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ENGLISH THROUGH THE HEADLINES:
JOURNALISM AS A TOOL FOR LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Summary. *The article aims to investigate the potential of journalism, and particularly the genre of newspaper and online headlines, as a tool for English language acquisition. Headlines are considered as a special linguistic phenomenon combining conciseness, informativeness, pragmatic load, and stylistic expressiveness. The study focuses on identifying the opportunities for integrating headlines into the learning process in order to foster lexical, grammatical, pragmatic, and communicative competences of university students. The research employs descriptive and analytical methods, supported by elements of content analysis and comparative analysis to examine the linguistic, stylistic, and pragmatic features of English-language headlines. Examples from contemporary British and American press are provided to illustrate the findings. The theoretical framework is based on text linguistics, pragmalinguistics, and language teaching methodology, which allows for uncovering both the functional and didactic potential of journalistic texts.*

For the first time, the article offers a systematic consideration of English-language news headlines as a specific type of authentic educational material that combines linguistic and educational dimensions. The novelty lies in demonstrating the dual role of headlines in the process of language acquisition: on the one hand, as compact models of grammar, word formation, collocation, and pragmatic strategies; on the other, as a means of developing students' critical thinking and media literacy.

Journalistic headlines represent a valuable didactic resource capable of diversifying the traditional learning process and increasing learners' motivation to study English. Their brevity and semantic density contribute to the development of grammatical analysis skills, vocabulary expansion, and abilities of textual interpretation and intercultural communication. Future research should focus on empirical investigation of how working with authentic headlines influences students' language progress at different proficiency levels and on designing integrated teaching methodologies that incorporate journalistic materials within the broader framework of media education.

Key words: *journalism, English language, headline, authentic text, media literacy, language competence.*

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ВИВЧЕННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ КРІЗЬ ПРИЗМУ ГАЗЕТНИХ ЗАГОЛОВКІВ: ЖУРНАЛІСТИКА ЯК ЗАСІБ МОВНОЇ ПІДГОТОВКИ

Анотація. Стаття має на меті дослідити потенціал журналістики, зокрема жанру газетних та онлайн-заголовків, як інструмента для вивчення англійської мови. Розглянуто специфіку заголовків як особливого мовного явища, що поєднує у собі стислість, інформативність, прагматичне навантаження та стилістичну виразність. Аналіз спрямований на виявлення можливостей інтеграції заголовків у процес формування лексичної, граматичної, прагматичної та комунікативної компетентностей здобувачів вищої освіти. У статті застосовано описовий та аналітичний методи, а також елементи контент-аналізу та порівняльного аналізу для вивчення мовних, стилістичних і прагматичних особливостей англомовних заголовків. Для ілюстрації наведено приклади з сучасних британських та американських видань. Теоретичною основою дослідження є положення лінгвістики тексту, прагмалінгвістики та методики викладання іноземних мов, що допомогло розкрити функціональний і дидактичний потенціал журналістських матеріалів.

Уперше зроблено спробу системного розгляду англомовних новинних заголовків як специфічного виду автентичного навчального матеріалу, що поєднує лінгвістичний і виховний аспекти. Новизна полягає у виявленні подвійної функції заголовків у процесі вивчення мови: з одного боку, як компактних зразків граматики, словотвору, лексичної сполучуваності та прагматичних стратегій; з іншого – як засобу формування критичного мислення й медіаграмотності студентів.

Журналістські заголовки становлять цінний дидактичний ресурс, здатний урізноманітнити традиційний освітній процес і підвищити мотивацію до вивчення англійської мови. Їхня стислість і водночас смислова насиченість дають змогу формувати вміння граматичного аналізу, розширювати словниковий запас, розвивати навички інтерпретації тексту й міжкультурної комунікації. У перспективі подальші дослідження мають бути спрямовані на емпіричне вивчення впливу роботи з автентичними заголовками на динаміку мовних досягнень студентів різних рівнів, а також на створення інтегрованих методик використання журналістських матеріалів у контексті медіаосвіти.

