

Specialized Lexis as A Mechanism of Domain Encoding and Communicative Precision in Online News Headlines: A Comparative Study of BBC News and KUN.UZ

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ABSTRACT

Online news headlines must identify an event, establish its domain, and remain interpretable within severe spatial limits. This article examines how terminological units perform this work in English and Uzbek digital journalism. The material is a purposive micro-corpus of 21 headlines (10 from BBC News and 11 from Kun.uz) containing 28 salient terminological units, evenly divided between the two outlets. Each unit was assigned a dominant role within a five-part analytical model: domain identification, denotative specification, quantitative-parametric precision, audience accommodation, and interdisciplinary integration. A contrastive qualitative analysis was supplemented with descriptive frequencies. Domain identification was the most frequent dominant role (7/28; 25.0%), followed by denotative specification (6/28; 21.4%); each of the other three roles accounted for five units (17.9%). The BBC News sample showed a stronger concentration of medical, scientific, and technological terminology, whereas Kun.uz foregrounded public-administrative, statistical, diplomatic, and economic vocabulary. English headlines tended to package specialized meaning through compact noun clusters and premodification, while Uzbek headlines more often relied on relational morphology, extended attributive structures, and explanatory co-text. The findings indicate that terms in headlines do more than name specialist concepts: they delimit reference, encode measurable parameters, activate domain knowledge, and manage the distance between expert and general audiences. The study proposes a replicable functional model for comparative headline analysis while recognizing the limits of a small purposive corpus.

Keywords: Terminology; digital news headlines; specialized lexis; semantic functions; BBC News; Kun.uz; English-Uzbek contrastive analysis; media discourse.

INTRODUCTION

A digital news headline is expected to perform several communicative tasks simultaneously: it must identify the event, signal why the event matters, indicate its thematic field, and invite further reading. These tasks are carried out under conditions of extreme compression. Classical descriptions of headlines emphasize structural economy, omission, and dense nominal packaging (Mårdh, 1980), while pragmatic accounts view the headline as an instrument that directs the reader toward the most contextually rewarding interpretation (Dor, 2003). In online journalism, where headlines circulate independently

through search engines and social media feeds, lexical choice becomes particularly consequential.

Terminological units are central to this lexical economy because they connect a linguistic form with a specialized concept. Sager (1990) treats terminology as an interface among knowledge, language, and communication, whereas Cabré (1999) conceptualizes the terminological unit as simultaneously cognitive, linguistic, and communicative. These perspectives make it possible to examine a term not merely as a label stored in a technical vocabulary, but as a discourse-sensitive unit whose value emerges in use.

Kageura (2002) further shows that terminologies develop through systematic patterns of conceptual naming, and Gotti (2003) demonstrates that specialized discourse relies on lexical precision to construct expert relations and domain-specific meanings.

Contemporary terminology studies also challenge the assumption that specialized concepts are stable and fully insulated from ordinary language. Temmerman's (2000) sociocognitive approach foregrounds category variation and context, while Faber (2012) explains terminological meaning through knowledge frames and conceptual relations. Corpus-oriented work similarly stresses that terms must be studied in authentic contexts rather than as isolated dictionary entries (Pearson, 1998; Bowker & Pearson, 2002). This is especially relevant to journalism, where terms migrate from professional domains into public communication. Such movement may lead to de-terminologization, semantic broadening, or partial accommodation to non-specialist readers (Meyer & Mackintosh, 2000).

News discourse is not a neutral container for specialist vocabulary. Its lexical and structural choices reflect institutional routines, presumed audience knowledge, editorial priorities, and culturally specific ways of organizing public information (van Dijk, 1988; Bell, 1991). Fairclough (1995) approaches media language as a site where institutional meanings are recontextualized for wider circulation, while Bednarek and Caple (2012) show how linguistic and multimodal resources construe newsworthiness. Within this setting, a term may function as a compact indicator of domain, as a denotational boundary, as a numerical parameter, or as a bridge between professional and everyday knowledge.

