



Original Research

Headline complexes in business articles as a means of opinion manipulation

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Article history Received May 12, 2023 | Revised August 19, 2023 | Accepted September 4, 2023

Conflicts of interest The authors declared no conflicts of interest

Research funding The reported study was funded by Russian Science Foundation, Project No. 23-28-00505 Manipulative rhetoric in modern English business media discourse: The functional pragmatic analysis

doi 10.22363/2521-442X-2023-7-3-69-78

For citation Aleksandrova, O. V., & Sibul, V. V. (2023). Headline complexes in business articles as a means of opinion manipulation. *Training, Language and Culture*, 7(3), 69-78.

The article considers the multidimensional phenomenon of speech manipulation and the role of mass media in forming public opinion. Linguistic studies show that speech manipulation also includes social, political, and psychological components. Mass media plays a significant part in creating a culture of relationships, influencing the behaviour and intelligence of any society. This explains why it eventually shapes public opinion by manipulating the consciousness of the audience using an extensive arsenal of linguistic means, which may express both verbal aggression and verbal collaboration. The paper considers the reasons why this phenomenon emerges in the language of mass media, its interpretations, and forms of expression, including its method, intensity, and purposefulness. The use of the discrediting strategy, which appears to be the most common for speech manipulation in modern mass media, is analysed. The strategy can be formed explicitly or implicitly, starting with title and subheading (the headline complex), and using different language means. The study identifies linguistic indicators of speech manipulation within the discrediting strategy which represent different tactics of direct and indirect accusation, opposition, solidarity, and rejection. They key functions of headline complexes are hence considered. Linguistic and functional analysis has revealed main indicators of speech manipulation while quantitative analysis has identified the most frequent linguistic means that indicate speech manipulation in the articles focused on economic and political issues.

KEYWORDS: *speech manipulation, headline complex, business mass media, discredit strategy, verbal aggression, verbal collaboration*



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1. INTRODUCTION

Newspaper headlines are of importance in mass media discourse. Titles and subheadings in mass media, as an opening section to their relevant main text, have had different functions ascribed to them. Discussing the news schema, Van Dijk (1988) has referred to headlines and leads of newspaper articles as categories forming 'the summary' of the news reports. Although in most cases headlines do bear such functions in mass media, some newspapers headlines present their readers with complex riddles which neither summarise nor present the detail of the main mass media text. In other words, newspaper headlines not only have the function of indicating the topic and summarising the main content of the news text, but they also try to help the reader grasp the meaning of the text, thus, in some way, manipulating readers' opinions. Manipulation is a linguistic term with great creative potential that is first and foremost topical in the framework of the theory of speech manipulation. The wide

and somewhat blurred semantic field of the term includes such key elements as the 'negative' intention of the speaker, and the covert (not evident for the reader) character of influence. Manipulative functions of any discourse create an overt, masked layer of linguistic data that is not easily separated from purely informational content. Depending on the character of the message (its orientation towards past or future), more importance is attached to either confirmation of objective reality (if the topic of interaction touches upon something that has already happened) or to the pragmatic factor (frankness of the author whose message is associated with the future).

This study aims to reveal linguistic means that indicate cases of speech manipulation in mass media and how they contribute to manipulating the reader's opinion. Awareness of what predetermines the perception of mass media information and forms a certain opinion in advance will be instrumental in perceiving and analysing this information more effectively.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study used a purposeful sampling for material collection since it aimed only at focusing on headlines of articles on economic and political issues. By adopting a non-random purposeful sampling, we have selected material from mass media focused on economic and political issues, such as *The Economist* (40 articles), *Financial Times* (40 articles), *Bloomberg* (40 articles), and *The Guardian* (40 articles). We have analysed headline complexes in recent issues (Spring to Summer of 2023) to reveal if there are any cases of speech manipulation or attempts to manipulate reader's opinion via special linguistic means chosen.

In the course of the study, linguistic and functional analysis of headline complexes for 160 articles was conducted coupled with the quantitative analysis to identify the linguistic means in most frequent use. The present article will present analysis of some of the most representative examples.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. The concept of speech manipulation

The concept of speech manipulation has been developed by many scholars. Most recent investigations emphasise the social nature of manipulation which rather often violates social norms. According to Raz (1986), *'manipulation, unlike coercion, does not interfere with a person's alternatives; instead, it perverts how a person makes judgments, establishes preferences, or sets goals'* (Raz, 1986, p. 377). Barnhill (2014), as well as Sunstein (2015), believe that manipulation consciously influences someone's beliefs, desires, or feelings, so that it falls short of ideals for belief, desire, or emotion in ways that are generally not in their self-interest or are likely not in their self-interest in the present context.