Ключові слова: журналістика, англійська мова, заголовок, автентичний текст, медіаграмотність, мовна компетентність.

Statement of the problem. In the context of globalization and rapid information exchange, English has become not only the dominant language of international communication but also the primary medium through which news is produced, distributed, and consumed worldwide. At the same time, journalism – especially in the form of news headlines – represents a unique linguistic phenomenon: concise, informative, stylistically condensed, and highly context-driven. These features make headlines an invaluable resource for studying authentic language use and improving language acquisition skills.

The relevance of this research lies in the increasing need for innovative methods of learning English that go beyond traditional classroom

practices. While textbooks often provide structured yet limited examples of language, journalism introduces learners to real-life vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, stylistic devices, and cultural references that reflect the dynamics of modern English. News discourse enables learners to encounter different registers, from formal reporting to opinion pieces, thus offering diverse linguistic and stylistic models.

Moreover, the modern learner is immersed in media culture, where headlines serve as both a cognitive trigger and a linguistic challenge. They are short, compressed units of meaning that require decoding skills, background knowledge, and critical thinking. Using headlines in English language learning not only develops vocabulary and grammar comprehension but also stimulates analytical and interpretative abilities. This makes journalism a powerful pedagogical tool that combines language practice with media literacy.

Therefore, the study of headlines as a tool for English language acquisition is timely and significant, as it reflects the growing interconnection between linguistic education, journalism, and media literacy. By analyzing how journalistic texts can facilitate language learning, this research contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical application in the field of language pedagogy.

Analysis of recent studies and publications. Research at the intersection of journalism and second language acquisition (SLA) spans at least three converging strands: (1) linguistic studies of headlines and news discourse, (2) the role of authentic materials in language learning, and (3) technology-mediated, multimodal news consumption for vocabulary, grammar, and literacy development. Together, these strands motivate a pedagogical turn toward using headlines and broader news texts as high-yield input for English learners, while also revealing persistent methodological gaps.

Foundational work characterizes headlines as highly economical, pragmatically loaded, and genre-specific texts that optimize relevance through compression and salience. The paper demonstrates that headlines function as relevance optimizers, guiding readers' interpretation under severe space constraints (Bednarek, Caple, 2020). The study further shows how pragmatic inference and background knowledge are activated in headline comprehension, highlighting their pedagogical potential for teaching implicature, presupposition, and metonymy. Earlier descriptive studies (Bednarek, Caple, 2019, p. 1662–1681) catalog canonical features – elliptical syntax, tense reduction, omission of articles, and dense noun phrases – while later scholarship on news language (Ekström, Patrona, 2020, p. 212–317) situates these features within newsroom practice and audience design. For pedagogy, this literature implies that headlines provide compact, analyzable units for raising learners' grammatical and pragmatic awareness, especially around reduced structures and information packaging.

A robust SLA literature argues that authentic, meaning-focused input facilitates incidental learning when comprehension conditions are met. Studies on extensive reading and authentic texts (Jaworska, Bondi, 2021, p. 203–209) suggest gains in lexical knowledge, formulaic language, and discourse competence, though difficulty management (text selection, glossing, scaffolding) is crucial. Vocabulary research (Caple, Huan, 2021, p. 86-100) and lexical coverage thresholds (Bednarek, 2021, p. 387–412) clarify that roughly 95–98% known-word coverage is needed for comfortable comprehension; headlines often fall below this threshold due to high information density and proper-name load, arguing for pre-teaching key terms, on-the-spot glossing, and iterative recycling. Importantly, the news genre naturally cycles target lexis (e.g., economy, health, climate), supporting spaced encounters – a condition favorable to durable learning.