Despite the large body of research on terminology and news language, the semantic-functional behavior of specialized units in English and Uzbek online headlines has received limited contrastive attention. Existing headline studies tend to prioritize syntax, evaluation, or news values, whereas terminological studies often focus on scientific texts, technical documentation, translation resources, or expert corpora. The present study addresses this intersection by examining how BBC News and Kun.uz headlines deploy terms to encode subject domains and

organize reader interpretation. Its purpose is not to reproduce a catalogue of examples, but to develop a quantified and theoretically grounded account of the communicative work performed by terminological units in two linguistically and institutionally distinct news environments.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. Which subject domains are most visibly encoded by terminological units in the selected BBC News and Kun.uz headlines?
2. Which semantic-functional roles are dominant in the headline context?
3. What similarities and differences emerge in the English and Uzbek realization of specialized meaning?

METHODS

1. Corpus design and sampling

The analytical material is a purposive micro-corpus drawn from publicly accessible BBC News and Kun.uz headlines published between January 2025 and March 2026. The dataset contains 21 headlines: 10 English headlines from BBC News and 11 Uzbek headlines from Kun.uz. Selection was criterion-based rather than random. A headline was included when it contained at least one lexical item or multiword denomination whose interpretation depended on a specialized institutional, legal, economic, scientific, medical, technological, ecological, statistical, or diplomatic domain. The complete list is reproduced in Appendix A.

The corpus yielded 28 salient terminological units, with 14 units identified in each outlet. The balance at the term level permits a direct descriptive comparison even though the number of headlines differs slightly. The material should be understood as an analytically rich sample rather than a representative corpus of either platform. It was designed to test a functional model and to reveal recurrent mechanisms, not to estimate the full frequency of terminology in all BBC News or Kun.uz output.

Table 1. Composition of the analytical corpus

Outlet	Headlines	Terms	Terms per headline	Prominent topical profile
BBC News	10	14	1.40	Governance and finance; science, medicine, and technology
Kun.uz	11	14	1.27	Public administration; economics; statistics, metrology, and diplomacy
Total	21	28	1.33	Contrastive purposive sample

2. Unit of analysis and inclusion criteria. The unit of analysis was a single-word term or a stable multiword terminological expression functioning as one conceptual designation in the headline. Inclusion required two properties: (1) a domain-restricted or institutionally specialized meaning and (2) a direct contribution to the interpretation of the reported event. General lexical items, personal names, and place names were excluded unless they formed part of a specialized denomination. Initialisms such as VAT and DNA were included because their semantic role as technical concepts was under

examination; their formal abbreviation structure was not analyzed in this article.

3. Coding framework. The categories were derived from recurrent functional patterns in the corpus and aligned with terminology theory, specialized discourse analysis, and headline pragmatics. Because several functions may coexist in one term, each unit was assigned one dominant function for quantitative description, while secondary functions were retained in the qualitative interpretation. The five categories are operationalized in Table 2.

Table 2. Operational model for coding terminological functions

Function	Operational definition	Diagnostic question
Domain identification	Signals the professional, institutional, or knowledge field to which the event belongs.	What field is activated by the term?
Denotative specification	Narrows the referent and distinguishes it from broader everyday alternatives.	What precise entity, process, or status is selected?
Quantitative-parametric precision	Links a specialized concept with a numerical value, rate, quantity, duration, or direction of change.	Which measurable parameter is encoded?
Audience accommodation	Places an opaque or semi-specialized term beside familiar vocabulary, contextual cues, or an explanatory question.	How is non-expert interpretation supported?

Function	Operational definition	Diagnostic question
Interdisciplinary integration	Connects two or more subject fields within one terminological configuration.	Which domains are conceptually joined?

4. Analytical procedure. The analysis proceeded in two manual passes. The first pass identified candidate terms and assigned domain labels; the second examined each unit in its full headline context and assigned the dominant semantic-functional category. Frequencies and percentages were then calculated by outlet and for the combined dataset. Qualitative comparison focused on conceptual scope, neighboring lexical cues, numerical context, question structures, and English-Uzbek differences in nominal packaging. No inferential statistics were used because the corpus is small and purposively sampled. The coding was conducted by one analyst; consequently, no inter-coder agreement coefficient is claimed. The study involved only publicly available headlines and no human

participants.

