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Public Perception and Language Use in BBC Economic Crisis News: a Pragmatic Study

Siti Kurniasih[1], Siti Farihah Fitri Humairah[2*], Tatu Siti Rohbiah[3]
[1-3]University Islam Negeri Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten

**Correspondence e-mail: 221230021.sitif@uinbanten.ac.id*

Abstract
This study investigates how pragmatic strategies in BBC News construct public perceptions of the global economic crisis through a single case analysis of the video "How Will the Global Economy Fare in 2025?" Employing a qualitative approach within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study examines three units of analysis—headline/thumbnail, narration, and captions—to identify pragmatic features including implicature, presupposition, deixis, and metaphor. The analysis focuses on how these linguistic elements contribute to the framing of economic uncertainty and ideological positioning. Rather than generalizing across multiple reports, this research provides a focused interpretation of one representative case to reveal how media language subtly guides interpretation and emotional response. The findings indicate that the BBC's lexical and discursive strategies construct narratives of uncertainty and global imbalance through evaluative and speculative expressions. However, the study does not claim direct causality between linguistic form and public emotion, acknowledging that interpretation is mediated by individual and sociocultural factors. The contribution of this study lies in clarifying how pragmatic and discourse devices operate within a single-item media text to shape meaning in times of economic instability, while its limitation is the narrow data scope that precludes broad generalization.

Keywords: *BBC News; critical discourse analysis; economic crisis; media framing; pragmatic*

INTRODUCTION

In the digital communication era, the media is no longer a neutral observer of events but a powerful actor in constructing social reality, especially during crises. Among the most influential components of media are headlines, which serve not merely as summaries but as strategic, linguistic instruments that guide interpretation even before the full content is read. Headlines often compress complex economic phenomena into a few impactful words, influencing how people feel and think about financial events. According to (Yule, 2017), pragmatics provides tools to examine how such language implicitly communicates meaning, particularly through implicatures, presuppositions, and metaphorical framing.

As a subfield of linguistics, pragmatics is deeply concerned with how meaning is constructed not only from words themselves but also from their usage in context. In economic news, pragmatic strategies frequently add urgency, emotion, or direction to otherwise neutral facts. For instance, expressions like "markets collapse" or "economic storm" are not only descriptions they are acts of persuasion that evoke reader response. As the (Levinson, 2015) emphasizes that much of human communication operates through implicature, where the speaker or writer implies more than they explicitly say. In the case of news media, this allows

journalists to craft powerful headlines with minimal words while exerting significant influence over the reader's understanding.

To fully understand the role of media language in shaping meaning, one must also consider how discourse analysis—particularly Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)—explains the relationship between language, ideology, and power. (Fairclough, 2019) argues that language used in media texts operates on three interconnected levels: the textual (words and grammar), the discursive practice (how texts are produced and consumed), and the sociocultural practice (the broader ideological and institutional context). In economic turbulence, CDA reveals how specific word choices or headline-framing devices may legitimize dominant narratives and marginalize alternative viewpoints.

Moreover (Van Dijk, 2017) complements this by explaining how discourse reflects and shapes social cognition. He argues that repeated linguistic patterns in news media reinforce dominant ideologies by influencing mental models in the public mind. For instance, when countries like the United States, China, or Germany are consistently centered in economic headlines, the public's perception of financial power is gradually skewed toward these elite actors. (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2017) also highlight how discourse is never neutralit functions ideologically and politically through subtle cues embedded in text and context.

Empirical studies have shown how media frames economic issues significantly affect public behavior and belief. (Damstra & Boukes, 2021) found that economic news coverage directly shapes public expectations, while (Kim, 2023) demonstrated that emotionally charged headlines have a measurable impact on financial markets and news sentiment. These findings confirm that language used in economic reporting can drive more than awareness. It can influence decision-making, investments, and collective mood.

