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## **ENCODING IMPLICIT BIAS IN POLITICAL NEWS HEADLINES**

### **Abstract**

Political headlines often convey more than they explicitly state, relying on linguistic strategies that violate Grice's maxims to demonstrate a biased or ideological stance. This study examines how implication is constructed through maxim violation in twenty-five political headlines from both right- and left-leaning media outlets (e.g., Fox News, The Guardian, Breitbart, HuffPost, etc.). The analysis focuses on how headlines use exaggeration, loaded statements, preambles, and omissions to influence public interpretation by violating the principles of Quality, Quantity, Attitude, and Manner. Findings show that right-leaning headlines most frequently violate the maxim of Quality through exaggerated and evaluative labeling, while left-leaning headlines violate Attitude or Quantity by expressing blame or moral judgment without a direct statement. Neutral sources still engage in maximum manipulation through softer forms such as vague attribution. Overall, the study demonstrates how headlines use pragmatic strategies to create ideological effects and indirectly shape reader perceptions. The results highlight the persuasive power of headline language and highlight the need for critical awareness of implicit bias in media discourse.

*Key words: headlines, politics, implicature, discourse.*

### **Introduction**

In our polarized media environment, political headlines are no longer merely summaries of news articles, they are weapons that help construct public opinion before readers even engage with the full text. Headlines frequently contain a subtext or a hidden message that subtly shapes interpretation through pragmatic devices which imply ideological positioning. Furthermore, as studies have shown (e.g., Staliunaite & Vlachos, 2025; Furko, 2017), media language tends to use indirect meanings and pragmatic vagueness in order to alter interpretation but sustain plausibility of denial. But many of these studies have been aimed at political speeches or long articles, ignoring headlines. Since so many readers rely only on the headline, this site of discourse is worth a close look. Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) is a convenient tool to explore how headlines persuade. In Grice's theory, discourse abides by four maxims—Quality, Quantity, Attitude and Style—and a breach results in implicature. These principles are violated by political actors and journalists selectively in order to convey their message indirectly, through

implication. This is further supported by recent research: hedging is a vehicle for ideological accommodation (Nuraniwati and Permatasari, 2021) and ambiguity in political talk makes it open to interpretation or strategic denial (Alrufaiey and Alrikabi, 2024). Recent mass studies have also expanded this idea to Headlines. Pan et al. (2023) show that the emphasis on themes in US headlines is indeed systematically different depending on ideology, especially with respect to politics and social issues. By placing headline analysis at the juncture of pragmatic and critical discourse studies, this paper explains how implicatures can compute ideological meaning. The results add to emerging research on bias detection, and discourse framing (Rodrigo-Ginés et al., 2023; Maab et al., 2024) and emphasize the need for pragmatic literacy in a headline-driven digital age.

### **Literature Review**

Language in political discourse often shapes interpretation not only through explicit claims but also through implicatures, presuppositions, and associative cues. Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle provides a theoretical foundation for this research. The intentional flouting of maxims—whether by exaggeration, vagueness, omission, or metaphor creates implicatures that audiences interpret in ways favorable to ideological agendas. Besides foundational scholars we need to focus on recent studies that have illustrated the related problems and the gaps in this topic. The studies reveal the importance of pragmatic devices and right strategies to convey intended messages. Pragmatic strategies also allow media actors to frame narratives in ways that influence audiences while preserving plausible deniability. As Furko (2017) argues, manipulative uses of pragmatic markers are particularly effective in political texts. Similarly, Staliunaite and Vlachos (2025) observe that implicature-driven manipulation is central to how modern media frames ideological positions. Nuraniwati and Permatasari (2021) highlight hedging as one such device, enabling writers to signal ideological alignment while avoiding direct commitment. Alrufaiey and Alrikabi (2024) further demonstrate that ambiguity and hedging in political speeches function as strategies of accountability avoidance. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) complements this pragmatic approach by underscoring how lexicalization, nominalization, and metaphor embed ideological bias (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). Yet CDA often prioritizes overt lexical strategies, giving less attention to how implicatures generated via maxim flouting serve as ideological tools. More recent research bridges this gap: Fraser (2010) shows the pragmatic force of hedging, while Cap (2008) traces proximization as a mechanism of legitimization.

