Analysis of the grammatical errors of English public signs translations in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia

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Abstract

This research analyzed the types of grammatical errors in English public sign translations in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia and the factors causing the errors. It used five public signs and their English translations as the data source. The theory proposed by Van Valin (1993) was used to identify the first formulated research problem. Meanwhile, the theory proposed by Vinay & Darbelnet (2000) was used to analyze the second formulated problem. The results showed that the public signs translations had grammatical errors in noun phrase formation, the use of the auxiliary verbs, verbal phrase formation, spellings, the formation of prepositional phrase and the application of tenses. Additionally, the inappropriate applications of the translation procedure, lack of understanding of the Target Language's (TL) grammar and the strong tendency for the translator to prioritize the Source Language's (SL) syntactical grammar were the factors causing the errors. These findings lead to a conclusion that the occurrence of any type of error in the translations could be due to the dominant interference from one of the languages towards the other language. Take for instance, the interference of the SL towards the TL. Therefore, understanding the linguistic and cultural aspects of both the SL and TL is compulsory to ensure that the translations are satisfactory.

Keywords: translation; linguistic aspect; cultural aspect; grammatical errors; public signs

1. Introduction

Translation is a very delicate process of re-expressing a particular meaning from a Source Language (SL) to the Target Language (TL). The process requires everyone practicing in the field of study to master the linguistic and cultural aspects of both languages. Translation consists of transferring the meaning of a text from the SL into the TL by going from the form of the first language to the form of a second language (Larson, 1998). Furthermore, the form may change, however the meaning needs to be held constantly. Having a good understanding about the lexicon, grammatical structure, communication situation, and the cultural context of both the SL and the TL plays a vital role in achieving the levels of accuracy, readability and acceptability of the translations. A number of

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varied aspects involved in the translation activity creates some challenges. One of the challenges is the grammatical errors commonly found in translations. Public sign translations often times convey varied types of grammatical errors. Therefore, five public signs in Ubud area, globally known as one of the most visited tourist destinations in Bali, Indonesia were selected to represent the linguistic and the cultural phenomena.

Translating two different languages with their own distinctive features in both linguistic and cultural aspects would always show an intricate relationship. This intricacy then influences the translator's decisions in applying the appropriate strategies to cope with any challenges or difficulties that may emerge in the translation process. It is a profound experience to observe the process each language articulates messages, which possesses the closest equivalence in meaning, through varied syntactical constructions. Grammatical errors provide a clue or two about the missing links between two languages. Take for instance, in spite of having the principal concepts in expressing a particular meaning, each language would always share its roles and rules in order to have the meaning reconstructed and rendered to different audiences with varied backgrounds and points of view. Brief comparison of Indonesian and English linguistic features were provided in the analysis in order to show the strength of both languages, since they were involved in the translation process. Finally, both languages played a role to produce the intended meaning through their distinctive rules.

1.1. Literature Review

Minda (2019) analyzed the types of error in the translation of the public signs written in English and the causative factors. Three types of error include spelling, grammatical and wrong choice of word errors were present in the translations. Meanwhile, the factor causing the errors was the lack of English knowledge possessed by the translators.

Candra (2018) analyzed the types of errors in English translations of the public signs along with the strategies applied in coping with the errors. The grammatical word order error, vocabulary lexical confusion, and grammatical verb tense error were the three types of errors identified. Meanwhile, addition, omission, and word-by-word translation were identified as the possible strategies for responding to the errors.

Qiannan (2021) analyzed the Chinese-English translation of public signs. This research discovered a number of strategies for the translators to consider in conducting the translation process. Some of them were to improve their language training and knowledge, understand the cultural convention and the way of behavior in English-speaking countries.

The obvious difference between the three research mentioned above and this research is in the analysis of the SL's interference towards the TL. Besides identifying the types of grammatical errors in each of the collected public signs, this research connects the relationship between the SL and the TL public signs. Furthermore, it aims to analyze the role that the SL's syntactical rule plays in forming the TL, and the influence it has on the translator's decision in the translation process. This research does not merely identify the forms of errors found in each collected public sign, because it attempts to discover the connection between the domination of the SL's syntactical rule on the TL. This focus discussion seems to be absent in those previous works. Finally, this research provides a comparison about Indonesian and English grammatical construction and the influence they have on each other.

1.2. Research Questions

The two formulated problems of this research include ascertaining the types of grammatical errors in the English public signs translations in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia and determining the factors

potentially causing the errors. These two problems further lead to another interesting phenomenon about the interference of the SL's syntactical rule on the TL.

