

SOURCE ATTRIBUTION AND QUOTATION AS LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES OF CREDIBILITY IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK ONLINE NEWS

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Abstract

This thesis examines source attribution and quotation as linguistic mechanisms through which credibility is constructed in English and Uzbek online news discourse. Rather than treating credibility as an inherent property of a news report, the study approaches it as a discourse effect produced by the interaction of source naming, reporting verbs, evidential markers, quotation patterns and degrees of journalistic distance. Selected examples from English-language Reuters reports and Uzbek-language Kun.uz materials are analysed comparatively. These choices influence perceived evidential strength, authorial distance and the reader's assessment of reliability.

Keywords: Credibility, media discourse, source attribution, quotation, evidentiality, reporting verbs, English news, Uzbek news, journalistic stance.

Introduction

Credibility is a central communicative condition of journalism. A news text is expected not only to present information but also to indicate why the information should be accepted as reliable. In professional media discourse, this task is performed by a system of linguistic choices: source naming, reporting verbs, direct and indirect quotation, evidential expressions, numerical data and references to institutional documents. These features connect propositions to identifiable knowledge holders and help readers evaluate where a claim comes from and how strongly the journalist endorses it.

News is not a transparent transmission of events. Bell treats news language as an edited and socially organized form of discourse in which attribution and audience design shape the final text [1]. Richardson similarly links linguistic form to the social practice of selecting and representing voices [2]. From this perspective, credibility is not identical to factual accuracy; it is also a discourse effect. A report may appear more credible because it names a competent institution, cites a document, distinguishes confirmed facts from estimates, or explicitly assigns responsibility for a claim to another speaker.

English and Uzbek journalism share these communicative goals, but they often encode source relations differently. English news frequently uses finite reporting clauses such as

“the ministry said” and “officials said”.Uzbek media uses equivalent clauses but also productive evidential patterns such as “qayd etilishicha”, “ma’lum qilinishicha”, “xabar bermoqda” and “ma’lumotiga ko’ra”. These forms influence source visibility, journalistic distance and epistemic responsibility.

The aim of this study is to compare source attribution and quotation as credibility-building strategies in English and Uzbek online news. It describes source-attribution patterns, examines reporting verbs, compares direct and indirect quotation, analyses impersonal evidential forms, and explains how these linguistic choices distribute responsibility for knowledge.

Evidentiality provides an important theoretical basis for the analysis. Aikhenvald defines evidentiality in relation to the linguistic marking of information source [3], while Chafe and Nichols connect evidential meanings with the broader linguistic coding of epistemology [4]. In journalistic discourse, source marking is institutionally important because reporters are expected to distinguish direct observation, inference, testimony and documentary evidence.

Attribution can therefore be treated as a form of evidential positioning. Bednarek shows that English news discourse systematically locates propositions in relation to sources and degrees of knowledge [5], while her work on evaluation demonstrates that apparently factual reporting still contains epistemic and evaluative choices [6]. A source label does more than identify a speaker: it may increase credibility when the source is authoritative, reduce the journalist’s responsibility for a contested proposition, or signal uncertainty when the source is anonymous or weakly specified.

White’s concept of “Reporter Voice” is particularly useful for quotation [7]. A journalist may appear neutral when a proposition is attributed to someone else, but the choice of source, reporting verb, quotation length and surrounding context still shapes interpretation. Martin and White likewise treat attribution as dialogic positioning [8]. The difference between “said”, “confirmed”, “claimed”, “warned” and “estimated” is therefore not purely lexical; each verb assigns a different epistemic status to the proposition.

For comparative analysis, credibility can be viewed through five dimensions: source specificity, source authority, evidential transparency, authorial stance and intertextual verifiability. English “according to X” and Uzbek “X ma’lumotiga ko’ra” are close functional equivalents, while English passive formulas such as “it was reported that” may correspond to Uzbek “qayd etilishicha” or “xabar qilinishicha”. The comparison should therefore focus on recurrent functional patterns rather than isolated lexical equivalents.