Recent large-scale studies further illuminate how bias manifests in headlines. Pan et al. (2023) found systematic thematic discrepancies between outlets across millions of U.S. headlines, demonstrating how ideological orientations influence issue selection and framing. Maghfiroh and Prayitno (2024) confirm that headlines often

rely on implicatures—especially metaphors and hyperbole—commonly associated with maxim violations. Computational approaches also reflect growing recognition of these linguistic cues: Rodrigo-Ginés et al. (2023) reviewed how bias is detected in media texts, while Maab et al. (2024) and Horych et al. (2024) highlight how evaluative language, emotionality, and vague attributions are operationalized as features for automated bias detection. These studies resonate with pragmatic analyses, reinforcing the idea that implicature and maxim flouting are central to ideological framing.

### **Methodology**

The corpus consists of excerpts from 25 political media outlets, drawn from headlines and short passages published between 2020 and 2025. Sources were selected from a balance of right-leaning, left-leaning, and neutral outlets to ensure ideological diversity. Only hard news, editorials, and political opinion pieces were included; sensational tabloid texts and COVID-related discourse were excluded to maintain topical focus and avoid biasing health-related narratives. Each piece was analyzed using Grice’s Cooperative Principle (1975) to determine whether and how the principles of Quality, Quantity, Attitude, and Manner were violated. Where appropriate, additional concepts from Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2015) were applied to explain the ideological and interpretive effects of implicature. Each example was coded for the violated maxim(s), the intended meaning (implicature), the pragmatic strategy (e.g., exaggeration, omission, ambiguity, initial assumption), and the ideological framework conveyed.

### **Discussion and analysis**

The present study is based on a corpus of 25 media excerpts drawn from political news articles, editorials, and opinion pieces published between 2020-2025. These samples were selected to represent a diverse range of ideological orientations and media outlets, thereby allowing a comparative analysis of how implicature and explicature function in contemporary media discourse

	<b>Headline</b>	<b>Source Style</b>	<b>Ideological Tone</b>	<b>Flouted Maxim</b>
	White House scrambles to defend Biden’s gaffe after awkward presser	Fox News-style	Right	Maxim of Manner (loaded language)
2	Republican leaders remain silent as violence spreads at rallies	Guardian-style	Left	Maxim of Quantity (silence = implied blame)

	<b>Headline</b>	<b>Source Style</b>	<b>Ideological Tone</b>	<b>Flouted Maxim</b>
3	Critics question the legality of Trump's latest immigration move	CNN-style	Left	Quality (suggesting illegality without proof)
4	Biden's inflation crisis hits working-class families hardest	Breitbart-style	Right	Quality (overstatement); Manner
5	PM accused of 'turning a blind eye' to corruption scandal	BBC-style	Neutral	Relation / Quality (suggesting guilt indirectly)
6	Progressive policies blamed for worsening border chaos	Fox News-style	Right	Causality claims → Quality
7	Experts warn democracy is at stake after new voting restrictions	NY Times-style	Left	Manner (dramatic phrasing); Quality (alarmist)
8	US and allies celebrate key victory against extremism in the region	Reuters-style	Neutral	Quantity (lack detail); Manner (vague)
9	Administration faces backlash over vague COVID messaging	Politico-style	Center	Relation / Quantity
10	Protests erupt nationwide amid outrage at police verdict	Al Jazeera-style	Neutral/global	Manner (emotive)
11	Tory MPs refuse to back plan, leaving prime minister humiliated	Guardian-style	Left	Quantity / Relation (implies humiliation)
12	Biden pushes radical climate agenda that could cost millions of jobs	Fox News-style	Right	Quality (exaggeration)
13	Supreme Court delivers blow to reproductive rights advocates	HuffPost-style	Left	Manner (metaphor)

