

On Translating Prepositions from English into Indonesian: A Case Study of Indonesian EFL Students

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Abstract

This study attempts to investigate errors in translating prepositions from English into Indonesian language by Undergraduate students at the Methodist University Indonesia, Medan. A total of 20 students in the Department of English Literature, Faculty of English Letters were involved in this study. Forty sentences containing English prepositions were translated by the students. The translations were then compared with the Indonesian equivalence in order to find out the quality of their translation. In order to measure the quality of preposition translation, three categories were referred to, namely: correct translation, correct with revision translation, and incorrect translation. Having analyzed the data, it revealed that most of the students failed to translate complex prepositions such as phrasal verbs. However, most students successfully translated simple prepositions such as noun prepositions and adjective prepositions. From 100% correct translation expected of students, only 44.37% of the total correct translation of prepositions committed by students. While correct with revision, from 100% correct translation with revision expected of students, only 41.75% of the total correct translation that need revision is produced by students. In the meantime, 13.75% of the total incorrect translation is produced by students. It was concluded that students tend to face problems in translating prepositional verbs as they are rarely used by and unfamiliar to students.

Keywords: Preposition translation, Difficulties and errors in translation, Linguistic analysis, English/indonesian

1. Introduction

Translating process is the most commensurate divert messages from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL), both in terms of meaning and style (Nida & Taber, 1974, p. 12). It could consist of words, strings of words (phrases), sentences, paragraphs, articles of several paragraphs, or writing an even longer. Good words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and writing or longer text are called shape (form or surface structure), (Nida and Taber 1974, p. 210). Every language has its own rules and certain characteristics such as the sound system of language based on the form (form-related) and meaning (meaning-related) that ultimately prove that the language is a complex system from a system (language is a complex system of systems) (Paul, 1993, p. 132).

Ordudari (2007) states that the difference between the Source Language and the Target Language and the variation in their cultures make the process of translating a real challenge. However, it is believed that in order for someone to translate a text effectively, he/she needs to follow the translation technical procedures in translation. The translating technical procedures, they are depicted by Nida (1964) as follows:

- a. Analysis of the source and target languages;
- b. A thorough study of the source language text before making attempts to translate it;
- c. Making judgments of the semantic and syntactic approximations. (pp. 241-45)

1.1 Aims of the Study

Despite the fact that prepositions are small words in both English and Indonesian, a number of Indonesian EFL university students tend to face challenges as to how and when one can translate prepositions correctly based on context. This is because some prepositions in English cannot be literally translated into Indonesian. Based on this background, this paper aims to explore the errors of preposition translation from English into Indonesian by undergraduate students at Methodist University Indonesia, Medan.

1.2 Significance of Study

Since present study discusses the errors of Indonesian Undergraduate students in translating prepositions, it will shed light on which prepositions should be taught intensively English teachers or English lecturers in order to avoid misunderstanding in using them.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Preposition

In Longman dictionary (1995) a preposition is defined as "a word that is used before a noun, pronoun, or gerund to show that word's connection with another word, such as 'of' in 'a house made of wood', and 'by' in 'We open it by breaking the lock' ". According to Wishon Burks (1980), prepositions are "always followed by nouns or pronouns". Wishon & Burks (1980:285) state that "prepositions are connective words that show the relationship between the nouns following them and one of the basic sentences elements: subject, verb, object, or

complement.”.

Webster's new English dictionary (1976, p. 395) defines a preposition as "a word or expression that combines with a noun or pronoun to form a phrase." A preposition is a part of speech that introduces a prepositional phrase. For example, in the sentence "Sadeq is reading French fiction in the room", the word *in* here is, grammatically speaking, a preposition, introducing the prepositional phrase "in the room". Studies show that in English, the most used prepositions are *of*, *to*, *in*, *for*, *with*, and *on*.