RESULTS

1. Overall functional distribution. All five functions were represented in both outlets. Domain identification was the most frequent dominant function in the combined dataset, accounting for 7 of 28 units (25.0%). Denotative specification followed with 6 units (21.4%). Quantitative-parametric precision, audience accommodation, and interdisciplinary integration each occurred in 5 units (17.9%). The relatively even distribution confirms that terminological work in headlines is multidimensional: no single function exhausts the communicative value of specialized vocabulary.

Table 3. Distribution of dominant terminological functions

Dominant function	BBC News (n)	Kun.uz (n)	Total (n)	Total (%)
Domain identification	3	4	7	25.0
Denotative specification	3	3	6	21.4
Quantitative-parametric precision	2	3	5	17.9
Audience accommodation	3	2	5	17.9
Interdisciplinary integration	3	2	5	17.9
Total	14	14	28	100.0

2. Domain identification. Domain-identifying terms functioned as semantic anchors that classified the news event before the reader encountered the full report. In the BBC News headline “MSPs pass emergency bill to fix business rates blunder,” emergency bill activates the legal domain, whereas business rates activates local taxation and commercial property. Their co-occurrence defines the story as a legal response to an economic-administrative

problem. Likewise, social media ban immediately places the reported consultation at the intersection of digital communication and public regulation.

Kun.uz used a comparable mechanism in “Deputatlar renovatsiya to‘g‘risidagi qonun loyihasini ko‘rib chiqdi.” The combination of renovatsiya and qonun loyihasi identifies both the policy object and the legal status of the text under review. The paired expressions aholini

ro'yxatga olish and qishloq xo'jaligini ro'yxatga olish similarly identify a statistical-administrative operation while specifying two distinct objects of enumeration. In these cases, terminology is not an optional technical embellishment; it is the principal device by which the headline assigns the event to a recognizable institutional field.

3. Denotative specification. The second most frequent function was the restriction of denotational scope. The BBC News pair visa rules and migration system illustrates a scale contrast: the first denotes specific regulatory conditions governing entry and residence, whereas the second refers to the wider institutional and legal arrangement through which migration is administered. Surveillance network is likewise more specific than general alternatives such as observation or control because it profiles an organized infrastructure for monitoring and information collection.

In the Kun.uz material, konsullik and elchi differentiate an overseas institution from the diplomatic office-holder who represents the state. Replacing them with general words such as office or official would erase the referent's formal status. The expression taksi pasporti shows a different process: an everyday noun, passport, is terminologized by the transport-domain modifier taksi. The resulting combination denotes a regulatory document or identifier rather than a personal travel document. Thus, denotative specification can arise through both established professional terms and context-driven terminologization.

4. Quantitative-parametric precision. Economic terminology was frequently combined with numbers, time expressions, and verbs of change. In "Fed holds interest rates for fourth time," the term interest rates supplies the economic variable, holds indicates stability, and for fourth time marks recurrence. In "Lib Dems call for 5% VAT cut," the tax concept is integrated with an explicit proposed magnitude. The headline therefore communicates not only the topic of taxation but the size and direction of the requested intervention.

Kun.uz displayed the same parameterizing pattern with greater numerical diversity. Asosiy stavka was fixed at 14 percent; xalqaro zaxiralar were reported as exceeding 77 billion dollars; and bojsiz import rejimi was linked to 60 product categories and an extension of one year. Across these examples, the term identifies what is being measured, while the numeral supplies scale, quantity, or duration. The

combination enables a headline to compress a policy variable, its current value, and its trajectory into a single clause.

5. Audience accommodation. Specialized vocabulary can increase precision while also raising the processing burden for non-expert readers. Both outlets used contextual strategies to manage this tension. The BBC News headline on a fertility clinic and endometriosis places medical terms beside the everyday narrative vocabulary of date and love. The human-interest frame does not define the disease, but it provides an accessible interpretive route into the medical topic. DNA, by contrast, appears without expansion, suggesting that repeated circulation in public discourse has made the initialism sufficiently familiar for broad audiences.

Kun.uz more visibly used metadiscursive and contextual prompts. The headline naming the Xalqaro metrik konvensiya is followed by the question "Bu nima beradi?" This question signals that the article will translate institutional metrology into practical consequences for readers. Akkreditatsiya is not explicitly defined, yet its co-text - OTM, talabalar, and o'qishi ko'chiriladi - locates the concept within higher education and indicates why it matters. Audience accommodation therefore occurs not only through lexical simplification but through surrounding cues that predict or stage subsequent explanation.

