

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Concept Of "Surprise" In Media Discourse (Based on English Language Material)

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## Abstract

This article examines the concept of "surprise" in media discourse. The study's relevance to the increasing emotiveness of journalistic texts, which often becomes a tool of propaganda. Therefore, analysing the manifestation of basic emotions, including the emotion of "surprise", will contribute to a deeper understanding of texts, an essential skill in today's world with contradictory information.

## KEY WORDS

Concept, basic emotion, surprise, emotive, journalistic text, media, lexeme.

## INTRODUCTION

The English press widely represents this concept in various topics, including nature and ecology, crime reports, economy and politics, children, food, and social media. The main lexical units verbalising this concept in the English language are astonishment, wonder, amazement, bewilderment and their derivatives[8]. They differ in intensity and emotional colouring.

The most stylistically neutral term is "surprise", as it refers to the visual perception of a surprising object. In English media, the word "surprise" is used frequently to denote unexpected events, often involving a shift from normalcy, expectations, or routine outcomes. The core meanings—unexpectedness, emotional reaction, and deviation from the norm—remain consistent across different genres, whether news reporting, entertainment, or opinion pieces[7].

The context plays the greatest role in determining whether the "surprise" is evaluated positively or negatively. Conceptual features of "surprise" include "unexpectedness", "astonishment", the desire to resolve an "informational paradox", "curiosity", "shock", "deception", "fascination", and

"interest"[8].

In the framework of the modern anthropocentric paradigm, special relevance is acquired by studies devoted to understanding the human being in all its manifestations. The emotional sphere, being an integral characteristic of homo sapiens, is of undeniable interest to linguistics as it reveals how different cultures perceive reality through the lens of language. Moreover, the emotional layer of a text contains an interpretation of cause-and-effect relationships, which, when analysed, allows for a fuller and more conscious understanding of the author's worldview and its subjective and ethnically conditioned features[9].

When we turn to journalistic texts, many researchers note their growing emotiveness. This is explained by the fact that in today's tense global climate, journalism often serves as an instrument of propaganda, and one of its most effective tools is precisely its appeal to emotions. Thus, the study of the emotional component becomes highly valuable.

This article analyses the emotion of "surprise" based on

English-language media discourse. In psychology, this emotion belongs to the so-called "basic" emotions, alongside "joy", "fear", and "sadness"[1]. Basic emotions are considered universal among healthy individuals and manifest similarly across different cultures. As a reaction to sudden, unexpected events, surprise arises instantaneously and also fades quickly. This emotion precedes human cognition and stimulates its development, preparing a person "for effective interaction with new, unexpected events and their consequences" [5].

### METHOD

The research material consists of articles from English-language media. The analysis employed methods such as cognitive analysis, descriptive-analytical method, comparative analysis, as well as discourse, contextual, and content analysis of mass communication texts. Information was collected through continuous sampling.

### DISCUSSION

Being one of the basic emotions, surprise is closely tied to intellectual activity "due to the presence in its structure of a component of 'not understanding', which arises from the mind's work in comparing two situations or phenomena—one familiar and one new" [9]. The intellectual nature of the concept of "surprise" can be understood differently: the cause of surprise is always consciously recognised by the person experiencing it, which distinguishes it from other basic emotions such as fear, anxiety, and joy [8].

A.I. Sergeev identifies the main distinguishing feature of the concept "surprise" as an informational paradox, which on one hand involves a lack of information about the event—it seems impossible or contrary to the usual course of things. But on the other hand, there is enough information to understand exactly what the event contradicts, thus causing surprise [11].

Surprise is also characterised by a wide range of evaluations: negative, neutral, positive; a transitional nature – the ability to quickly transform into another emotional state; brevity [1]; subjectivity – different people may be surprised by completely different things. Psychologists define surprise as a short-term, rapidly passing reaction to a sudden, unexpected event [2].