The study uses qualitative comparative discourse analysis. Illustrative material is drawn from selected 2026 English-language Reuters reports and Uzbek-language Kun.uz reports. These examples are not treated as a statistically representative corpus; they provide comparable professional news contexts in which attribution and reported speech are clearly visible.

The analysis proceeds in four stages. First, reporting verbs, source markers, quotation forms and impersonal evidential constructions are identified. Second, each marker is classified by function: source identification, confirmation, distancing, uncertainty management, document-based verification or voice representation. Third, English forms are compared with their closest Uzbek functional correspondences. Finally, their pragmatic effects are interpreted in terms of credibility, journalistic distance and epistemic responsibility.

“Credibility marker” here does not mean that the attributed proposition is necessarily true. Attribution makes the origin of a claim more transparent, but reliability still depends on source quality and available evidence.

The clearest credibility strategy in news writing is explicit source attribution. English news commonly uses a noun phrase plus reporting verb: “the ministry said”, “a senior official said”, “economists said”, or “data show”. In a Reuters report of 16 August 2026, information about diplomatic meetings is attributed to a diplomatic source, while other propositions are linked to an Israeli official and medical personnel [M1]. The linguistic effect is a layered map of responsibility: diplomatic information, official reactions and medical consequences are not presented as if they originated from the reporter’s direct knowledge.

The construction “according to + source” performs a similar function. It foregrounds the evidential basis and is especially common with institutions, statistics and documents. Reuters, for example, attaches probability estimates to the CME FedWatch Tool through “according to”, while other assessments are assigned to named experts [M2]. Such structures make the evidential origin of a proposition more visible and potentially more verifiable.

Uzbek news uses comparable patterns: “Bu haqda ... ma’lum qildi” (“... reported this”), “vazirlik ma’lumotiga ko’ra” (“according to the ministry’s information”), and “matbuot xizmati xabar bermoqda” (“the press service reports”). In a Kun.uz report about corruption statistics, the numerical information is first connected to a named senator speaking at a Senate session; the following sentence continues with “qayd etilishicha” [M3]. The first clause establishes an accountable source, while the impersonal evidential maintains the same attributional frame without repeating the source name.

Source naming also forms a scale of accountability. A fully named person with a professional role is more publicly verifiable than “a senior official”, while “sources familiar with the matter” offers even less specificity. Anonymous attribution may be necessary in sensitive reporting, but professional news usually compensates by adding role descriptions, proximity markers or corroborating evidence. In both English and Uzbek, explicit attribution therefore transfers epistemic responsibility from the reporter to a source while allowing readers to evaluate the strength of that source.

A further dimension of credibility concerns the linguistic distinction between institutional, personal and anonymous sources. Institutional sources include ministries, courts, press

services, research institutes, companies and international organizations. Their names often function as condensed guarantees of procedural authority. In English, phrases such as “the ministry said”, “the court said in a statement”, or “according to official data” present the institution itself as the source of knowledge. Uzbek uses structurally similar patterns: “vazirlik ma’lum qildi”, “sud axborotiga ko’ra”, “matbuot xizmati xabar berdi”, and “rasmiy ma’lumotlarga ko’ra”. In both languages, the institutional label can be more important than the individual employee who actually produced the statement because the proposition is represented as an official organizational position.

Personal sources create a different credibility effect. A fully named speaker with a title such as a minister, analyst, physician or researcher allows the reader to evaluate both identity and competence. Professional designations are therefore not merely biographical details; they are part of the evidential framing of the proposition. A medical statement attributed to a named physician, for example, is pragmatically stronger than the same statement introduced by the vague phrase “an expert said”, because the reader can more easily assess relevance and accountability.

Anonymous-source formulas are more complex. English journalism commonly uses expressions such as “a source familiar with the matter”, “two officials said”, or “a person briefed on the talks”. Uzbek news may use “manbaning ma’lum qilishicha”, “rasmiy manbaga ko’ra”, “masaladan xabardor manba” or similar constructions. Such forms intentionally hide identity while still providing information about access to knowledge. The credibility of an anonymous source therefore depends heavily on the descriptive phrase accompanying it. “A source” offers little evidential information, whereas “an official involved in the negotiations” explains why the person may know the relevant facts.

