



The Theory of Precedentness At the Present Stage of Linguistic Development

OPEN ACCESS

SUBMITTED 30 June 2025

ACCEPTED 29 July 2025

PUBLISHED 31 August 2025

VOLUME Vol.05 Issue 08 2025

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Mamatkulova Kamola

Doctoral student of Termez State University, Termez, Uzbekistan

Abstract: This article explores the current state of the theory of precedentness in modern linguistics. It traces the evolution of the concept, outlines key theoretical frameworks, and analyzes new trends in the understanding and use of precedent phenomena in the context of globalization, digitalization, and intercultural communication. Special attention is paid to the expansion of precedent units in media and internet discourse and their role in shaping cultural memory and collective identity.

Keywords: Precedentness, precedent phenomena, linguistic consciousness, intertextuality, cultural memory, discourse, modern linguistics.

Introduction: The concept of precedentness has become one of the significant areas of research in cognitive, cultural, and pragmatic linguistics over the past few decades. Initially introduced in Russian linguistics by Yu.N. Karaulov, E.M. Vereshchagin, and V.M. Telia, the idea of precedent phenomena has since expanded beyond national contexts and integrated into broader linguistic and cultural studies.

Today, the theory of precedentness is experiencing new developments in response to changing communication landscapes, especially due to the influence of the internet, mass media, and intercultural interactions.

The Evolution of the Theory of Precedentness

The foundation of precedentness theory was laid in the 1980s and 1990s within the Russian linguistic school. According to Karaulov, precedent units are culturally significant signs known and recognized by members of a linguistic and cultural community. These include:

- Precedent names (e.g., Hamlet, Napoleon)
- Precedent texts (e.g., religious passages, literary quotes)
- Precedent situations (e.g., the French Revolution, moon landing)
- Precedent utterances (e.g., “To be or not to be”, “I have a dream”)

Such units are deeply embedded in the linguistic consciousness of individuals and serve as tools for cultural identification, persuasion, irony, and more.

Defining Features of Precedent Phenomena

Current definitions emphasize the following features of precedent phenomena:

1. Cultural recognizability – they are familiar to the majority of speakers
2. Associative strength – they evoke stable mental or emotional associations
3. Reproducibility – they are cited or alluded to in discourse
4. Communicative relevance – they fulfill specific functions in communication

Modern scholars stress that precedentness is not inherent to a unit but arises through usage and collective memory.

The Role of Precedentness in Linguistic Consciousness

Precedent phenomena play an essential role in:

- Encoding cultural values and norms
- Transmitting national and global history
- Supporting group identity and shared experience
- Creating emotional and rhetorical effects

They are a part of what A. Wierzbicka and G. Lakoff might call a cultural-linguistic worldview: a system through which a society perceives and articulates reality using culturally loaded linguistic elements.

Modern Contexts: Media, Digital Culture, and Globalization

Media Expansion

Television, cinema, and social media platforms have dramatically expanded the sources of precedentness. Today's precedent units include:

- Movie lines: “I am your father” (Star Wars)
- Meme culture: “This is fine”, “OK Boomer”
- Social campaigns: #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo

Internet and Memetics

Memes, gifs, hashtags, viral tweets — all represent new forms of digital precedent phenomena. They are

characterized by rapid circulation, multimodality (text + image + sound), and high emotional charge.

Unlike classical literary or historical references, these emerge quickly, often without formal textual anchoring, and can cross cultural boundaries instantly.

Challenges in the Study of Precedent Phenomena Today

Contemporary linguistics faces several challenges when working with precedent units:

- Ephemerality of internet references
- Blurring of boundaries between local and global precedentness
- Hybridization of precedent sources (e.g., mixing religious, pop-cultural, and historical codes)
- Contextual instability — the same unit may have different meanings depending on time, platform, and community

This necessitates the development of dynamic, context-sensitive models for analyzing precedentness.

Theoretical Innovations in Precedentness Studies

Modern scholarship increasingly relies on interdisciplinary tools:

- Cognitive linguistics helps explore how precedent units are mentally processed and stored
- Corpus linguistics allows for the identification of frequently used precedent patterns
- Discourse analysis reveals how precedentness functions in specific genres (media, political speech, advertising)
- Translation studies examine how precedent units are adapted or replaced in cross-cultural communication

New theoretical contributions also come from memetics, semiotics, and digital ethnography.

Precedentness and Intercultural Communication

In cross-cultural contexts, precedent phenomena may fail to translate due to cultural specificity. For example:

- Russian reference: “He is like Oblomov” → requires cultural knowledge of Goncharov's novel
- Uzbek reference: “Like Alpomish” → may be opaque to outsiders
- American reference: “He's a real Benedict Arnold” → may confuse non-Americans

Thus, contextualization and cultural commentary become essential in translation and interpretation.

CONCLUSION

The theory of precedentness continues to evolve, responding to technological, cultural, and communicative transformations. From classic literature

and political speeches to internet memes and TikTok trends, precedent phenomena shape how people think, communicate, and relate to cultural memory.

Modern linguistics must embrace flexible, interdisciplinary frameworks to understand and categorize these powerful elements of human communication.

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