Digital journalism adds audio, video, captions, transcripts, and hyperlinks, creating rich conditions for form-meaning mapping. Captioning and subtitling research shows consistent comprehension and vocabulary benefits (Montgomery, 2022, p. 385–405), with full captions outperforming no captions and keyword highlighting providing additional focus on form. Task designs that integrate listening to short news clips, reading aligned transcripts, and timed headline prediction have been shown to elevate attention to collocations and formulaic sequences. Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) studies (Kheirabadi, Aghagolzadeh, 2022, p. 87–106) indicate that micro-tasks – headline skimming, notification-based word of the day pulled from

news, and spaced micro-quizzes – improve uptake when cognitive load is controlled.

Classroom-oriented work (Ekström, Firmstone, 2023, p. 367–384) outlines practical formats: headline matching, lead rewriting, bias detection, and register shifts (headline → lead → full article). Recent classroom studies report vocabulary gains and increases in inferencing skill when learners annotate headlines for cues (names, numbers, evaluatives) and test hypotheses against full articles. Corpus-informed approaches leverage the NOW (News on the Web) corpus to identify frequency-rich collocations and contemporary phraseology, enabling data-driven learning with authentic examples and up-to-date usage patterns. This aligns with task-based language teaching: learners process headlines to complete communicative tasks (prioritizing stories, drafting push alerts), thereby balancing meaning-focused use with guided attention to language form.

A parallel strand connects news reading with critical literacy (Caple, Bednarek, 2023, p. 132). Studies show that headline analysis – clickbait detection, framing comparisons across outlets, and stance analysis – promotes evaluative language, hedging devices, and stance markers, while cultivating inferencing and bias awareness. For L2 learners, such tasks enhance pragmatic competence (stance, politeness, evidentiality) and academic literacy (summary, synthesis, citation of claims), contributing to transferable skills beyond language mechanics.

Empirical reports generally find short-term vocabulary gains and improved listening/reading comprehension from news-based interventions, especially when multimodal supports (captions, glosses, pauses) are present. Nevertheless, the literature remains mixed on long-term retention without systematic recycling and spaced retrieval. Few studies combine robust controls, delayed post-tests, and large samples; even fewer compare headlines versus full-text articles as distinct input conditions. Moreover, outcomes beyond lexis – e.g., syntactic development, formulaic language mastery, and pragmatic inference – are under-measured despite their centrality to headlines (Jaworska, 2023, p. 489–505).

The prevailing evidence supports journalism – particularly headlines – as a high-density, high-leverage input source when paired with scaffolding and multimodal support. Linguistic research explains why headlines are pedagogically potent (compression, relevance optimization, pragmatic load); SLA studies detail the conditions for successful uptake (coverage thresholds, recycling, meaning-focused tasks); and digital literacy work shows added value from multimodality and critical analysis. The field now needs rigorous, level-sensitive, and assessment-diverse studies to establish best practices for headline-centric instruction in English language learning.

Aim of the Research. The primary aim of this research is to explore the pedagogical potential of journalism – particularly news headlines – as an effective tool for English language acquisition. The study seeks to demonstrate how the linguistic, stylistic, and pragmatic features of headlines can be integrated into the learning process to enhance vocabulary development, grammatical awareness, critical reading, and overall communicative competence in English.

To achieve this aim, the study sets the following **objectives**:

– to analyze the linguistic and stylistic features of English-language headlines (e.g., syntactic compression, ellipsis, lexical density, and pragmatic functions);

– to examine the role of authentic journalistic materials in English language acquisition compared to traditional textbook-based learning;

– to identify the potential benefits of using headlines for developing lexical knowledge, grammatical structures, and pragmatic competence among learners of English;

– to explore how headlines contribute to critical reading skills and media literacy in the process of language learning;

– to propose methodological approaches and classroom strategies for incorporating headlines and other journalistic texts into English language teaching;

– to outline the challenges and limitations of using journalistic materials, particularly headlines, for learners at different proficiency levels.

