi, mainstream media tends to emphasize elements of eliteness and negativity in their reporting, while platforms specializing in “good news” focus more on personalization and positivity [5, 670]. When covering the same events, good news platforms often overemphasize the positive aspects of the story, aiming to highlight optimism and hopeful narratives. In contrast, mainstream media typically provide a more balanced representation of the event, presenting a mix of perspectives that are less skewed toward a particular tone.

This contrast reflects the differing priorities and objectives of these platforms, with mainstream outlets seeking broader appeal and credibility through comprehensive reporting, while good news platforms cater to audiences searching for uplifting and emotionally engaging content. The study underscores the varied approaches in media reporting and their impact on audience perception of news.

The analysis of the emotional tone of news texts is rooted in the widely held belief that mass media predominantly frames events in a negative light. This idea is reflected in the English adage, *Good news is bad news*, which encapsulates a complex psychological and linguistic phenomenon inherent in the presentation of news by journalists and media outlets. The essence of this saying suggests that to effectively capture public attention, good news must be dramatized or given a negative or sensational twist, as this approach tends to evoke greater interest and engagement from the audience. This concept serves two primary purposes. On one hand, it illustrates a strategic approach used by mass media to stimulate audience curiosity by emphasizing conflict or dramatic elements. On the other hand, it highlights the tendency of media outlets to draw larger audiences by prioritizing negative or alarming information over positive narratives. While this belief has been widely accepted, it is also supported by rigorous scholarly research, which confirms the media's reliance on negativity to attract and retain public attention. These findings reveal a deliberate interplay between audience psychology and the media's content strategies, shedding light on the mechanisms that shape public engagement with news.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The foundational works of scholars such as T.A. van Dijk [11], M. McLuhan [7], V.G. Borbotko [1], Yu.V. Shemelina [10], T.G. Dobroslonskaya [2], and A.V. Fyodorov [4] are regarded as primary sources in this field of study. These researchers have significantly contributed to the understanding of media discourse, linguistic strategies, and the interplay between language and societal perceptions in news narratives.

For instance, research conducted by Kalev H. Leetaru analyzed the linguistic connotations of news articles published in *The New York Times* between 1945 and 2005, focusing on their psychological impact and the socio-emotional tone of the content. Additionally, Leetaru examined an archive of translated articles and radio broadcasts collected from 130 countries

spanning the years 1979 to 2010. These studies identified a growing trend in the use of words conveying positive and negative meanings, revealing a notable shift toward increasingly negative tones in news content over time [8, 245]. The findings emphasize the evolving nature of news language, reflecting a broader inclination of media narratives to prioritize negativity, potentially due to its higher appeal in engaging audiences.

In her scholarly work 'News Media Discourse in the Modern Online Space', N. V. Poplavskaya analyzes contemporary Western English-language news headlines and highlights their saturation with negative evaluations. According to her research, subjective-evaluative modal words frequently appear in news headlines, often reflecting a negative connotation. As Poplavskaya points out, this negativity emerges not only within the body of the news text but is also embedded at the headline level, establishing a negative tone from the outset. The researcher categorizes headlines into two primary groups: 1) Neutral headlines; 2) Negatively evaluative headlines (those utilizing negative lexical items and stylistic devices) [9, 13].

Negatively evaluative headlines are further divided into three subcategories:

1. **Lexical negativity:** Headlines created using negatively charged lexical items, including adjectives, verbs, nouns, and phrases;
2. **Metaphorical negativity:** Headlines employing metaphors to construct a negative impression, often achieved through media framing techniques, a strategy commonly observed in Western news sources;
3. **Playful negativity:** Headlines leveraging wordplay to deliver a negative evaluation while simultaneously capturing audience interest. This approach intensifies the negative interpretation of the news and piques curiosity among readers.

N. V. Poplavskaya's analysis reveals that negative headlines are not merely incidental but are strategically designed to influence audience perception, enhance engagement, and amplify the

emotional impact of the news content. By establishing a negative tone at the headline level, media outlets effectively shape the reader's interpretation of the entire news narrative.

In English, news is broadly categorized into positive and negative types based on their functional-pragmatic features, with each group further divided into various subcategories. In this regard, Maria Pia Buono and Jan Schneider presented 11 categories [2, 138] of news importance in a dendrogram format, based on the informational characteristics of headline vocabulary. However, the semantic features of these categories were not extensively elaborated.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the functional-pragmatic features and lexical-semantic tools used in English news discourse, with a particular focus on positive and negative news categories. The methodology is structured as follows:

1. **Categorization of news types:** News headlines were classified into two primary groups: positive and negative, based on their functional-pragmatic attributes. These groups were further divided into subcategories to capture variations in communicative intent and lexical choices.
2. **Data collection:** The study analyzed a dataset of news headlines from reputable English-language media outlets. Headlines were selected to represent a range of topics, regions, and tones to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the categories and subcategories of news importance.
3. **Semantic analysis:** Following the approach outlined by Maria Pia Buono and Jan Schneider, the study adopted a dendrogram model to visually represent the informational characteristics of headline vocabulary. While Buono and Schneider focused on categorization, this study extends their work by examining the semantic properties and communicative intent embedded within these categories.

