

SEMANTIC INTELLIGIBILITY OF NEWS SUB-TITLES AMONG NIGERIAN VIEWERS OF CHINA GLOBAL TELEVISION NETWORK (CGTN)

Fadare, B.O;

Department of General Studies
Osun State College of Technology, Esa-Oke, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The television as a medium of mass communication performs the socio-linguistic roles of informing, educating, entertaining, and enlightening the society. One way this is made possible especially in a foreign language situation is through the process of subtitling to the language of wider communication. This study took a critical look at some features of the English sentences in the news subtitles of China Global Television Network (CGTN) with a view to determining the intelligibility to Nigerian viewers. All the features of English sentences in the news subtitles were collated and analyzed. Findings showed that few sentences conformed to the conventional, traditional, and notional definition of English sentences while a substantial number of the sentences conformed with the systemic and prescriptive concepts of English with features such as verbless sentence, to -infinitive sentence, and use of a syndectic coordinators. It was concluded that all varieties and notions of the English sentence are being adopted by news writers in the news subtitle which tends to make it difficult for students of traditional grammar to understand. It was posited that the features should be taught to pupils in Nigeria. The paper then recommends a total overhauling of the curriculum of English language in Nigeria's secondary school to accommodate the descriptive and scientific approach of modern English linguistics and systemic functional grammar.

Key words: Semantic, Intelligibility, Mass Communication

INTRODUCTION

Stylistic and sociolinguistic studies are concerned with the social functions of a language. English language is an international language that is used by the print and electronic media, judiciary, trade and commerce. It is also used for on-line communication and in other social media. English language has enjoyed many features of multilingualism such as translation, transliteration and interpretation, subtitling of news, films and headlines captions both from English itself and from other world language. China Global Television Network (CGTN) is an international television bouquet on the Digital Television (DSTV) Channel 409. News items are broadcast in both the native Chinese language and the English language. These news items in the spoken or oral media are subtitled below the television screen for non-Chinese speakers for the purpose of clarity and for those with hearing impairment.

Grammar, according to Murthy (2007), refers to a systematic study of the scientific method which provides information and guidance necessary to learn a language. Grammar teaches us how a language is spoken or written correctly and effectively. It is primarily concerned with the formation and classification of words and sentences and their practical significance in daily life. English is very much controlled, conditioned and regulated by grammar; therefore a considerable mastery of English grammar is required for its second language users.

On the grammatical rank scale of English

grammar, the sentence occupies the highest rank. Quirk (1962) Grammar makes us familiar with the sentence patterns and also enables us to understand how other elements are structured in the syntagmatic axis to form acceptable English sentences. All these correspond with the functional types of sentences; declarative/assertive, interrogative, imperative and optative sentences (Aremo, 2004).

Fadare (2015) highlights some qualities/characteristics of a correct English sentence to include clarity, coherence, simplicity, correct pattern/structure and unity. A sentence must have a boundary. It must begin with a capital letter and end with full stop for declarative and optative sentences. A question mark is indicated at the end of a direct question, while an exclamatory mark appears at the end of an exclamatory sentence. Apart from all these, a good sentence must also express an action signaled in the verbal group. It must also express meaning as a complete thought. All the clausal elements must be well arranged according to the sentence types. For instance, the structure of a declarative assertive sentence is Subject + Predicator + Complement + Adverbial (SPCA) or Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object + Object Complement + Subject Complement and Adjunct (SVOiOdCoCsA) while the imperative sentence starts with the verb and in most cases the subject is ellipted. Interrogative sentences begin with wh-words or an auxiliary verb; for example: Who are you? Where are you going? Are you coming?

Traditional grammar posits that an English sentence should have an obligatory verbal group functioning as predicator; a nominal group functioning as object or complement and an adverbial group functioning as adjunct. All these groups must agree with one another in terms of number, person and tense markers. The positions of the subject and object are, however, interchangeable especially when transitive verbs are involved. In the passive construction, the initial subject/actor is rank-shifted and made to function as prepositional phrase while the original complement swaps position to function as the new subject. For example:

- Active voice - China has placed severe sanctions on DRC
- Passive voice - DRC has been placed on severe sanctions by China.

It is to be noted that English sentences can also be categorized into simple, compound, multiple, complex, compound-complex and multiple-complex depending on the number of independent clauses and dependent clauses in the sentence. For instance, a simple sentence consists of only one independent clause.

- Iran elects new President.
- UN puts restrictions on Britain after Brexit.

A Compound sentence, on the hand, contains two or more independent clauses;

- UK extradites Pastor to Kenya and a s k s him to face trial there.
- Trump approves sales of military fighters to Nigeria and gives aids in support of terrorism fight.

In a complex sentence, the independent clause is linked with a subordinate clause with the use of subordinating conjunctions such as *if, where, whom, although, when*.