Previous research in critical discourse analysis and pragmatics has extensively examined how media discourse functions as a social practice imbued with ideological implications. Fairclough's model emphasizes the dialectical relationship between language and social structure. While (Van Dijk, 2017) Highlights the media's role in reinforcing dominant ideologies through lexical choices and discourse patterns. (Bednarek & Caple, 2017a) introduced Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA) to explain how newsworthiness is constructed through linguistic and visual resources. While these foundational works illuminate the mechanisms of news framing, they also call attention to the need for ongoing analysis in specific, evolving contexts, particularly during crisis periods when media framing has amplified consequences for public behavior and policy attitudes.

This research aims to bridge the gap between linguistic theory and media studies by analyzing BBC News discourse on the global economic crisis through a focused case study of the video "How Will the Global Economy Fare in 2025?". By identifying pragmatic devices and discursive structures used to frame economic events in this single report, the study seeks to uncover the linguistic mechanisms by which media subtly influences public awareness and perception. Such inquiry is crucial in today's globalized, fast-paced information environment, where media language can shape not only what people know but also how they feel and react toward economic realities.

The principal findings suggest that BBC employs a framing of uncertainty, metaphorical pessimism, and emotionally loaded lexis to position economic narratives within a framework of impending risk. This research explores both

micro-linguistic and macro-discursive elements as reflected in the selected news report. Based on these considerations, this study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How are pragmatic strategies and discourse used in the BBC video "How Will the Global Economy Fare in 2025?" to represent the global economic crisis? (2) How does the choice of language in this report influence viewers' perceptions of the economic situation? (3) What framing tendencies emerge in the BBC's presentation of the 2025 economic outlook?

By addressing these questions, this research aims to bridge the gap in Pragmatic and Discourse Analysis of Economic Crisis Discourse in BBC News and the Impact of Language on Public Perception. Based on the explanation above, the researcher will systematically examine the pragmatic and discursive strategies used by BBC News in describing the global economic crisis as presented in the selected report. These strategies reflect and reinforce the social atmosphere during economic instability, emphasizing global economic uncertainty and focusing on political and structural instability (such as in the US, Germany, and China).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method to explore how BBC News constructs the global economic crisis through pragmatic and discursive strategies. The qualitative approach is appropriate as it allows for in-depth textual interpretation, especially regarding the role of language in shaping social meaning and influencing public perception. The data source consists of a single BBC News video titled *"How Will the Global Economy Fare in 2025?"*, which is available on YouTube. This news report highlights economic conditions and projections in three major economies: the United States, Germany, and China. The analysis focuses on three main units: the headline and thumbnail (visual-verbal framing), the narration transcript (spoken content), and the captions (supporting text), each representing different layers of meaning that contribute to the construction of economic uncertainty, political instability, and risk.

To collect and analyze the data, the researcher used three instruments: (1) a literature review to establish the theoretical foundation; (2) documentation of the transcript and key quotations from the video, each marked with time-codes for reference; and (3) an analytical framework based on discourse theory (Fairclough, 2019; Van Dijk, 2017) and Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA) (Bednarek & Caple, 2017), which explain how linguistic and visual resources are used to generate newsworthiness. These frameworks guided the identification of language patterns and the interpretation of ideological positioning embedded in the text.

A codebook was developed to categorize pragmatic and discursive features identified in the video. The pragmatic codes included *implicature, presupposition, deixis,* and *metaphor*, while discursive codes captured elements of evaluative tone, framing, and lexical emphasis. Coding was conducted manually by the researcher, and consistency was maintained through repeated review of coded segments. Because the study was interpretive and single-authored, no inter-coder reliability was calculated; however, theoretical triangulation ensured the internal consistency of the analysis.

The analysis applied qualitative interpretation combining textual, pragmatic, and discursive levels. Textual analysis addressed word choices, figurative language, and sentence construction. Pragmatic interpretation examined implicature,

presupposition, deixis, and indirect speech acts using the established codebook. Finally, discourse interpretation followed a socio-cognitive approach, identifying how the language used by the BBC not only presents facts but also constructs particular perspectives on the global economy. By operationalizing the method in this way, the study ensures clarity in its analytical procedures while maintaining alignment between the single-item dataset and the research objectives.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Although BBC headlines on the economic crisis may appear neutral on the surface, they embed deeper pragmatic and discursive mechanisms that shape public understanding. This chapter presents findings based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA), structured into three focused discussions: (1) pragmatic strategies in headline construction, (2) language influence on reader perception, and (3) framing tendencies in economic news discourse.

