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LANGUAGE, STYLE, AND GENRE ISSUES IN CONTENT COVERING OFFENSES AND CRIME

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Abstract

This study examines the linguistic, stylistic, and genre-specific characteristics of media content addressing juvenile delinquency and criminal offenses across print, television, and online digital platforms. Drawing on critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and media linguistics frameworks (including Teun A. van Dijk and Norman Fairclough), the research explores how the thematic representation of delinquency has evolved from 19th-century institutional press coverage to contemporary multimedia newsrooms. Through comparative textual and discourse analysis – incorporating empirical case studies from the departmental newspaper Postda, investigative television broadcasts (Bir jinoyat izidan, O‘tkir tergov, Kids Behind Bars, Odin za vsekh), and online publications (e.g., Kun.uz)– the article identifies key lexical, morphological, syntactic, and structural mechanisms of legal reporting. The findings reveal a marked dichotomy across media formats: traditional print press prioritizes institutional legitimization, official-normative register, and denotative neutrality, whereas digital and broadcast media systematically employ individualization, dramatization, and emotionally charged connotative markers to maximize audience engagement and clickability. Furthermore, the article addresses ethical and legal constraints concerning minors’ privacy and evaluates the transforming role of social networks and video platforms in shaping juvenile socialization.



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Over the past decade, reports, articles, and video content concerning delinquency and criminal offenses have grown substantially across both mass media and social networking platforms. The extensive media coverage of crimes, corruption, fraud, domestic violence, traffic accidents, and violent acts has become one of the primary focal points of the modern media landscape. On the one hand, this reflects ongoing social realities; on the other hand, in certain instances, it risks turning into an instrument of informational manipulation and social stigmatization. Content addressing legal offenses functions not merely as informative reportage, but also as a socio-informational phenomenon carrying significant emotional resonance. By inherently synthesizing legal, social, and ethical contexts, it serves as a powerful medium for influencing public perception. Consequently, examining the linguistic mechanisms deployed within such content is essential not only for general linguistics, but also for sociolinguistic and pragmatic discourse analysis.

When did terminology such as "juvenile delinquency" and adolescent offending first emerge in print media? The term "juvenile delinquency" was first recorded in the United States in 1816. This linguistic development was closely linked to a sharp surge in youth-perpetrated offenses after 1807. By the 1820s, the term's first precise institutional usage was documented alongside the founding of the Society for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency in New York. The



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representation of youth offenses and juvenile lawbreaking in the press emerged as a distinct social issue during the nineteenth century. In these press dispatches, the official-formal style predominated: specific statutory names, penal codes, article numbers, state institutions, and correctional facilities were explicitly cited. In nineteenth-century British press discourse, several specialized terms were widely employed:

- **“Reformatory school”** – a corrective institution aimed not merely at punitive retribution, but at the resocialization of young offenders through disciplined education and moral rehabilitation;
- **“Industrial school”** – an educational institution focused on vocational and technical training while emphasizing moral instruction;
- **“House of correction”** – an institutional facility typically organized as a disciplinary detention house or labor colony.

According to media linguistics scholar Teun A. van Dijk, crime and delinquency reports shape social cognition through specific textual structures, lexical choices, and cognitive schema. It is precisely through linguistic framing that one can determine how an offense is positioned—whether as an illicit act deserving punitive condemnation, a structural social problem warranting comprehension, or an event sensationalized for public spectacle.

In general, media materials covering offenses systematically exhibit the following communicative and stylistic features:

- **Lexical features:** Characterized by a high concentration of normative legal terminology, including standardized formulaic phrases such as “criminal proceedings were instituted,” “suspect,” “court hearing,” and “material evidence.” Additionally, official-documentary elements are consistently deployed: statutory provisions, codified legal acts, explicit citations of article and



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section numbers, and the formal designations of state authorities, all of which reinforce the legal veracity of the text.

- **Morphological features:** Dominated by nominal structures and nominalized lexical items, which serve to categorize states and individuals with analytical precision. In verb paradigms, past tense forms and passive voice constructions predominate (e.g., "the defendant was detained," "a criminal case was initiated"). Such syntactic choices allow the presentation of events as established facts while shifting primary focus away from the human subject.

- **Syntactic features:** Marked by complex and compound sentences that enable authors to correlate event details with formal documentation. Relative and explanatory subordinate clauses provide supplementary parameters regarding person, setting, and timeline (e.g., "...as reported by the press service of the Prosecutor General's Office"). Passive constructions (e.g., "...was taken into custody by...") keep the institutional procedure or event at the center of discourse rather than the acting individual.

- **Textual structure:** Typically constructed around a tripartite framework: an introduction (date, venue, core nature of the incident), the main body (circumstantial details, evidentiary and statutory grounds), and a conclusion (administrative/judicial measures taken or court rulings delivered). Chronological exposition prevails, facilitating logical comprehension of factual sequences.

