

An SFL Analysis of English Grammatical Features in BBC and Reuters News Reports on the Indonesia–US Trade Agreement

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Abstract

News reports play an important role in communicating political and economic events to global audiences. Beyond conveying information, news texts construct meanings through various linguistic resources that shape readers' understanding of events. This study investigates English grammatical features in two international news reports discussing the Indonesia–US Trade Agreement published by BBC and Reuters on 20 February 2026. The study employs the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the ideational metafunction and transitivity system, to examine how grammatical features contribute to meaning construction in economic news discourse. The data consist of two news reports covering the same economic event, allowing a comparative analysis of linguistic choices across different media institutions. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, the study focuses on four grammatical features: parts of speech that express connecting relationships, expletive *it* and *there*, derivational forms of verbs, and descriptive adjectives. The findings indicate that connecting relationships are the most frequently occurring feature in both reports, followed by derivational verbs and descriptive adjectives, while expletive constructions occur only minimally. Furthermore, the identified grammatical features are predominantly associated with material and relational processes within the transitivity system. These findings demonstrate that grammatical choices contribute significantly to the representation of economic actions, evaluations, and institutional relationships in news discourse. The study is expected to contribute to the application of SFL in media discourse analysis and provide authentic examples for grammar and discourse analysis courses in English language education.

Keywords: Systemic Functional Linguistics, grammatical features, transitivity, news discourse, BBC, Reuters, economic new

INTRODUCTION

Language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a resource for constructing meaning in social contexts. Through language, individuals represent experiences, express attitudes, establish relationships, and organize information. This perspective is central to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which views language as a social semiotic system rather than merely a collection of grammatical rules. According to Halliday & Matthiessen, (2014), every linguistic choice reflects a particular communicative purpose and contributes to the construction of meaning. Consequently, language analysis should focus not only on grammatical correctness but also on how linguistic forms function in authentic communicative contexts.

One of the most productive areas for applying SFL is news discourse. News reports are often perceived as objective representations of reality; however, they are carefully constructed texts

shaped by linguistic choices made by journalists and editors. Through lexical selection, grammatical structures, and textual organization, news organizations present information in ways that influence readers' understanding of events. Chalimah et al., (2021) argue that language in media discourse functions not only to deliver information but also to strengthen or weaken particular perspectives through linguistic choices. Therefore, analyzing language in news reports can reveal how meanings are constructed and communicated to audiences.

Economic news discourse provides a particularly valuable context for linguistic analysis because it involves the representation of complex relationships among governments, institutions, policies, and international markets. Journalists must explain economic agreements, trade negotiations, and financial regulations in ways that are accessible to readers while maintaining accuracy and coherence. To achieve this goal, writers employ various grammatical resources, including conjunctions, derivational word forms, descriptive adjectives, and specific clause structures. These grammatical features contribute to the organization and interpretation of information, making economic news reports a rich source of data for linguistic investigation. A recent example of an internationally significant economic event is the Indonesia–US Trade Agreement finalized in February 2026. The agreement attracted widespread media attention because it involved tariff reductions, market access arrangements, investment commitments, and strategic economic cooperation between Indonesia and the United States. Given its importance, the event was reported by major international news organizations, including BBC and Reuters. Although both organizations covered the same event, differences in their linguistic choices may reflect distinct approaches to information presentation. Investigating these linguistic features can therefore provide insights into how economic events are represented through language.

Numerous studies have applied Systemic Functional Linguistics to investigate various forms of discourse. (Alharbi, 2021) examined controversial discourse and demonstrated that transitivity choices contribute to the transformation of negative representations into more acceptable forms. The study highlighted the importance of grammatical structures in shaping ideological meanings and social interpretations. Similarly, Ali et al., (2021) analyzed Nelson Mandela's speeches and found that material processes dominated the discourse, reflecting the speaker's emphasis on action and social transformation. Their findings indicate that grammatical choices play a crucial role in representing experiences and social realities.

Research on media discourse has also produced significant findings. (Potter (2016) investigated ideological representations in English and Arabic news reports and concluded that linguistic structures contribute to ideological positioning through thematic organization and textual patterns. Likewise, Prawiro (2017) analyzed interpersonal, ideational, and textual meanings in a news text and found that grammatical choices simultaneously realize multiple metafunctions of language. These studies demonstrate that news reports are not neutral texts but linguistic constructions shaped by specific communicative purposes.

