



HERMENEUTIC INTERPRETATION OF IMPLICIT CULTURAL MEANINGS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK NEWS HEADLINES

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Abstract. News headlines compress complex events into a short textual frame, but their efficiency comes with a cost: many evaluative and cultural assumptions remain implicit. This article offers an exploratory hermeneutic analysis of implicit cultural meanings in a small comparative corpus of English-language headlines (Reuters) and Uzbek-language headlines (Kun.uz) published in 2024–2026. Combining philosophical hermeneutics (the hermeneutic circle, the fusion of horizons) with discourse-pragmatic tools from framing research and headline studies, the paper identifies recurring mechanisms through which headlines presuppose shared values, normalize institutional authority, and cue moral evaluation without stating it directly. The analysis highlights cross-linguistic differences in agency and voice (explicit actor naming vs. impersonal/passive constructions), in the distribution of modality and certainty, and in culturally saturated lexicon that signals modernisation, social responsibility, or moral order. Finally, the article outlines how multilingual language models can support scalable comparative headline analysis while preserving interpretive rigor. The findings contribute to media linguistics, intercultural pragmatics, and media and information literacy by showing where “meaning beyond words” is created in the headline itself.

Keywords: hermeneutics; news discourse; headlines; framing; presupposition; Uzbek media; multilingual NLP

Introduction

Headlines are the most visible and most read part of a news story. They are not merely labels, but micro-texts that select what counts as the “problem,” foreground a causal story, and suggest an evaluative stance even when no explicit judgment is written. In framing terms, headlines increase salience by selecting a limited set of cues that guide interpretation (Entman, 1993). In pragmatic terms, they optimize relevance by steering the reader toward a context that makes the story worth processing (Dor, 2003).

Because headlines must be brief, they routinely encode assumptions indirectly: through presupposition, lexical choice, voice, and culturally recognizable narratives. When readers share background knowledge, this implicitness is efficient; when readers do not, misunderstanding, stereotyping, or misframing can occur. This is especially visible in cross-linguistic contexts where “the same” event is packaged differently for different interpretive communities.

The goal of this article is to examine how implicit cultural meanings are built into headlines in English and Uzbek media. The focus is not on proving universal differences between languages, but on demonstrating a transparent interpretive procedure: a hermeneutic reading that moves between micro-linguistic choices and macro-cultural horizons. To keep the



analysis concrete, the paper draws on a small illustrative corpus from Reuters and Kun.uz, both widely read outlets with distinct editorial traditions and audience expectations.

Theoretical orientation

Philosophical hermeneutics treats understanding as an interpretive activity grounded in historical and cultural situatedness. Interpretation proceeds through a hermeneutic circle: parts of a text are read through an evolving sense of the whole, while the whole is revised through attention to parts (George, 2020). For Gadamer, understanding is not the recovery of a fixed original meaning but a “fusion of horizons,” where the interpreter’s questions meet the text’s historically formed possibilities of meaning (Malpas, 2003). Ricoeur adds that texts generate a “surplus of meaning”: they can say more than the author intended, especially through metaphor, narrative, and symbolic forms (Pellauer, 2002).

When applied to headlines, hermeneutics emphasizes two points. First, headlines are not neutral: they are interpretations already, produced under institutional constraints and genre conventions. Second, the implicit cultural content of a headline is not an optional ornament; it is part of what makes the headline intelligible and persuasive for a target audience.

To operationalize hermeneutic reading, this paper integrates complementary approaches from media linguistics. Framing research describes how news selects and highlights aspects of reality to promote specific definitions and evaluations (Entman, 1993). News discourse analysis stresses that news is a structured discourse practice shaped by routines, power relations, and audience design (Bell, 1991; van Dijk, 1988). Headline studies show how headlines lure attention and manage curiosity, including click-inducing forward reference in online environments (Blom & Hansen, 2015; Kuiken et al., 2017). Together, these perspectives provide a toolkit for identifying where “implicit culture” appears: in what is left unsaid, but presupposed.

Data and method

This study is exploratory and illustrative. It uses publicly available headlines published online between January 2024 and February 2026. The English-language sample consists of Reuters headlines on education, religion in schools, youth employment/education, and policy responses. The Uzbek-language sample consists of Kun.uz headlines on education policy, teacher workforce, curricular change, and health system reform.