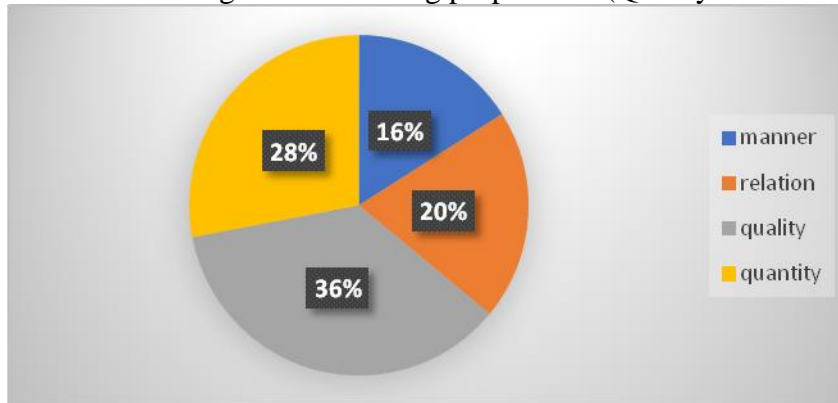
	<b>Headline</b>	<b>Source Style</b>	<b>Ideological Tone</b>	<b>Flouted Maxim</b>
14	Migrants flood border towns as crisis worsens under Biden	Breitbart-style	Right	“blow” Manner (metaphor), Quantity (exaggeration)
15	Lawmakers hail historic deal to support Ukraine defense	Reuters-style	Neutral	Quantity (lack specifics)
16	Senate leaders quietly drop ethics probe after public outrage subsides	Politico-style	Neutral	Manner (implied secrecy)
17	Conservative lawmakers celebrate ‘major victory’ for traditional values	Fox News-style	Right	Quantity (who? specifics missing)
18	Officials admit policy errors as unemployment numbers climb	BBC-style	Neutral	Relation (admits guilt); possible Manner Relation (presupposing insufficient action)
19	Progressives criticize Biden for not doing enough to address Gaza attacks	HuffPost-style	Left	Relation (contrast “despite”); Quantity
20	Report finds no evidence of fraud despite months of claims	Reuters-style	Neutral	Quality (impugns motives)
21	Democrats accused of prioritizing migrants over citizens in budget plan	Breitbart-style	Right	Manner & Quantity (hyperbolic)
22	Scientists warn climate inaction could become catastrophic by 2030	Guardian-style	Left	Manner (metaphor), Relation
23	Court overturns decision, dealing a blow to immigration reform advocates	AP-style	Neutral	Quantity (generalization)
24	Poll shows growing frustration with rising food prices under current	Al Jazeera-	Neutral/global	

	Headline	Source Style	Ideological Tone	Flouted Maxim
25	government PM hailed for decisive leadership during economic crisis	style Telegraph-style	Right	Quantity (vague praise); Quality

The corpus consisted of **25 political headlines** taken from left-leaning, right-leaning, and centrist/neutral outlets. Each headline was coded for flouted Gricean maxims. Results are presented as raw frequencies and percentages.

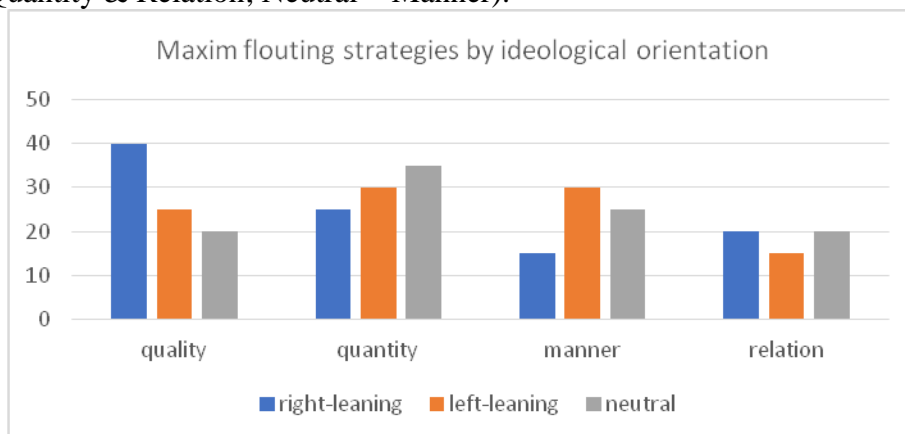
**Figure 1: Frequency of Maxim Flouting in Headlines (N=25)**

Pie chart showing maxim flouting proportions (Quality dominates at 36%).



**Figure 2: Maxim Flouting by Ideological Orientation.**

Bar chart comparing maxim violations by ideology (Right = Quality-heavy; Left = Quantity & Relation; Neutral = Manner).



