

The English Students' Difficulties in Translating English News Headlines

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Abstract

A newspaper headline is often the only thing that readers read in a newspaper, or at least, it is the first thing that everyone notices in a newspaper. It serves as a guide for the reader that helps decide whether to continue on reading the whole report or to skip onto another one. According to LaRocque (2003:10), a good headline persuades the readers to stop and dedicate their time to reading the story. Such a headline catches reader's interest as well as it captures the essence of the story. That is why the style of news headline writings has its own features different from other types of text. Obviously it is not only a matter of lexical, and rhetorical features, but also grammatical features. Many English students still, therefore, get difficulty translating and grasping the written messages of the English news headlines.

This small research tries to find out the problems faced by English students in understanding and translating the English news headlines especially found in Jakarta Post Newspaper as well as to analyze some typical linguistic features found in Jakarta Post headlines.

The results of this research show that some typical linguistic features found in Jakarta Post headlines that the English students do not know, among others, are the absence of the verb 'be', or articles, using infinitives to refer to the future tense, simple tenses instead of progressive or perfect forms as a result, they surely cannot get and translate the conveyed messages of the English news headlines as a source language into target language well.

Keywords: Newspaper headlines, linguistic features, written messages, source language, target language

Introduction

Living in the era of information technology, it goes without saying that nowadays people can perceive what is happening in every part of the world through news from either electronic media or printed media. Newspaper as one of the major printed media for everyone to get information all over the world is still believed that it has more readers than any of other kind of written texts as what Van Dijk (1986) as cited in Khodabandeh (2007) says, "for most citizens, news is perhaps the type of written discourse with which they are confronted most frequently".

However, the first thing that everyone notices in a newspaper is newspaper headline. It is an indispensable part of the newspaper that attracts most of the readers as it is often the only thing that readers read in a newspaper. Headline newspaper serves as a guide for the readers that help decide whether to continue on reading the whole report or to skip onto another one. According to Ungerer (2000:48), "a headline describes the essence of a complicated news story in a few words. It informs quickly and accurately and arouses the reader's attention". According to La Rocque (2003:10), a good headline persuades the readers to stop and dedicate their time to reading the story. Such a headline catches reader's interest as well as it captures the essence of the story. Gilmore even further says, "the best headlines both 'tell and sell', that is, they tell the reader quickly what the news is and persuade the reader that the story is worth reading." (2005:107). That is why the style of news headline writings has its own features different from other types of text as seen in the following explanation.

Grammatical Rule of English News Headlines

As mentioned above that the headlines in English language newspaper are often written in special style, which is very different from ordinary English. In this style there are some special rules of grammar, and words are often used in unusual ways that the English students should

know. Here are few typical linguistic features of English News headlines taken from Swan (1995:365) :

- a. Headlines are not always complete sentences. Many headlines consist of noun phrases with no verb.

Example:

MORE WAGE CUTS

(**There are/will be** more power cuts)

TERROR ALERT IN CAPITAL

(**There is/was a** terror alert in **the** capita

- b. Articles and the verb be are often left out in headlines.

Example:

HUSSAIN PAINTING OBSCENE, SAYS MINISTER

(**The**Hussain painting **is** obscene, says **the** Minister)

OLD MAN SCALES EVEREST

(**An**old man, **has** scaled Mt. Everest)

- c. Headlines often contain strings of three, four or more nouns; nouns earlier in the string modify those that follow.

Example:

FURNITURE FACTORY PAY CUT ROW

Headlines like these can be difficult to understand. It sometimes helps to read the backwards. FURNITURE FACTORY PAY CUT ROW refers to a Row (disagreement) about a CUT (reduction) in PAY at a FACTORY that makes FURNITURE.

- d. In headlines, simple tenses are often used instead of progressive or perfect forms. The simple present is used for both present and past events.

Example:

FORMER PM PASSES AWAY

(Former PM **has** passed away.)

BLIND GIRL CLIMBS EVEREST

(Blind girl **has** climbed Everest.)

STUDENTS FIGHT FOR COURSE CHANGES

(Students are fighting for course changes)

- e. Many headline words are used as both nouns and verbs, and nouns are often used to modify other nouns. So it is not always easy to work out the structure of a sentence. Compare the following headlines:

US CUTS AID TO THIRD WORLD

(The US reduces its help....CUTS is verb, AID is a noun)

AID CUTS ROW

(There has been a disagreement about the reduction in aid. AID and CUTS are both nouns)

CUTS AID REBELS

(The reduction in aid is helping the revolutionaries. CUTS is a noun, AID is a verb)

- f. Headlines often use infinitives to refer to the future.