Speaking of preposition translation, Lorinz and Gordon (2012:1) argue that in order to determine what pedagogical methods are most effective, it is important to first understand what makes learning prepositions so difficult; this challenge can be attributed to several factors. First, prepositions are generally polysemous. Polysemy is “a semantic characteristic of words that have multiple meanings” (Koffi, 2010, p. 299). Essentially, the majority of prepositions in English have a variety of meanings depending on context. Thus, learners often become frustrated when trying to determine prepositional meanings and when trying to use them appropriately (p. 299). Second, as Lam (2009) points out, prepositions can be difficult to recognize, particularly in oral speech, because they typically contain very few syllables. Many English prepositions are monosyllabic, such as *on*, *for*, or *to*. As a result, language learners may not be able to recognize prepositions in rapid, naturally occurring speech. Moreover, the use of prepositions in context varies greatly from one language to another, often causing negative syntactic transfer. The same prepositions can carry vastly different meanings in various languages.

A preposition expresses a relation between two entities, one being represented by the prepositional complement of the various types of relational meaning (Quirk et al, 2000). These relationships include those of time, position, direction, and various degrees of mental and emotional states.

2.2 English Prepositions

According to its function, English prepositions can be divided into two: simple prepositions and complex prepositions. Simple prepositions include preposition for time, preposition for place, preposition for direction, preposition for agent, preposition for instrument and prepositional phrase. Phrasal verbs which are part of prepositional phrase is one of the hardest group of words to translate. This is since the combination of a word and a preposition don't make up one meaning. A combination of a verb and a preposition is called prepositional verb. A verb followed by a preposition.

In addition to the above simple prepositions, English has some frequent complex prepositions. A complex preposition is a word group (such as "along with" or "on account of") that functions like an ordinary one-word preposition. Complex prepositions can be divided into two groups:

- two-word units (a word + a simple preposition), such as *apart from* (also known as *compound prepositions*)

- three-word units (a simple preposition + a noun + a simple preposition), such as *by means of* (also known as *phrasal prepositions*)

Some complex prepositions in English are: according to, ahead of, along with, apart from, as for, as well as, aside from, away from, because of, but for, by means of, by virtue of, by way of, close to, contrary to, due to, except for, far from, for lack of, in accordance with, in addition to, in back of, in between, in (the) case of, in charge of, in exchange for, in front of, in light of, in line with, in place of, in (the) process of, in regard to, inside of, in spite of, instead of, in view of, near to, next to, on account of, on behalf of, on top of, out of, outside of, owing to, prior to, subsequent to, such as, thanks to, together with, up against, up to, up, until, with respect to. These complex prepositions are literally hard to translate by some Indonesian students as will be shown in the discussion section.

2.3 Indonesian Prepositions

Some prepositions in Indonesian, unlike in English, serve to function for several purposes. Below are some common use of prepositions in Indonesian language.

1. A preposition that mark a place. For example: *di* (in, at, on), *ke* (to), *dari* (from).
2. A preposition that mark a purpose and an objective. For example: *untuk* (for/to), *guna*.
3. A preposition that mark timing. For example: *hingga* (until), *hampir* (almost).
4. A preposition that mark cause of an action. For example: *demi* (for the sake of), *atas* (on).

Apart from the above purposes, based on its function, Indonesian prepositions also express the following purposes:

- A place of something; *di*, *pada*, *dalam*, *atas* dan *antara* (in between).
- The origin of something; *dari* (from).
- Destination of something; *ke*, *kepada*, *akan*, dan *terhadap*. (*to*, *towards*)
- Doer of an action; *oleh* (by).
- As a tool; *dengan* and *berkat* (with, by, for).
- Comparing; *daripada* (than).
- Matter or issue; *tentang* and *mengenai* (about).
- Cause; *hingga* and *sampai* (until).
- Purpose; *untuk*, *buat*, *guna*, and *bagi* (to, for).

