A COMPARISION OF THE FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE OF 'YESTERDAY', 'TODAY', AND 'TOMORROW' IN ENGLISH NEWS WRITTEN BY VIETNAMESE AND THOSE BY NATIVE SPEAKERS

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Abstract - This paper analyzes the frequency of occurrence of three English time deictic words, namely 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' and compare their occurrences in business news written by Vietnamese and and those by native speakers in the US and UK. One third of the samples were written by Vietnamese news reporters who currently work as news reporters in Vietnam; the rest of the samples were collected from news written by native speakers in two popular electronic papers New York Times and BBC news in US and UK respectively. Generally, there is a discrepancy in the occurrence of 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' in news by Vietnamese writers and native speakers, in which Vietnamese tends to make more use of these words to describe the time of an event. To be more specific, Vietnamese writers tend to employ these words at a much higher frequency in their news than their counterparts in English speaking countries.

Key words - frequency of occurrence; deictic words; yesterday; today; tomorrow; time event;

1. Introduction

Deixis is a universal phenomenon, which is embedded in every language. Deixis refers to words or phrases, which require contextual information in order to understand their meanings. Grundy stated that deixis was a "closed class" (2008 : 26), which had limited set of words. Even though humans cannot make up new words to add into the deictic system, the use of these words varies across different regions in the world.

The complex background and the universal nature of the deictic system trigger me to have a deeper look into it. The purpose of this paper is to investigate and compare the frequency of occurrence of the three English time deictic words, namely 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' in English business news written by Vietnamese writers, and those by native speakers in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). The frequency of occurrence of these three deictic words not only reveals how Vietnamese reporters use time deictic in their writing, but also show the differences between the way native speakers and Vietnamese (second language learners) use time deictic words in reporting news.

1.1. Research Question

What is the frequency of occurrence of 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' in English business newspapers written by Vietnamese writers?

What is the frequency of occurrence of 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' in English business newspapers written by native writers in the United Kingdom?

What is the frequency of occurrence of 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' in English business newspapers written by native writers in the United States?

What are the differences in the frequency of occurrence of 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' in the English newspapers by the Vietnamese, and the native writers in the United States and the United Kingdom?

2. Literature Review

Deixis is at the interface of pragmatics and semantics, which was explained by Levison (2006) that "the description of deixis is a matter of either semantics or pragmatics, depending on the theory in question (p.112)". The shared boundary between pragmatics and semantics of deixis is probably due to the fact that the meaning of deictic expression can only be determined with the context of actual speech situation (Levison, 2006). Traditional views on deixis made a distinction between its indexical and symbolic meanings, in which the symbolic meaning of a deictic term might be said to be its semantic aspect, while the indexical meaning was its pragmatic aspect (Green, 2006).

2.1. Definition

According to Levison (2006), deixis is "one the most empirically understudied core areas of pragmatics", which is "more pervasive in language than normally recognize (p.97)". He continued that "deixis introduces subjective, attentional, intentional and, of course, context-dependent properties into natural languages (p.97)".

Another definition of deixis by Green (2006) was that deixis is "the encoding of the spatiotemporal context and subjective experience of the encoder in an utterance (p.178)". He said that "pure deictic terms" such as *I, here, now, this,* were problematic in terms of reference and meaning, as these words are heavily dependent on contexts. 'Here' when uttered by a speaker will differ from the 'here' by listeners.

Bushman (1998) defined deixis in relation to person, time, and space:

"Characteristic function of linguistic expressions that relate to the personal, spatial, and temporal aspect of utterances depending upon the given utterance situation (p.286)".

2.2. Types of Deixis

Traditionally, deixis contains three main categories related to people, time, and place. Discourse and social deixis have been added into the deixis system since the 1980s (Levinson, 1983).

Regarding person deixis, Cruse (2004) stated that person deixis basically involves the speaker, known as 'first person', the hearers, known as the 'second person', and the 'third person', who participates in the speech neither as the speaker or the hearer. While the first and the second person concern with those who directly participate in the utterance, the third person are those who not directly involved in the utterance, but are mentioned as a

subject in the utterance (Grundy, 2008).

Time deixis refers to the time when the utterance takes place (Fillmore, 1997).