- **Attribution and citation apparatus:** Explicit citation of official sources is a foundational characteristic. Articles routinely reference statutory articles, press statements from state organs, and direct or indirect quotes from authorized officials. Statistical data are methodically incorporated to illustrate offense rates, territorial breakdowns, and criminogenic dynamics.

The representation of offenses varies considerably across different media platforms—namely print media, television, radio, and digital publications. These



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differences stem from each platform's inherent communicative constraints, target audiences, and informational objectives.

Traditional print media employs the most classical, professionally edited, normative, and neutral register of press discourse. In print coverage of offenses, several traits stand out: the dominance of the official-normative register and a deliberate commitment to lexical impartiality. Prioritizing reader information, print journalism emphasizes documentary facts rather than emotive rhetoric. Attribution is frequently formalized through attributions such as "according to reliable sources" or "based on data from the prosecutor's office." For instance, an analytical piece titled "Tahlillar, o'rganishlar, natijalar" ("Analyses, Investigations, Results"), published in the departmental newspaper Postda (2024)—an object of our empirical study—exemplifies statistical rigor, syntactic conciseness, emotional detachment, and documentary primacy. It serves as a representative sample of official-administrative reporting within the legal-journalistic publicistic genre:

"A comprehensive operational-preventive campaign titled 'Towards National Peace – Public Welfare' was conducted in the Urganch district. Spanning ten days, this operation prioritized stabilizing the criminogenic situation, ensuring public security, early prevention of crimes and offenses, and improving the population's socio-economic conditions. During the campaign, 3,163 residential households, 601 country residences (dachas), and 572 commercial, consumer-service, and manufacturing enterprises were inspected. Additionally, individual preventive discussions were conducted with 523 previously convicted individuals, 397 persons under probationary supervision, and 106 individuals requiring special social attention. Notably, 6 unresolved crimes from previous years were cleared. Six individuals evading investigative and judicial authorities were apprehended, ensuring the inevitability of punishment.



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Three missing persons were located during operational inquiries. Furthermore, 32 offenses were uncovered on the direct initiative of operational personnel, resulting in the detention of suspects. Among these, 12 pertained to narcotics, 5 to illicit currency exchange, 4 to pimping and keeping brothels, 1 to fraud, 3 to bribery, 3 to illegal consumption of energy resources, 1 to human trafficking, 1 to illegal possession of firearms, and 1 to violation of administrative surveillance regulations. Based on operational leads, 2 individuals were found storing 129.5 grams of narcotics in their residences.”

Such texts are fundamentally structured around public order, crime prevention, and the maintenance of the rule of law; their linguistic architecture fully complies with the conventions of institutional-legal communication. Facts are arranged chronologically and fortified with statistical and documentary evidence. As Norman Fairclough observed, this approach performs an “institutional discourse legitimizing function,” “presenting information stripped of subjective editorial bias. Institutional discourse represents the collective textual output produced and disseminated on behalf of state, judicial, political, or administrative apparatuses. Such discourse not only transmits functional data, but actively legitimizes the authority and competence of these institutions in the eyes of society by framing them as lawful, methodical, and authoritative.

At the lexical level, a dense layer of normative-legal terminology is evident: collocations such as “criminal case was instituted,” “suspect,” “probationary register,” “administrative detention,” “protection order,” and “surveillance camera was integrated” establish technical precision and signal adherence to the formal style. As E. A. Kozina emphasizes, the terminological stratum serves as the primary functional anchor of legal-informational texts. In other words, the presence of specialized jurisprudence terminology is the decisive criterion distinguishing this discourse from other journalistic subgenres. This



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terminological stratum comprises strictly codified statutory, administrative, and legal nomenclatures that define the functional vector, stylistic register, and official status of the text.

In terms of composition, statistical metrics constitute the empirical backbone of the article. Syntactically, the text maintains a balanced equilibrium between simple and compound sentences, primarily organized around the "one fact per sentence" principle. Emotive and expressive linguistic units are practically non-existent. Nonetheless, discursive markers such as "Notably" serve to steer the reader's cognitive focus toward salient operational milestones. Socio-evaluative collocations like "stabilizing the criminogenic situation," "subjected to harassment and violence," and "illegal possession" contextualize the narrative, fostering public awareness regarding the systemic repercussions of criminal behavior.

In Uzbek broadcast media, offenses are predominantly framed through the lens of organized crime programming, historically epitomized by the investigative television series "Bir jinoyat izidan" (In the Footsteps of a Crime). This investigative format typically relies on dramatized reconstructions of closed criminal cases, pairing staged reenactments with official commentary from investigating officers and eyewitness accounts. For many years, this production stood as the nation's singular specialized criminal television project; currently, it also maintains an active digital presence on YouTube. Similarly, Milli TV broadcasts "O'tkir tergov" (Sharp Investigation), which examines closed criminal case files to analyze severe homicides, investigative trajectories, and judicial sentencing.