- UN claims that Nigeria failed in anti-terrorism fight because of her failure to mop up arms.

Compound-complex sentences contain two independent clauses each and one or more subordinate clauses.

- Talibans kill many Iranians, bomb military camp while they were unaware.

Apart from the use of subordinating conjunctions above, clauses in a sentence can also be coordinated by coordinating conjunctions such as *and, but, or, therefore* as well as by asyndetic coordinators like comas and semi colons.

- Iranian President: We shall rebuild devastated areas.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was specifically conducted to examine the varieties of English sentences employed by news writers and news directors

on CGTN in the news subtitles/headlines, their features, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of words and other attributes of systemic linguistics. The study sought to:

- analyze and discuss the types of English sentences used in news subtitles on China Global Television Network (CGTN);
- to discuss other relevant features of English sentences such as coordination, ellipsis, voice, subordination, finiteness;
- to examine if the attempt by news writers at brevity, economy of space, and time does not affect the clarity, intelligibility and effectiveness of English sentences in passing information to the viewers across the world; and to underscore the importance of the teaching of these features to Nigerian secondary school students.

Research Questions: This study was conducted to find answers to the following questions;

- Do Second language English speaking secondary school viewers derive semantic benefits from the news headlines and subtitles on (CGTV)?
- Are the syntactic features in the news headlines and subtitles within the learning purview of Nigerian secondary school students?

RESEARCH METHOD

Data for this study were gathered from the subtitles of news items on CGTV for two days—7th and 8th August, 2017. Those days were purposively selected because they coincided with the Rwanda elections, Al-Shabab attacks in Somali and Kenya, Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria and the finals of IAAF world championship in which the global community would be awash with information trending across the world on social, political, and human angle.

Data Analysis:

The selected sentences were discussed in relation to their features such as nominal group, verbal group, adjunct, as well as their functional and structural types. Similarly, other features of the English sentences such as coordination, subordination, ellipsis, thematization, passivization and proforms were also examined.

Findings

Our findings revealed the following:

- Preponderant use of verbless sentences with to-infinitive participial phrases as well as ellipsis of the auxiliary verbs
 - Nigeria to legalize mini oil refinery
 - Ghana to produce biggest cocoa crops
 - China born professor and wife to be expelled by Singapore for collaborating with foreign intelligence.
 - China to seal large part of Yellow sea for military purpose.

- UN to vote on tougher sanctions for DPRK
- ii. Use of passive voice without auxiliary verbs
 - Three people killed by bombs in Central Iraq (omission of the auxiliary verb 'were').
 - Flood alerts* issued and emergency responses ordered in Naima (the auxiliary verb 'were')
 - Code of conduct on South China expected to be linked.(omission of was is ellipted)
 - Heavy *rain in North East China inner Mongola (occurred)
 - Iranian President inauguration: Economy, Youth Unemployment among top priority.
 - 50 ISIL reported killed.
- iii. Use of simple imperative sentences probably to avoid ambiguity, vagueness and to ensure clarity and explicitness
 - Find us on Facebook
 - Watch us on Youtube
 - Stay in touch **with** our anchor.
- iv. Use of Complex Sentences with
 - to infinitive clauses
 - UN reports on DRC says deadly militant groups in Kasmir are mostly children.
 - UK extradites Pastor to Kenya to face child trafficking charges.
 - UN says it will not interfere in Italy's decision to send troops to Libya.
 - Ethiopia parliament votes to lift state of Emergency on Kasmir.
 - Trump approves sales of military planes to Nigeria to fight Bokoharam.
- v. Use of simple present tense form to report past event without-ed past tense morpheme as well as the use of present and past participle tense standing as main verb in a sentence.
 - UN puts restrictions on Britain after Brexit.
 - UK extradites pastor
 - Iran elects new President
 - Trumps approves sales of weapons to Nigeria
- vi. Use of gerunds and gerundial phrases to function as subject and object or complement of a verb.
 - Homes in Rome: planting trees on rocks
 - Cyber bullying in South Africa on the rise
 - Vote counting underway following Rwanda Presidential polls.
- vii. Thematization is employed as a stylistic concept to highlight graphically some linguistic items for emphasis and to bring focus on same items. IRANTERORISM:
- viii. Use of ellipsis, passivization, direct and indirect speeches, different forms of concord and finiteness.
 - ix. Use of singular present verb for nations and world political, economic associations
 - China opposes ban on D.R. Congo has opposed ban on Congo
 - x. Use of acronyms, and names of some heads of states, presidents, world sporting activities and sportsmen.
 - DPRK, ASEAN, IAAF, C.Ron7, Bulls.
 - xi. Use of sentences lacking in unity, clarity, cohesion and coherence and require re-arrangement for clarity
 - London shakes up ranking of biggest gold stockpiles
 - Tempting stock selections emerge from South Africa Wolves.
 - Cyber bullying South Africa on the rise
 - Gas powered car sputtered towards obsolence.
 - Ruwanda official say Talliban attacks repelled(says)
 - 10 militant dead 5 missing.
 - Egypt says will confront attacks on Italy if strays on her water.
 - xii. Use of asyndetic coordination like colons, comas and hyphen Terrorism: Us Promise assistance to Nigeria.
 - xiii. Use of present tense forms to report past events and anticipated future events
 - UK extradites Pastor to Kenya (has extradited)
 - Iran elects new President (have elected)
 - UN puts bans on DRK (put)
 - Russian President visits US next week- (will visit)
 - xiv. Use of appositions, abbreviations, acronyms, passivization, reported speeches
 - US aircraft missing - 23 rescued
 - Venezuela crisis: new assembly sacks government critics.
 - Flonda sinkhole: Search for Jeffrey Bush Called off.
 - Islamist militant "killed in Mail.
 - Mali says Britain bullying Syria.

