FEATURES OF ENGLISH NEWSPAPER HEADLINES

As a window of newspapers, headlines play an extremely important role and always receive the most attention from readers. Therefore, it’s of great significance for translators to master the features of headlines.

Personally, I am much fond of reading newspapers, especially English editions. Before focusing on any news article, I would start from the headline, if it sounds interesting, I will go on. Moreover, I paid a lot of attention to the grammar structure of the English headlines. Here are some features of English headlines.

Firstly, it always omits verb “be”, no matter what forms it acts as. For example,

NYC homeless man shoeless again despite boots (Quoted from USA TODAY. The verb “is” after “man” is omitted. )

Two bodies found after shooting

(Quoted from THE SUNDAY TIMES. The verb “are” after “bodies” is omitted. )

China Easing One-Child Rules?

(Quoted from THE DAILY BEAST. The verb “is” after “China” is omitted.)

China to fine-tune policies in 2013: state TV
Apart from the verb “be”, indefinite articles are also omitted, we can learn it from the following headlines:

*Baby saved amid “weather bomb” alert* (Quoted from *THE TIMES*. The indefinite article “a” before “Baby” is omitted.)

*Teenager found after 62 days lost in bush* (Quoted from *THE TIMES*. Besides the verb “is” before “found”, the indefinite article “a” before “Teenager” is also omitted.)

*NYC subway train kills man pushed off platform* (Quoted from *USA TODAY*. The indefinite article “a” before “man” is omitted)

*Corporates get tough lesson in FX risk from central bank* (Quoted from *REUTERS*. The indefinite article “a” before tough is omitted.)

In addition to omission, another distinctive feature of English headlines is the widely use of present tense to describe something happening in the past as well as in the present for the purpose of making readers feel that the news has just happened, and this feature can be attributed to the timeliness of news.

*Obama says struggling over whether to intervene in Syria* (Quoted from *REUTERS*)

*Nightclub fire kills 233 in Brazil* (Quoted from *REUTERS*)

*Venezuela transfers inmates from prison after riot kills 58* (Quoted from *REUTERS*)
As we know, headlines only take a small space but have to reveal the main idea of the news, and that’s the reason why they should be precise and concise, consequently it’s necessary to use shortenings, which are divided into acronyms, abbreviation and clippings. In the following table, we can see the common use of shortenings.

Americans cash in on £3bn City office deal (Quoted from THE SUNDAY TIMES. Here, bn refers to billion.)

Sanofi expects FDA decision on Lemtrada in H2 2013 (Quoted from REUTERS. FDA=Food and Drug Administration)

The slanting of a tech hero (Quoted from REUTERS. “tech” is equal to “technology”)

‘Argo’ wins SAG’s top film prize (Quoted from LOS ANGELES TIMES. SAG=Screen Actors Guild)

Fed waits for job market to perk up (Quoted from REUTERS. Fed=Federal Reserve)

Manipulation found in Singapore’s FX market (Quoted from REUTERS. FX=future exchange)

As the briefest summary of a news article, a headline is by no means a simple sentence. Instead, it has its own lexical features, grammatical features and rhetorical features. So we should pay much attention to it while reading. Only after we truly grasp the features of headline, can we fully understand its meaning and tactically translate it.