Empirical analysis indicates that juvenile delinquency has not been systematically addressed through dedicated television programs. Instead, offenses committed by minors are largely relegated to periodic television news segments, brief factual



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dispatches, or breaking bulletins. As a result, the viewing public receives episodic coverage of isolated incidents rather than sustained, analytical perspectives addressing preventive frameworks, sociological determinants, and psychological foundations of juvenile offending. This editorial shortfall can be attributed to broadcast rating policies, programmatic constraints, ethical and statutory boundaries, and a scarcity of specialized legal journalists. Commercial networks tend to prioritize emotionally charged, high-stakes narratives (such as aggravated homicides) that maximize audience engagement, whereas juvenile infractions are often categorized under pedagogical and social spheres. Furthermore, strict statutory prohibitions against revealing the identity, facial features, or names of minors—codified within the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Guarantees of the Rights of the Child"—alongside international legal covenants—impose stringent reporting boundaries.

In contrast, international broadcast traditions demonstrate alternative models. Networks in the United States, Russia, and South Korea, for example, have instituted dedicated socio-analytical programs that examine juvenile offenses through the prism of adolescent socialization, family dynamics, educational environments, and cyber-threat vectors. In Uzbekistan, this gap presents an untapped opportunity for developing innovative public-affairs journalistic formats.

In Russian broadcast journalism, specialized investigative formats are deeply institutionalized, exemplified by programs such as "Chelovek i zakon" (Man and Law) and "Sledstvie veli..." (The Investigation Was Conducted by...). These programs incorporate focused thematic segments on adolescent offenses, deliberately contextualizing raw criminal facts with analytical commentary from pedagogues, child psychologists, and sociologists. They frequently address the recruitment of minors via digital platforms, cyber offenses, and virtual



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delinquency, offering audiences insight into the underlying socio-psychological drivers rather than merely cataloging consequences.

Similarly, the Ukrainian channel STB's program "Odin za vsekh" (One for All) engages investigative frameworks to explore crime, public order, and community safety. The project relies extensively on multimodal communication strategies, combining field reporting, studio debates, expert commentary, archival footage, witness testimonies, and reenactments. This hybrid apparatus generates intense affective resonance, facilitating a layered understanding of each case. Narrative progression is guided by dramaturgical techniques: investigative evidence is unveiled sequentially along an escalating dramatic axis, built around clashes between prosecution and defense arguments, physical evidence, and countervailing testimonies.

Operating under an interactive dispute model, the program convenes criminologists, psychologists, jurists, witnesses, and primary participants within the same studio arena. Crucially, suspects are frequently invited to offer their defense live on air. This aligns with adversarial/confrontational journalism, using public dispute to unpack conflicting viewpoints. Simultaneously, this dynamic triggers a "naming and shaming" mechanism through explicit public exposure. The carceral conditions of juvenile offenders remain a focal point of debate in international human rights and criminology. The United States occupies a distinct position within this discourse, being the sole UN member state that has not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This legal anomaly has historically permitted severe sentencing practices for minors, including life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

A prominent media exploration of this condition is the A&E documentary television series "Kids Behind Bars: Life or Parole" (premiered in 2019). The project chronicles the legal journeys and judicial resentencing hearings of



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individuals who received life sentences without parole for violent offenses committed during adolescence. Its audience primarily consists of viewers interested in jurisprudence, forensic psychology, and criminal sociology, as well as human rights advocates, legal scholars, and journalists campaigning for criminal justice reform and sentence mitigation.

Produced in a documentary realism format, each episode follows an individual's trajectory from initial offense through incarceration to potential resentencing. Archival footage, courtroom recordings, expert analysis, and interviews with family members and survivors are woven together. This narrative framing avoids superficial fact-listing to evoke ethical debate, compelling audiences to weigh punitive retribution against the ethics of restorative justice and second chances.

The same network produces "60 Days In" (launched in 2016), an immersive documentary series that sheds light on carceral realities, including facilities housing young offenders. In this investigative experiment, civilians from various professional walks of life volunteer to spend 60 days undercover as inmates within correctional institutions, with their identities concealed from both correction officers and the incarcerated population. The project aims to expose systemic deficiencies, internal corruption, illegal enterprises, and security blind spots. Simultaneously, it illustrates the psychological consequences of institutional isolation and systemic dysfunction. The series documents the experiences of young incarcerated individuals, solitary confinement, and inequities within the judicial process, illustrating how penal institutions frequently prioritize punitive isolation over rehabilitation.