DISCUSSION

From the collected data, it is obvious that apart from the mechanics of writing, special journalistic styles also come to bear in the news subtitling and headlines in an attempt to inform the whole viewers. The media practitioners, being coordinate bilinguals are versatile in the two international languages (English and Chinese). They are also resourceful in all the forms of communication - oral, written, non-verbal and on-line. Similarly, they are vast in phonetics, morphology, lexis, syntax, grammar, and the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing in both

international languages.

A few things are very clear from the data. One is the gross violation of the traditional sentence structure and obvious departure from the conventional style of writing. These two infractions by all means significantly affect semantic comprehension and intelligibility, which is the heart of communication. If what is written is not meaningful, then nothing else counts.

According to Oloyede (2008), communication is the most fundamental, the most pervasive, the most ubiquitous and the most important of all human activities. Semantically, communication means the imparting, conveying or exchanging of ideas and knowledge whether by speech, writing or signs. Quoting Radjokovio, Oloyede (2008) affirms that modern society today is hardly imaginable without a specialized subsystem which disseminates information internally within the society and externally between societies in the world as a whole.

Accordingly, the press is the next most important organ of mass communication available to man. The mass media constitute a vibrant channel by which information and messages are shared within and across the globe through the print and electronic media. The electronic media include the radio and television. The China Global Television Network (CGTN) is one of the global digital television which broadcast news and programmes across the world. Though located in China and uses Chinese language, news items and world information are relayed in English. Interestingly, CGTN perfectly exhibits the characteristics of modern press as postulated by Oloyede (2008): reproduction, amplification and transmission; speed, simultaneous reception, fidelity, universal or mass access and credibility. It also conforms to the indispensable functions of modern press which include information, education, entertainment, commercial, cultural, as well as serving as a mirror of the society.

The modern press is also a forum for the expression of opinions and ideas; bearer of danger signals, mass mobilizer, and a veritable instrument of governance. In the pursuits of these roles, the CGTN employed all the available forms of communication – spoken/oral, written, verbal and non-verbal in its news broadcast. While news are relayed in the spoken form, the important news headlines and items are translated, and presented on the screen for reading while interpreters also interpret the news to the physically challenged viewers. News subtitles though involves summary, brevity and compression of ideas into phrases, clauses and

condensed sentences some of which negate the traditional prescription of the English sentences. Here, ideas and semantics take precedence over conventional grammatical forms and prescriptions. Verbless, to-infinitive, foregrounded sentences and other peculiar sentence forms which contradict the traditional conventions of English sentences are common. All these are in conformity with few scholars who recognize non-finite and verbless, nominal sentences.

Asiyanbola (2012:20) classifies clauses into finite, non-finite, verbless. According to him a non-finite clause is the one that contains no finite verb but there are some verbal elements like present and past participle. This negates the notion of traditional English grammar where such expressions are either classified notionally as gerund, participial phrases and they function as nominals in the subject or object/Nominal group. Apart from all the peculiar linguistic features of English sentences used in CGTN news subtitles, news writers also make use of thematization, foregrounding, periodic stylistics as well as the use of bullet points in presentation Ogbulogo (2004:143). This device helps many executives are ever busy and are frightened' with vast areas of text. According to Ogbulogo: Bullet points are easier to read; They point quickly to expressions, express complicated ideas faster and more quickly; reduce rigidity of formal presentation. They are also used to emphasize points and they are easily caught by readers sight.

C O N C L U S I O N A N D R E C O M M E N D A T I O N

As far as information dissemination is concerned, it could be concluded that little is gained by a cross section of the viewers represented by secondary school leavers who are not exposed to the elevated grammar being used on CGTN. The traditional grammar to which the students are exposed puts a limit to their understanding of the prevalent sentence constructions on the CGTN news. The post secondary students and graduates may also partake in the disadvantage except those that studied or are studying English as a course.