2.4 Problems of Translating Prepositions

Studies have shown that the preposition is one of the most problematic categories that students encounter in learning English (Richards, 1974; Ravina, 1982), this is not to mention

translating it into another language. It has been known that translating prepositions has always been a problem for Asian students, especially Indonesian students. This is since some prepositions are ambiguous in nature. In addition to that, in translating prepositions, linguistic errors such as mother tongue interference usually cause the mistranslation. Despite this ingrained problem, little research has been conducted with regard to Indonesian contrastive analysis of English prepositions.

It is not uncommon to find the use of English preposition reflecting Indonesian structures—that is to say, literal translations from Indonesian to English. The differences between the prepositional systems of English and Indonesian are believed to constitute the difficulty of the Indonesian learner in learning and using the English prepositions.

2.5 Previous Studies

Tahaineh (2010) in his research entitled “Arab EFL University Students' Errors in the Use of Prepositions” found that EFL Arab Jordanian students at the tertiary level experience serious difficulties in using the correct prepositions in their writing. The prepositions proved to be the most common in use and the most difficult ones for the learners in this study are by, in, on, to, with, of, from, for and at respectively. Mother tongue interference (MTI) is a learning strategy that most foreign-language learners fall back on especially in acquisition-poor classroom situations where exposure to the language is confined to a few hours per week of formal instruction.

Castro (2016) conducted a study entitled *An Analysis of Prepositional Errors of College Students*. Her study concluded that the interference of Filipino is minimal as the results show the dominance of intralingual over interlingual errors. Given this scenario, the study explores ways by which teachers can address correcting the errors and restructuring the students' interlanguage system.

A study conducted by M. Agha and Salih (2007) entitled *the Problems of Translating Prepositions in Shakespearean Othello into Arabic* discovered that the rendering of (7) prepositions in *Othello* show that the four translators handle prepositions in different ways. They adopt, but variably, the two types of equivalence proposed by Nida (1964). Their analyses of the four renderings of prepositions show that the prepositions have not changed through time. Prepositions are formally translated by all the translators and one time by Al-Khumayri and Matraan who also delete the preposition once.

Yatiningrum, A. (2013) conducted a study on a *Contrastive Analysis between English and Indonesian Prepositions*. Her study discovered that there are four differences between English and Indonesian prepositions of place. (1) Based on the meaning, to indicate a place, Indonesian prepositions of place uses “di” while English prepositions of place uses “in”, “on”, and “at”. (2) Based on the meaning, the use of English prepositions of place of “above” and “over” differ from Indonesian prepositions of place “di atas”. (3) Based on the meaning, the use of English prepositions of place “under”, “underneath”, “beneath” and “below” differ from the Indonesian prepositions of place of “di bawah”. (4) Based on the meaning, the use of English prepositions of place of “between” and “among” differ from Indonesian

prepositions of place “di antara”.

3. Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature. Therefore, errors in translating prepositions committed by undergraduate students are descriptively discussed in the finding and discussion section.

3.1 Participants

A total of twenty participants were involved in this research. They were the 6th semester students majoring in English letters at the Methodist University, Indonesia.

3.2 Data Collection Method

Students were asked to translate forty English sentences into Indonesian. The sentences are comprised of simple sentences and compound sentences with simple prepositions and complex prepositions in them. Students were given one hour forty minutes to finish the task.

3.3 Data Analysis Method

Content Analysis method was applied in this research. The source text was compared to the target text (Indonesian) and then problems in mistranslation of prepositions were described. Three metrics are used to tabulate the data, namely: correct, correct with revision, and incorrect. The correct translation is the translation that has good meaning and needs no revision in order to make it better, while the translation with correct with revision is the translation that has standard and acceptable meaning but it needs further revision to make it better. While the incorrect one is the translation that is mistranslated by the participants and the translated version is rendered differently.

4. Results and Discussion

Below is the recapitulation of correct translation, correct with revision translation and incorrect translation of prepositions. Each translation quality classification is illustrated by five sentences.