6. Interdisciplinary integration. Five terms primarily integrated more than one domain. Climate change was connected to fishermen's mortality, bringing environmental change into contact with occupational health and regional livelihood. Robotic technology was contextualized through prostate problems, linking engineering innovation to clinical application. The term pair does not merely mention two fields; it establishes a problem-solution relation between them.

In the Uzbek data, ekologik talablar were embedded in the construction sector, thereby joining environmental norms with technical regulation and administrative enforcement. Islomiy moliya integrates economic activity with religious and legal principles. The modifier islomiy specifies not only a cultural association but a normative framework governing permissible financial practice. These cases show that headline terminology can compactly represent cross-domain knowledge structures that would otherwise require extended explanation.

7. Cross-outlet domain profiles. The two outlets contained the same number of coded terms but differed in topical concentration. BBC News devoted 5 of its 14 terms to science, medicine, and technology, whereas the selected Kun.uz headlines contained no term assigned primarily to

that broad category. Kun.uz instead displayed a more differentiated public-policy profile: three units belonged to demography, statistics, and metrology, and two to diplomacy and public services. Economic vocabulary was prominent in both outlets.

Table 4. Broad subject-domain distribution of the coded terms

PA	BBC News	Kun.uz	Total	Total (%)
Governance, law, and regulation	5	4	9	32.1
Economy, finance, and trade	3	4	7	25.0
Science, medicine, and technology	5	0	5	17.9
Environment and infrastructure	1	1	2	7.1
Demography, statistics, and metrology	0	3	3	10.7
Diplomacy and public services	0	2	2	7.1
Total	14	14	28	100.0

8. English-Uzbek realization of specialized meaning. Within the sample, English terminological expressions were commonly realized as compact noun groups with pre-head modification: business rates, visa rules, migration system, fertility clinic, climate change, and robotic technology. Their internal relations were encoded primarily through word order and lexical adjacency. This structure is well suited to headline compression because several conceptual features can be accumulated before the head noun without overt relational markers.

Uzbek terms more often appeared in head-final or relationally marked structures: qonun loyihasi, aholini ro'yxatga olish, bojsiz import rejimi, xalqaro zaxiralar, and ekologik talablar. Case morphology and extended co-text also helped readers locate specialized meaning, as in akkreditatsiyadan o'ta olmagan OTM talabalarining o'qishi ko'chiriladi. These patterns do not indicate greater or lesser precision; rather, they show that terminological compression is realized through different grammatical resources. English favors dense premodification, whereas Uzbek frequently distributes conceptual relations across modifiers, case forms, and syntactic context.

DISCUSSION

1. Terminological units as semantic anchors. The findings support a multidimensional account of the term. In line with Sager (1990) and Cabré (1999), the analyzed units simultaneously encoded knowledge, linguistic form, and communicative purpose. Their headline function was not exhausted by naming. A term such as migration system established a conceptual frame, limited the referential field, and positioned the event within public policy. Likewise, asosiy stavka identified an economic variable whose informational value became complete only when combined with a numerical parameter. This confirms that terminological meaning in media discourse is relational and context-dependent rather than merely lexical.

2. Compression and accessibility as concurrent pressures. The headline must maximize informational return from minimal linguistic material, a requirement consistent with Mårdh's (1980) account of headline economy and Dor's (2003) relevance-based model. Terminological units are efficient because they condense conceptual structures familiar to expert communities. However, the same compression can generate opacity for general readers. The corpus shows that journalists respond through contextual accommodation rather than through systematic replacement of terms with broad synonyms.

Familiar narrative vocabulary, explanatory questions, educational co-text, and widely circulated initialisms help preserve precision while reducing interpretive distance.

This pattern corresponds to Meyer and Mackintosh's (2000) discussion of de-terminologization, but the headlines also demonstrate that movement into public discourse does not necessarily erase specialized meaning. DNA retains a scientific reference while functioning as common media vocabulary; endometriosis remains specialized but is embedded in a recognizable personal narrative. Terms therefore occupy different points on a continuum of public familiarity. Audience accommodation is most effective when the surrounding language indicates the concept's relevance without distorting its scope.

