

УДК 316.77

**Сулейманова Айтен Камал гызы**  
кандидат филологических наук  
г. Баку, Азербайджан  
Азербайджанский университет языков  
*e-mail*: a.rzayeva25@gmail.com

**Aytan Kamal Suleymanova**  
PhD in Philology  
Baku, Azerbaijan  
Azerbaijan University of Languages  
*e-mail*: a.rzayeva25@gmail.com

## ХАРАКТЕРНЫЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ БРИТАНСКИХ ТАБЛОИДОВ

Данная статья посвящена анализу характерных особенностей британской таблоидной прессы, включая их языковые, стилистические, структурные и идеологические черты. Таблоиды Великобритании, такие как The Sun, The Daily Mail, The Mirror, The Daily Express занимают особое место в медиапространстве страны. В отличие от качественной прессы, они ориентированы на массовую аудиторию и используют сенсационный стиль подачи материала. Исследование основано на методах дискурсивного анализа и контент-анализа, и охватывает корпус статей за последние годы. Выявлены ключевые особенности: простота лексики, выразительные и провокационные заголовки, персонализация новостей, моралистическая дихотомия, ориентация на развлекательную составляющую. В статье утверждается, что такие стратегии являются прагматически мотивированными и направлены на эмоциональное воздействие, формирование мнения и привлечение внимания аудитории. Анализ показывает, что таблоиды не только отражают социально-культурные реалии, но и активно формируют общественное мнение, используя язык как инструмент воздействия. Исследование опирается на методы критического дискурс-анализа и социолингвистики, демонстрируя сложность и многослойность медиа-дискурса в современной британской прессе.

*Ключевые слова*: британские таблоиды; заголовки; медиа дискурс; персонализация; прагматика; сенсационность; стилистические свойства.

## THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF BRITISH TABLOIDS

This article is devoted to the analysis of the distinctive features of the British tabloid press, including its linguistic, stylistic, structural, and ideological characteristics. British tabloids such as The Sun, The Daily Mail, The Mirror, and The Daily Express occupy a special place in the country's media landscape. Unlike the quality press, they target a mass audience and employ a sensational style of news presentation. The study is based on methods of discourse analysis and content analysis and covers a corpus of articles from recent years. Key features are identified, including simple vocabulary, expressive and provocative headlines, personalization of news, moral dichotomies, and an emphasis on entertainment. The article argues that such strategies are pragmatically motivated and aimed at emotional impact, shaping opinion, and capturing audience attention. The analysis demonstrates that tabloids not only reflect socio-cultural realities but also actively shape public opinion by using language as a tool of influence. The research is grounded in critical discourse analysis and sociolinguistics, revealing the complexity and multilayered nature of media discourse in contemporary British press.

*Key words*: British tabloids; headlines; media discourse; sensationalism; stylistic features; personalization; pragmatics.

### Introduction

British tabloids, among the most widely read and influential forms of print media in the United Kingdom, have long been recognized as a unique and influential

segment of the media landscape [5; 12]. Known for their sensationalist tendencies, simplified language, vivid imagery, and focus on scandal, entertainment, political messaging, and human-interest stories, tabloids play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and disseminating information [9; 3]. Unlike the so-called “quality press,” tabloids such as *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, and *The Mirror* reach millions of readers daily. They aim to engage a broader audience by prioritizing accessibility, emotional appeal, and visual stimulation [7].

This article aims to explore the core linguistic and stylistic features of British tabloids, offering a comprehensive linguistic and communicative analysis grounded in both sociolinguistic and pragmatic frameworks [15; 17]. We explore how tabloids use repetition, emotive language, informal register, and narrative personalization to construct a distinctive discourse that appeals to a wide readership.

### **Relevance of the Study**

In an era marked by rapid information exchange, media fragmentation, and declining trust in traditional news outlets, understanding the discourse strategies employed by tabloids is increasingly important. As Fairclough [9, p. 14] notes, media discourse plays a central role in constructing social relations and ideologies. British tabloids, such as *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror*, and *The Daily Mail*, reach millions of readers daily and have a demonstrable impact on public discourse [5, p. 3].

Analyzing their stylistic, linguistic, and rhetorical features contributes to a deeper understanding of contemporary media practices and their influence on society. As Richardson [12, p. 15] emphasizes, newspapers do not simply report reality; they help to shape it through discursive practices. Moreover, this study addresses the evolving role of tabloids in the digital age, where the boundaries between print and online media are increasingly blurred [17, p. 52].