Pragmatic Strategies in Headline Construction

BBC economic headlines use pragmatic strategies to compress complex events into brief yet powerful statements that resonate emotionally and cognitively. According to Badnerk & Caple, such headlines reflect core news values like negativity, timeliness, and relevance by employing strategic lexical choices. Headlines such as “Markets Reel Amid Global Uncertainty” illustrate metaphor and evaluative presupposition, which provoke concern and seriousness even before the article is accessed. Furthermore, pragmatic tools like implicative and deixis, highlighted by Yule, encourage readers to derive implied meanings, including assumptions of urgency or culpability. This use of pragmatic elements reveals how BBC headlines serve not just as summaries, but as guided interpretations aligned with institutional ideologies.

Language Influence on Reader Perception

The lexical and syntactic choices in economic crisis headlines are shown to influence public perception by framing events as dire or beyond control. According to (Blackwell, 2015) Discourse structures in media can function as subtle tools of manipulation. By repeating crisis-related vocabulary and selective framing, the media shapes mental models and cognitive frameworks that influence how audiences interpret the world. When headlines consistently emphasize uncertainty, loss, or instability, they contribute to a discourse of fear, leading readers to internalize economic insecurity even when objective indicators may be more stable. According to (Sulehry & Wallace, 2021) Media discourse is rarely neutral; instead, it is structured through frames that selectively highlight specific aspects of an issue while downplaying others. This framing process can significantly influence how audiences interpret reality by reinforcing particular ideologies and emotional responses to news events.

Recent studies have revealed that the structure and tone of digital news headlines have undergone substantial evolution in recent years. (Nickl et al., 2025) found that online headlines increasingly rely on strategic brevity, emotional triggers, and interactivity, all of which amplify audience engagement. Similarly, (Khawar & Boukes, 2024) demonstrated that sensationalist tendencies are no longer exclusive to tabloid journalism but have become a cross-platform strategy, particularly in digital environments where attention metrics dominate. These

findings reinforce the current study's observation that the BBC's economic headlines employ evaluative lexis and emotional framing to sustain relevance and reader interest. Rather than labeling such practices as "biased," these tendencies can be interpreted as adaptive strategies within competitive news ecosystems.

Framing Tendencies in Economic News Discourse

BBC economic headlines exhibit framing tendencies that consistently align with dominant ideological narratives. These frames often rely on metaphorical and sensationalist language to portray economic downturns as natural disasters terms like "storm," "earthquake," and "tsunami" imply inevitability and diminish the role of human agency.

However, instead of labeling the headlines as *sensationalist*, this study reinterprets them through linguistic mechanisms that shape evaluative meaning. The evaluative tendency is examined through conceptual metaphor, evaluative lexis, and modality/hedging, each contributing to how economic uncertainty is framed. Metaphors such as "storm" or "meltdown" simplify complex realities and evoke emotional resonance; evaluative lexis like "crisis," "collapse," and "stagnation" intensifies news value negativity; and modal expressions like "may," "might," or "could" introduce epistemic uncertainty that subtly stimulates speculation(Cont & Vuletic, 2025). This linguistic focus replaces moral judgment with analytical explanation, keeping the discussion theoretically grounded in CDA and DNVA frameworks. (Bednarek & Caple, 2017b) (Repetskaya E.R. & Ivanova A.G., 2022) A study on pandemic discourse revealed how conceptual metaphors (e.g., *"battle," "war,"* or *"wave"*) structure collective understanding of crises. When mapped onto economic news, similar metaphoric patterns such as *"storm," "meltdown,"* or *"shock"* construct the economy as an uncontrollable natural or physical force. This finding aligns with the present study's argument that metaphors in BBC headlines naturalize instability and reduce perceived agency, shifting public interpretation toward fatalism. Such metaphoric framing is not merely descriptive but ideological, framing economic decline as inevitable rather than politically or structurally mediated.

