

## A Comparative Linguo-Pragmatic Analysis of the 'Clickbait' Phenomenon in Chinese and Uzbek Digital Media

Barakayeva Nigora O'tkirovna<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tashkent State University, Uzbekistan

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### Corresponding Author:

Barakayeva Nigora O'tkirovna,  
Tashkent State University of  
Oriental Studies, Master's  
program, 1st-year student of  
Linguistics (Chinese language).  
Tashkent State University,  
Uzbekistan.

Email: [nigora5@gmail.com](mailto:nigora5@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** This scientific article provides a comparative linguo-pragmatic analysis of the clickbait phenomenon widely used in Chinese and Uzbek digital media. The study aims to identify and compare the linguistic and pragmatic strategies employed in clickbait headlines across Chinese and Uzbek online news platforms and social media. The research applies a qualitative comparative method using linguo-pragmatic and discourse analysis. Data were collected from clickbait headlines published in Chinese and Uzbek digital media and analyzed based on their lexical features, emotional-expressive units, hidden meanings, pragmatic functions, and psychological influence on audiences. The study examines the methods used in Chinese and Uzbek online publications and social media headlines to attract audience attention, including emotional-expressive units and pragmatic influence strategies. The linguistic structure, lexical devices, hidden meanings, and psychological effects of clickbait headlines are analyzed through examples. The results of the study show that Chinese and Uzbek digital media share both similar and distinctive clickbait strategies that strongly influence audience behavior in digital communication.

**Keywords:** clickbait, digital media, linguo-pragmatics, media language, internet journalism, headline, audience psychology.



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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, digital media has become one of the most active and rapidly developing fields of modern communication. Internet journalism, social networks, and mobile information platforms have fundamentally changed the way people receive information. Especially in the context of digital media, attracting audience attention in a short period of time has become one of the key tasks. Consequently, the linguistic structure and pragmatic impact of media headlines have become even stronger.

Chinese digital media has one of the largest internet audiences in the world, delivering information to millions of users through platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Toutiao. In these platforms, the impact and speed of headlines play an important role. In Uzbek media as well, Kun.uz, Daryo.uz, Qalampir.uz, and media pages on social networks are becoming a core part of digital communication. In both media spaces, various pragmatic methods are actively used to increase audience attention. One such tool is the clickbait phenomenon. The term "clickbait" refers to headlines and texts that encourage internet users to open a specific link or material. Such headlines are usually constructed through strong emotional units, hidden meaning, intriguing questions, or exaggerated expressions. The main purpose of clickbait is to arouse the audience's interest and increase the number of visits to the material.

Linguo-pragmatic analysis, on the other hand, studies not only the grammatical or lexical features of language units, but also their communicative function and impact on the audience. Therefore, analyzing the clickbait phenomenon from a linguo-pragmatic perspective is of great importance in understanding the hidden mechanisms of influence in media language.

Clickbait headlines often employ emotional-expressive units, hyperbole, question forms, ambiguity, and intrigue-based linguistic devices. For example, headlines such as "You won't believe this," "Everyone is making this mistake," or "One simple method shocked everyone" arouse curiosity and a sense of surprise in the audience. Similar emotional and pragmatic units are actively used in Chinese media as well. In the context of digital media, the clickbait phenomenon is closely linked to audience psychology. Within a large flow of information, users pay attention more quickly to emotional or intriguing headlines. For this reason, media platforms use clickbait strategies to retain the audience and generate more traffic.

Today, the clickbait phenomenon has become not only a stylistic element of media language but also one of the key pragmatic tools of digital communication. Especially in Chinese and Uzbek media, its use is shaped in connection with language, culture, and audience psychology. This article provides a comparative analysis of the linguo-pragmatic features of the clickbait phenomenon in Chinese and Uzbek digital media and sheds light on its mechanisms of influence on the audience's mind.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative comparative research design to investigate the linguo-pragmatic characteristics of clickbait headlines in Chinese and Uzbek digital media. The research focuses on identifying similarities and differences in the linguistic and pragmatic strategies used to attract audience attention.

The data consist of clickbait headlines collected from Chinese digital media platforms, including WeChat, Weibo, and Toutiao, as well as Uzbek online media sources such as Kun.uz, Daryo.uz, Qalampir.uz, and social media news channels. The selected headlines were chosen because they contain features commonly associated with clickbait, such as emotional expressions, intriguing questions, exaggeration, ambiguity, and hidden meanings.