Table 1. Identification of Correct Translation, Correct with Revision Translation and Incorrect Translation of Prepositions

No.	Source text	Correct	Correct with revision	Incorrect
1	Joe waited for the train.	17	2	-
2	The train was late for an hour.	12	8	-
3	I looked for Mary and Samantha at the bus station.	15	-	5
4	Mary and Samantha arrived at the bus station early but waited until noon for the bus.	16	4	-
5	He laughed at my acting.	12	8	-
6	I am good at drawing a portrait.	15	5	-
7	She looked me directly in the eyes.	17	3	-

8	I am currently staying in a hotel.	16	4	-
9	My hometown is Los Angeles, which is in California.	11	9	-
10	I believe in the next life.	13	7	-
11	We are not interested in gambling.	14	6	-
12	Spotlights in many different colors lit the stage.	8	12	-
13	Turtles and frogs crawled over the aquarium rocks.	8	12	-
14	Let's talk about something different.	7	13	-
15	We drove across the desert.	2	12	6
16	Anthony is ahead of Rachel in the race. He'll win.	3	13	4
17	We have a long day ahead of us. Let's get going!	7	13	-
18	As for Matt, he will arrive later.	2	12	6
19	You should telephone as well as write, just to be sure.	13	7	-
20	Sergeant is below the rank of captain.	6	14	-
21	They were very anxious about the merger	11	9	-
22	We could sense their anxiety about the merger.	5	12	3
23	Who are you applying to work with?	8	11	1
24	What percentage can the cost be reduced by?	3	8	9
25	Yesterday I saw that woman (that/who) you introduced me to!	12	8	-
26	She managed to see the film that it is impossible to get tickets for!	-	13	7
27	We drove our car to the store	16	4	-
28	Four armed man held up the bank	3	4	13
29	We ran up the bill	2	4	14
30	He came by the office in a big hurry	4	14	2
31	Tom live down the street	3	17	-
32	Finally we lived down that incident	5	15	-
33	Despite the rain, we still went jogging.	20	-	-
34	Barring any setbacks, the quarterback will play in the next game.	2	10	8
35	In spite of all the harm it causes, people still smoke cigarettes.	4	13	3
36	The battery in my phone is dead because I forgot to plug it into the charger	16	4	-
37	She enjoys being fussed over	-	6	14
38	They must be convinced of the commitment that they are taking on	2	3	15
39	What music are you interested in?	16	4	-
40	I'll meet you in the cafe opposite the cinema	9	11	-
Total		355	334	110
Percentage		44.37%	41.75%	13.75%

Based on the above data, the following percentage was gathered:

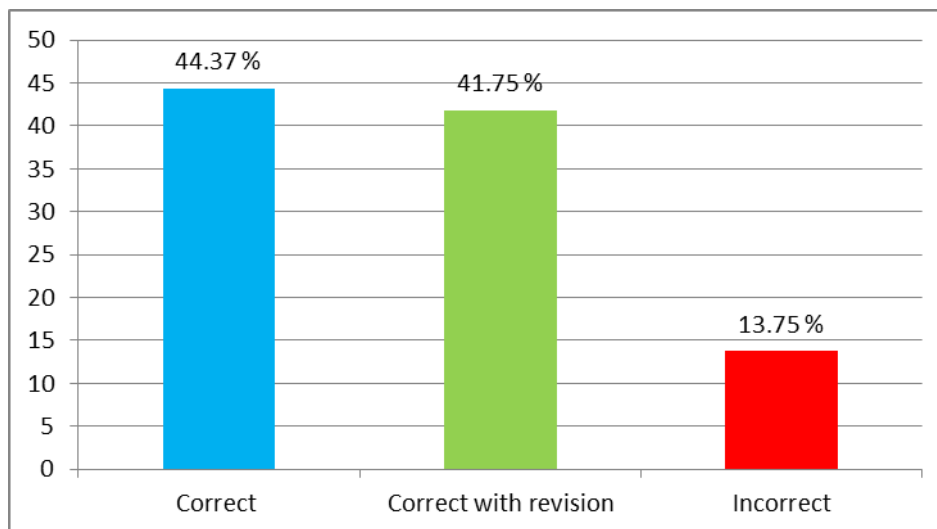


Figure 1. Percentage of Correct, Correct with revision, and Incorrect Translation of Preposition