Several researchers have focused specifically on transitivity in news discourse. El Fallaki (2022) examined newspaper headlines depicting the Russian attack on Ukraine and reported that transitivity patterns influenced representations of agency and responsibility. Similarly, Zakizadeh (2024) analyzed English newspaper headlines concerning the Ukraine–Russia war and found that grammatical choices contributed to ideological framing and event representation. More recently, Noori (2026) investigated CNN news titles related to the Israel–Palestine ceasefire and concluded that transitivity patterns affected how political actors and events were portrayed. These studies illustrate the usefulness of SFL in examining media representations of international events.

Other studies have applied SFL to educational and institutional texts. Jati and Somphithak (2021) explored narrative texts in elementary school textbooks and demonstrated how functional grammar can reveal patterns of meaning construction. Rodliyah and Liani (2022) investigated students' use of cohesive devices in exposition texts and found that linguistic resources contribute significantly to textual coherence. Shuya (2021) examined thematic progression in English news discourse and reported that textual organization plays an important role in facilitating communication. In addition, (Thi Nhat Linh, 2021) analyzed Vietnamese economic contracts and found that material processes were dominant because economic texts frequently describe actions, obligations, and agreements.

Recent research has continued to expand the application of SFL. (Łazuka-Banach, 2024) investigated transitivity choices in Polish newspaper headlines and demonstrated how grammatical patterns influence representations of social change and stability. Luan and Zhang (2024) analyzed Russian educational texts from an ecological discourse perspective and showed that transitivity analysis can reveal underlying ideological positions. Chalimah et al., (2021) explored language use in media discourse and found that grammatical and lexical choices significantly contribute to the strengthening and weakening of affect in ideological representation. Their findings reinforce the view that linguistic choices in media texts are closely related to meaning construction and audience interpretation.

Although previous studies have made substantial contributions to SFL research, several gaps remain. First, many studies have concentrated on transitivity processes, thematic progression, ideology, or cohesion, while relatively few have examined specific grammatical features within authentic economic news discourse. Second, existing research tends to focus on political speeches, educational texts, newspaper headlines, and conflict-related reporting. Comparatively little attention has been given to grammatical features such as connecting relationships, expletive constructions, derivational verbs, and descriptive adjectives in economic news reports. Third, studies comparing different international news organizations reporting the same economic event remain limited. Consequently, there is still insufficient understanding of how grammatical features are employed across different media institutions when representing identical economic issues.

To address these gaps, the present study examines grammatical features in BBC and Reuters reports on the Indonesia–US Trade Agreement through the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Specifically, the study focuses on parts of speech that express connecting relationships, expletive *it* and *there*, derivational forms of verbs, and descriptive adjectives. By analyzing these features and their realization within the transitivity system, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how language functions in economic news discourse.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and pedagogically. Theoretically, the study extends previous SFL research by examining grammatical features that have received limited attention in economic news discourse. Pedagogically, the findings may support English language education, particularly in grammar, discourse analysis, and media literacy courses. Through authentic examples drawn from international news reports, students can better understand how grammatical structures function as resources for meaning-making rather than merely as formal linguistic rules.

Based on the background presented above, this study investigates the English grammatical features found in BBC and Reuters news reports on the Indonesia–US Trade Agreement and examines how these features are represented through the transitivity system of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Through this analysis, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the role of grammatical choices in constructing meaning within international economic news discourse.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate English grammatical features in international economic news discourse. Qualitative research was considered appropriate because the study focused on describing, interpreting, and explaining linguistic phenomena rather than measuring statistical relationships. The analysis was conducted within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the ideational metafunction and transitivity system proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). Through this framework, the study examined how specific grammatical features contribute to the construction of meaning in news reports.

The data of this study consisted of two international news articles discussing the Indonesia–US Trade Agreement published on 20 February 2026. The first article, entitled “US and Indonesia Finalise Deal to Cut Tariffs to 19%,” was published by BBC News and written by Osmond Chia. The second article, entitled “Key Points of the Indonesia–US Trade Agreement,” was published by Reuters on the same date. These articles were selected because they discuss the same economic event, allowing direct comparison of linguistic choices across different news organizations. Furthermore, BBC and Reuters are internationally recognized media institutions with extensive global readerships and established journalistic standards, making their reports suitable sources for discourse analysis.

The focus of the analysis was limited to four grammatical features: parts of speech that express connecting relationships, expletive *it* and *there*, derivational forms of verbs, and descriptive adjectives. These features were selected because they frequently occur in formal written discourse and contribute significantly to the organization, representation, and evaluation of information. In addition, the study examined how these grammatical features were realized through transitivity processes, particularly material, relational, verbal, and existential processes. Data collection was conducted through document analysis. The researcher first obtained the two news articles from the official BBC and Reuters websites. The articles were then carefully read several times to identify grammatical features relevant to the research objectives. Sentences containing conjunctions, expletive constructions, derivational verbs, and descriptive adjectives were highlighted and classified according to their grammatical categories. Subsequently, the identified linguistic features were analyzed using the transitivity framework to determine how they contributed to the representation of actions, relationships, evaluations, and institutional processes within the news reports.