3. Conceptual framing and interdisciplinary knowledge. Interdisciplinary examples reinforce the sociocognitive and frame-based view of terminology. Temmerman (2000) emphasizes that categories are shaped by evolving knowledge and usage, while Faber (2012) models terms as access points to structured conceptual frames. Climate change in a headline about fishermen activates environmental, medical, occupational, and economic relations; robotic technology in a prostate-treatment context activates an innovation-to-clinical-application frame. The terms guide the reader toward a network of relations rather than a single isolated definition.

4. Outlet-specific profiles and cautious interpretation. The domain contrast between the two outlets is analytically meaningful but should not be generalized as an inherent English-Uzbek difference. The BBC News subcorpus contains more medicine, biology, and technology, whereas the Kun.uz subcorpus foregrounds state administration, economic regulation, statistics, metrology, and diplomacy. This distribution may reflect editorial agendas, the specific period sampled, and the purposive selection of examples. Van Dijk (1988), Bell (1991), Fairclough (1995), and Bednarek and Caple (2012) all stress that news language is shaped by institutional production and news-value choices. The observed lexical profile should therefore be interpreted as an outlet-sensitive pattern within the sample, not as a fixed property of either language.

5. Implications for comparative linguistics, translation, and journalism. The comparison has three practical implications. First, terminological equivalence in translation should preserve conceptual scope rather than merely substitute a general-language synonym. Visa rules

and migration system, for example, are related but not interchangeable; konsullik cannot be reduced to a generic office without loss of diplomatic status. Second, headline writers can improve accessibility by retaining the term and adding a short contextual cue, numerical parameter, or explanatory question. Third, comparative analysis should attend to grammar as well as vocabulary: the same communicative function may be realized through English premodification or Uzbek relational morphology and extended attributive syntax.

From a corpus-methodological perspective, the study also supports the contextual principles advanced by Pearson (1998) and Bowker and Pearson (2002). A term's role cannot be reliably inferred from the isolated lexical form. Business rates acquires its full significance through the legal frame created by emergency bill; Xalqaro metrik konvensiya becomes audience-oriented through the subsequent question; and islomiy moliya becomes interdisciplinary through the semantic interaction of its modifier and head. Functional terminology analysis must therefore preserve the headline as a complete micro-context.

6. Limitations and directions for further research. The study has four principal limitations. The corpus is small and purposively selected; it cannot establish platform-wide frequency patterns. Each term was assigned one dominant function for counting, even though functions overlap in actual discourse. Coding was conducted by one analyst, and audience comprehension was inferred from textual cues rather than measured experimentally. Finally, the analysis focused on verbal headlines and did not examine accompanying images, metadata, or article leads.

Future research should construct a larger, temporally balanced English-Uzbek corpus; combine manual annotation with automated term extraction; test coding reliability across analysts; and examine reader responses to specialized vocabulary. Diachronic research could trace how initially opaque terms become familiar through repeated media exposure. Multimodal work could also investigate whether images compensate for terminological opacity or reinforce the conceptual frames activated by the headline.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that specialized lexical units in BBC News and Kun.uz headlines perform a coordinated set of

semantic and communicative functions. In the 28-term dataset, domain identification was the most frequent dominant role, followed by denotative specification; quantitative precision, audience accommodation, and interdisciplinary integration were equally represented. The results demonstrate that terminology enables headlines to classify events, narrow reference, encode measurable values, connect fields of knowledge, and manage the relationship between professional concepts and general readers.

The comparison also revealed outlet- and language-sensitive tendencies. The BBC News sample concentrated more heavily on science, medicine, and technology, while Kun.uz contained a broader cluster of public-administrative, statistical, diplomatic, and economic terms. English specialized meaning was commonly compressed through premodified noun groups; Uzbek used head-final combinations, relational morphology, and explanatory context. These are different grammatical routes to the same communicative objective: maximum conceptual precision under headline constraints.

The article's principal contribution is a five-function model that can be applied to larger contrastive corpora and adapted for translation studies, media linguistics, and terminography. The model treats the headline term as an active discourse mechanism rather than a passive technical label. Although the findings remain bounded by the purposive corpus, they offer a systematic basis for investigating how specialized knowledge is condensed, recontextualized, and made publicly meaningful in digital news.

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