As can be seen from figure 1 above, from 100% correct translation expected of students, only 44.37% of the total correct translation of prepositions committed by students. While 41.75% of the total correct translation that need revision is produced by students. In the meantime, 13.75% of incorrect translations of prepositions were committed by students.

Shown below are the examples of different prepositions translation produced by students.

4.1 Examples of Correct translation

- Source Text: We drove **across** the desert.
Target Text: Kami melaju **melintasi** padang pasir (Student 1)
Kami mengemudi **melewati** padang pasir (Student 2)
- Source Text: *We drove our car to the store*
Target Text: Kami mengendarai mobil **ke** toko (Student 1)
Kami mengendarai mobil kami **menuju** toko (Student 2)
- Source Text: He **laughed at** my acting.
Target Text: Dia menertawakan akting saya.
- Source Text: We are not **interested in** gambling.
Target Text: Kami tidak tertarik **pada** perjudian. (Student 1)
Kami tidak tertarik **dengan** perjudian. (Student 2)
- Source Text: I am currently staying **in** a hotel.
Target Text: Saat ini saya menginap **di** Hotel.

In sentence number one, the source text of “We drove across the desert” was translated as “Kami melaju melintasi padang pasir” by student 1. This translation is more natural than translation of student 2 where he translated it as “Kami mengemudi melewati padang pasir”. The word “melewati” is less natural than the word “melintasi”.

While sentence number two, the source text of “*We drove our car to the store*” was translated as “Kami mengendarai mobil ke toko” by student 1 and “Kami mengendarai

mobil kami menuju toko” by student 2. The preposition “to” has the literal meaning of “ke” in Indonesian language. Since translation should sound more natural in the target language, in this case the preposition “to” is better translated as “menuju”.

In sentence number three, the verb “laugh at” was translated as “menertawakan” in Indonesian. The majority of students translated the same in Indonesian. It is true that the preposition “at” in this case does not necessarily go through translation.

While in sentence number four, it was found that different students translated the preposition “in” in the adjective preposition of “interested in” into various equivalence. Some students translated “in” into “pada”, the others translated it into “dengan”. Both are accepted in Indonesian language and has natural meanings.

In sentence number five, the preposition “in” has no other meaning but “di” in Indonesian. Thus, no translation is mistranslated by students in this sentence.

4.2 Examples of Correct Translation with Revision

1. Source Text: The train was late **for** an hour.

Target Text : kereta api terlambat **selama** sejam.

2. Source Text: Let's **talk about** something different.

Target Text: Mari **berbicara tentang** suatu yang berbeda. (Student 1)

Ayo **berbicara tentang** sesuatu hal yang berbeda. (Student 2)

3. Source Text : Sergeant is **below** the rank of captain.

Target Text : Sersan berada **di bawah** pangkat kapten (Student 1)

Sersan pangkatnya **lebih rendah** dari kapten (Student 2)

4. Source Text : She looked me directly **in** the eyes.

Target Text : Dia menatap mata saya secara langsung

5. Source Text : Spotlights **in** many different colors lit the stage.

Target Text : Lampu sorot yang berwarna warni menerangi panggung.

As can be seen, sentence number 1 constitute a simple sentence. Thereby, the majority of students successfully translated the sentence into a correct target language. As for sentence number 2, different students translated the sentence into different target texts based on their own styles and perception. The source text of “Let's talk about something different” which was translated as “Mari berbicara tentang suatu yang berbeda” has no error at all and it already sound natural in the target language. By looking at Nida and Taber (1969) definition of translation naturalness, a translation is considered a good one when it doesn't show to be translation. With regard to sentence number 2, it has the natural language on it.