Spatial deixis: Spatial deixis are also called 'space deixis', or 'place deixis' across linguistic books. Space deixis are the "linguistic expression of the speaker's perception of his position in three-dimensional space" (Fillmore, 1997, p.28).

Discourse deixis refers to the use of linguistic material within an utterance to refer to the preceding and following parts of the discourse that contains the utterance (Fillmore, 1997).

Social deixis involves in the "marking of social relationships in linguistic expressions" (Fillmore, 1997, p.28).

2.3. Time Deixis

Time deixis is also known as temporal deixis, which refers to the "points or intervals on the time axis, using the moment of utterance as a reference point" (Cruse, 2004, p.334). Three major time divisions of the time axis can be identified: (1) "before the moment of utterance", (2) "at the time of utterance", and (3) "after the time of utterance" (Cruse, 2004, p.334).

There are two central types of time deixis, which are demonstrative "adverbial expression", and "tense makers". Tense makers are used to indicate the points of time whose reference can only be determined in relation to the time of the utterance in which the tense markers occur (Grundy, 2008, p.31).

According to Cruse (2004), 'today', 'yesterday', and 'tomorrow' are temporal deixis devices, which designate, respectively, "the period of twenty-four hours beginning at 12 o'clock midnight which includes the time of utterance", "the period of twenty-four hours which precedes the one including the time of utterance", and "the period of twenty four hours which follows the one including the time of utterance" (p.335).

3. Research Design

This is a quantitative research including three different phases of research methods, namely finding samples, processing samples, and analyzing samples.

In the first place, business news written by the Vietnamese, and those by native writers were collected from different sources from the Internet. The first English business newspaper is the 'Vietnam News' which is one of the most famous English papers reporting both local and international business news, primarily used to cater for English native speakers currently living in Vietnam. The second newspaper is the 'BBC News', written by native speakers in the UK; and the last one is the business section in the 'NY Times' written by native speakers. A sample of 50,000 words were copied from each newspaper, and transferred into Microsoft Words files. 'Word count' tool in the Microsoft Word was used to measure the number of words collected from each newspaper.

The second phase includes several steps, first of which a table needed to be set up to gather the frequency of occurrence of the each word. Then, the 'word search' tool

by the Microsoft Word was employed to point out the position of each word in the text without having to scan or skim through it. The final step was to insert the number of occurrence of each word into the table under the headlines where it occurred.

The final phase was to pull all the information together into a table in Microsoft Excel file to measure the total number of occurrence by each newspaper, and compare the similarities and differences in the frequency of occurrences of 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' in English business news written by the Vietnamese, and those by native writers in the US and the UK.

4. Data Analysis

There is a discrepancy in the frequency of occurrence of 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' in business news written by the Vietnamese writers. Among the 50,000 words collected from 127 business news from the beginning to the end of February in the VN news website, 'yesterday' has the occurrence of 91 times, while 'today' only appears twice, and 'tomorrow' has no occurrence. The result shows that Vietnamese news reporters prefer to use 'yesterday' in their writing news.

In the business news written by native speakers in the UK, the frequency of occurrence is much lower than that of Vietnamese's. In 50,000 words from 98 business news from the beginning to the end of February, 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' occur two times, eleven times, and none respectively.

A similar result was obtained from news written by the native speakers in the US. With the same sample size of 50,000 words collected from 46 business news on the NY Times website, 'yesterday' had no occurrence, 'today' occurred thirteen times, and 'tomorrow' occurred only once.
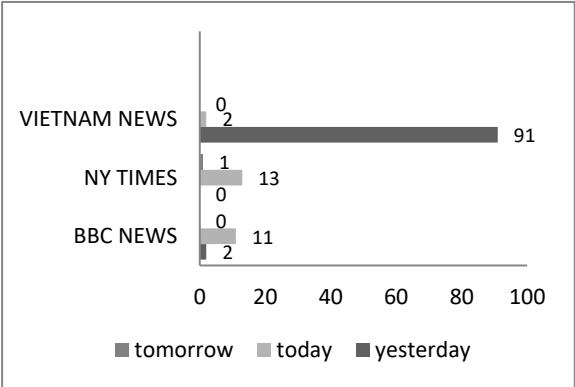

Figure 1. The frequency of occurrence of 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' in business news written by Vietnamese writers, and native writers in the US and UK.