Example:

PM TO VISIT CANADA

(**The** PM **is** going to visit Canada)

BUSINESS SCHOOLS TO TAKE MORE STUDENTS

(Business schools **are** going to take more students)

- g. For is also used to refer to future movements or plans.
INDIAN TROOPS FOR IRAQ?
 (Are Indian soldiers going to be sent to Iraq?)
MORE TESTS FOR STUDENTS
 (More tests **are in store** for students this year)
- h. Auxiliary verbs are usually dropped from passive structure, leaving past participles.
 Example
MURDER HUNT; MEN HELD
 (a man **is being held** by police.)

SIX KILLED IN EXPLOSION

(Six people **have been killed**...)

Note that forms like held, attacked are usually past participles with passive meanings, not past tenses (which are rare in newspaper headlines). Compare the following headlines:

AID ROW; PRESIDENT ATTACKED

(*the President* **has been attacked**)

AID ROW: PRESIDENT ATTACKS CRITICS

(...*the President* **has attacked** her critics)

BOY FOUND SAFE

(*The missing boy* **has been found safe**)

BOY FINDS SAFE

(*A boy* **has found** a safe)

- i. The present progressive is used to talk about changes. Be is usually eliminated.
 Example:
EARTH GETTING WARMER, SAY SCIENTISTS
 (Earth **is getting warmer**)
TRADE FIGURES IMPROVING
 (Trade figures **are improving**)
- j. A colon (:) is often used to separate the subject of a headline from what is said about it.
POWER CRISIS: GOVERNMENT TO ACT
 (The Government **is going to act** over the power crisis)
BUILDING COLLAPSE: DEATH TOLL RISES
 (The death toll from the building collapse **has risen**)

Observed Problem

Since the news headlines of English newspapers are designed to be short, concise, and informative to convey different kinds of information, Many English students especially in Translation subject still find that English newspaper headlines as their source language (SL) are difficult to understand and translate to bahasa Indonesia as their target language(TL) well as perhaps they do not know the rule of grammar commonly used in English news headlines. Swan (200: 366) says,

Headlines are the short titles above newspaper reports. The headlines in English-language newspapers can be very difficult to understand. One reason for this is that newspaper headlines are often written in a special style, which is very different from ordinary English. In this style there are some special rules of grammar, and words are often used in unusual ways.

Waterhouse as cited in Sanderson (1999:29) also adds, "this genre of language is not one that people actually use in normal, everyday speech. There is, however, a clear pattern in this special genre; once the rules and tactics are understood a lot of difficulties may disappear".The followings

are some English news headlines (SL) which are randomly taken from Jakarta Post and deliberately given to the English students to translate.

1. Pilot, passenger killed in Papua plane crash.(JP/ 12/18/2011)
2. Terrorism behind shooting in Solo:Police (JP/08/23 2012)
3. IPW wants Malaysians probed in Lampung deaths.(JP/12/16/2011)
4. RI praised and criticized by Clinton (JP/09/04 2012)
5. House committee to deal with Papua issues (JP/09/05/2012)
6. Rocker Ahmad Dhani to report Cirebon Police (JP/12/21/2011)
7. Bali-based US midwife named CNN hero.(JP/ 12/13/2011)
8. Govt seeking new ways to boost exports (JP/09/10 2012)
9. Public trust in SBY govt at 'record low' (JP/ 01/09/2012)
10. *Business as usual for UI rector despite demand to step down.*(JP/12/22/2011)

Although some English students can understand and translate the above headlines quite well, some other students still do not get the conveyed message due to their lack of understanding the grammatical features of English news headlines of as a result, they cannot certainly translate them well as seen in the following table:

Table 1: Translation of English News Headlines (SL) to Indonesian (TL)