While in the sentence number 3, different students translated it with different styles. the source text of “Sergeant is **below** the rank of captain” was translated as “Sersan berada di bawah pangkat kapten”. This translation can be translated a lot more natural such as a

translation of student 2 “Sersan pangkatnya lebih rendah dari kapten”. In Indonesian, the rule of modified and modifier is different than that of English. The translation of student 2 shows that “sersan” is the modified and “pangkat” is the modifier with the suffix of “-nya”. Though structurally different, where normally the modifier word comes the first and the modified word comes the second, it works differently in spoken Indonesian, where the use of suffix “-nya” mark the word as the modified one.

In sentences number 4 and 5 above, the prepositions need no translation into Indonesian. The source text in sentence number 5 above says “Spotlights in many different colors lit the stage” was translated as “Lampu sorot yang berwarna warni menerangi panggung”. At a glance, this translation has no error at all. However, in terms of naturalness, this translation can still be revised into a better one, such as “Kilauan cahaya lampu sorot itu menerangi panggung”.

4.3 Examples of Incorrect Translation of Prepositions

1. Source Text : *Who are you applying to **work with**?*

Target Text : Dengan siapa kamu melakukan pekerjaan ini?

2. Source Text : She enjoys being **fussed over**

Target Text : Dia sangat **merepotkan**

3. Source Text : **As for** Matt, he will arrive later.

Target Text : **Untuk** Mat, dia akan datang nanti

4. Source Text : *She managed to see the film that it is impossible **to get tickets for!***

Target Text : Dia mengatur menonton film yang mana mustahil **untuk mendapatkan tiketnya.**

5. Source Text : I **looked for** Mary and Samantha at the bus station.

Target Text : Saya **melihat** Mary dan Samantha do stasiun bus.

In sentence number 1 above, the source text reads “*Who are you applying to **work with**?*” *was translated as* “Dengan siapa kamu melakukan pekerjaan ini?”. The preposition “with” is not necessarily literally translated into “dengan” in Indonesian. The source text has the same meaning as “Kamu melamar untuk siapa?”. If the proposed translation is back-translated into English, it would be “Who are you applying for?”.

While for sentence number 2, the source text of “She enjoys being fussed over” was translated by one of the students as “Dia sangat merepotkan”. If this translation is back-translated, its equivalence would be “He is a very troublesome person”. In English, according to macmillandictionary.com, to fuss over means, “to give a person or animal a lot of attention to show that you love them”. Therefore, the correct translation of the source text would be “Dia suka dimanjakan” in Indonesian.

In the sentence number 3 above, the source text reads “As for Matt, he will arrive later” was

translated as “Untuk Mat, dia akan datang nanti”. This translation sounds too formal as the preposition “as for” is literally translated as “untuk” in Indonesian language. The preposition “as for” in this sentence can be translated in many ways. In our opinion, to make it sound more natural, the sentence can be translated as “Mat sendiri akan tiba nanti”.

In the sentence number 4, a number of students committed errors in translating this sentence. The source text reads “*She managed to see the film that it is impossible to get tickets for!*” *was translated by one of the students as* “Dia mengatur menonton film yang mana mustahil untuk mendapatkan tiketnya.”. This translation sounds too long to read and is not natural in the target language. According to macmillandictionary.com, “to get something for” means to buy something. Thus, this sentence should be translated as “Dia berhasil membeli tiket film eksklusif itu”. If it is back-translated, it might mean “She managed to buy the hard-to-get film ticket”. This particular verb preposition is hard to translate since it is a form of a phrasal verb.

In sentence number 5, the phrasal verb “look for” has the definition of “mencari” in Indonesian. The antonym for that in English would be “search for”. In the example above, the student mistranslated it as “melihat”. In English “melihat” is synonymous to “to look” in Indonesian.