Generally, speech manipulation is understood as a multifaceted phenomenon, which includes various components: political, psychological, and social. One of the forms of speech manipulation is verbal aggression. According to recent studies, a person tends to 'absorb' and copy forms of behaviour from the screen (Zayyrbekova, 2020). The incoming information can be framed to exert direct imposition on someone's opinion. It exerts linguistic influence on the listener/viewer with the desire to change their mindset, often unreasoned or insufficiently reasoned, open, or disguised, and latent with the intent to offend, or have a negative impact that has the potential to cause further harm to a person.

Hamilton (2012) states that the selfish emotions of the individualistic affective system can drive verbal aggression and even physical assault. In contrast, the prosocial emotions of the cooperative affective system drive verbal collaboration and is most comforting. As for modern mass media, being a type of verbal communication, it may possess both verbal aggression and verbal collaboration.

The forms of verbal aggression and verbal collaboration encompass a diverse range of linguistic mechanisms. In the context of verbal aggression, these mechanisms include using

obscure language deliberately to hinder comprehension, incorporating borrowed vocabulary and inflating jargon, even to the extent of incriminating others. Additionally, we can include linguistic demagoguery and excessive use of metaphors, as well as relying on fixed expressions, proverbs, and sayings, and introducing new words associated with negatively evaluated situations or proper names connected to specific negatively assessed phenomena to express verbal aggression.

Philologists studying manipulation naturally rely on the research of psychologists and following them they name these signs of manipulative influence, which should be considered in the aggregate (David, 2014; Grishechko, 2023; Malyuga & Akopova, 2023):

- the covert nature of influence (intentional concealment of the true goal);
- the conscious nature of the impact;
- the inducement of addressees to carry out actions pleasing to the manipulating agency, or the introduction into their consciousness of desires and attitudes alien to them, but necessary for the sender of the message;
- the manipulated person does not see themselves as an object of control, believing that it was their own decision related to the implementation of certain actions, and that they themselves made a choice.

According to Akopova (2013), manipulation can be categorised along several dimensions. First, it can be classified based on the *awareness of linguistic actions*. This results in two primary categories: intentional and non-intentional manipulation. In cases of intentional linguistic manipulation, the manipulator has a specific objective, aiming for a particular response from the target audience. On the other hand, non-intentional manipulation occurs unintentionally, with no deliberate intent to influence the recipient's response.

Secondly, manipulation can be examined through the lens of *the type of linguistic action* involved. This categorisation identifies three main forms, which are social, volitional, and informational and estimative manipulation. Social manipulation involves non-informational speech acts utilising clichés, such as greetings, oaths, and prayers. Volitional manipulation encompasses speech acts where the author's intentions guide the recipient's actions, including issuing orders, making requests, refusals, providing advice, and more. Informational and estimative manipulation comprises speech acts that shape public moral, legal, and interpersonal emotional relations. Examples include expressions of reprobation, praise, accusation, insult, and threats.

Furthermore, manipulation can be assessed *based on the addressee's reaction*, a criterion known as the perlocutionary criterion. This categorisation yields three primary forms of manipulation – evaluative, emotional, and rational. Evaluative manipulation entails altering the subject-object relationship and changing the connotative meaning of an object for the subject. Emotional manipulation focuses on establishing a particular emotional atmosphere or mood. Rational manipulation involves

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restructuring the categorical framework of an individual's conscience and introducing new categories to ultimately influence perception.

Lastly, as posited by Akopova (2013), manipulation can be categorised by its *orientation towards the interlocutor*. It can either be person-oriented, directed at influencing an individual, or society-oriented, with the aim of shaping perceptions and responses within a broader societal context.

We can also distinguish types of speech manipulation by the methods of expression, which are *explicit manipulation* (a pronounced effect on consciousness with the purpose of imposing their ideas and points of view), and *implicit manipulation* (implicit impact on the consciousness of the audience to impose the speaker's or writer's opinion).

Among the linguistic indicators of manipulateness, the following groups were originally identified.