### **Purpose of the Study**

The principal objectives of this article are:

1. To identify and categorize the distinctive linguistic and stylistic features of British tabloids.
2. To examine the communicative strategies used in tabloid journalism.
3. To analyze how these features serve pragmatic functions, including persuasion, entertainment, and emotional engagement.
4. To contextualize these characteristics within the broader framework of media discourse and sociolinguistic dynamics.

### **Materials and Methods**

The study employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative content analysis with qualitative discourse analysis, in line with methods proposed by Bell [3, p. 29] and Richardson [12, p. 37]. The corpus consists of 60 articles published between 2020 and 2024 in leading British tabloids: *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Mail*, and *The Daily Express*. These articles were selected to represent a range of topics, including politics, celebrity news, crime reports, and social issues.

Key methods include:

- Lexical frequency analysis to identify high-frequency terms and phraseology [6, p. 264].

- Pragmatic and stylistic analysis focusing on repetition, hyperbole, emotive language, and headline structure, as outlined in Conboy [5, p. 28].
- Comparative analysis between tabloid and broadsheet coverage of similar events, in line with the critical discourse analysis approach [9, p. 88].

## Discussion

### 1. Linguistic Characteristics: Simplicity and Emotional Appeal

One of the most prominent linguistic features of British tabloids is lexical simplicity. Tabloid journalism prioritizes accessibility and emotional resonance over linguistic complexity, targeting a broad readership. As Conboy [5, p. 27] observes, tabloids are characterized by a “lexical immediacy” designed to provoke instant recognition and reaction from readers.

A quantitative review of tabloid headlines from *The Sun* and *Daily Mirror* reveals a high frequency of monosyllabic, high-impact words. For example:

*“Pm fury over migrant chaos” (The Sun, April 2023)*

*“Love rat footie ace dumps pregnant wag” (Daily Mirror, July 2022)*

These headlines display lexical economy, focusing on key emotive words such as *fury*, *chaos*, *love rat*, and *dumps*. As noted by Bell [3, p. 110], tabloids rely on an “economy of expression,” where a small number of highly charged words carry the narrative weight.

The use of colloquial language and slang further supports an informal, conversational tone. Words such as *WAG* (wives and girlfriends of footballers), *boffin* (scientist), or *scrounger* (welfare recipient) are employed to create familiarity and reinforce stereotypes [12, p. 69]. These lexical choices also fulfill a pragmatic function: they construct a shared social world in which the reader is presumed to understand the cultural codes embedded in the language [17, p. 45].

Additionally, emotional appeal is foregrounded through hyperbole, loaded language, and value-laden epithets:

*“Junkie mum sells baby for drugs” (Daily Star, September 2021)*

Here, the lexical choices (*junkie*, *sells*, *baby*) are intentionally sensationalized to elicit shock and moral judgment. As Cotter [6, p. 89] points out, tabloids aim for “affective intensity,” using language not just to inform, but to provoke emotional involvement.

Moreover, pronoun usage in tabloids often constructs in-group/out-group dynamics. The inclusive *we* and exclusive *they* dichotomy strengthens reader identification with certain viewpoints:

*“We’re being betrayed by Brussels again” (The Sun, March 2020)*

Such phrasing aligns with populist narrative strategies, where the tabloid positions itself as the voice of the people against an alienated or elite ‘other’ [2, p. 24].

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the simplicity and emotionality of tabloid language reflect its function as a performative discourse – designed not only to inform, but to entertain, outrage, and build community around shared values [9, p. 132].

### 2. Stylistic Features

The stylistic features of British tabloid journalism are central to its identity and effectiveness. Through a distinct mix of colloquialism, emotive language, figurative devices, and syntactic simplicity, tabloids create a discourse that is both accessible

and emotionally charged. These stylistic elements are not merely superficial – they reflect the papers' ideological positions and their intent to shape public perception.

### 2.1. Emotive and Hyperbolic Language

British tabloids frequently rely on emotionally loaded vocabulary to amplify drama and provoke reaction. Words such as “fury”, “horror”, “shock”, or “betrayal” regularly appear in headlines: *“Fury as migrants put up in hotels while locals go homeless” (Daily Mail, 2023)*

*“Horror crash kills mum and baby – driver ‘high on cocaine’” (The Sun, 2022)*

These lexical choices serve not only to sensationalize but to embed a moral judgment into the narrative. As Allan [1] notes, this stylistic inflation is aimed at emotional persuasion, rather than objective reporting.