2. Method

A descriptive – qualitative approach was applied in conducting the analysis of this research. Furthermore, by referring to the idea proposed by (Bungin, 2007) about this approach, this analysis attempts to describe various forms of linguistic phenomena that occur during the translation process.

2.1 Sample / Participants

Five public signs were chosen to be the samples for this research. Each of the sign was selected based on the level of public exposure and the unique linguistic phenomena it conveys. Two public signs were about the COVID-19, meanwhile the other three were about the general public information and instruction.

2.2 Data Collection Procedures and Data Analysis

The data was collected by combining the observation and photographic methods, and the note-taking technique. Furthermore, it was analyzed qualitatively using the theory proposed by (Creswell, 2009). A number of other theories were also applied in conducting the analytical process of this research. The theory proposed by (Van Valin, 1993) focusing on English grammar was used to identify the first formulated research problem. Meanwhile, the combination of the theory proposed by (Vinay & Darbelnet, 2000) on translation studies and (Sneddon, 1996) on Indonesian grammar were used to analyze the second formulated problem. The data were then presented by combining the formal and the informal method. The use of a number of photos along with tables highlighting the results of the analysis were the forms of the formal method. Meanwhile, the informal method involved using the description to elaborate the analysis of the research.

3. Results and Discussion

The grammatical error of Data 3.1 could be identified through its noun phrase translation (Area Monitored). The information derived from Data 3.1 should have been that the CCTV Camera monitors the area for 24 hours. However, the English translation appears to provide a different information. The wrong information is the area serves to be the one in charge of monitoring the CCTV Camera in the past time for 24 hours. The cause of this confusion is from the incorrect form of the English noun phrase translation (Area Monitored). In fact, this phrase does not seem to create a perfect sense according to the logical ways of thinking.

**Data 3.1.** Grammatical Error in Noun Phrase

The translator should have switched the positions of the modifier in past participle form (Monitored) with the core noun (Area). Therefore, the modifier should have been positioned before the core noun. In noun phrase construction, a modifier aims to modify, describe or provide an additional or a specific information about the core noun. English noun phrases may be headed by nominalized verbs like destruction, admiration and performance (Van Valin, 1993). In this case, the past participle of 'Monitored' could therefore be categorized as part of the nominalized verb indicating the performance. The modifier (Monitored) informs the people visiting the area that they are under CCTV surveillance. There is a sense of action or a performance conveyed by the word *Monitored*. This error is an evidence that the position of a modifier in the formation of an English noun phrase plays a vital role in making sure that the intended message is rendered accurately. Otherwise, the incorrect syntactical construction would create a completely different meaning and potentially cause a confusion. One of the logical factors causing the error is the interference of the SL grammatical construction. This form of interference could be observed through the translation of *Dipantau* into *Monitored*. The translator seems to translate the SL into the TL using the procedure of Literal Translation. Literal Translation is the direct transfer of a SL text into a grammatically and idiomatically appropriate TL text in which the translators' task is limited to observing the adherence to the linguistic servitudes of the TL (Vinay & Darbelnet, 2000). However, the application of the Literal Translation procedure does not seem to be the appropriate option for this case. In fact, the application of this translation procedure creates a grammatical error and affects the accuracy of the entire meaning of the message in Data 3.1. The following Table 3.1 below illustrates the relationship between the application of the Literal Translation procedure and the occurrence of the grammatical error.

Table 3.1. The Application of Literal Translation Procedure in Data 3.1

SL:	Area	Dipantau	Kamera	CCTV	24	Jam
TL:	Area	Monitored	CCTV	Camera	24	Hours

The interference of the SL on the TL could be observed obviously from the words *Dipantau* and *Monitored*. These two words happen to be both in passive forms. Since the translator did not position the word *Monitored* before the core noun, it could be noticed that the word *Dipantau* was simply translated following the procedure of Literal Translation, without acknowledging the syntactical rule of the TL's noun phrase construction. The focus of this above translation procedure is to ensure that the translation is carried out by translating each word from the SL to the TL to follow the SL's strict grammatical construction. This is an example on how merely following the principal rule of the translation procedure without giving consent to the syntactical rule of the TL would potentially create an error in its grammar. The form may be maintained, however the meaning in the TL would not be managed well.