In digital journalism, the stylistic and linguistic parameters of juvenile offense reportage are closely linked to audience engagement and algorithmic visibility. At the lexico-semantic level, emotional-expressive lexical units frequently dominate. Consequently, the crime is framed not merely as an informational



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event, but as an affective catalyst designed to elicit an emotional response. Headlines and lead paragraphs routinely emphasize the most sensational details, diverging from the classical inverted pyramid model. Readers are thus nudged toward an emotional assessment before engaging with the underlying factual details.

Headlines in digital journalism warrant separate scholarly scrutiny. Navigating a relentless flow of information where hundreds of headlines compete for attention, users rely heavily on the headline to decide what to read. Digital audiences frequently read only the headline and short lead text before moving on; hence, digital headlines must simultaneously inform, provoke emotional interest, and drive user click-throughs. Competing within algorithmic feeds, search results, and mobile aggregators, headlines regularly incorporate personalization, dramatic tension, evaluative adjectives, and provocative rhetoric. The headline ceases to be a mere title and operates as an independent communicative vehicle. From a critical discourse perspective, digital coverage of juvenile offenses relies on two primary communicative strategies: **individualization (personalization)** and **dramatization**.

1. Individualization: Prioritizes individuals over systemic factors. By placing concrete actors—suspects, victims, or their immediate relatives—at the center of the narrative, the entire event is filtered through their personal profile. This strategy fosters emotional identification or indignation. For example, in an investigative piece published by Kun.uz titled "Horrors at the Samarkand Boarding School: Director of Children's Prison Arrested", the headline does not reference institutional mistreatment in the abstract; it directly ties the offense to a named actor (Shuhrat Sadinov). The systemic failure is thus mediated through an identifiable perpetrator, intensifying the reader's affective reaction by focusing on individual culpability.



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2. Dramatization: Unfolds the narrative along an escalating dramatic axis rather than strict chronological order. Articles frequently lead with shocking or visceral details before unpacking contextual causes and effects. Irony, metaphorical tropes, intensifying adjectives, and rhetorical questions are commonly deployed. For instance, in the headline "Trial Begins Regarding Incident Where Youth from Kitob Was Stabbed and Lost an Eye", visceral physical injuries ("stabbed", "lost an eye") occupy the lead position, while official statements and procedural milestones follow secondarily. Similarly, in the retrospective headline "The Kalinin Case' – Murdering War Veterans in the USSR... How Was the Couple Caught?", the dramatic premise ("murdering war veterans") precedes the procedural details of the investigation.

Furthermore, digital crime journalism often foregrounds the socio-psychological fallout of an offense over statutory nuance. The event is characterized not merely as a legal transgression, but as a traumatic rupture impacting families and community stability. Digital news media thus fulfills a dual communicative function: it reports immediate facts while actively cultivating specific ideological attitudes and affective judgments¹.

Unlike the thorough, institutional accounts characteristic of traditional broadsheets, digital publications favor condensed, punchy formulations. Emphatic tones and high-impact vocabulary attract immediate attention, distill complex matters into easily digestible summaries, and maximize sharability across social media networks.

This communicative duality highlights the operational distinction between **denotative** and **connotative** meanings²:

¹ Muncie, J. (2021). *Youth and crime* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

² Jewkes, Y. (2015). *Media and crime* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.



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• **Denotative units** denote the literal, objective dictionary definition of a term, pointing directly to a specific referent, phenomenon, or process. They represent the objective, value-neutral dimension of language and remain stable across personal or cultural variables. In legal, scientific, and official registers, denotative clarity is essential to prevent ambiguity. Terms such as "homicide", "theft", and "fraud" are strictly denotative: they identify verified legal classifications without encoding subjective evaluation or emotional color. Scholarly literature defines denotation as the primary lexical meaning of a linguistic sign, pointing to an objective referent independent of personal or cultural bias.

• **Connotative units** encompass the secondary, figurative, emotive, and socio-evaluative overtones attached to a word. This semiotic layer is inherently contingent on subjective perspective and cultural context, reflecting the author's stance, ideological values, and communicative intent. Lexical collocations such as "barbaric atrocity", "wretched woman", and "shattered dreams" convey pity, sorrow, or indignation rather than detached legal status. In mass communication and marketing, connotative framing is deliberately used to trigger audience affect. When detailing criminal events, journalists regularly combine denotative and connotative markers: denotative language grounds the factual occurrence, while connotative choices dramatize the narrative and communicate moral evaluations.

Over the past decade, the rapid expansion of social media networks and short-form video platforms has fundamentally transformed the resocialization trajectories of juvenile audiences. Platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have emerged not merely as channels of content consumption, but as key environments shaping communicative culture and linguistic habits. The linguistic, developmental, and psychological implications of these virtual



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environments on children and adolescents represent an increasingly pressing area of global academic inquiry.

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