From the chart above, it is clear that the frequency of occurrence of 'yesterday' used by Vietnamese writers is significantly high compared to all other occurrences of 'yesterday' produced by native speakers as well as the frequency of occurrence of 'today', and 'tomorrow' across the three newspapers. Both Vietnamese and native speakers in the UK do not use 'tomorrow' in reporting news, while native speakers in the US only use it once over 50,000 words. Both US and UK native speakers tend

to make more use of 'today' in their news than Vietnamese writers. The frequency of 'today' is both highest among the three investigated words in the sample collected from news written by native writers in the US and UK, while it only has two occurrences in news written by the Vietnamese. 'Tomorrow' seems to be the least popular word, which only occurred once in the news written by native speakers in the UK.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

There are two major differences in the way native and Vietnamese writers use the three terms 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' in news. First, there is a difference in the frequency of occurrence among the three investigated words. Vietnamese writers are likely to use 'yesterday' in news rather than the other two words, while native speakers prefer 'today'. Second, the frequency of 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' in English news written by the Vietnamese is much higher compared to those by native speakers in the US and UK.

The first discrepancy is about the highest frequency of occurrence of 'today' in news written by native speakers in the US, and UK, instead of 'yesterday' as in news written by the Vietnamese writers. It is probably due to the fact that this paper is mainly used to cater for foreigners living in Vietnam, the number of readers is therefore very limited. Thus, these news are not updated daily. Also, most of the English news written by Vietnamese are translated from Vietnamese news. The reporters often make it on the day after the same news has been published in the Vietnamese versions. Therefore, 'yesterday' has a higher number of occurrences compared to the other two words of 'today', and 'tomorrow.' News written in the US and UK is primarily used to cater for a huge number of native readers. These news have to be updated every day. Therefore, the occurrence of 'today' is more widespread than 'yesterday'. Lastly, the fact that 'tomorrow' is hardly mentioned in news written by both native and non-native speakers may indicate the fact that news reporters as their name implies tend to report news, which means they report what happened rather than what is about to happen, which leads to the higher frequency of 'yesterday' or 'today' than 'tomorrow'. Admittedly, there are news articles that inform readers about the happening in the future, but only a very small proportion of that news is to discuss what happens 'tomorrow'.

A very small number of occurrences are found for the time deictic devices of 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' in news written by native speakers. Instead, they are likely to use the exact date during the week such as 'Monday', 'Tuesday', and so on in their news. This preference helps readers to avoid confusion when read the news some days later in the week. Compared to native speakers, Vietnamese reporters use 'yesterday', 'today', 'and tomorrow' much more frequently. As Vietnamese people have a high tendency to use 'hôm qua' (yesterday), 'hôm nay' (today), and 'ngày mai' (tomorrow) in their news written in the

Vietnamese language. Therefore, the high frequency of occurrence of 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' is somewhat influenced by the first language. To be more specific, tense aspect in English indicates past events, whereas, in Vietnamese, there is no such tense aspect. Thus, time makers such as 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' have a role to play to signify the time of event.

For example:

Vietnamese: Ngày hôm qua, thủ tướng đến thăm …

English: The Prime Minister visited …

To signal past event in Vietnamese, time makers such as 'yesterday' (ngày hôm qua) must be employed while no aspect of tense is found in the verb (thăm). By contrast, in English, tense aspect works as an indicator to inform readers to the time of happening of the verb.

All in all, Vietnamese news writers tend to use much higher number of 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' in news than native speakers, which is resulted from the first language interference.

5.1. Limitations

This paper cannot avoid certain limitations due to the time constraints and limited sources of materials for analysis. Firstly, due to the time constraints, the sample size is not large enough to produce a more convincing result when comparing the number of occurrences of 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow.' In addition, news written by the Vietnamese is only collected from one newspaper in Vietnam, which possibly has the same English editors; therefore, whether the number of occurrence of the three investigated words reflect the overall trend of the occurrence of these words in writings by Vietnamese news reporters or not is still questionable, thus is open for further research.

5.2. Suggestions for Further Study

Below are some suggested topics for further research:

- A comparison among the occurrences of 'yesterday', 'today', and 'tomorrow' in newspapers written by people living in the 'inner circle', 'outer circle', and expanding circle.'

- An investigation into the influence of first language on the frequency of usage of English deictic devices.

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