1. Triggers, which can be explicit or open (words and phrases reflecting socially significant objects, phenomena, etc.; precedent names), and 'hidden' (visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic predicates).

2. Indicators that involve some national context.

3. Evaluation indicators:

– words with an average and low index of negative evaluation;

– set expressions, metaphors, clichés with a negative connotation;

– words with a high index of negative evaluation;

– words with a negative connotation in the article's title;

– words with a negative tone in the text of the article;

– set expressions, clichés with a negative tone, characterising the country, state, government, social significant objects, phenomena, etc.;

– words with a medium or low index of negative connotation in the text of the article, characterising the country, state, government, socially significant objects, phenomena, etc.;

– words with a high index of negative sentiment in the text of the article, characterising the country, state, government, socially significant objects, phenomena, etc.

4. Formal manipulation markers: repetition of words with a negative tone, rhetorical questions, impersonal constructions, generalisation.

Importantly, language mechanisms operating the processes of speech manipulation have appeared spontaneously since language itself to some extent may facilitate a kind of distortion of objective reality offering not only specific designations but also imprecise, blurred, ambiguous denominations. Any discourse, intended to manipulate, takes a position between two extreme points – the legitimate (true and complete) information and a lie. Some scholars consider a lie and manipulation to be different types of truth, whereby a lie stands up against 'semantic truth', while manipulation opposes 'pragmatic truth'. Manipulation can be only realised when the recipient cannot see the speaker's covered-up intentions behind what is being verbally communicated. As one of the key parameters of a manipulative message is specific intentionality, to recognise manipulation, one must analyse such parameters as the aim of the verbal communication, its communicative intention, reason, and motive.

The use of certain grammatical forms and syntactic constructions in a discourse characterised as manipulative does not mean specific 'manipulative grammar', as the same linguistic means are used to fulfil many other functions. At the same time, it is crucial to consider any linguistic means typical of a manipulative message as it helps to identify the very fact of manipulation. A discourse becomes manipulative not due to the usage of specific lexical or grammatical units, but first and foremost, through association with the speaker's intentions, the unclear influential character of the utterance and the conditions of communication (social context). Thus, language offers to speakers a whole arsenal of means to realise manipulative aims.

3.2. The role of mass media

Mass media plays an important role in the life of any modern person. It forms a culture of relationships and influences the behaviour and intelligence of a whole society, communicating to a large group of people the agenda of what they will think at any time. Appropriately, through mass media, the variety and quality of information available to people has increased immensely, which has resulted in the need to protect their human rights if there is any violation. According to Paul and Rai (2021, p. 8), *'mass media has massively impacted the people by acting as an agent of change, replicator, and strengthening guiding principles, and law protecting their rights'*. Mass media also shapes public opinion by manipulating their readership's consciousness using a whole arsenal, including a variety of speech means. As Robinson (2017, p. 523) notes, *'the media is an essential institution of democracy, which plays a vital role in shaping public opinion and holding those in power accountable for their actions'*.

Another significant function of the mass media is education. The media provides educational content on a wide range of topics, such as science, history, and politics, through documen-

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taries, news programmes, and online resources. The media can act as a valuable source of information for individuals who may not have access to traditional educational institutions, such as schools and universities (Robinson, 2017). However, the media's role in society is not without controversy. Some critics argue that the media can promote false or misleading information, which can lead to harmful consequences. For example, the media can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and biases, leading to discrimination and social inequality. Additionally, some media outlets prioritise profit over public service, which can lead to sensationalism and biased reporting (Robinson, 2017).

3.3. Headline complex functions

A headline complex (HC) is a structural-semantic association of text elements, not only previewing it, but organically connected, meaningfully and conceptually, with the text. The elements of the HC are traditionally considered to be a title, a rubric, a subheading, and internal headings.

Serdali et al. (2016) distinguish three main functions of the HC: nominative (names the text), informative (briefly describes the content of the article), and pragmatic. The latter function implies that the HC attracts the reader's attention, forms their perception of the text, and, with its internal and external form, causes curiosity, bewilderment, surprise, indignation, confusion, or disappointment. To Mirabela and Ariana (2010) the pragmatic function is achieved through the linguistic features of the headline, whereby the author shows their application of the reader's capability to understand and notice linguistic features by using different linguistic methods to enhance the effect of the headline. Therefore, one may conclude that headlines do not necessarily give a summary of the story or article since sometimes an author tries to arouse the readers' curiosity through different techniques, thus manipulating the reader's view of the issue raised in the article.