### 2.2. Use of Informal and Colloquial Language

Tabloids intentionally adopt a conversational register to reduce social distance with their audience. This is achieved through slang, contractions, and idiomatic expressions: *“BoJo’s Brexit Blunder”* or *“Meghan slams the Palace snub”*

Such informal expressions align with what Fairclough [9] describes as a “synthetic personalization” – the illusion of intimacy between the institution and the individual reader.

### 2.3. Figurative Devices: Metaphor, Alliteration, and Puns

Tabloids frequently employ rhetorical devices that contribute to their catchy and memorable style. Alliteration and puns are particularly prevalent in headlines: *“Migrant Mayhem” (The Sun, 2023)* or *“Megxit Madness” (Daily Express, 2020)*, also *“From Hero to Zero: The Rise and Fall of Rishi” (The Mirror, 2023)*

These devices aid semantic framing, often reinforcing ideological perspectives through humour or ridicule. According to KhosraviNik [11], such stylized constructions play a significant role in building and stabilizing social narratives.

## 3. Pragmatic Functions

In addition to stylistic and lexical characteristics, British tabloids deploy language strategically to fulfill specific pragmatic functions – that is, how meaning is constructed and communicated beyond literal content. These functions are grounded in illocutionary intent, reader positioning, and ideological framing, often reflecting broader socio-political goals.

### 3.1. Assertion and Presupposition

Tabloid texts frequently use assertive language that leaves little room for doubt or negotiation, even when reporting on speculative or controversial topics. This is achieved through strong modality (must, will, always) and presupposition triggers (again, too, still):

*“Migrants flood Britain again – and ministers do nothing” (Daily Mail, 2023)*

Here, the verb *flood* is not only assertive but also metaphorical, implying crisis and chaos. The word *again* presupposes a recurring failure of government policy. As van Dijk [16] notes, such pragmatic devices naturalize ideological positions by presenting them as given.

### 3.2. Evaluation and Judgment

Another core pragmatic function is the expression of explicit or implied judgment, often concerning political actors, marginalized groups, or institutions. Tabloids tend to rely on evaluative adjectives, naming strategies, and loaded epithets:

*“Woke mob cancels Christmas – again!” (The Sun, 2022)*

*“Do-nothing Tories let the country rot” (The Mirror, 2023)*

These statements do more than describe; they perform a speech act of blame. As Thompson and Hunston [14] argue, such evaluation is central to constructing social alignment, prompting the reader to adopt the same attitudinal stance.

### 3.3. Irony, Mockery, and Humour

Pragmatically, tabloids often rely on humour – especially irony, sarcasm, and mockery – to delegitimize political or celebrity figures while maintaining reader engagement:

*“Carrie On Governing: Who’s really running No. 10?” (Daily Star, 2021)*

*“Not-So-Clever Keir flops again” (The Sun, 2023)*

These headlines perform indirect speech acts, conveying criticism through what Sperber and Wilson [13] term “echoic mention” – where the speaker pretends to reproduce a commonly held opinion only to ridicule it. Irony thus functions as a tool of ideological distancing and ridicule.

## 4. Sociolinguistic Dynamics

The language of British tabloids reflects and reinforces sociolinguistic dynamics such as class, regional identity, gender, and power hierarchies. These publications do not merely report events but also construct social realities through strategic linguistic choices. By aligning with the vernacular of particular groups and caricaturing others, tabloids contribute to the (re)production of social divisions in British society.

### 4.1. Regional and Ethnic Markers

Tabloid headlines often exploit regional stereotypes to evoke cultural familiarity or animosity: *“Scots demand more cash – English foot the bill” (Daily Mail, 2021)*

*“Brummies baffled as council bans pork in schools” (The Sun, 2022)*

This type of representation amplifies interregional tensions by foregrounding regional identity and contrasting it with national unity or fiscal fairness. Additionally, coded references to ethnicity often appear in reporting on crime or migration without explicitly stating race: *“Teen gang terrorizes locals in East London estate” (Daily Express, 2022)* While ethnicity is left unsaid, readers may infer racialized identities based on implicature and context.

### 4.2. Gendered Discourse

Gender also plays a crucial role in tabloid narratives. Female figures, particularly celebrities and politicians, are often framed in sexist or diminutive terms, focusing on appearance or emotions: *“Rishi’s real boss? Carrie goes glam for No. 10 party” (The Sun, 2022)* or *“Labour’s lady flounders on big night” (Daily Star, 2023)*

Men, by contrast, are typically judged by competence or power. These asymmetries echo what Cameron [4] describes as verbal hygiene, where societal gender norms are reinforced through the policing of language and representation. Tabloids become key sites for reproducing gendered language ideologies.