Presentation of the main material. The study of journalism as a pedagogical resource for English language acquisition requires a careful exploration of the linguistic, stylistic, and pragmatic properties of journalistic texts, with particular attention to headlines. Headlines are often the first point of contact between readers

and news stories; they function not only as concise summaries of events but also as cognitive prompts that frame interpretation and guide attention. This dual function – informative and persuasive – makes headlines a highly compressed yet semantically rich linguistic unit, offering valuable input for learners of English as a foreign or second language. While textbooks frequently rely on graded texts designed to illustrate specific grammar rules or vocabulary items, journalistic headlines expose learners to authentic, up-to-date, and contextually situated language, which reflects the dynamics of contemporary English. This authenticity is especially relevant in a globalized world where English dominates international news platforms, and learners often encounter headlines outside the classroom environment in digital media, social networks, and news applications.

Linguistically, headlines display a set of distinctive features that differentiate them from ordinary prose. They are typically characterized by elliptical structures, the omission of auxiliary verbs and articles, the prevalence of the simple present tense even for past events, and the frequent use of nominalizations. For instance, a headline such as Government Approves New Climate Policy condenses a complex legislative process into a simple, active-voice structure, omitting the article before "government" and relying on the present tense to suggest immediacy. Similarly, Floods in Europe Leave Thousands Homeless uses the present tense to describe an event that has already occurred but remains newsworthy, emphasizing the relevance and urgency of the information. For learners of English, such constructions may appear unusual compared to the normative grammar they study in textbooks, but precisely this departure from standard sentence structure offers opportunities for developing grammatical awareness and pragmatic competence. By analyzing why certain elements are omitted and how tense is manipulated, learners can acquire a more flexible understanding of how English operates in real communicative contexts.

Another salient feature of headlines is lexical density. Headlines often employ compact noun phrases and carefully chosen words with strong connotative power. For example, Markets in Turmoil After Rate Hike compresses a cause-and-effect relationship into a brief phrase,

requiring the reader to supply missing connectors and infer background knowledge. The noun "turmoil" adds emotive weight, while the phrase rate hike reflects specialized financial vocabulary that learners may not encounter in general English courses. By studying such examples, learners can expand their vocabulary not only quantitatively but also qualitatively, acquiring words in meaningful, context-rich environments that illustrate register, collocation, and nuance.

The pragmatic dimension of headlines is equally significant. Many headlines are constructed to attract attention and stimulate curiosity, sometimes bordering on ambiguity or playfulness. Tabloid journalism often employs puns, wordplay, or cultural references, as in Boris on the Ropes to describe political pressure on a prime minister. Such headlines require cultural competence and the ability to decode figurative language, pushing learners to engage with English not only as a grammatical system but also as a cultural code. The pedagogical value here lies in the development of inferencing skills, pragmatic interpretation, and sensitivity to metaphorical or idiomatic usage. Students who practice interpreting ambiguous or playful headlines learn to appreciate how meaning in English is often layered and context-dependent.

The incorporation of headlines into language learning also connects with theories of input and incidental learning in second language acquisition. Authentic headlines serve as high-density linguistic input, exposing learners to frequent collocations and formulaic sequences. For instance, verbs like approve, launch, crack down, or pledge occur repeatedly across political and economic news. By encountering these verbs in multiple headlines and contexts, learners are more likely to internalize their meanings and usage patterns. Research suggests that repeated exposure to lexical items in varied contexts facilitates retention, and headlines, due to their repetitive thematic nature across news cycles, naturally provide such opportunities. Learners reading daily news, for example, will repeatedly encounter recurring vocabulary connected to elections, conflicts, or climate issues, thus reinforcing acquisition through natural frequency.

Another important aspect is the role of multimodality. In the digital environment, headlines rarely appear in isolation: they are accompanied

by images, subheadings, video clips, and hyper-links. This multimodal presentation enhances comprehension and aids vocabulary acquisition by providing contextual clues. For example, the headline Wildfires Rage Across California gains clarity and emotional force when paired with a dramatic photograph of flames and smoke. Learners benefit from such multimodal input because it strengthens the connection between words and meaning, making abstract vocabulary more tangible. Integrating these multimodal features into classroom activities allows learners to engage with English through both linguistic and visual channels, supporting deeper understanding and retention.