The second Data 3.2 further proves that the interference of the SL's syntactical rule on the TL causes a grammatical error. This TL data consists of two different clauses, "*If you not feel well*" and "*Please go to our medical clinic*." The sign below shows that the TL translation could be understood, however grammatically speaking, it is incorrect. The error is in the first clause of the data.
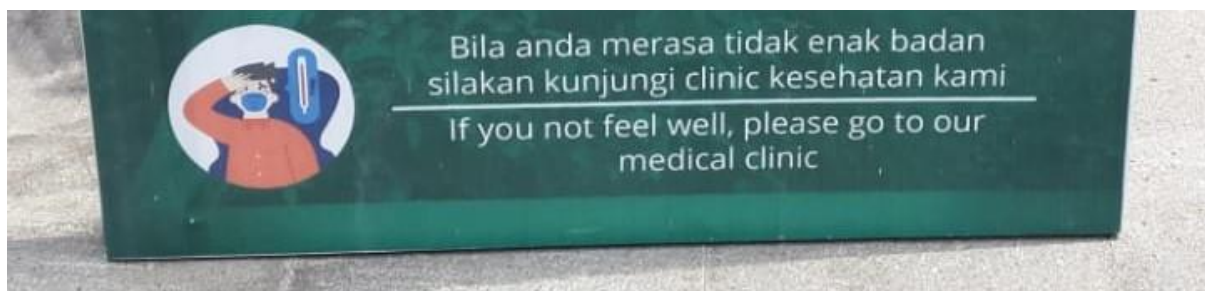
Data 3.2. Grammatical Error in Auxiliary Verb

The first conditional clause should have been added with an auxiliary verb of *do not* or *don't*. This auxiliary verb should have been inserted after the pronoun *you* and before the word *not*. In English, pronouns cannot be positioned side by side with the word *not* in order to create any type of negation. Furthermore, an auxiliary verb should be positioned with the main verbs in order to assist them in forming interrogative, negative, passive sentences, and providing an extra emphasis in the sentence. The auxiliary verbs in English further possess a number of other important grammatical functions as modals and by indicating a progressive aspect. A modal exemplifies a sense of ability, possibility, suggestion, permission, and obligation. Meanwhile, the use of an auxiliary verb (*be*) indicates that a particular action is in progress or happening. Therefore, the sequence of each action becomes more vivid to be understood. This vividness applies particularly in more complex types of sentence constructions, which consist of a number of varied actions.

English syntactical rule requires the use of auxiliary verbs to articulate the entire meaning of sentences. Therefore, it is a mandatory to insert the auxiliary verb in forming a negation in English; otherwise, it would be grammatically incorrect. It is not a compulsory to use an auxiliary verb to create a negation in Indonesian. This is because by simply inserting the word *tidak* (*not*) before the verb, it would automatically create a negation. The nature of the Indonesian auxiliary verbs are to provide an additional explanation of the main verbs or the emphasis in the sentence. In addition, these auxiliary verbs also serve to indicate different sequences of events since Indonesian does not possess varied tenses like English. Take for instance, in order to indicate a future event; the sentence would require the use of *akan*. Likewise, the auxiliary verb *sudah* is used to indicate that an action has happened in the past. *Sudah* and *akan* are referred to as 'aspect markers,' that indicate completeness or continuation of an action (Sneddon, 1996). Modals, often called auxiliary verbs in Indonesian, refer to concepts such as possibility, ability, and necessity (Sneddon, 1996). However, in the context of the Data 3.2 in this research, these auxiliary verbs are not needed to create any forms of negation in its SL. Understanding the different roles auxiliary verbs play in Indonesian and English could show the logical reason for the grammatical error in this data. The translation appears to be in accordance with the SL's syntactical rule without adapting to that of the TL.

The translator should have considered the target audiences when translating the message. Moreover, considering the audience here means understanding both the cultural and the linguistic aspects of the TL. Applying the SL syntactical rule for the TL would lead to poor translations. Furthermore, the message expressed may be understandable; however, the syntactical rule may not be in accordance with the standard grammar. Therefore, understanding both the cultural and the linguistic aspect of the SL and the TL is a compulsory in order to minimize errors and enhance the quality of the translations.

This Data 3.3 is another interesting phenomenon. It shows that interference of the SL grammatical construction contributed to the grammatical errors in the TL as shown below.

Data 3.3. Grammatical Error in Verbal Phrase & Spelling

Two types of errors were observed from Data 3.3, and the first was spelling error. The last word of *thank's* should not have been added with an apostrophe. This is because it does not imply a sense of possession. In the message, the word serves to thank people for being extra careful and not breaking the fragile goods displayed in the shelves. Therefore, it should have been simply written as *thanks* or *thank you*. Omitting the apostrophe after the letter *k* and before the letter *s* should correct this first error.

The second error could be observed from this following part, "…*break on goods must pay*…" This clause could be understood, however grammatically speaking, it is incorrect. "…*break on goods must pay*…" may want to inform people that when someone breaks or damages the goods, they would need to pay a fine or compensation. Since the word *break* appears at the beginning, this verb should have been turned into the form of a gerund. A gerund is a word, which is formed with a verb, followed by the suffix, – *ing*. The addition of – *ing* to the word made it function as a noun.