4. **Lexical and pragmatic examination:** Each subcategory of positive and negative news was analyzed for its communicative-functional purpose. This involved identifying the lexical-semantic tools – such as evaluative modal words, metaphors, and stylistic devices – used to shape the emotional and informational tone of the headlines.
5. **Comparative analysis:** The study compared the use of lexical tools and pragmatic strategies across the positive and negative news categories. Attention was given to identifying patterns in how these tools are employed to influence audience perception and engagement.
6. **Communicative-functional analysis:** To deepen the understanding of the headlines' impact, the study investigated the specific communicative tasks served by different types of news, such as attracting attention, providing evaluative commentary, or framing the narrative.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Therefore, in this study, we analyze the communicative-functional roles and the lexical-semantic tools associated with each type according to news headline categories of Maria Pia Buono and Jan Schneider.

1. **Good news:** Positive news promoting hope and optimism.
2. **Entertainment:** News about cultural events, celebrity lifestyles, and other entertainment-related content.
3. **Shareability:** News with a high potential for rapid dissemination, commonly shared across social media and other media platforms.
4. **Celebrity:** News focused on fame, covering achievements and personal aspects of well-known individuals.
5. **Power elite:** News portraying influential figures, such as actors, singers, political leaders, or entrepreneurs, often involving significant and thrilling events.
6. **Drama:** Emotional news filled with conflict or controversies, often revolving around the personal lives or activities of notable individuals.

7. **Surprise:** Astonishing news that evokes a sense of wonder, typically involving unexpected events.
8. **Magnitude:** Large-scale news related to significant occurrences, such as natural disasters or major international political events, characterized by their extensive impact.
9. **Follow-up:** Ongoing news that covers the progression of previously reported events, providing updates on their subsequent stages.
10. **Conflict:** News highlighting disputes, whether political, social, or personal, aimed at evoking negative sentiments and emotional responses from the audience.
11. **Bad news:** Negative news centered on adverse events and incidents, designed to capture attention and heighten anxiety or tension among readers.

Indeed, all the aforementioned subcategories related to positive and negative news are distinguished by their specific functional characteristics. Additionally, the headlines of each type contribute to shaping the content of the text, employing lexical and stylistic tools to create a more coherent and logical structure. In the following section, this theoretical principle will be examined in the context of news texts using practical examples, starting with an example of positive news:

Olivia Colman is SERIOUSLY excited to get a Blue Peter badge [12]

Olivia Colman couldn't contain her excitement at finally receiving a coveted Blue Peter badge – much to the bafflement of her Paddington in Peru co-star Antonio Banderas.

Blue Peter is the longest-running children's TV show in the world and people who appear on the show or achieve something notable are awarded a badge.

The presented text and its headline demonstrate the use of a single lexeme in different grammatical forms: the adjective excited in the headline appears as the noun excitement in the main text, creating lexical and semantic cohesion between the

two. Moreover, the word excited in the headline can be considered a key lexeme, as its various grammatical and semantic forms appear throughout the text in multiple contexts. Although the lexeme excited itself does not explicitly occur within the text, semantically related terms such as excitement, receiving, achieve, and awarded expand its meaning, ensuring continuity and emphasizing the core message of the news.

Additionally, the adverb seriously, used before the adjective excited, serves to intensify the emotional expression of the individual. In this context, the semantic load of the word seriously goes beyond its conventional meaning, adopting a sense akin to extremely. This adverb functions as an intensifier, enhancing the pragmatic and emotional impact of the information, thereby reinforcing the message's expressive power. The communicative function of the text is to provide additional context and details not included in the headline. For example, it elaborates on the significance of the Blue Peter badge, noting its association with the world's longest-running children's show and its presentation to individuals achieving noteworthy accomplishments. It also conveys Olivia Colman's emotional reaction to receiving the award, along with her colleague Antonio Banderas's astonishment at the event, referencing their collaboration on the film *Paddington in Peru*. Clearly, this falls under the category of positive news, designed to deliver joy and evoke a sense of admiration among the audience. The information provided creates a narrative that is not only informative but also emotionally engaging, highlighting achievements and personal responses that resonate with the public.