However, the question of whether the emotion of "surprise" carries a positive or negative connotation remains debatable. For instance, V.I. Shakhovsky believes that all emotions form evaluative pairs: each has a positively and a negatively connoted version [10]. Thus, this applies to the emotion of

surprise as well. Ortony also supports this view, speaking of "pleasant" and "unpleasant surprise" [6]. American psychologist Carroll Izard notes that most people evaluate surprise positively and recall instances of "positive" surprise more frequently [2]. We believe that surprise can carry either positive or negative connotations, usually clarified by context.

Merriam-Webster distinguishes cognitive and emotive components of surprise. While it focuses on the suddenness and unexpected nature, it also includes the wonder or astonishment typically associated with positive or neutral feelings, not just negative shock[3].

From a psychological standpoint, surprise is categorized as a basic emotion with clear neurobiological and behavioral markers. Unlike general language dictionaries, it includes the process: from automatic reaction to cognitive interpretation, indicating that surprise plays a role in learning and adaptation[1].

The emotional tone of "surprise" is often context-dependent. It can range from joy and admiration (pleasant surprises) to shock or fear (unpleasant surprises), but many dictionaries leave room for positive interpretations, especially when linked to novelty, beauty, or wonder.

Thus, it can be stated that in English culture, surprise is based on the idea of its positive influence on a person's intellectual capabilities and suggests that what triggers this emotion is, in most cases, something positive (beautiful and grand).

The main themes in which this emotion is mentioned include: nature (most frequent), crime (second), economy and politics (third), followed by culture, sports, food, children, and social networks. Nature has always amazed people, and the volume of analysed articles only confirms this. Therefore, it can be concluded that the concept of "surprise" definitely includes nature as a source of amazement.

Frequently, one of the lexemes of the conceptual field of "surprise" appears in newspaper headlines, for example:

- "Surprise win for the underdog in the elections"
- "Market takes surprise downturn amid global uncertainty"

In such contexts, surprise highlights unpredictability in political, economic, or social domains. The tone can vary from neutral to alarmed, depending on context.

- "Inheritance, astonishment, and experiences in the world of sports",

- "Astonishment in Venice: The Grand Canal glows green – what the authorities say",

Lexemes of the conceptual field of "surprise", or phrases like to put someone into astonishment (to amaze), indicate that the article will deal with unexpected events that do not correspond to expectations or the usual course of things [7]. Thus, the reader gets an initial impression: the article will be about something unusual or unexpected.

Often, surprise in media texts is caused by the discrepancy between the expected and the actual outcome. For example:

"The opening of a planned hotel in London causes astonishment, because instead of the expected new construction, a historical building will be renovated."

This case involves a mismatch of expectations: a modern building was expected, but instead, a historical renovation took place, which leads to surprise.

In some cases, media texts express surprise regarding judicial decisions, which in turn reflect the discrepancy between common legal expectations and actual outcomes. For instance:

"The acquittal in the trial of the alleged murderer of Sophia L. causes astonishment – and indignation."

Here, the emotion of surprise transitions into a negative emotional state—indignation—emphasising the previously discussed point about the evaluative ambiguity of surprise depending on context.

Another example related to the economy:

"A sudden rise in inflation caused astonishment among many economists."

The unexpected nature of the economic change contradicts expert forecasts, resulting in surprise.

It's also worth noting that surprise can sometimes arise not from specific events but from people's actions or the results of their actions, especially when these go beyond normal expectations:

"The student's creative solution at the Math Olympiad amazed the jury."

Or in political contexts:

"President's decision to dissolve the parliament caused astonishment both domestically and abroad."

These examples demonstrate how surprise is used as a discursive tool to highlight the unexpected nature of certain events or decisions and guide readers' evaluations.

### CONCLUSION

In this article, we analysed the representation of the concept of "surprise" in English-language media texts. The study shows that the concept is widely used across various media genres, from nature and crime reporting to economics, politics, and culture.

The emotion of surprise, being one of the basic emotions, is characterised by ambivalence: it can be both positive and negative, depending largely on the context. English media discourse reveals this ambiguity: surprise is expressed in both neutral informative contexts and emotionally colored evaluative ones.

The analysis showed that surprise in media discourse often functions as a tool for guiding the reader's perception, drawing attention to events that contradict expectations or norms. This makes the emotion of surprise a powerful discursive mechanism in shaping public opinion and engaging the audience.

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