The results of this study reveal different ideological tendencies in how headlines violate the principles of discourse. Right-leaning sources (e.g., Fox News, Breitbart)

most often violate the maxim of Quality through exaggeration or evaluative labeling (“radical agenda,” “catastrophic crisis”). Left-leaning sources (e.g., The Guardian, HuffPost) more often cited violations of Quantity and Attitude, implying guilt or moral judgment through error or assumption (“staying silent,” “not doing enough”). Neutral sources are also engaged in maximal manipulation but usually accommodated with mild violations of Quantity or Manner due to ambiguity or lack of detail. Right-leaning publications often exaggerated or dramatized political events. For example, Breitbart’s “Biden Pushes Radical Climate Agenda That Could Cost Millions of Jobs” (Heading 12) violates the maxim of Quality by exaggerating potential economic damage without providing supporting evidence. The evaluative term “radical” characterizes politics as dangerous and extreme, consistent with Capin’s (2008) notion of approximation, in which language constructs distant threats as imminent threats. Similarly, Breitbart’s “Migrants Flood Border Towns as Crisis Worsens Under Biden” (Heading 14) uses metaphor (“flood”) to create a manifestation of uncontrolled invasion and again uses hyperbole to encode ideological bias. These examples confirm Furcon’s (2017) observation that emotional and manipulative lexical choices are central to right-wing persuasive strategies. In contrast, left-leaning discourses often implied guilt by making mistakes. The Guardian’s “Republican leaders remain silent as violence spreads at rallies” (Headline 2) violates Quantity by focusing on silence as a news value element, leaving aside obvious causal connections. The conclusion is clear: Republican leaders are indirectly responsible for creating the conditions for violence. Similarly, HuffPost’s “Supreme Court strikes down reproductive rights advocates” (Headline 13) uses a metaphor that disrupts Manner (“struck”) by dramatizing the event, but more importantly, it incorporates an ideological perspective by foregrounding the harm done to one group. These strategies support Nuraniwati and Permatasari’s (2021) claim that hedging and implication allow political actors (and journalists) to signal compliance without making direct claims. Even seemingly neutral speeches relied on maxim flouting. Reuters’ “Report finds no evidence of fraud despite months of allegations” (Heading 20) manipulates attitudes, juxtaposing “no evidence” with “months of allegations” to show the baselessness of certain political narratives. Although presented as neutral, the frame subtly undermines one side of the political spectrum. Similarly, the BBC’s “Prime Minister accused of ‘turning a blind eye’ to corruption scandal” (Heading 5) uses conjecture and metaphor, implicitly suggesting guilt while leaving room for denial. These findings echo Fairclough’s (1995) and Staliunaite & Vlachos’ (2025) views that even “neutral” discourse encodes ideology through linguistics. The analysis demonstrates how implicature serves as a strategic resource in news production. Grice’s (1975) cooperative principle provides the mechanism, but ideological orientation determines which maxim is more beneficial to violate.

The study shows that the most frequently flouted maxim was Quality (36%), followed by Quantity (28%), confirming Maghfiroh & Prayitno's (2024) finding that exaggeration and omission dominate headline implicatures. Also it shows that right-leaning outlets primarily relied on Quality violations, using evaluative labeling to reinforce partisan narratives (Pan et al., 2023; Rodrigo-Ginés et al., 2023), whereas left-leaning outlets leaned more on Quantity (40%) and Relation (30%) floutings, employing omission and indirect associations to imply moral culpability (Alrufaiey & Alrikabi, 2024). Neutral outlets, by contrast, distributed floutings more evenly, with a tendency toward Manner violations (40%), reflecting ambiguity as a neutrality strategy.

### **Conclusion**

This study has shown that political media discourse strategically employs implicature through systematic flouting of Gricean maxims, with Quality violations (36%) emerging as the most frequent. The findings demonstrate clear ideological asymmetries: right-leaning outlets predominantly rely on evaluative exaggeration, while left-leaning outlets use omission and indirect associations, and neutral outlets lean toward vagueness as a neutrality strategy. These results support prior research (e.g., Maghfiroh & Prayitno, 2024; Rodrigo-Ginés et al., 2023) while extending the analysis through a fine-grained pragmatic lens. Ultimately, the study highlights the central role of implicature and pragmatic manipulation in shaping ideological framing, underscoring the need for continued critical examination of media discourse.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

This study is limited by the relatively small size of the corpus (25 excerpts), which restricts the generalizability of the findings. The analysis also relies on manual coding, which, while thorough, involves a degree of subjectivity in identifying implicatures and maxim flouting. Additionally, the exclusion of certain discourse domains, such as health or entertainment media, narrows the scope of applicability to political texts only.