A gerund could serve as the subject of the sentence, the predicate nominative, the direct object (which receives the action of the verb), and the object of preposition. Therefore, turning the verb *break* into its gerund form, *breaking,* could be the appropriate choice for the translator to maintain the same form without 'upsetting' the syntactical rule of the TL. Instead of the statement "…*break on goods must pay*…," the translator could write "…*breaking on goods will be fined*", "*If you break the goods, you must compensate*" or "*A compensation is required if you break any items.*" Apart from these three given alternatives, it could be identified that the clause "…*break on goods must pay*…" conveys much of an interference from the SL's syntactical rule. Therefore, when this English clause is translated to Indonesian, the interference of the Indonesian syntactical rule could be observed clearly. Moreover, the English translation follows the arrangement of the Indonesian word orders. A modality or the mock-up version of this clause in Indonesian is provided below in order to show the interference of the Indonesian's syntactical rule on the English translation.

Table 3.2. Modality in Indonesian Version for Data 3.3

Modality in Indonesian	memecahkan	-	barang	harus	membayar
English Translation	break	on	goods	must	pay

The table 3.2 above shows another evidence that prioritizing the SL's syntactical rule without considering the syntactical rule of the TL could lead to grammatical errors. Likewise, the absence of a good understanding about the translation procedure could also be a factor causing the grammatical error. This proves that in the translation study, only the meaning of sentences need to be held constant, and not their grammatical form (Larson, 1998: 3). The fourth Data 3.4 below shows three grammatical errors.

Data 3.4. Grammatical Error in Prepositional Phrase & Spelling

The first error is the spelling error observed from these two words, *your* and *self*, in the following sentence, "*Protect your self from COVID - 19 before shop at Bintang Supermarket*." These two words should have been written as a single word, *yourself*. The second error is in the prepositional phrase, "*…before shop at Bintang Supermarket*." Since the word *shop* was initiated by the preposition, *before*, it should be in the form of a gerund. Therefore, the clause should have been read as, "*…before shopping at Bintang Supermarket*." The complete sentence of the revised version is "*Protect yourself from COVID - 19 before shopping at Bintang Supermarket*." English syntactical rule requires that any verb, which comes after a preposition, should be in the *– ing* form. Therefore, this applies to the above text because in this context, the word *shop* does not function as a noun, however as an active verb. A prepositional phrase is a string of words built upon a preposition and followed by an object or two. In this Data 3.4, the object, right after the preposition was the word *shop*. Moreover, as it is known, this word possesses more than one word class because it could serve as both a noun and a verb. Since the context of this sign shows that the word *shop* serves as a verb, therefore it should be in the gerund form in order for it to be acceptable in English. Unlike in Indonesian language, it is not a requirement to change or modify the verb in order to create a prepositional phrase. An Indonesian preposition could be positioned with any type of noun and verb. Therefore, the obvious reason for the error in this Data 3.4 is the interference of the Indonesian language on the English translation.

Table 3.3 below shows that the translator followed the Indonesian syntactical rule in carrying out the translation procedure, therefore, the English sentence produced was, "*Protect your self from COVID - 19 before shop at Bintang Supermarket*." Additionally, the translation process may have been conducted by applying the principal concept of the Literal Translation.

Table 3.3. The Application of Literal Translation Procedure in Data 3.4

SL:	sebelum	belanja	di	Supermarket Bintang
TL:	before	shop	at	Bintang Supermarket

Each word on Table 3.3 above was translated literally, except the last two. Referring to the SL's syntactical rule without acknowledging the TL's syntactical rule appears to be the core problem causing the grammatical error. The third error in this Data 3.4 could be observed from the inappropriate preposition, *under,* in this following sentence, "*Apply hand soap and rinse under water*." This sentence does not only show an error, however, the inappropriate preposition could also potentially create a confusion to the readers. Washing our hands under the water is not grammatically correct in English. Thus, the preposition *under* in this sentence needs to be replaced with the preposition *with*.

The fifth Data 3.5 shows three errors, which include an error in the formation of the prepositional phrase, in the use of the tense, and the spelling.