5. Conclusions

Some students had difficulty in translating prepositional verbs. The rare exposure to prepositional verbs (phrasal verbs) in their daily life poses the source of problems in translating phrasal verbs. Notwithstanding, a large number of students succeeded in translating some prepositional nouns and prepositional adjectives. When it comes to longer sentences, such as sentence number 25, 26, 28, 29, students tend to face problems in translating the prepositional verbs. It was observed that students did not follow translation technical procedures in translation. As a result, their final product did not seem to match natural and accurate target language.

6. Suggestions

6.1 For Researchers

This study was conducted at a one hour thirty minute session; leading to the results of students’ translation might not be as good as they should be. Several students confessed that if they were given enough time, they could edit the translation and make them better. Therefore, it is suggested for further research to give more time to students in editing their final translation so as to allow them to edit their final translation. In addition to that, it is suggested that more participants are to take part in similar study so as to illuminate different results of errors committed by students. In the end, by being aware of students’ knowledge on prepositions, teachers may opt to better solution to teach translation of prepositions in sentences.

6.2 For Students

In general, this study agrees with Yaari’s (2013) recommendation that in order for EFL

students to improve their translation, students are advised to practice translation such as translating long sentences, and/ or paragraphs about themselves or translating stories from and to their language. In addition to that, students should translate any passage they read and in case they find some difficulties, they can ask their professors to help them and revise their translation. Indonesian EFL students can also watch western channels including News channels like CNN, BBC, NATGEO, Discovery Channel etc. with subtitles in Indonesian so that they are familiar with how certain sentences with prepositions are translated appropriately.

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Appendix

The Test

This test is for RESEARCH PURPOSE ONLY.

Do your best to translate the following sentences into Indonesian.

Attention:

- Pay attention to accuracy and fluency
- The translation should not read like a translation
- Proofread your translation and final edit it.

1. ...Joe waited for the train.

.....

2. The train was late.

.....

3. I looked for Mary and Samantha at the bus station.

.....

4. Mary and Samantha arrived at the bus station early but waited until noon for the bus.

.....

5. He laughed at my acting.

.....

6. I am good at drawing a portrait.

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7. She looked me directly in the eyes.

.....

8. I am currently staying in a hotel.

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9. My hometown is Los Angeles, which is in California.
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 10. I believe in the next life.
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 11. We are not interested in gambling.
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 12. Spotlights in many different colors lit the stage
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 13. Turtles and frogs crawled over the aquarium rocks
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 14. Let's talk about something different.
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 15. We drove across the desert.
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 16. Anthony is ahead of Rachel in the race. He'll win.
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 17. We have a long day ahead of us. Let's get going!
.....
 18. As for Matt, he will arrive later.
.....
 19. You should telephone as well as write, just to be sure.
.....
 20. Sergeant is *below* the rank of captain.
.....
 21. They were very anxious about the merger.
.....
 22. We could sense their anxiety about the merger.
.....
 23. Who are you applying to work with?
.....
 24. What percentage can the cost be reduced by?
.....
 25. Yesterday I saw that woman (that/who) you introduced me to!
.....
 26. She managed to see the film that it is impossible to get tickets for!
.....

27. We drove our car to the store
.....
28. Four armed man held up the bank
.....
29. We ran up the bill
.....
30. He came by the office in a big hurry
.....
31. Tom live down the street
.....
32. Finally we lived down that incident
.....
33. Despite the rain, we still went jogging.
.....
34. Barring any setbacks, the quarterback will play in the next game.
.....
35. In spite of all the harm it causes, people still smoke cigarettes.
.....
36. The battery in my phone is dead because I forgot to plug it into the charger
.....
37. She enjoys being fussed over
.....
38. They must be convinced of the commitment that they are taking on
.....
39. What music are you interested in?
.....
40. I'll meet you in the cafe opposite the cinema
.....

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