## 5. Personalization and Human-Interest Focus

British tabloids prominently employ personalization strategies, emphasizing individual stories and emotional appeal to engage readers. This technique transforms abstract political or social issues into relatable narratives by foregrounding personal experiences, emotions, and conflicts.

### 5.1. Focus on Celebrity and Scandal

Personalization extends to a fascination with celebrities, where private lives and scandals dominate coverage: “*Royal rift deepens: Harry and William at war*” (*Daily Mail*, 2021) or “*Pop star caught in cheating scandal*” (*The Sun*, 2022)

This focus satisfies readers’ voyeuristic curiosity and reinforces the tabloids’ role as providers of entertainment as much as information. According to Franklin [10], this blurring of news and entertainment blurs public and private spheres, impacting how audiences relate to figures of authority and fame.

### 5.2. Human-Interest Frames and Social Issues

Tabloids also utilize human-interest frames to portray social issues through personal narratives, often emphasizing victimhood or resilience:

“*Struggling single dad fights homelessness*” (*Daily Mirror*, 2023)

“*Teen cancer survivor raises thousands for charity*” (*The Sun*, 2022)

By framing complex social phenomena around individual stories, tabloids evoke pathos and potentially mobilize public support. However, critics argue this may oversimplify structural problems, reducing them to isolated cases [8].

## 6. Sensationalism and Dramatization

Sensationalism is a hallmark of British tabloid journalism, characterized by exaggerated language, intense imagery, and a tendency to frame stories in stark moral terms. This strategy serves to capture attention quickly and sustain reader interest through emotional provocation.

### 6.1. Exaggerated Language and Emotional Impact

Tabloids frequently utilize hyperbolic expressions, superlatives, and emphatic adjectives to dramatize events: “*BEAST CAGED: Killer finally behind bars*” (*The Sun*, 2023) or “*FURY AT PM’S PARTY LIES*” (*Daily Mail*, 2022)

Such language elevates the emotional intensity of news stories, aiming to elicit shock, outrage, or excitement from readers. As Bell (1991) explains, this linguistic intensity is part of the tabloid’s effort to engage the audience affectively and distinguish itself from more sober broadsheet reporting.

### 6.2. Moral Dualism and Conflict Framing

Tabloids commonly employ moral dichotomies, casting events and individuals in terms of heroes versus villains or victims versus perpetrators. This clear-cut framing simplifies complex social realities, providing readers with a straightforward narrative:

“*FURY AT PM’S PARTY LIES*” implies political wrongdoing framed as a betrayal or “*BEAST CAGED*” constructs a villain archetype, reinforcing social norms around justice. According to Richardson [12], this polarized discourse not only dramatizes but also reinforces ideological positions and social values.

### 6.3. Functions and Effects of Sensationalism

Sensationalism serves several pragmatic functions: 1. Attracting and retaining audience attention in a competitive media market. 2. Eliciting emotional responses that can reinforce reader loyalty. 3. Framing political and social issues in ways that influence public opinion and moral judgment.

However, sensationalism also faces criticism for potentially distorting facts, promoting fear or prejudice, and undermining journalistic objectivity [5].

### **7. Ideological Framing and Political Bias**

British tabloids are not only purveyors of sensational stories but also active agents in shaping political ideologies through their distinct framing strategies. Their discourse reflects and reinforces particular worldviews, often through populist and nationalist rhetoric that aligns with specific political agendas.

#### **7.1. Populist and Nationalistic Framing**

Tabloids frequently deploy populist language, positioning “the people” against elites, outsiders, or perceived threats. This dichotomous framing appeals to a broad base by emphasizing shared values, national identity, and sovereignty. For example, during the Brexit debate, tabloids such as *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* framed the European Union as an oppressive entity undermining British autonomy.

Headlines like “*Britain Betrayed: PM caves to EU demands*” (*Daily Express*, 2020) employ strong evaluative language that signals betrayal and loss of sovereignty, key themes in nationalist discourse [12].

#### **7.2. Ideological Bias and Agenda Setting**

Tabloids demonstrate clear ideological bias through selective coverage and framing of political events. For instance, *The Sun*’s support for the Conservative Party and Brexit was visible in both overt editorial stances and linguistic choices:

“*Bojo’s Brexit Blunder*” vs. “*Bojo’s Triumph*” headlines reveal how tabloids may oscillate between criticism and praise depending on political alignment, but often maintain a nationalist tone that prioritizes sovereignty and British interests (Fairclough, 1995). This agenda-setting function not only shapes what readers perceive as important but also how they interpret political realities [3].