The study applies linguo-pragmatic analysis and discourse analysis as the primary analytical approaches. Linguo-pragmatic analysis is used to examine lexical choices, expressive language units, pragmatic intentions, and audience-oriented communication strategies. Discourse analysis is employed to explore how clickbait headlines function within media communication and influence readers' perceptions and behavior. The

interpretation of findings is supported by theoretical perspectives from Van Dijk, Fairclough, and Cook concerning media discourse, audience influence, and hidden meanings in communication.

Data analysis was conducted through comparison of headline structures, emotional and persuasive language devices, pragmatic functions, and psychological effects on audiences in both media environments. The findings were then categorized according to common and distinctive clickbait strategies observed in Chinese and Uzbek digital media. This methodological approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how clickbait operates as a *linguo-pragmatic* tool in contemporary digital communication.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The clickbait phenomenon has become one of the most active elements of modern digital media language. Since attracting audience attention is one of the main goals in internet journalism and social networks, the impact of headlines is increasing even further. In this process, clickbait headlines have become a strategy for media platforms to engage with the audience.

Teun van Dijk pays special attention to the mechanisms of language's influence on the audience's mind in media discourse (Van Dijk, 1988). This very pragmatic influence mechanism is also observed in clickbait headlines. The headline is constructed in an emotional or intriguing form that forces the user to open the material. In Chinese digital media, clickbait is often formed through emotional-expressive units and hidden meaning. In headlines on platforms like Weibo or Toutiao, units such as "surprise", "mystery", "shock", "what you didn't know" are frequently encountered. These methods serve to increase user interest. In Chinese media, short, fast, and emotional headlines are viewed as one of the effective means of increasing audience flow. Similar pragmatic strategies are also actively used in Uzbek media. Especially in online publications and Telegram channels, headlines like "No one expected this", "You might be making this mistake too", "The event that shocked everyone" are common. Such units increase intrigue for the user and encourage them to open the material.

Norman Fairclough, reflecting on the manipulative characteristics of media language, emphasizes that modern media uses special language strategies to manage audience attention (Fairclough, 1995). The clickbait phenomenon is also considered one of these very strategies. Here, the headline serves not only to provide information but also to manage the emotional response of the audience. There are also some differences between clickbait headlines in Chinese and Uzbek media. While Chinese media uses units aimed more at collective interest and public resonance, individual interest and emotional impact are more strongly felt in Uzbek media. For example, the more frequent occurrence of units like "you", "everyone", "no one" in the Uzbek media language serves to create direct communication with the audience.

Guy Cook, in pragmatic analysis, focuses on how the audience perceives hidden meanings (Cook, 2001). Hidden meaning and ambiguity also play an important role in clickbait headlines. The headline does not provide complete information; instead, it leaves a certain gap to interest the user. As a result, the audience opens the link to fill this gap. The impact of clickbait on audience psychology is also one of the important issues. Repeated emotional headlines evoke a rapid emotional reaction in the user. Especially, units related to fear, surprise, curiosity, or sensation spread faster among internet users. Therefore, media platforms use clickbait as an effective way to gather traffic. However, there are also negative aspects of clickbait. Headlines based on excessive exaggeration or false intrigue can reduce the audience's trust in the media source. For this reason, some

researchers also evaluate clickbait as an issue related to media ethics. Summarizing all of this, the clickbait phenomenon in Chinese and Uzbek digital media manifests as an important linguo-pragmatic tool that manages audience attention. In both media spaces, it works through emotional impact, intriguing headlines, and pragmatic manipulation, but national media style and audience characteristics also play an important role in its expression.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the article comparatively analyzed the linguo-pragmatic features of the clickbait phenomenon in Chinese and Uzbek digital media. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that clickbait headlines are one of the important media tools aimed at attracting audience attention, evoking an emotional reaction, and increasing internet traffic. Additionally, the similarities and differences of clickbait strategies in Chinese and Uzbek media were examined. It was highlighted that pragmatic methods based on expressive units, intriguing questions, and hidden meanings are actively used in both media spaces. During the study, the role of the clickbait phenomenon in media language and its impact on audience psychology were analyzed based on the views of some researchers. As a result, it was found that clickbait is shaping up as one of the important linguo-pragmatic tools in modern digital communication.

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