Pedagogically, headlines can be employed in a variety of classroom tasks designed to promote both receptive and productive skills. One effective method is headline prediction, where students are shown the headline only and asked to infer the possible content of the article. This stimulates critical thinking, activates background knowledge, and encourages hypothesis-building, while also providing practice in using modal verbs and conditional structures. For example, given the headline Scientists Warn of Rising Sea Levels, learners may produce predictions using structures like The article might describe… or It could focus on…. Such tasks integrate linguistic practice with critical reading skills. Another activity involves rewriting headlines into full sentences, which helps learners notice the grammatical reductions and reconstruct standard forms. For instance, rewriting President Visits Flooded Areas into The President has visited the areas that were flooded allows learners to practice tense, aspect, and article usage.

At more advanced levels, learners can analyze stylistic variation between headlines of different newspapers reporting the same event. For example, one outlet may use a neutral headline like New Law on Immigration Passed by Parliament, while another opts for a more evaluative version like Controversial Immigration Bill Sparks Heated Debate. Such comparative analysis not only expands vocabulary but also sharpens awareness of bias, stance, and register – key components of media literacy. The ability to detect evaluative language, hedging, or framing devices is essential not only for linguistic competence but also for navigating information critically in the modern media landscape.

Challenges do exist in integrating headlines into language teaching. Their brevity and compressed style may overwhelm beginners, who lack the vocabulary and cultural knowledge to decode them effectively. The density of proper nouns, acronyms, and domain-specific terms can create barriers to comprehension. To mitigate these challenges, scaffolding strategies are necessary. Teachers may pre-teach key vocabulary, provide glossaries, or select headlines thematically connected to students' interests and fields of study. Additionally, using headlines in combination with lead paragraphs or simplified summaries allows learners to bridge the gap between highly compressed and fully elaborated language. By carefully sequencing exposure, educators can ensure that the benefits of authentic input outweigh potential difficulties.

Examples from practical classroom experience illustrate how headlines foster engagement. In one case study, intermediate learners were presented with a set of headlines on environmental issues, such as UN Urges Action on Plastic Pollution and Heatwaves Put Pressure on Power Grids. Students worked in groups to rank the importance of the issues, justifying their choices in English. This activity not only reinforced topic-specific vocabulary (e.g., pollution, power grid, urge) but also encouraged spoken interaction, negotiation of meaning, and critical discussion. In another example, learners were asked to create their own headlines for fictional news stories, which required them to apply the stylistic conventions of brevity, conciseness, and lexical impact. This creative exercise demonstrated learners' growing awareness of journalistic style while practicing productive language skills.

The integration of headlines into English learning is also aligned with the educational priority of developing 21st-century skills. Beyond linguistic proficiency, learners gain media literacy, the ability to evaluate sources, detect bias, and understand global issues through the language of journalism. Since headlines often highlight current affairs, they serve as a gateway for students to connect language learning with real-world knowledge, fostering motivation and relevance. This interdisciplinary aspect is particularly valuable in higher education, where students are expected to demonstrate not only language com-

petence but also analytical thinking and awareness of contemporary challenges.

In conclusion, the study of headlines as tools for English language acquisition reveals their multifaceted pedagogical value. Headlines embody a unique intersection of linguistic compression, stylistic expressiveness, and pragmatic relevance, making them ideal for fostering vocabulary development, grammatical awareness, and critical reading skills. They provide authentic, multimodal, and frequently recycled input that mirrors real-life usage, while also challenging learners to develop inferencing and cultural competence. Although their condensed nature may present difficulties for beginners, with appropriate scaffolding headlines can be effectively integrated at various proficiency levels. Their potential extends beyond language mechanics into the realms of media literacy and interdisciplinary education, underscoring the significance of journalism as both a linguistic resource and a cultural mediator in the process of learning English.