Data 3.5. Grammatical Error in Prepositional Phrase, Tense & Spelling

The first error, which was in the prepositional phrase formation, could be observed in this sentence, "*Please park in accordance line*." This sign was found in one of the parking areas in Ubud. Furthermore, the parking area was divided into car, motorcycle or scooter, and bicycle sections. The pavement for each section was drawn with yellow lines indicating the space allocated for a single vehicle. The sentence in the fifth sign was grammatically incorrect due to the absence of the preposition *with* after the word *accordance* and before the word *line*. Moreover, the determiner *the* should have been written after the preposition *with* and before the word *line*. Therefore, the sentence should have been "*Please park in accordance with the line*." The revised version of this sentence could also be written by omitting the preposition *in* and changing the word *accordance* to *according to the*. Thus, the second revised version could be "*Please park according to the line*."

The second error could be observed through the tense applied in asking the people to lock their helmet with or inside of their vehicles. From this sentence, it could be seen that the SL is in the passive form, while the TL is in the active form. This change in forms does not necessarily cause the error, however the tense applied does contribute to the grammatical error. The translator used the past form or the past participle of the word *lock*. Meanwhile, the word *locked* in the sign should not have appeared right after the word *please*. English syntactical rule requires a simple or the base form of a verb after the word *please*. Thus, the correction could be "*Please lock your vehicle and helmet*." Alternatively, the revision could

also be carried out by writing the sentence in the passive form, "*Vehicles and Helmets Must be Locked*."

Another interesting finding could be identified from this error. Besides the lack of a good understanding about English grammar, the error might have occurred because of the interference of the SL linguistic feature. The SL is in passive form indicated by the prefix *di,* which should have been attached to the word *kunci* as a single word (*dikunci*). The translator may have simply put the past participle form of the word *lock* (*kunci*) without further completing this construction with the use of an auxiliary verb. In order to transfer the active form into a negative form, the Indonesian syntactical rule simply requires the addition of the prefix *di* in front of the verb. This syntactical rule obviously does not apply in English, and is another example showing that following the SL's syntactical rule without acknowledging that of the TL's would always create grammatical errors.

The third error could be observed from this sentence, "*Do not put valuebles your vehicle*." The obvious error that could be observed is in the misspelled word, *valuebles*, where the correct spelling is *valuables*. However, merely fixing this misspelled word would not solve the entire error in the data. The possessive pronoun of *your* should have been added right after the word *put* and then followed by the word *valuables*. Finally, yet importantly, the preposition *in* should have been added before the noun phrase *your vehicle*. This action would result in the changing of the noun phrase into a prepositional phrase, *in your vehicle*. Thus, the appropriate revised version of this sentence should have been, "*Do not put your valuables in your vehicle*." The analysis above shows a very strong relationship between the SL and the TL. The translator possessed an authority to always change and adjust the form; however, the meaning should always be maintained constantly. These five data show that a number of errors occur and are caused by a number of reasons. A few of them are the inappropriate application of the translation procedure, lack of understanding of the TL's syntactical rule or grammar and a strong tendency that the translator has to strictly follow the SL's syntactical rule or grammar. Below is the summary of the grammatical errors observed in each of the data collected in this research.

Table 3.4. Summary of the Grammatical Errors Observed

No	English Translation	Units of Errors
1	*Area Monitored* CCTV Camera 24 Hours.	Noun Phrase
2	If *you not* feel well, please go to our medical clinic.	Auxiliary Verb
3	Handle with care, *break on* goods *must pay*, *thank's*.	Verbal Phrase & Spelling
4	Protect *your self* from COVID – 19 *before shop* at Bintang Supermarket. Apply hand soap and rinse *under water*.	Prepositional Phrases & Spelling
5	Please park *in accordance line*. *Please locked* for vehicle and helmet. Do not put *valuebles your vehicle*.	Prepositional Phrases, Spelling & Tense

This research shows that there are many crucial elements to consider in conducting any types of

translation project. Possessing an excellent understanding of both the linguistic and cultural aspects appear to be compulsory in order to transfer a meaning from the SL into the TL. Considering the TL audience in mind plays another important role, which could contribute to the quality of the translation. Finally, the SL's syntactical rule could be followed, however it should always be accompanied by acknowledging the method by which the TL audience would likely accept, read and understand the meaning conveyed in the translated text.

4. Conclusions

This analysis showed a number of grammatical errors in the public signs. They include the grammatical error in noun phrase formation, the use of the auxiliary verb, in the verbal phrase formation, prepositional phrase formation, spelling, and the application of the tense. In addition, there were a number of factors potentially causing the errors. Those factors include the inappropriate applications of the translation procedure, lack of understanding of the TL's syntactical rule or grammar and a strong tendency that the translator may have, in imitating the SL's syntactical rule or grammar. Possessing a good understanding of both the linguistic and cultural aspects in each SL and TL plays a vital importance in reproducing the meaning with good quality in its accuracy, readability and the acceptability.

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