Considering the importance of mass media in forming public opinion, the pragmatic function of HCs in the overall perception of mass media messages, as well as the results of studies that prove the rise in frequency of manipulation in mass media, this study intends to reveal the most effective forms of manipulation in mass media HCs and their function.

4. STUDY AND RESULTS

4.1. Evaluation indicators

Back in 1955, Bird and Merwin (1955) stated that headline writers choose the most effective and emphatic words and avoid any words that might weaken the effect of the headline on their readers. More recently, Bucaria (2004) has pointed out that one of the most important features of headlines is the use of 'loaded' words and expressions which carry strong connotation and hence attract attention. Concerning lexicon, headlines are notably characterised as 'rich', retaining lexical units imbued with semantic significance while often discarding grammatical components due to their semantically vacuous nature. This choice of vocabulary creates evaluation indicators in a headline. The most notable examples below are subjected to analytical analysis in accordance with the stipulated research objectives.

An article published by Bloomberg, bearing the title *Germany's Economic Malaise Evokes 'Sick Man of Europe' Era* (Wind, 2023) seeks to address the economic landscape of Germany. Evident from the outset is the conspicuous overtone of metaphorical language encapsulated in the title itself, notably the phrases 'economic malaise' and 'sick man of Europe era', which predispose readers to embrace adverse information and foster a negative perspective concerning the state of Germany's economy. Through the use of terms such as 'malaise' and 'sick', defined respectively as '*an indefinite feeling of debility or lack of health often indicative of or accompanying the onset of an illness*' (The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023b) and '*affected with disease or ill health*' (The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023c), the author orchestrates an intended pragmatic outcome. Subsequent subheadings, such as *Second-Quarter Data Showed No Growth After a Recession* and *Enduring Industrial Weakness Is Overshadowing Outlook*, serve to further reinforce this effect. While the imposition of a specific standpoint is not explicitly articulated, the deliberate selection of metaphors and connotatively charged vocabulary engenders an impact on readers, shaping a bleak portrayal of Germany's economic panorama. Consequently, the title efficaciously serves its pragmatic purpose, concurrently discrediting the contemporaneous state of the German economy while fulfilling both its informative and nominative functions.

Two additional instances drawn from *The Economist* provide opinions on people who rule corporate business or occupy prominent roles in government bodies.

The article entitled *What to Read About Villains in Business* (The Economist, 2023f) presents a list of books and TV shows about business leaders. The deliberate adoption of the term 'villain', which carries a negative connotation and an element of accusation – being defined as '*a deliberate scoundrel or criminal*' (The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023d) – overtly manifests the author's disposition toward contemporary business leadership. This stance is further underscored by the subheading *Four Books and a TV Show on Corporate Crooks*, where the word 'crook', meaning a dishonest person, is also a direct accusation. Furthermore, being informal and idiomatic in

its linguistic characterisation, it assumes an unequivocally forceful connotation. Evidently, readers are systematically primed for an accusatorial stance, with the title competently discharging its defamatory role.

The other article under the title *Nepo Babies are Taking Over the Workplace* (The Economist, 2023d) dwells on the predicament of nepotism, wherein familial ties often dictate professional placements. The subheading *One in Three Americans Has Worked for Mum or Dad* supplements this with empirical evidence. The term 'nepo baby' inherently imparts a pejorative undertone, encapsulating the concept of according unjust advantages to kinfolk due to positions of authority, so that from the start readers are presented with an unequivocal perspective of the author's stance on the matter and on those who procure occupational positions solely by virtue of influential familial associations.

The aforementioned examples collectively underscore how authors, through the meticulous curation of vocabulary and expressions resonating with adverse connotations, systematically ready readers to internalise their viewpoints on specific issues, pre-empting conclusions prior to engaging with the textual content and the information therein elucidated.

A parallel trajectory can be observed in instances drawn from the corpus of the Financial Times. The article entitled *Mitch McConnell's 'Sandbag' Moment Stokes Anxiety Over US Gerontocracy* (Fedor, 2023) reveals the concerns harboured by certain people regarding the occupancy of influential positions by individuals of advanced age. The deliberate integration of the slang term 'sandbag' in a metaphorical capacity, along with the lexical inclusion of 'gerontocracy', denoting 'a form of social organisation in which a group of old men or a council of elders dominates or exercises control' (The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023a), collectively imbue the titular composition with an overtly negative connotation. The photo under the title and commentary to it, *The US Senate's top Republican, Mitch McConnell, centre, is helped by other senators after the 81-year-old GOP leader froze at the microphones at a press conference*, being a part of a HC, further support the author's attitude to the topic.

