

Sentences with misplaced modifiers in online Vietnamese newspapers identification and correction for Vietnamese-English translation practice by students of translation-interpretation in Dong Thap University

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Abstract: *In the age of digitalization-based communication, there have witnessed a huge and continuous increase in the number of online newspapers in Vietnam. However, several shortcomings, especially those related to language use, do exist in the newspapers, thus causing ambiguity or misunderstandings for students who do Vietnamese-English translation practice. This article presents our identification of the sentences containing misplaced modifiers and proposes solutions to correcting such errors so that students could be able to overcome difficulties in their English-Vietnamese translation work with an aim to improve the quality of teaching and learning translation in Dong Thap University.*

Keywords: *Misplaced modifier, news headline, awareness, correction, translation practice*

1. Introduction

It is of great happiness and honor for Vietnam to be recognized as one of the territories with high-speed rank for IT application, specifically with rocketing number of internet subscribers, not only in bustling cities but also in tranquil countryside. In parallel with that situation, the appearance of online newspapers have fairly met the government's job of education and propagation and the public's right and interests in accessing to information, thus "contributing to the nation's socio-economic development (Trần Vũ Thị Giang Lam, 2020) and to the developing press in a country with strict censorship for producing, accessing, sharing and retrieving information.

Readers with true sense of reading culture should have been quite satisfactorily delighted with such that progress and should be proud of what a new and modern press brings them but instead show grave concerns on the carelessness and unprofessionalism demonstrated by a large number of computer-assisted journalists. The language use by such writers is so careless and ridiculous that even readers with ordinary reading tastes may find the articles uninteresting and even disgusting. The very initial alarm set for such poorly-written newspapers was mentioned by Nguyen Van Pho (2013) whose research article pointed out that the Vietnamese language in mass media is now in an alarming state.

In this short article, we present a mini study on such matters, with the focus on sentences with misplaced modifiers as well as propose measures for correction and translation performed by students of translation-interpretation in Dong Thap University.

2. Contents

2.1. Literature review on wrong sentences and types of wrong sentences

It's true that everyone, regardless of education background may compose wrong sentences as asserted by Nguyen Duc Dan (2013) who said that all of us, linguistics included, would be likely to write wrong sentences if no attention is being paid to the language they use". So, what is a wrong sentence? According to Cambridge dictionary, the term "error" is defined as something done or written by accident that is not correct, not accurate, or does not give the right results.

How has everything gone wrong in Vietnamese newspapers? This was clarified by Nguyen Van Pho who collected 100 sentences and sentence segments, which contain problems as he believed, in a famous newspaper. He then added that some of the errors are not identified exactly because they show ambiguity in meanings. According to Nguyen Duc Dan (2013), wrong sentences can be classified into five groups, (i) wrong spellings, (ii) wrong word choice, (iii) wrong grammar, (iv) wrong logics and (v) wrong

knowledge.

2.2. The study

** The scope of the study*

Within the scope of this article, we focus on sentences with errors of misplaced modifiers found in online Vietnamese newspapers. In terms of grammar, a modifier is defined as a word or group of words that describes another word (or group of words) in a sentence. The modifier should be placed as close as possible to the word it modifies. When a modifier is too far from the word it is describing, the sentence becomes confusing and the modifier is named as being misplaced. In the English language, a misplaced modifier is one of the most insidious and confusing cases, causing problems because it can change the intended meaning of the sentence dramatically, which makes readers slow down reading in an effort to get the true meanings.

**The effects of wrong sentences (with misplaced modifiers) on translation*

Discussing about the bad effects of wrong sentences, Nguyen Duc Dan (2013) said that in the past Vietnamese people showed strong disagreements and objections to 12 types of errors in sentences and that those who composed such wrong sentences would be surely criticized. He also informed that foreigners, especially those in France, England and United States have been afraid of writing or speaking wrong sentences because the action is seen as a disgrace.

Bui Thi Kim Phung (2018) stressed that errors are inevitable in a person's process of language perception. The causes of errors vary from student to student. According to her, there are three reasons for students' error commitment: (i) the inability to overcome the negative influence of mother tongue, (ii) in Vietnamese sentences the subject is often dropped, but not in English and (iii) because of "poor language competence", sometimes students feel "extremely embarrassed" if they cannot find out any equivalent structure in English to match to the source language (Vietnamese). She concluded that Vietnamese students' limitations of grammar knowledge leads them to conduct a word-by-word translation genre. As a result, this will lead to content misunderstandings and then wrong translation. Consequently, Nguyen Hai Ha et al (2015) pointed out that in their translation procedure students of translation usually make errors because they keep the

sentence structures in the source texts (Vietnamese) unchanged, thus causing misunderstandings in target text (English). Pham Phu Quynh Na (2010) also showed concerns on such matter by affirming that the structural differences between 2 languages in lexis, sentence structures and suprasegmental features give rise to certain translation problems.