Studies by (Ekström & Firmstone, 2017) observe that such discursive choices function as tools of ideological reinforcement, emphasizing structural forces over individual responsibility. Moreover, the prominence given to elite nations such as the U.S., Germany, and China reflects what (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017) term "hierarchized representation," where global economic power dynamics are mirrored and reproduced through selective visibility. This consistent framing reinforces existing asymmetries and legitimizes the dominance of specific perspectives within the global economy, which reflects and reproduces power structures through its lexical and discursive emphasis. This research's data was obtained from analyzing a BBC News report titled **"How Will the Global Economy Fare in 2025?"**

In this news report, the BBC outlines the global economic outlook 2025 by focusing on three major countries: the United States, Germany, and China. The news highlights economic uncertainty through specific word choices and narratives that build a perception of significant risks and challenges ahead.

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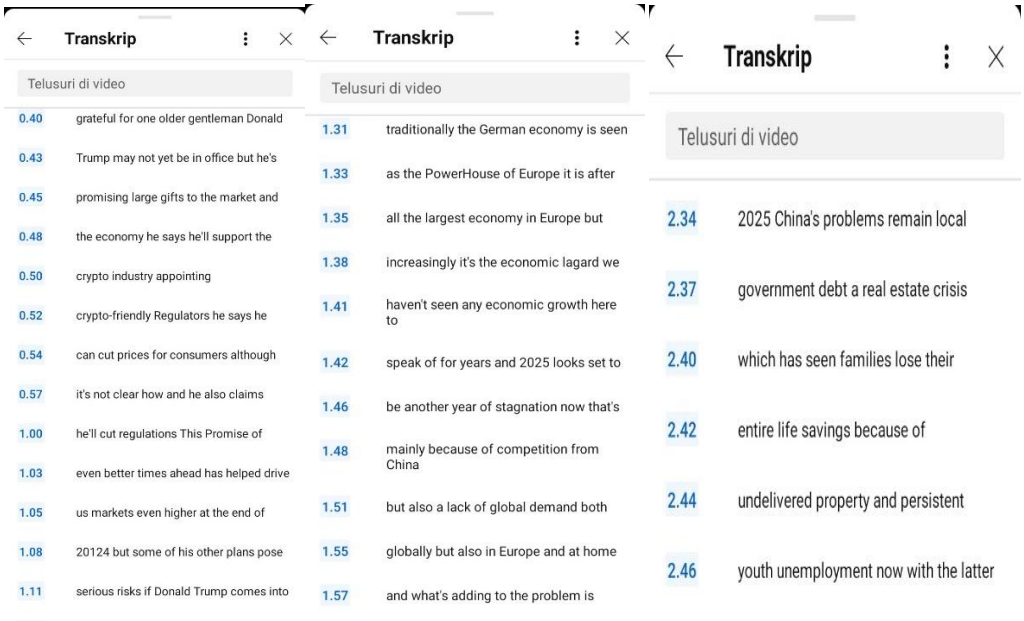

Some of the key excerpts analyzed include:

> "Donald Trump may not yet be in office but he is promising large gifts to the market and the economy he says he will support the crypto industry appointing crypto-friendly Regulators he says he can cut prices for consumers although it is not clear how and he also claims he will cut regulations This Promise of even better times ahead has helped drive us markets even higher at the end of 2024 but some of his other plans pose serious risks."
>
> "German economy is seen as the Power House of Europe it is after all the largest economy in Europe but increasingly it is the economic laggard we have not seen any economic growth here to speak of for years and 2025 looks set to be another year of stagnation now that is mainly because of competition from China but also a lack of global demand both globally but also in Europe and at home and what is adding to the problem."
>
> "China's problems remain: local government debt, a real estate crisis which has seen families lose their life savings because of undelivered property and persistent youth unemployment."