Another article under the title *An Inquiry into Macron Derangement Syndrome* (Ganesh, 2023) deals with the policy initiatives undertaken by the French leader. Evident once more is the deliberate selection of lexicographic elements brimming with unfavourable implications, encapsulated in the phrase 'derangement syndrome'. The nomenclature in question leaves scant room for ambiguity regarding the author's distinctly negative appraisal of the aforementioned policy paradigm, with the chosen term signifying a state characterised by an inability to comport oneself and reason coherently, particularly stemming from an affliction of mental well-being. Furthermore, this selection arguably carries a veiled insinuation of Macron's purported inadequacy in effectively regulating the socio-political situation in France. The subsequent subheading, employed in immediate succession, affirms this sentiment unequivocally: *'Dislike of the French president reveals how shallow and tribal*

politics now is'. Within this framework, a conspicuous application of discrediting strategy is perceptible, a strategic intent rendered manifest through the culling of lexemes of marked potency.

4.2. Triggers

Morphologists partition language into two distinct categories: realised words and potential words. The lexicon of a language remains fluid, as speakers and writers possess the capacity to forge novel lexical entities, while recipients, listeners, or readers, evince the capability to comprehend an unbounded expanse of novel vocabulary (Haspelmath, 2002, p. 39). Neologisms, a frequent occurrence within mass media, assume a role of a catalyst, warranting examination. This study further looks into examples, elucidating their utilisation of linguistic constructs as strategic triggers in the framework of the discrediting strategy.

The article bearing the headline *'Greedflation' Is a Nonsense Idea* (The Economist, 2023c) deliberates upon the causative factors behind inflation. It is discernible that the author's perspective is entrenched within a negative valence, an attribute perceptible from the outset. The neologism 'greedflation', a fusion of the lexemes 'greed' and 'inflation', thereby bestows a derogatory hue attributed to the component 'greed' – 'a selfish desire to have more of something (especially money)' (The Britannica Dictionary, 2023). This association with an unfavourable human trait lends itself to a negative disposition. This sentiment is buttressed by the subheading *Inflation Is the Result of Economic Policy Mistakes and War, Not Corporate Avarice*, conclusively attributing causality. Although an overt indictment or denigration remains veiled, readers are primed to assimilate an adverse perspective concerning the existing economic policy and its ramifications. The title, accompanied by the subheading, consequently, serves as an instrument of discrediting strategy.

The following example pertains to the article *Erdoganomics Is Spreading Across the World* (The Economist, 2023b), elucidating the economic policy propagated by the Turkish leader, which has affected various burgeoning economies across Asia and Africa. The neologism 'Erdoganomics', synthesising the name of the Turkish leader with 'economics', is laden with unfavourable connotations, closely associated with the extensively criticised Turkish statesman in Western media and political circles. The subheading immediately following the title fortifies this notion: *'It has been embraced in emerging-market finance ministries, threatening trouble*'. Ergo, readers are instantly predisposed to imbibe a pessimistic assessment of Erdogan's economic strategy and its implications for emerging economies, rather than embarking on an independent analysis of facts and figures. Consequently, this title also attains significance in the context of a discrediting strategy.

Moving further, the article titled *Bidenomics Is a Battle Between Efficiency and Resilience* (Sahm, 2023), furnishes an analytical evaluation of the economic policies pursued by the United States President. Analogous to the previous example, the

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employment of the neologism 'Bidenomics', a portmanteau of 'Biden' and 'economics', is prominent, adding a particular leader's nomenclature to the economic doctrine being scrutinised. The inclusion of robust terms within the title, such as 'battle', 'efficiency', and 'resilience', engenders a favourable connotation encapsulating the overall title and potentially evoking the readers' constructive appraisal of the extant economic policy. This sentiment is reinforced by the ensuing subheading, *'The White House's economic policies are designed to help the economy weather rough patches down the road rather than produce an immediate payoff'*, which clarifies the intent behind the economic strategies employed. This instance deviates from the prior examples, adopting a strategy rooted in cooperative discourse rather than overt aggression.