No	SOURCE LANGUAGE (E)			TARGET LANGUAGE (I)	
	Source	Headline	The Omission of Syntactical Elements	Students' Translation	Suggested Translation
1	JP/ 12/ 18/2011	Pilot, passenger killed in Papua plane crash. (The pilot and passenger were killed in Papua plane crash.)	Article, Conjunction and Auxiliary verb	Pilot, penumpang meninggal di Papua karena kecelakaan pesawat	<i>Pilot dan penumpang pesawat tewas dalam kecelakaan pesawat di Papua</i>
2	JP/08/ 23/2012	Terrorism behind shooting in Solo: Police (The police reported that terrorism was behind shooting in Solo)	Article and Auxiliary verb	<i>Polisi: terorisme di belakang penembakkan di Solo</i>	<i>Pōlisi mengemukakan bahwa terorisme berada di balik penembakkan di Solo</i>
3	JP/12/ 16/2011	IPW wants Malaysians probed in Lampung deaths (IPW wants Malaysians to be probed in Lampung deaths)	Infinitive	<i>IPW ingin melibatkan orang-orang Malaysia dalam kematian-kematian Lampung</i>	<i>IPW menginginkan orang-orang Malaysia yang terlibat dalam tragedy kematian di Lampung</i>
4	JP/09/ 04 /2012	RI praised and criticized by Clinton (RI was praised and criticized by Clinton)	Auxiliary verb	<i>RI memujikan mengkritik Clinton.</i>	<i>Pemerintah Republik Indonesia dipuji dan dikritik oleh Hillary Clinton</i>
5	JP/09/ 05/2012	House committee to deal with Papua issues The Committee of the House of Representative is going to deal with Papua issues	Future	<i>Pemerintah daerah menangani masalah Papua.</i>	<i>Komisi di DPR akan mem bahas masalah-masalah di Papua</i>
6	JP/12/ 21/2011	Rocker Ahmad Dhani to report Cirebon Police (Rocker Ahmad Dhani is going to report Cirebon Police)	Future	<i>Rocker Ahmad Dhani melaporkan ke Polisi Cirebon.</i>	<i>Penyanyi Rock Ahmad Dhani akan melaporkan ke Polisi Cirebon</i>

7	JP/ 12/ 13/2011	Bali-based US midwife was named CNN hero.	Auxiliary verb	<i>Bidan Amerika yang ada di Bali menyebut CNN Pahlawan.</i>	<i>Bidanasa Amerika Serikat yang bermukim di Bali dinobatkan sebagaipah lawano leh CNN</i>
8	JP/ 09/ 10 2012	Govt seeking new ways to boost exports (Government is seeking new ways to boost exports)	Auxiliary verb	<i>Pemerintah mencari carabarui untuk meningkat kanekspor</i>	<i>Pemerinah sedang mencari cara-cara baru untuk meningkat kanekspor</i>
9	JP/ 01/ 09/2012	Public trust in SBY govt at 'record low' (Public trust in SBY government is at 'record low')	Auxiliary verb	<i>Masyarakat percaya pemerintah SBY di tingkat yang renda</i>	<i>Kepercayaan masyarakat terhadap pemerintahan SBY berada di tingkat yang rendah</i>
10	JP/12/ 22/2011	Business as usual for UI rector despite to step down UI rector runs his business as usual despite demand to step down	Verb	<i>Bisnis dengan rektor UI meskipun permintaan menurun</i>	<i>Rektor UI berjalan kanaktivitas seperti biasameskipun dituntut untuk mundur</i>

Discussion and Alternative Solution

The translation results made by the English students above show that some students may take for granted that the inexistence of auxiliary verbs before past participle belong to active sentences especially if they are followed by the regular verb forms of simple past as they look like past participle as seen in the headlines no 1, 2, 4, 7, 8 and 9 therefore, they translate them as if they were simple past forms. Meanwhile, the incapability of the students to use infinitives to refer to the future is clearly seen in headlines no 5 and 6 and others are associated with missing article, coordinating conjunction, infinitive, and verb.

The alternative solution to overcome translation problems related to the grammatical rules used in English news headline for both teacher and students is as follow:

1. The teacher teaching translation subject is supposed to explain to his/her students typical features of grammar used in English news headlines;
2. The students should analyze and know the meaning of the English news headlines written in source language (SL);
3. The students should try to transfer the meaning of source language text to target language text;
4. The students should restructure the meaning taken from the source language (SL) to target language (TL) in terms of lexical, grammatical or rhetorical aspects.

Conclusion and Pedagogical implication

Considering that having information taken from both electronic and printed media is needed to keep up the latest news all over the world and that understanding the grammatical rules especially used in English newspaper as one of printed media since they are different from other kind of written texts is also necessary, The English teachers especially teaching translation subject are supposed to let their students know all grammatical rules mainly used in English news headlines in advance before they practice translating them in order that they will not get any difficulty to understand the meaning of the text. Furthermore, Due to the advance of information technology, understanding grammatical rules used not only in newspapers but also in any kinds of text such as SMS, e-mail, agreements is necessarily suggested to be one of the subjects given to the English students in translation class.

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