In view of the features exhibited by the coordinate bilinguals who subtitle news headlines in CGTV, it can be concluded that English language being an international language for media practitioners is performing great roles in informing, educating, enlightening and setting agenda all over the world. The teaching and learning of these various aspects of sentences should be expanded and intensified

especially in nations where it is used as the second language, official language and language of governance and administration like Nigeria. The curriculum of English language should be reviewed to conform to the global standard of pedagogy and other sociolinguistic purposes. All aspects of English language: mechanics, lexis and structure, morphology semantics, grammar translation, essay writing, summary and comprehension should be well taught to Nigerian Students. Teachers should also utilize the reality and benefits of multilingualism by using contrastive and error analysis models in their pedagogy.

The study observes greatly the important roles English language plays in agenda setting role of the media in another international language (Chinese) especially in the subtitling of news items in CGTV Chinese being another world language of technology, ICT still endeavours to translate news into English language. It is suggested that developing nations like Nigeria should intensify

efforts in translation, transliteration, interpretation of news, sermons from the indigenous language to English. This paper then recommends pragmatic teaching of all aspects of English language at all levels in Nigerian schools; reinvigorating the teaching of use of English for the professionals and technical English in tertiary institutions; teaching of popular world acronyms with their full meanings to pupils right from primary schools as well as exposure of pupils to current affairs in their essay and writings and articles; mechanics of writing and knowledge of different sentence types. The qualities and conventions should be distinctively taught to pupils; English language teachers should update their knowledge on the various schools of thought on grammar; traditional, systemic, modern grammar etc and teach such to students. Principles of news writing, editing should be introduced in the curriculum of senior secondary schools and technical English in higher schools. Government should also encourage bilingual education more.

REFERENCES

- Adegbite N, Adekoya, S & Adegoju, A (2012): *Use of English: A manual on Communication skills for Tertiary Institutions* OAU: Ile-Ife Olas Ventures.
- Andrew, C (2007) "Syntax *A Generative Introduction*: USA: Blackwell Publishing:
- Aremo, B (1997): *An introduction to English Sentences* (2 Ibadan Callop Publications.
- Aremo, W.B. (2004): *An Introduction to English Sentences I&II*. Ibadan: Scribe Publishers
- Asiyanbola, A.A. (1997): Some Problems Associated with the Verbal Group in Texts written by Senior Secondary School learners of English in Ife Central Local Government Area. Ph.D Thesis, OAU, Ile-Ife.
- Asiyanbola, A. (2012): *Basic English Grammar for Universities: An Introduction*. Lagos: Olas Ventures.
- China Global Television Network: www.CGTV.com
- Chomsky, N (1965): *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* Cambridge Massachusetts: M.I.T.
- Cullup, M(2004): *Correct Grammar*: Great Britain: Cox and Wyman Limited.
- Fadare, B.O.(2015) *Business Communication*. Ilesha: Franks Prints.
- Firth, J.R : *A Synopsis of Linguistic Theory Oxford: Blackswell*
- Halliday, M.A.K. (2004): *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Hodder Education.
- Halliday, M.A.K (1957): *Some Aspects of Systemic Description and Comparison in Grammatical Analysis* London: Oxford Press.
- Halliday, M.A.K & Hassan, R (1977): *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.
- Herfersoen, O.A(1940): *Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*. Copenhagen.
- Machintosh, A, Halliday, M.A.K and Strevens, P(1964): *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* London: Longman.
- Murthy, J.D (2007): *Contemporary English Grammar*. Lagos: Book master.
- Muir J(2013) *A modern Approach to English Grammar* London: Batsferd ltd.
- Odejide B; Soola D; Oyetade, W; & Mosuro, T. (1996): *English for Communicative Tasks in Higher in Education*. Benin City; Stirling-Horden Publishers.
- Ogbulogo, C. (2012): *Business in Practice*. Lagos; Communication. Sam Iroons; Publications.
- Oloyede, B. (2008): *Free Press and Society*. Benin City: Stirling-Horden Publishers.
- Oluga, S.O; Adewusi, C.O. & Babalola, H.A.L (2001) *Basic Communication Skills*. Ede: Boa Publishers.
- Osinsanwo, W (1997): *An Introductory Analytical Grammar of English for Undergraduates: A systemic Approach*. Lagos: Femolus – Fertop publishers.
- Osinsanwo, W (2008): *An Introductory Analytical Grammar of English for Undergraduates: A systemic Approach*. Lagos: Femolus – Fertop publishers.
- Palmer, F.R.A(1974): *Linguistic study of the English Verb* London, Longman.
- Palmer, F.R.(1974): *The English Verb*. London: Longman.
- Quirk, R.(1962): *The Use of English*, London: Longman.
- Quirk, R and Greenbaum(1973): *A University Grammar of English*. London: Longman,