The subsequent trio of illuminating examples points to the preference for idiomatic constructs, brimming with negative implications as immediate triggers for fashioning a negative feeling among readers.

In the Financial Times' publication titled *Worldcoin Foundation Swims Against the Crypto Tide* (Aldridge, 2023), the author engages with the analysis of a company's performance within the cryptocurrency market. The idiomatic usage of 'swim against the tide', signifying opposition to prevailing attitudes or viewpoints, carries an overtly negative insinuation. In its employment within the headline, it serves to underscore the author's disapproval of the company's strategic course, arguably inferring its counterproductive nature.

A publication by The Guardian features the headline *From Thatcher to Sunak – Toxic Divide and Rule Has Always Been the Tory Weapon of Choice* (Jones, 2023a) dealing with the current policy of the British Prime Minister. The selection of the term 'toxic', carrying the connotation of being poisonous, coupled with the idiomatic phrase 'divide and rule', signifying the tactic of keeping control by fostering discord among opposing groups, effectively communicates the author's unequivocally negative stance toward the policy pursued by the leader. The subsequent subheading, *'Consider the aliens bill of 1904 and then Theresa May's claims about a migrant's cat, and you see a long, ignoble*

tradition', consolidates this perspective. The explicit mention of Theresa May, who is associated with negatively-received policies, and the use of ignoble tradition, with an unmistakable negative hue, corroborate the endeavour to cultivate a predetermined standpoint among readers. Thus, both the headline and subheading function as triggers to inculcate a specific stance within a discrediting strategy.

Bloomberg contributes to this discourse with the article *Actually, Americans Can Handle a Rainy Day* (Karl, 2023), expounding on the financial stability of American households. Here, the title extrapolates the idiomatic expression 'to keep/save for a rainy day', denoting saving for unforeseen contingencies, into an assertive declaration affirming Americans' capability to surmount difficult circumstances. In contrast to the earlier instances, this example employs an idiomatic construct to accentuate the author's viewpoint, arising from personal analysis of the situation. The subsequent subheading, *'You know that statistic about how most people say they don't have enough cash to pay for an emergency \$400 expense? It's mostly bogus'*, serves to negate the veracity of the stated statistic through the use of the potent term 'bogus'. Thus, through verbal collaboration rather than aggression, this headline and subheading collectively substantiate their role as strategic devices.

The amalgamation of the above suggested examples collectively elucidates the manipulation of neologisms, idioms, and linguistically robust terms to forge a specific attitude within a discrediting strategy.

4.3. Indicators that involve some national context

The national context of any society comprises its distinct national cultures and social institutions. These components collectively contribute to shaping fundamental norms, values, and beliefs. As an integral part of the institutional framework intertwined with this process, mass media invariably engages with the national context, with the following select examples illustrating this argument.

In its publication, The Economist presents an article headlined *Niger Spoils Macron's Plan for an African Reset* (The Economist, 2023e), delving into the nuances of French political and economic influence within the African region. The readers are promptly immersed in the national context, signified by explicit indicators such as 'Niger' (a proper name denoting West Africa's largest country), 'Macron' (a proper name denoting the French president), and 'African' (pertaining to Africa and its populace). The subheading *The Coup Is Another Blow to French Influence in Africa*, advances this initial sense of national context established by the headline. This effect is further amplified by the use of potent terms like 'coup', referring to an unlawful and often violent governmental upheaval, and 'blow', connoting an unforeseen occurrence with detrimental consequences. Consequently, both the headline and the subheading serve to orient readers towards the inference that recent events in Africa have adversely impacted France's influence in the African sphere, thereby discrediting French policy in the region.

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Another case, drawn from Bloomberg, presents an article titled *UK Lawmakers Criticise HSBC After Executive's China Remarks* (Wickham, 2023), conducting an analysis of the British bank's stance towards its Chinese counterparts. The national context is established through the use of proper names such as 'UK' (a country abbreviation), 'HSBC' (the name of the renowned British bank), and 'China' (a proper name denoting a country). The ensuing subheading, *'HSBC's Cowper-Coles said 'weak' UK follows US on China policy. Ex-Tory leader Duncan Smith says HSBC has 'lot to answer for'*, bolsters this national context by incorporating names of individuals espousing contrasting viewpoints on the matter. As a consequence, readers are aptly primed to assess the issue from different perspectives, thereby enabling them to engage with and support one of the divergent viewpoints.