2.3. Findings and discussions

**Identification of sentences with misplaced modifiers in Vietnamese newspapers*

In online Vietnamese newspapers, it's not too difficult for readers to identify sentences or sentence fragments with misplaced modifiers. It's noticeable that news headlines, which are in bigger fonts and in bold letters, can catch the readers' attention easily. However, due to specific rules for writing newspaper headlines as well as translating them, we move our focus to normal sentences in the articles themselves. The followings are examples of those.

Hóa thạch con quái vật lộ diện **với 5 đột sống lưng và 12 phần phụ**, giúp các nhà cổ sinh vật học ước tính nó phải dài từ 10-15 m khi còn sống (tienphong.vn, 08/9/23)

Vụ tràn bùn trên còn làm cho nhiều xe cộ qua lại khó khăn **ở đường Huỳnh Thúc Kháng** (tuoitre.vn, 28/5/20)

Mới đến tháng 8 và 10/2019, nhà mạng đã khóa và sau đó thu hồi các sim này khiến ông không thể tiếp tục sử dụng **mà không thông báo**. (vnexpress.net, 22/5/24)

Những người gây ra tội ác ở dải Gaza phải bị truy tố ở mức cao nhất, **dù là ai đi chăng nữa** (Vnexpress.net, 22/5/24)

Cựu Ngoại trưởng Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif cũng cho rằng, **bằng cách áp dứt các lệnh trừng phạt đối với ngành hàng không của Iran**, Mỹ phải chịu trách nhiệm về vụ tai nạn. (dantri.vn, 22/5/24)

In the first two sentences (a and b), modifiers are prepositional phrases, function as adjectives and modify "quái vật" and "xe cộ". Therefore, they must come after those words. In the rest sentences (c-e), the modifiers are adverb clauses, modifying the main verbs in the main clauses (e.i., "thu hồi", "gây", "chịu trách nhiệm" respectively). Consequently, these adverb clauses must come after the main clauses in the given sentences. We have the suggested revision for the above-mentioned sentences as below by relocating the modifiers to their correct positions so that translation work is easily and correctly done.

Hóa thạch còn **quái vật với 5 đốt sống lưng và 12 phần phụ** lộ diện, giúp các nhà cổ sinh vật học ước tính nó phải dài từ 10-15 m khi còn sống.

Vụ tràn bùn trên còn làm cho nhiều xe cộ ở **đường Huỳnh Thúc Kháng** qua lại khó khăn.

Mới đến tháng 8 và 10/2019, nhà mạng đã khóa và sau đó thu hồi các sim này **mà không thông báo** khiến ông không thể tiếp tục sử dụng.

Những người gây ra tội ác ở **Dải Gaza dù là ai đi chăng nữa** phải bị truy tố ở mức cao nhất.

Cựu Ngoại trưởng Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif cũng cho rằng Mỹ phải chịu trách nhiệm về vụ tai nạn **bằng cách áp đặt các lệnh trừng phạt đối với ngành hàng không của Iran**.

**Correction and suggestion for translation practice by students in Dong Thap University*

What should students do to deal with such mistakenly-written sentences? It goes without saying that the students should take strong grasp of grammar knowledge, not only of Vietnamese but also of English. By doing so, students can identify sentences or sentence fragments with misplaced modifiers and correct them before proceeding further steps of translation. From the above-cited examples, we believe that students can translate them easily, quickly and accurately as what is shown below.

The monster's fossil **with 5 dorsal vertebrae and 12 appendages** was exposed, leading paleontologists to estimate it must have been between 10-15 m long when it was alive.

The mudslide also made it difficult for many vehicles **on Huynh Thuc Khang street** to travel.

In August and October 2019, the telephone service providers locked the SIMs and then revoked them **but they didn't give him any notices**, making it impossible for him to use them.

Anyone who commits crimes in the Gaza, **whoever he is**, must be prosecuted at the highest penalty.

Former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also argued that the United States was responsible for the crash **because they imposed sanctions on Iran's aviation industry**.

3. Conclusions

Our study does not mean to pick up mistakes but to convince the language users that Vietnamese has been terribly written, thus giving rise to misunderstandings for communicators and to a bad habit of language use by future users. Furthermore, an urgent warning

of bad Vietnamese language manipulation on online environment is sent to translators, especially the inexperienced ones like students, so that necessary cautions must be taken on translation procedure, in which the compulsory step of pre-consideration will be made for identifying and correcting wrongly-structured sentences. By doing so, it's strongly expected that no more vague sentences in Vietnamese will appear on online newspapers and no problems will be posed to translators, thereby contributing to the beautification of Vietnamese as well as the improvement in translation quality performed by students of translation in Dong Thap University.

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