#### **7.3. Linguistic Devices Reinforcing Bias**

Tabloids employ a variety of linguistic tools to sustain ideological framing:

Repetition of slogans and key phrases to embed ideological messages.

Use of evaluative adjectives (“traitorous,” “heroic”) to position actors morally.

Presuppositions and implicatures that subtly suggest political stances without explicit statements [15].

### **8. Visual Layout and Headlines**

Visual presentation and headline construction are central to the communicative impact of British tabloids. These features facilitate rapid consumption of information and amplify emotional and persuasive effects on readers.

#### **8.1. Visual Elements**

British tabloids rely heavily on bold, eye-catching visual design to attract and maintain reader attention. This includes: Large, bold headlines often set in capital letters to maximize immediacy and prominence; Use of colorful, dramatic images that illustrate or exaggerate news stories, enhancing emotional engagement; Frequent use

of short paragraphs, bullet points, and subheadings to improve readability and allow quick scanning [5].

Such layout techniques align with the tabloid aim of accessibility, especially for readers who may skim rather than read in depth. According to Fairclough [9], these visual strategies work synergistically with language to create a “media event” that captures attention and reinforces narrative framing.

## 8.2. Headline Style and Function

Headlines in tabloids often employ a telegraphic style, omitting auxiliary verbs and articles to create punchy, immediate statements:

Examples include headlines like “*BOJO: I’LL FIX BRITAIN!*” or “*FURY AT PM’S PARTY LIES*” which deliver maximal impact with minimal words.

This brevity and directness enhance memorability and stimulate curiosity or emotional reactions. Moreover, tabloids frequently use linguistic devices such as alliteration, puns, and rhymes to add catchiness and entertainment value [7]: The Sun’s headline “*Megxit Mayhem*” combines a neologism with alliteration to dramatize the royal exit story and engage readers.

## Conclusion

British tabloids represent a distinctive form of journalistic discourse characterized by their linguistic simplicity, emotive appeal, and visual dramatization. Through strategic use of repetition, hyperbole, colloquial language, and personalized narratives, tabloids construct accessible yet persuasive texts that resonate with a broad and diverse readership. The combination of visual layout techniques, sensational headlines, and pragmatic functions enables tabloids not only to inform but also to engage and influence public opinion effectively.

This study has demonstrated that tabloid discourse is far from superficial sensationalism; rather, it embodies complex sociolinguistic and pragmatic mechanisms that reflect and shape social attitudes, cultural identities, and ideological stances. The ideological framing of political issues, the reinforcement of social stereotypes, and the cultivation of emotional proximity to events all highlight the power of tabloids as agents of media discourse.

Understanding these linguistic and stylistic features is essential in decoding the role tabloids play within the contemporary media landscape, particularly as traditional print media evolve alongside digital platforms. Media discourse operates as a site where language and ideology intersect, shaping public consciousness and societal dynamics. Hence, the tabloid press, often dismissed as low-brow, warrants serious academic inquiry for its profound impact on communication, culture, and politics.

## REFERENCES

1. Allan, S. (2010). *News Culture* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
2. Baker, P., Gabrielatos, C., & McEnery, T. (2013). *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: The Representation of Islam in the British Press*. Cambridge University Press.
3. Bell, A. (1991). *The Language of News Media*. Blackwell.
4. Cameron, D. (1992). *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*. Palgrave.

5. Conboy, M. (2006). *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a Community through Language*. Routledge.
6. Cotter, C. (2010). *News Talk: Investigating the Language of Journalism*. Cambridge University Press.
7. Crystal, D. (2003). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. Cambridge University Press.
8. Entman, R. M. (1993). "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm." *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
9. Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media Discourse*. Edward Arnold.
10. Franklin, B. (1997). *Newszak and News Media*. Arnold.
11. KhosraviNik, M. (2010). "The representation of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants in British newspapers." *Journal of Language and Politics*, 9(1), 1–28.
12. Richardson, J. E. (2007). *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.
13. Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1986). *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Harvard University Press.
14. Thompson, G., & Hunston, S. (2000). *Evaluation in Text: Authorial Stance and the Construction of Discourse*. Oxford University Press.
15. Thornborrow, J. (2014). *Power Talk: Language and Interaction in Institutional Discourse*. Longman.
16. van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Sage.
17. Wodak, R. (2001). *The Discourse of Historical Approaches*. In Wetherell, M., Taylor, S., & Yates, S. (Eds.), *Discourse Theory and Practice*. Sage.