Both instances highlight the presence of national context within articles centred around economic and political subject matter. Such contextual elements prominently emerge in scenarios that intersect with pertinent national interests, serving to contextualise and, at times, accentuate the discourse.

4.4 Formal manipulation markers

One of the discernible markers of manipulation involves employing parallelism or repetition to underscore analogous concepts within a sentence. This technique enhances sentence clarity, conciseness, and readability, proving particularly crucial in items listed sequentially, paired items, and in constructing outlines or lists. Within the realm of mass media, this strategy is deftly wielded by authors to influence reader opinions. The following cases exemplify such instances.

The Economist, in its published piece *Americans Love American Stocks. They Should Look Overseas* (The Economist, 2023a), investigates the stock market scenario and endeavours to uncover the underlying causes of the American predilection for domestic stocks, coupled with their tepid interest in overseas equivalents. Notably, the theme is reinforced through the deliberate repetition of the term 'American' within the same sentence, signifying both the investors and the stocks' origin. This effect is amplified by the inclusion of the emphatic word 'love', which conveys an extreme degree of preference. Consequently, readers swiftly grasp the author's unwavering conviction in the stance conveyed by the headline. This sentiment is reinforced by the subsequent subheading *'Even if*

shifting to foreign shares after such a long winning streak feels risky', underscoring the author's recommendation to break with convention and embrace overseas stocks.

Similarly, Bloomberg presents an article titled *Wall Street Squirms While Main Street Gets Relief* (Sen, 2022), offering a comparative analysis between two distinct markets: the stock market and the consumer market. The principle of contrast or juxtaposition is effectively accomplished through the repetition of the term 'street' in the dual word compositions: Wall Street, representing the financial hub of the US, and Main Street, embodying the primary commercial district in a town. Additionally, the parallel grammatical structure 'subject plus predicate' further accentuates this concept. The ensuing subheading, *'Investors may have lots to worry about, but consumers are feeling more confident as gas prices fall, the housing frenzy calms and jobs remain plentiful'*, corroborates this opposition directly.

A formal marker of manipulation, the rhetorical question, functions distinctively from its linguistic definition as a question posed for effect, rather than genuine pursuit of an answer. This technique, frequently deployed in debates to convey a point without a declarative stance, stimulates thought and discourse. As the modern mass media is progressively interactive, it is harnessed by authors to catalyse contemplation and encourage discourse.

Thus, in Bloomberg's *A US Soft Landing? Even the Fed Doesn't Believe It* (Dudley, 2023) an examination of currency exchange dynamics in the US is undertaken. Notably, the title frames the idea of a 'soft landing' as a rhetorical question, denoting scepticism about the feasibility of a smooth currency depreciation. This questioning effect is amplified by the subsequent segment *'Unless 3.6% unemployment is the new normal, the central bank has more tightening to do'*, which reinforces the initial doubts. By resorting to a rhetorical question, the author stimulates readers to ponder and potentially arrive at similar uncertainties.

Another Bloomberg article, under the headline *Inflation? The Workforce Is the Bigger Problem* (Cowen, 2022), presents two rhetorical questions that prod readers to reflect on distinct economic concerns: inflation and employment rates. The subsequent subheading, *'This current period of rising prices has its roots in mistaken assumptions about supply and demand made a decade ago'*, expounds the author's perspective on the underpinnings of these economic issues.

In parallel, two examples from The Guardian shed light on the use of rhetorical questions for stimulating thought and inciting discussion. The first, entitled *Why do Britain's MPs Hang On to Their Second Jobs? Because Our Tinpot Democracy Lets Them* (Jones, 2023b), critiques the practice of MPs holding additional jobs unrelated to their parliamentary duties. Here, the rhetorical question serves both as a thought-provoking gesture and as a means to articulate the author's perspective, while the subheading *'New analysis on MPs' second jobs reveals a wealth of vested interests – when their only interest should be their*

constituents’ harnesses strongly connotated lexical units and expressions, such as ‘tinpot democracy’ and ‘vested interest’, to enhance the negative evaluation.

The second article, *Where Have All the Buses Gone? Their Neglect Is an English National Failure* (Harris, 2023), employs a rhetorical question in its title to highlight the author’s perspective. Strong words like ‘neglect’ and ‘failure’ further reinforce the author’s sentiment, accentuating the inefficiency of governmental policies. The subsequent subheading *‘Buses should be at the heart of public policy. Instead, the government panders to motorists while local routes vanish’* further underscores the author’s viewpoint and highlights the premise of the discrediting strategy.