Attribution may also form a chain. A news outlet can report what another outlet says that an official said. Each additional layer increases distance from the original communicative event. English may represent this as “the newspaper reported, citing officials, that...”, while Uzbek can use “nashr rasmiylarga tayanib xabar berishicha...”. Such chains are important because they show that the immediate source and the original source are not identical. Clear news writing keeps these layers visible. If the chain is compressed or omitted, readers may mistakenly interpret second-hand information as directly verified by the reporting outlet.

For this reason, source proximity should be considered part of credibility analysis. Direct institutional statements, named first-hand participants, documented records and independently accessible data generally provide a more transparent evidential basis than multiply relayed or vaguely attributed claims. Linguistically, professional media signals this hierarchy through source labels, reporting verbs and attribution chains. English and Uzbek differ in form, but both possess resources for marking how close the journalist is to the originating source.

Reporting verbs are not neutral containers. The English verb “say” is relatively general and therefore common in hard news. By contrast, “confirm” suggests validation, “deny”

responds to an existing proposition, “warn” adds a risk frame, “estimate” marks approximation, and “claim” may create distance between journalist and source. These lexical differences guide the reader toward different interpretations of the proposition’s status.

Uzbek has a comparable system: “dedi” (said), “ma’lum qildi” (announced/informed), “ta’kidladi” (emphasized), “qayd etdi” (noted), “tasdiqladi” (confirmed), “rad etdi” (denied), “ogohlantirdi” (warned), “bildirdi” (stated), “xabar berdi” (reported) and “e’lon qildi” (announced). “Ma’lum qildi” is especially productive in formal news and often functions as a relatively neutral institutional reporting verb. “Tasdiqladi” and “rad etdi” explicitly place a proposition in a verification or contestation sequence.

For credibility, the key principle is semantic fit. “Officials confirmed the figure” presents a stronger epistemic commitment than “officials estimated the figure”. Likewise, Uzbek “tasdiqladi” differs from “taxmin qildi”. Accurate reporting requires the verb to match the evidence available. A verb that overstates certainty can create false confidence, whereas an appropriately cautious verb preserves credibility by representing uncertainty honestly.

Direct quotation visibly separates the source’s wording from the journalist’s wording. Its credibility value lies in authenticity and accountability: readers can see the lexical choices attributed to the speaker, and quotation marks signal a boundary between voices. Direct quotation is especially important when exact wording has political, legal or evaluative significance.

Yet quotation is still an editorially selected form of evidence. Journalists decide which words to quote, how much context to provide and where to place the quotation. White’s analysis shows that attributed voices remain part of the larger organization of “Reporter Voice” [7]. Thus, quotation can strengthen evidential immediacy without becoming a transparent copy of the entire communicative event.

Indirect quotation allows greater compression. English uses structures such as “the ministry said that...” or “the report found that...”. Uzbek uses “vazirlik ... ekanini ma’lum qildi”, “rasmiylar ... bo’lishini bildirdi”, or “hisobotda ... qayd etilgan”. Professional reports often combine both forms: facts are summarized indirectly, while a short direct quotation preserves the source’s most significant wording.

The credibility of quotation depends on source identification and context. A sentence attributed only to “an expert” gives the reader less basis for evaluation than a quotation from a named specialist or institution. Likewise, one-sided quotation may create an appearance of evidence while excluding relevant competing voices. Credibility is therefore related not to the number of quotations, but to their relevance, transparency and contextual balance.

A distinctive feature of Uzbek journalistic attribution is the productivity of impersonal forms such as “qayd etilishicha”, “ma’lum qilinishicha”, “aytilishicha”, “ta’kidlanishicha” and “xabar qilinishicha”. Their approximate English correspondences include “it is

reported that”, “it is noted that”, “reportedly”, and context-dependent passive constructions.

In a Kun.uz report on heat-related mortality, “hisobotida qayd etilishicha” connects a numerical estimate to a weekly report of the Robert Koch Institute [M4]. In another report on legislative terminology, “qayd etilishicha” introduces an explanation after the relevant institutional context has been established [M5]. In both cases, the journalist is backgrounded while the proposition remains anchored to prior documentary discourse.

