This survey is devoted to the sociolinguistic and contrastive analysis of contextual synonymic groups in the English and Russian newspapers. Synonymic groups are formed round socially important events: weather cataclysms, terror acts, war conflicts, Olympic Games, drugs, new viruses, election campaigns.

Special attention is focused on the hierarchical structure of these synonymic groups – their standard and substandard parts as they may include different lexical strata – literary lexemes, colloquialisms, low colloquialisms, slang words, jargon words, argot words and vulgarisms. Informal lexical units in the language of the paper, in many cases, express the author’s opinion and evaluation of the event. While implicit evaluation is a part of the lexical meaning of the word, explicit evaluation is realized only within the limits of the context.

Our analysis has shown that Russian newspapers use colloquial, slang, jargon, even argot words quite intensively in comparison with English newspapers and this points to some transient period in Russian mass media when social changes correspond to active linguistic processes and innovations.

Keywords: lexical stratum, synonymic group, synonym.