STUDY ON AMBIGUITY OF NEWSPAPER HEADLINES AND ITS IMAPACT ON TARGET READERSHIP

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Abstract

Headline writing is an art which employs ambiguity as an ornament. The intent of this study was to observe the impact of lexical and syntactic ambiguity on target readership referring to newspaper headlines from Sinhala to English. It also examined the factors that should be considered in translating ambiguous headlines, difficulties encountered by translators in translating ambiguous headlines and suggestions to overcome them. To gather data, thirty ambiguous headlines selected from different newspapers were set in three test papers, with ten headlines in each. They were applied to six professional translators and twelve Translation Studies undergraduates. The undergraduates were asked to note down the difficulties they encountered in translating headlines in the test paper itself. The data were analysed qualitatively using Error-Analysis method. Since there were 61% acceptable translations, it was clear that the overall impact of ambiguity in newspaper headlines on target readership was positive. The complete absence of non-acceptable translations from professional translators also proved that the impact of their headlines on target readership was positive. It was identified that meaning, grammar, style and sense were the major factors that should be considered in translating ambiguous headlines. Lack of practice, background knowledge, inability to grasp idiomatic meanings, untranslatability, lack of English knowledge, and difficulty in achieving the style were the major difficulties confronted by translators when translating ambiguous headlines. These difficulties could be overcome by referring to dictionaries and glossaries, employing strategies like italics, direct translation, omission and searching background knowledge before translating and dedicating more time to practice headline translation.

Keywords: *Lexical ambiguity, Newspaper headline, Syntactic ambiguity, Target readership, Translation*