These forms are strong credibility devices when the underlying source is recoverable. If the article has already named a ministry, report or speaker, “qayd etilishicha” can maintain evidential continuity without awkward repetition. If no source is identifiable, however, the same form may weaken transparency. English can use impersonal passives, but agency-style news more often prefers active source clauses such as “the ministry said”. Uzbek therefore appears more willing to use impersonal evidential morphology as a routine cohesion strategy.

News credibility is also supported by documents and quantitative evidence. English constructions such as “data show”, “the report found” and “according to government figures” correspond to Uzbek “ma’lumotlarga ko’ra”, “hisobotda qayd etilishicha” and “rasmii statistika bo’yicha”. These forms anchor a proposition in a retrievable evidential object rather than in the journalist’s personal knowledge.

Numerical precision must nevertheless be represented carefully. An official count, an estimate and a forecast are epistemically different. English markers such as “approximately”, “estimated” and “projected”, and Uzbek “taxminan”, “baholanishicha” and “prognozga ko’ra”, prevent false precision. Such qualifiers do not weaken credibility; they preserve it by matching language to the actual status of the evidence.

Overall, English and Uzbek news share a common functional architecture. Both distinguish journalist voice from source voice, use reporting verbs to grade commitment, and employ documents and quotations as external evidence. English hard news strongly favours compact active source clauses and “according to” frames. Uzbek combines finite reporting verbs with a wider range of impersonal evidential constructions and postpositional source markers. These are different grammatical solutions to the same professional task: making knowledge claims accountable.

The comparison also has practical implications for translation and bilingual media production. Literal substitution is not always sufficient because attribution patterns have different stylistic frequencies in the two languages. English “according to the ministry” can normally be rendered as “vazirlik ma’lumotiga ko’ra”, but repeated English “X said” clauses may sound monotonous in Uzbek if translated identically in every sentence. Uzbek translators often alternate “ma’lum qildi”, “bildirdi”, “qayd etdi” and impersonal constructions to preserve natural news style. This variation is acceptable only when the semantic value of the original reporting verb is retained.

The opposite direction presents a related problem. Uzbek “qayd etilishicha” may be translated as “according to the report”, “the report said”, “it was noted that”, or “reportedly”, depending on the source that controls the proposition. Choosing “reportedly” when a clearly named institutional source is available can unnecessarily weaken source specificity. Conversely, translating a vague Uzbek evidential as “the ministry confirmed” would improperly increase certainty and authority. Translation therefore affects perceived credibility because it can strengthen or weaken the explicitness of attribution.

Particular caution is required with verbs such as “tasdiqladi”, “ta’kidladi”, “bildirdi” and “ma’lum qildi”. English “confirmed” is a close equivalent of “tasdiqladi”, but “ta’kidladi” is usually closer to “emphasized” or “stressed” than to neutral “said”. “Ma’lum qildi” may correspond to “said”, “announced” or “reported” according to context. Functional equivalence should be determined by the speech act and evidential status rather than by dictionary matching.

Thus, credibility-preserving translation requires three operations: identifying the original source, preserving the degree of epistemic commitment, and selecting a target-language attribution pattern that sounds conventional without altering responsibility for the claim. This is especially important in cross-lingual online journalism, where translated reports may be read as independent news texts and readers may not have access to the source-language original.

Conclusion

Source attribution and quotation are major linguistic mechanisms of credibility in English and Uzbek online news. Explicit clauses such as “the ministry said” and “vazirlik ma’lum qildi” identify responsible knowledge holders; “according to” and “ma’lumotiga ko’ra” connect propositions to external evidence; reporting verbs regulate the degree of endorsement; direct quotation increases source presence; and Uzbek forms such as “qayd etilishicha” maintain evidential continuity while backgrounding the reporter.

The comparison reveals strong functional similarity but meaningful structural variation. English agency-style news tends to prefer short active attribution clauses, whereas Uzbek news more readily alternates finite clauses with impersonal evidential and postpositional constructions. Neither pattern is inherently more credible. Credibility depends on source specificity, authority, semantic accuracy of the reporting verb, transparency of evidence and contextual balance.

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