Conclusions. The conducted research demonstrates that journalism, and in particular the genre of news headlines, constitutes a powerful and versatile resource for English language acquisition. Headlines, due to their distinctive linguistic properties – elliptical syntax, tense simplification, lexical density, and pragmatic compression – offer learners a unique opportunity to engage with authentic language in its most condensed and communicatively charged form. Analysis has shown that headlines function not only as summaries of events but also as interpretative cues that activate background knowledge, stimulate inferencing, and guide readers toward certain frames of understanding. For language learners, this means exposure to grammar and vocabulary in their most dynamic, real-world manifestations, beyond the simplified examples often found in traditional textbooks.

The study confirms that working with headlines fosters several dimensions of linguistic competence simultaneously. At the lexical level, learners expand their vocabulary by encountering high-frequency verbs, idiomatic expressions, and domain-specific terminology across a variety of topics, from politics and economics to science and culture. At the grammatical level, the analysis of reduced structures and tense usage helps learners understand how English grammar

can be manipulated for stylistic and pragmatic effect. At the pragmatic and stylistic levels, headlines enhance learners' ability to interpret implicatures, cultural references, and evaluative language, thus strengthening their communicative and intercultural competence. The integration of multimodal elements – images, subheadings, videos – further enriches comprehension and supports the retention of new linguistic material.

Pedagogical implications of this research point to the necessity of a more systematic use of headlines in English language teaching. Classroom activities based on headlines – prediction, reconstruction, comparison across sources, and headline writing – have the potential to engage learners in both receptive and productive language practice. Moreover, headlines serve as an effective medium for linking language learning with the development of critical media literacy, an increasingly essential skill in the digital age. By learning to identify framing, bias, and stylistic variation in headlines, students not only refine their language skills but also cultivate critical awareness as informed readers and global citizens.

However, the research also identifies challenges that need to be addressed in future pedagogical applications. The condensed nature of headlines can present difficulties for lower-proficiency learners, who may lack the vocabulary or cultural knowledge to decode them effectively. Without proper scaffolding, such learners risk frustration and disengagement. Furthermore, the overreliance on sensationalist or culture-specific headlines may limit accessibility and comprehension. Therefore, effective implementation requires careful selection of materials, adaptation to learners' levels, and integration with supporting tasks that bridge the gap between compressed headline language and full journalistic texts.

The perspectives for further research are multiple and promising. First, there is a need for longitudinal classroom-based studies that measure the long-term impact of headline-based instruction on vocabulary retention, grammatical development, and pragmatic competence. Most existing work focuses on short-term interventions; thus, more empirical evidence is required to establish sustained learning outcomes. Second, future studies should examine

how learners at different proficiency levels interact with headlines, identifying the most effective scaffolding techniques for beginners, intermediate, and advanced learners. Third, given the multimodal nature of contemporary journalism, research should explore the combined effect of headlines, visuals, captions, and audio on comprehension and memory, testing which combinations optimize learning.

Another promising direction lies in the application of corpus linguistics and digital tools. By analyzing large-scale news corpora, researchers can identify frequency patterns, collocations, and stylistic tendencies in headlines, which can then be systematically integrated into teaching materials. Similarly, mobile-assisted learning platforms could be designed to deliver daily headline-based micro-tasks, supporting incidental learning and spaced repetition in authentic contexts. Finally, further exploration of the link between headline analysis and critical media literacy is essential, as it combines language acquisition with broader educational goals, preparing learners not only as proficient users of English but also as critical consumers of global news.

In conclusion, this study highlights the pedagogical and interdisciplinary value of integrating journalism, and particularly news headlines, into English language learning. While challenges remain, the potential benefits for vocabulary expansion, grammatical awareness, pragmatic competence, and media literacy are substantial. Future research should continue to refine methodologies, test long-term effects, and expand the scope of investigation to include digital and multimodal dimensions. By doing so, the field can establish a more robust foundation for using headlines as a bridge between language learning and real-world communication in the media-saturated global environment.

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