The corpus was compiled by selecting headlines that (a) explicitly mention education or health institutions, (b) are likely to activate culturally salient values (e.g., modernisation, order, responsibility), and (c) allow comparison of agency and evaluation. The headlines are treated as short textual artifacts; the analysis does not aim to summarize the full articles.

Illustrative corpus (headlines):

- Reuters (2024, September 13): “Italy tests AI-assisted teaching in schools to boost IT skills.”
- Reuters (2024, August 7): “How US public schools became a new religious battleground.”
- Reuters (2024, January 11): “Thousands of Indian teachers set to lose jobs as Muslim school funding ends.”
- Reuters (2024, September 2): “Fact Check: British school marked down over cultural development, not ethnic make-up.”
- Reuters (2025, January 20): “China unveils plan to build 'strong education nation' by 2035.”

- Reuters (2025, February 20): “Emotional trauma piles up for Ukraine's children three years after invasion.”
- Reuters (2026, February 26): “Number of UK young people not in work or education nears 1 million.”
- Kun.uz (2024, January 24): “Pedagoglarni kasbiy rivojlantirishning tabaqalashtirilgan dasturlari joriy etiladi.”
- Kun.uz (2024, February 4): “Maktablarning yuqori sinflarida ikkinchi xorijiy til ham o‘qitiladi.”
- Kun.uz (2024, March 6): “Infratuzilmasi ham, ta’limi ham sifatsiz maktablar – MHTI tahlillarini e’lon qildi.”
- Kun.uz (2024, April 14): “O‘zbekistondagi maktablarda dars berayotgan o‘qituvchilar soni ma’lum qilindi.”
- Kun.uz (2024, May 21): “Sog‘liqni saqlash sohasidagi takliflar muhokama qilindi.”
- Kun.uz (2024, May 22): “Saida Mirziyoyeva sog‘liqni saqlash sohasida kutilayotgan o‘zgarishlarni ma’lum qildi.”
- Kun.uz (2024, August 23): “Klinik ordinaturaga qabul imtihonlari sanasi ma’lum qilindi.”
- Kun.uz (2024, August 23): “SSV: Angorda kasalliklarning oldini olish bo‘yicha yangi tizim sinovdan o‘tkazilmoqda.”
- Kun.uz (2025, February 3): “2024 yilda tez yordamga yolg‘on chaqiriqlar soni kamaygani qayd etildi.”
- Kun.uz (2026, February 23): “Maktab va bog‘chalarda baxtsiz hodisalar oshdi: 2025 yilda 20 ta holat.”

Analytically, the paper applies a three-step hermeneutic procedure. First, it identifies salient linguistic choices (lexicon, agency/voice, modality, evaluation). Second, it reconstructs the implied horizon of shared knowledge that makes those choices meaningful (institutional trust, moral order, reform narratives). Third, it tests the interpretation by returning to the headline as a whole and asking whether the reconstructed horizon explains its economy and persuasive force (George, 2020; Malpas, 2003).

Ethics and permissions: all examples are short quotations from publicly accessible news headlines. The study does not involve human participants or personal data and therefore does not require ethics committee approval. No images, private datasets, or copyrighted tables are reproduced.

Findings and hermeneutic analysis

Across both languages, implicit cultural meaning is produced through selection and silence: by naming some actors and omitting others, by implying causality without stating it, and by treating certain institutional goals as self-evident. Yet the two headline traditions in the sample often differ in how they manage agency, certainty, and moral evaluation.

Agency and institutional voice. Reuters headlines frequently name an actor and an action in an active construction (e.g., “Italy tests...”, “China unveils...”, “India... stops paying...”) and thereby suggest that policy change is a deliberate intervention by identifiable institutions. This explicit agency makes the headline compatible with a liberal accountability horizon: if actors are named, they can be questioned and evaluated. In contrast, many Kun.uz headlines in the sample use impersonal or passive-like constructions such as “ma’lum qilindi” (“was announced”) or “joriy etiladi” (“will be introduced”), which foreground the event



(announcement, introduction) and background the individual decision-maker. Hermeneutically, this style can be read as indexing an institutional-trust horizon where official information circulates as authoritative news and where reform is framed as a system-level process, not a personalized contest.