4.5. Empirical evidence and discussion

Through the above outlined linguistic and functional analysis, the study has identified four primary categories of markers indicative of speech manipulation: triggers, indicators involving national context, evaluation indicators, and formal manipulation markers, each manifested through various linguistic mechanisms of established efficiency. Table 1 below showcases a quantitative analysis that explores the frequency of occurrence for each indicator across four selected mass media publication outlets, offering practical informed data on how often each of these markers is strategically employed to shape public discourse and influence opinions in the media landscape, as per the sample analysed.

Table 1
Quantitative breakdown of manipulation indicators in mass media examples

PUBLICATION	TRIGGERS	INDICATORS INVOLVING NATIONAL CONTEXT	EVALUATION INDICATORS	FORMAL MANIPULATION MARKERS
Bloomberg	7	8	20	5
The Economist	6	7	21	6
Financial Times	7	5	22	6
The Guardian	8	6	25	6

The analysis of the selected mass media examples clearly reveals a prevalent utilisation of evaluation indicators – an observation that can be attributed to the pragmatic intent of these media outlets, whose purpose extends beyond merely imparting information and onto providing comprehensive analyses of political and economic contexts. Such analytical endeavours inherently involve evaluations, thus influencing the selection of linguistic tools.

The findings affirm the existence of speech manipulation within mass media, particularly those focusing on economic and political domains. This manipulation predominantly employs a discrediting strategy to sway public opinion. Evidently, the impact of conveyed information significantly hinges on the addresser’s strategic and tactical choices, serving as instruments of influence. According to Blakar (1979), even when senders endeavour to present information objectively, the chosen linguistic elements inherently shape and condition the recipients’ understanding. This potency of language and its wielders to structure and influence underscores the assertion that language is an instrument of social power. In our context, this influence and manipulation is manifested through the deliberate linguistic construction of discourse in mass media articles.

Furthermore, the outcomes compel us to deduce that mass media instances represent communicative scenarios wherein the accurate interpretation of speech activities relies on contextual background and inferential comprehension (Aleksandrova,

2018). Effective implementation of manipulation strategies within discourse hinges on the readers’ capacity to grasp the message in its entirety. This points to the need for readers to possess a certain level of knowledge to decode messages comprehensively.

These research findings advocate the incorporation of the understanding of speech manipulation as a means to shape reader opinions within pedagogical practices, particularly in foreign language instruction at higher educational institutions. Educators can enlighten students regarding manipulation markers in headlines and content, encouraging them to autonomously identify such markers. This fosters a deeper understanding of authors’ stances and nurtures critical comprehension skills.

6. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to illuminate the complex landscape of speech manipulation within mass media discourse, with a particular focus on economic and political contexts. By employing a purposeful sampling method, the study examined headlines from reputable sources such as The Economist, The Financial Times, Bloomberg, and The Guardian, collectively amounting to 160 articles. Through a blend of linguistic and functional analyses, coupled with a quantitative exploration, we endeavoured to discern linguistic markers indicative of speech manipulation and their frequency of occurrence.

The empirical findings of the investigation unearthed compelling evidence of the prevalence of manipulation strategies in these media contexts, predominantly through the use of evaluation indicators. It is evident that media outlets often employ linguistic techniques to not only convey information but to also mould readers' perceptions and opinions. The analysis underscores how media headlines, as the forefront of articles, serve as a platform for implementing these strategies, often through triggers, national context indicators, formal manipulation markers, and rhetorical questions.

These results carry profound implications for the comprehension of mass media discourse. It becomes apparent that headlines, despite their concise nature, are instrumental in setting the tone for the subsequent content and shaping readers'

understanding. The strategic application of linguistic elements enhances the communicative impact and the potential to influence public opinion. This realisation prompts a call for greater media literacy, empowering readers to critically engage with headlines and decode manipulation markers to discern the underlying intentions.

Furthermore, this study bridges the gap between linguistic theory and media practice, explaining how language can be harnessed to wield influence. The study advocates the integration of media literacy education, equipping individuals to navigate media content with heightened discernment. In essence, understanding the mechanics of linguistic manipulation in media headlines not only enhances linguistic analysis but also fosters a more informed and empowered media consumer base.

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