Future research should expand the corpus to include a larger dataset across multiple years and media genres, enabling quantitative validation of the patterns observed here. Computational or mixed-method approaches (e.g., corpus linguistics tools combined with CDA) could help reduce subjectivity and enhance replicability. Comparative studies across languages or cultural contexts would also be valuable in exploring whether similar pragmatic strategies are employed in different media systems.

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### **Başlıqların siyasi xəbərlərdə gizli qərəzliliyi kodlaması.**

#### **Xülasə**

Siyasi başlıqlar, qərəzli və ya ideoloji mövqə nümayiş etdirmək üçün Qraysın məksimlərini pozan linqvistik strategiyalara əsaslanaraq, çox vaxt açıq-aydın ifadə etdiklərindən daha çox məlumat verir. Bu araşdırma həm sağ, həm də sol təmayüllü media orqanlarından (məsələn, Fox News, The Guardian, Breitbart, HuffPost və s.) əldə edilən iyirmi beş siyasi başlıqda məksim pozulma yolu ilə implikasiyanın necə qurulduğunu araşdırır. Təhlil ictimai şərhə təsir etmək üçün başlıqların necə şişirtmə, yüklənmiş ifadələr, müqəddimə və nöqsanlar – keyfiyyət, kəmiyyət, münasibət və üslub prinsiplərini pozaraq istifadə etdiyinə diqqət yetirir. Araşdırmanın nəticəsi

göstərir ki, sağa meyilli başlıqlar ən çox şişirdilmiş və qiymətləndirici etikətləmə vasitəsilə “keyfiyyət” maksimumunu pozur, sola meyilli başlıqlar isə birbaşa bəyanat olmadan günah və ya mənəvi mühakimə ifadə edərək “münasibət” və ya “kəmiyyət”i pozur. Neytral mənbələr hələ də qeyri-müəyyən atribut kimi daha yumşaq formalar vasitəsilə maksimum manipulyasiya ilə məşğul olurlar. Ümumilikdə, tədqiqat başlıqların ideoloji təsirlər yaratmaq və dolayısı ilə oxucu qavrayışını formalaşdırmaq üçün pragmatik strategiyalardan necə istifadə etdiyini nümayiş etdirir. Nəticələr başlıq dilinin inandırıcı gücünü vurğulayır və media diskursunda gizli qərəzliliyə dair tənqidi məlumatlılığa ehtiyacı vurğulayır.

*Açar sözlər: başlıqlar, siyasət, implikatura, diskurs.*

### ***Кодирование неявной предвзятости в заголовках политических новостей***

#### **РЕЗЮМЕ**

Политические заголовки часто передают больше, чем они явно заявляют, полагаясь на лингвистические стратегии, которые пренебрегают максимумами Грайса, чтобы намекнуть на предвзятость или идеологическую позицию. В этом исследовании изучается, как импликатура конструируется посредством пренебрежения максимумами в двадцати пяти политических заголовках, взятых из СМИ как правого, так и левого толка (например, Fox News, The Guardian, Breitbart, HuffPost и т. д.). Анализ фокусируется на том, как заголовки используют преувеличение, веские формулировки, предпосылку и упущение — нарушая максимы Качества, Количества, Отношения и Манеры — чтобы повлиять на общественную интерпретацию. Результаты показывают, что заголовки правого толка чаще всего пренебрегают максимумом Качества посредством гиперболы и оценочной маркировки, тогда как заголовки левого толка, как правило, пренебрегают Отношением или Количеством, подразумевая вину или моральное суждение без прямого утверждения. Нейтральные источники все еще занимаются манипуляцией максимумами, хотя и в более мягких формах, таких как неопределенная атрибуция. В целом, исследование демонстрирует, как заголовки используют прагматические стратегии для создания идеологических импликатур и косвенного формирования восприятия читателя. Результаты подчеркивают убедительную силу языка заголовков и необходимость критического понимания скрытой предвзятости в медиадискурсе.

*Ключевые слова: заголовки, политика, импликатура, дискурс.*

**Rəyçi: filologiya üzrə fəlsəfə doktoru Milana Abbasova**