These excerpts demonstrate how the BBC frames the global economic situation by emphasizing uncertainty, risk, and serious future challenges.

Analysis of Dominant Crisis Economy Discourse Strategy

The BBC uses language strategies in this news report, emphasizing pessimism, uncertainty, and potential global economic risks. The headline in the form of a question ("How will the global economy fare in 2025?") strengthens the framing of uncertainty that dominates the entire news content.

Factors Influencing the Language Strategy in the Report

Several main factors influencing the form and style of reporting include :

Global politics: The potential re-election of Donald Trump as U.S. President brings uncertainty to economic and international trade policies.
National economic performance: Germany's economic stagnation and domestic political instability worsen the perception of stability.
Structural problems: China struggles with a real estate crisis and weak domestic demand, depicted through terms like "persistent youth unemployment" and "very tough indeed."

Language Strategies Used:

Using metaphors: For example, "Wall Street might find a lump of coal in its stocking" illustrates potential market disappointment with a Christmas metaphor.
Repetition of negative terms: Such as "crisis", "stagnation", "risks", and "uncertainty".
Speculative framing: Predictive statements amplify uncertainty without providing concrete solutions.

Comparison with Previous Studies

This finding aligns with prior research on economic-news discourse, which notes a tendency toward speculative, pessimistic, and hyperbolic language to boost story salience. The BBC excerpts align with this pattern by foregrounding risk and uncertainty while offering minimal context or solutions, reinforcing a global narrative of economic fragility approaching 2025.

The interpretive implications of linguistic framing are further supported by (Kim, 2023) empirical evidence connecting the use of negative words in financial news with fluctuations in stock market indices. This correlation suggests that the lexical framing of uncertainty can produce measurable real-world outcomes. In the context of the BBC's economic reporting, the frequent use of speculative modal verbs such as *"might," "could,"* and *"appears to"* does not merely hedge information but can also sustain audience attention and reinforce perceptions of volatility. This supports the argument that hedging functions both as a linguistic and psychological strategy within economic discourse.

Theoretical Reinforcement and Analytical Implications

The linguistic construction of the BBC's headlines during economic uncertainty reveals a deliberate use of pragmatic and discursive strategies. These headlines are informative and persuasive, shaped by communicative goals and ideological intent. According to (Yule, 2017), pragmatic interpretation, through implicatures and presuppositions, allows readers to access meanings that are not overtly stated. This is reflected in BBC headlines that imply fear or instability without direct claims, such as "Markets in Turmoil" or "Germany Faces Stagnation Again." The speech act framework embedded in pragmatics underscores that these utterances are not neutral; they do something to the reader: warn, frame, or alert.

Moreover, (Fairclough, 2019) The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model allows us to understand how these headlines operate across three dimensions: textual structure, production context, and sociocultural practice. BBC's choice of crisis-related vocabulary, repetition of negative terms, and preference for elite

countries in framing suggest that the language used reflects power dynamics and institutional positioning. This aligns with Van Dijk's theory, the socio-cognitive model emphasizes that media texts activate and reinforce mental models that support dominant ideologies, especially in how certain nations (like the US, China, and Germany) are continuously positioned at the center of economic narratives.

The emotional tone of the headlines is further reinforced through media framing techniques. For instance, headlines such as "Wall Street Might Find a Lump of Coal in Its Stocking" evoke metaphor and humor *pessimism*, drawing readers into a deeper emotional connection with uncertainty. Similarly, (Damstra & Boukes, 2021) confirm that changes in the tone of economic reporting significantly influence public expectations, demonstrating that media coverage reflects economic trends and shapes them.

The notion of newsworthiness is also linguistically constructed by Bednarek & Caple through their Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA); they argue that negativity, timeliness, and relevance are not merely objective features but are produced through language. BBC's use of expressions like "meltdown" or "economic crisis" exemplifies how language amplifies the drama of events to meet institutional expectations of what counts as 'news.' According to (Fischer, 2020) Metaphorical language in headlines is a pragmatic shortcut. It simplifies complex realities into digestible, emotionally resonant phrases that subtly influence public reaction.