Still in ruins: the 2023 Turkish earthquake – then and now[13]

A 7.8-magnitude quake hit southern Turkey and northern Syria on 6 February 2023, killing more than 40,000 people and erasing entire cities. Then and now photographs show the scale of devastation and the enormity of the reconstruction.

Over 65 nightmarish seconds of the pre-dawn hours of 6 February 2023, the ground swallowed swathes of entire cities across south-east Turkey resulting in more than 50,000 deaths.

Bridges collapsed, roads and airport tarmacs cracked and millions of lives across 11 Turkish provinces were upturned by the time the rest of the country woke up, stunned.

In the given example, the phrase *in ruins* appears in the headline as a prepositional phrase describing a state or condition. It serves as a leading key term, with its lexical meaning referring to destruction, damaged buildings, or obliterated infrastructure, often resulting from events like earthquakes or other natural disasters. However, the connotative meaning of this expression extends beyond physical destruction to encompass emotional and social losses. In the context of an earthquake, *in ruins* conveys not only the collapse of buildings and roads but also the profound loss of human life, societal stability, and economic resources.

The headline uses this phrase to provide a broad depiction of the situation. While the phrase itself does not reappear in the body of the text, its implications are elaborated through specific examples such as erasing entire cities, bridges collapsed, and roads and airport tarmacs cracked. These detailed descriptions underscore the catastrophic consequences and provide a clearer picture of the devastation. The tragic and negative tone set by the phrase *in ruins* in the headline is reinforced throughout the text with the use of emotionally charged and negative terms such as quake, hit, kill, erase, devastation, nightmarish, swallowed, deaths, collapsed, and cracked. These linguistic choices effectively convey the severity of the disaster, maintaining the somber and impactful nature of the discourse.

RESULT

Each linguistic element employed in the news discourse contributes to the successful delivery of the message. The careful selection of these language tools ensures the content is informative, emotionally engaging for the audience, and communicatively effective. This highlights the pivotal role of precise linguistic choices in crafting impactful and meaningful news narratives.

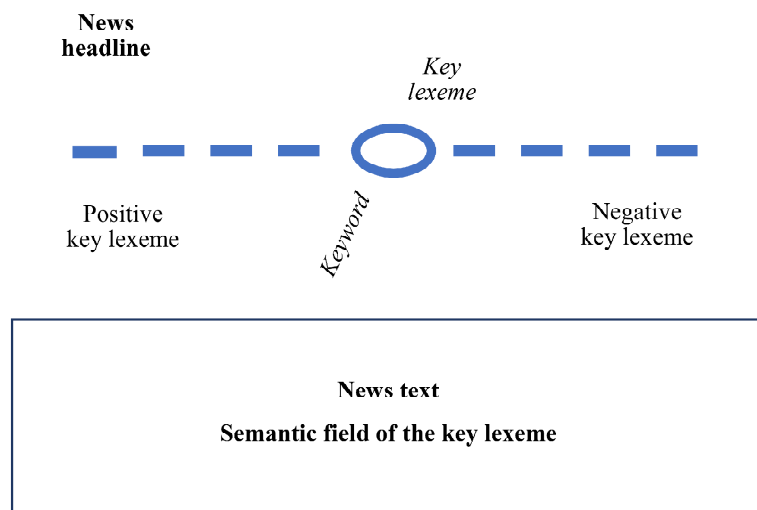


Figure 1. A semantic and pragmatic visual representation for identifying positive and negative news

The results indicate that the tone of news, whether positive or negative, can frequently be inferred from the semantic and grammatical characteristics of the key lexemes present in the headline. Furthermore, while headlines provide an initial framework for the narrative's tone, their relationship with the main text ensures consistency and adds emotional complexity to the overall message. Negative news headlines tend to use language that is emotionally intense and judgmental, whereas positive news headlines focus on fostering a sense of hope and positivity through carefully crafted expressions.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between a headline and the accompanying text is fundamentally tied to the positive or negative connotation of the key word featured in the headline. The semantic field of this key word is echoed and expanded upon within the text, while its grammatically and semantically related lexemes contribute to elucidating the overall meaning of the news. However, the complete meaning of the narrative cannot be extracted solely

from the headline, as the headline merely serves as a fragment of a larger cohesive structure. The entirety of the message emerges from the integration of multiple interconnected components. That said, the overall tone of the text—whether positive or negative—can often be presupposed from the presence of a Positive Key Lexeme (PKL) or a Negative Key Lexeme (NKL) within the headline. These key lexemes act as semantic anchors, providing initial cues that guide the reader's expectations and interpretation of the full content. This interrelation highlights the critical role of headline lexemes in framing and shaping the communicative intent of news discourse.

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