Modality and the temporality of reform. Uzbek headlines frequently encode futurity and planned change (e.g., “joriy etiladi”, “yo‘lga qo‘yiladi”, “tutilgan”), signaling a reform narrative in which policy is experienced as a staged transition toward an improved state. The cultural implication is that social problems are manageable through planned modernization. English headlines also discuss reform, but often anchor it in contestation or risk (e.g., “battleground”, “set to lose jobs”, “trauma piles up”), which invites an interpretive horizon of conflict, uncertainty, and competing values.

Evaluative lexicon and moral cues. Headlines can perform moral evaluation indirectly through loaded nouns and metaphors. For example, the Reuters “battleground” metaphor frames school policy as struggle, pre-structuring expectations of polarization. The Kun.uz headline “Infratuzilmasi ham, ta‘limi ham sifatsiz maktablar” (“schools with poor infrastructure and poor education”) compresses diagnosis into a blunt evaluation, presupposing that quality is a legitimate and urgent standard and that systemic deficits are socially unacceptable. Such evaluations rely on shared cultural norms: readers are expected to agree that “quality education” is a non-negotiable public good.

Presupposition and shared background. Many headlines presuppose an informational background rather than provide it. “Klinik ordinaturaga qabul imtihonlari sanasi ma‘lum qilindi” presupposes that the audience already knows what clinical residency is, why it matters, and why timing is consequential. Similarly, “Number of UK young people not in work or education nears 1 million” presupposes that NEET status is a recognized social indicator. Dor’s headline-as-relevance-optimizer account helps explain the mechanism: a headline supplies just enough cues to activate the most efficient interpretive context for its readership (Dor, 2003).

Click-inducing and curiosity management. While the present corpus is not built around tabloid clickbait, online headline conventions still matter. Research shows that forward reference and curiosity gaps can raise click-through rates (Blom & Hansen, 2015; Kuiken et al., 2017). In Uzbek health-policy headlines, the phrase “kutlayotgan o‘zgarishlar” (“expected changes”) invites anticipation: the headline promises actionable new information without stating all details. Hermeneutically, such anticipation works because readers share a reform horizon in which health-system modernization is a recurring public storyline.

Toward scalable comparative analysis

A qualitative hermeneutic approach is often criticized as difficult to scale. However, recent multilingual NLP makes it feasible to combine interpretive reading with computational support. Contextual language models such as ELMo and BERT represent word meaning as context-sensitive, which is directly relevant for polysemy and implicit evaluation in headlines (Peters et al., 2018; Devlin et al., 2019). Multilingual models such as XLM-R enable cross-lingual comparison by mapping semantically related expressions across languages (Conneau et al., 2020).

In practice, an interpretive workflow can use multilingual embeddings to cluster headlines by semantic field, identify recurrent metaphors, or detect shifts in agency patterns (active vs. passive constructions). Crucially, these tools should not replace interpretation. Their most productive role is to suggest where the analyst should look, while the hermeneutic justification remains grounded in close reading and in culturally informed reasoning.

Discussion and implications

The comparative reading suggests that implicit cultural meaning in headlines is not random; it is a regular product of genre constraints and institutional audiences. For translation and intercultural communication, this matters because literal headline translation can fail precisely where meaning is most implicit: in presupposed values and in culturally salient frames. Translators and editors may need to re-balance explicitness, for example by adding agentive information in Uzbek-to-English translation or by reducing conflict metaphors when translating into a context where institutional harmony is expected.

For media and information literacy, the findings support teaching readers to ask a disciplined set of questions about headlines: What background does this headline assume? What moral evaluation is implied? Who is the actor and who is backgrounded? UNESCO's MIL curriculum emphasizes competencies for interpreting media messages and recognizing how communication shapes understanding (UNESCO, n.d.). In health and crisis contexts, implicit meanings in headlines can also influence trust and compliance; WHO highlights that risk communication and infodemic management depend on building trust and addressing rumors and misunderstanding (World Health Organization, 2024).

Conclusion

This article proposed a structured hermeneutic approach to reading implicit cultural meanings in news headlines and demonstrated it on an illustrative English–Uzbek corpus. The analysis showed recurring mechanisms—agency management, modality, evaluative lexicon, and presupposition—through which headlines cue shared cultural horizons without stating them. The paper also argued that multilingual NLP can support, but not replace, interpretive rigor.

Future work can expand the corpus across more outlets and genres, include systematic sampling and inter-coder procedures, and examine how readers from different backgrounds actually interpret the same headlines. Such research would move from interpretive plausibility to empirical validation while preserving the hermeneutic insight that meaning is always situated in cultural horizons.

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