In line with (Zeng & Li, 2025)methodological advancements in Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA), this study's findings also emphasize the importance of intertextual and multimodal cues that construct newsworthiness. Zeng argued that linguistic elements such as evaluative adjectives, hedging markers, and metaphorical choices contribute to the hierarchical prioritization of certain events. Applying this to the BBC corpus, evaluative lexis like *"crisis", "collapse",* and *"meltdown"* function not merely as stylistic features but as linguistic resources that encode news values such as negativity and impact. Consequently, these findings validate the analytical relevance of DNVA as a framework for explaining how economic crises are linguistically legitimized.

These observations align with what Flowerdew & Richardson described as *the interplay between language and ideology in media discourse*. Their work highlights how media institutions function as ideological actors, capable of embedding messages into seemingly neutral content. The BBC's repeated use of metaphors, predictive language, and elite-centric framing illustrates how headlines are not just journalistic summaries but powerful rhetorical tools that shape collective perception. This is especially significant during economic crises when public sentiment is volatile and heavily shaped by how risks are presented.

As the current study also found, public perception is influenced by what is reported and how it is linguistically framed. This supports Ekstrom's theory that media discourse does not passively report reality but constructs it. Headlines function as mini-narratives that frequently blend fact, judgment, and ideology in emotionally charged language. These frames, reinforced by repetition, cultivate a shared sense of pessimism or crisis, even when the actual economic indicators may present a more balanced picture.

In conclusion, the findings reinforce that language in economic news headlines functions pragmatically, discursively, and ideologically. Through implicatures, metaphors, and strategic framing, the BBC crafts informative, persuasive, and emotionally directive headlines. These strategies are best

understood through a blend of pragmatic theory, CDA, framing, and discursive news analysis, as each offers insight into how headlines influence public perception and contribute to broader economic narratives.

Synthesizing these recent findings, the BBC's discourse on economic crisis reflects a convergence between linguistic adaptation, ideological framing, and audience economics. According (Martin et al., 2024), the integration of DNVA with socio-cognitive perspectives underscores how linguistic choices in headlines, metaphor, evaluation, and modality do not operate in isolation but interact to construct interpretive realities. Consequently, the results of this study extend the conversation beyond stylistic analysis toward a more comprehensive understanding of how news discourse shapes perception and trust in economic communication.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The analysis of BBC news headlines during the economic crisis reveals the strategic use of pragmatic and discourse elements such as implicature, presupposition, deixis, and emotionally charged language to shape meaning, guide reader interpretation, and influence public perception of economic events. These strategies help frame the crisis from macro-level institutional viewpoints while often overlooking individual impacts. Therefore, future studies should compare how different international media outlets frame similar crises and examine the role of media literacy in reader interpretation. Journalists are urged to avoid sensationalism and maintain accuracy. At the same time, educational institutions should promote critical media literacy to help readers recognize and evaluate the subtle linguistic strategies embedded in news headlines.

Limitations, Practical Implications & Research Directions

While this study provides insights into the linguistic framing of the BBC's economic news, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the corpus consists of a single BBC video, which restricts generalization to other contexts or outlets. Second, inter-rater reliability was not statistically tested, making the coding of linguistic elements interpretive rather than replicable. Third, the temporal scope (2024–2025) constrains the study's ability to track changes in discourse over time.

Nevertheless, these limitations offer opportunities for practical reflection. Editors and content creators should consider marking speculative economic claims and linking them with verified data sources such as IMF or World Bank reports to enhance transparency. Furthermore, journalism educators can use these findings to promote media literacy and awareness of linguistic framing devices—particularly metaphor, evaluative lexis, and hedging.

For future research, a multi-outlet comparative study across different media (BBC, Reuters, CNN) and platforms (text, video, and social media) is recommended. Longitudinal designs and audience-response triangulation (via surveys or focus groups) would also strengthen understanding of how linguistic framing influences reader perception and emotional interpretation.

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