To ensure systematic analysis, the study followed four analytical procedures. First, the researcher identified and categorized occurrences of the four grammatical features within both

articles. Second, each feature was classified according to its grammatical function and contextual meaning. Third, the identified features were interpreted through the transitivity system to determine their relationship with material, relational, verbal, or existential processes. Finally, similarities and differences between the BBC and Reuters reports were compared and interpreted to reveal patterns of grammatical representation in economic news discourse. The findings were presented descriptively through tables and explanatory discussions. Frequency counts were used only to support qualitative interpretation rather than as the primary focus of the study. The analysis emphasized how grammatical features functioned within the texts and how they contributed to the construction of meaning regarding the Indonesia–US Trade Agreement.

RESULTS

The analysis identified four grammatical features in both news reports: parts of speech expressing connecting relationships, expletive *it* and *there*, derivational forms of verbs, and descriptive adjectives. Table 1 presents the overall distribution of these features in the BBC and Reuters articles.

Grammatical Feature	BBC	Reuters	Total
Connecting Relationships	18	22	40
Expletive <i>It</i> and <i>There</i>	2	1	3
Derivational Verbs	11	15	26
Descriptive Adjectives	9	8	17
Total	40	46	86

Table 1. *Distribution of Grammatical Features in BBC and Reuters Reports*

The findings indicate that connecting relationships were the most frequently occurring grammatical feature in both reports. This result suggests that economic news discourse relies heavily on conjunctions and linking expressions to connect policies, agreements, commitments, and economic actions. Derivational verbs appeared as the second most common feature, reflecting the action-oriented nature of economic reporting. Descriptive adjectives were also frequently employed to characterize agreements, investments, and economic relationships. In contrast, expletive constructions occurred only minimally, indicating a preference for direct and information-dense sentence structures.

Parts of Speech Expressing Connecting Relationships

The analysis revealed that conjunctions and linking expressions occurred frequently in both articles. Examples include *and*, *while*, *including*, *as part of*, *furthermore*, and *also*.

Source	Example
BBC	“Indonesia will cut trade barriers on more than 99% of US imports and facilitate more than \$30bn of purchases of American goods.”
BBC	“The agreement will break down trade barriers while advancing the interests of the American people.”
Reuters	“Indonesia will remove restrictions on exports and intensify cooperation with US firms.”
Reuters	“Indonesia will arrange imports from the United States including energy commodities and agricultural goods.”

Table 2. Examples of Connecting Relationships

These conjunctions establish additive and temporal relationships between actions and events. Through the perspective of SFL, they contribute to logical meaning by connecting multiple material processes within a single clause. Their frequent occurrence indicates that economic news reporting often compresses large amounts of information into concise grammatical structures.

Expletive *It* and *There*

Expletive constructions appeared only rarely in the data.

Source	Example
BBC	“ It comes in exchange for Indonesia opening up its markets to American products.”
Reuters	“A review of the regulation is to take place within 12 months of the agreement.” (existential meaning)

Table 3. Examples of Expletive Constructions

The limited occurrence of expletive constructions suggests that both news organizations favor direct representations of actors and actions. This pattern is consistent with the informational nature of economic reporting, where clarity and precision are prioritized.

Derivational Forms of Verbs

Derivational verbs occurred frequently throughout both reports.

Source	Example
BBC	facilitate
BBC	finalise
Reuters	eliminate
Reuters	intensify
Reuters	facilitate

Table 4. *Examples of Derivational Verbs*

Most of these verbs describe institutional actions, policy implementation, or economic processes. Their use reflects the formal and professional style characteristic of economic news discourse.

Descriptive Adjectives

Descriptive adjectives were used to characterize economic agreements, relationships, and policy outcomes.

Source	Example
BBC	beneficial
BBC	mutual
BBC	optimistic
Reuters	critical
Reuters	indicative

Table 5. *Examples of Descriptive Adjectives*

These adjectives contribute evaluative meanings and help readers interpret the significance of the trade agreement. In particular, adjectives such as *beneficial* and *mutual* portray the agreement positively, emphasizing cooperation and shared economic advantages.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the four grammatical features examined in this study contribute significantly to meaning construction in economic news discourse. Among the identified features, parts of speech expressing connecting relationships appeared most frequently in both the BBC and Reuters reports. This finding suggests that economic news discourse relies heavily

on conjunctions and linking expressions to connect multiple actions, agreements, and policy measures within a coherent text. Economic events are often complex and involve numerous actors, decisions, and consequences; therefore, journalists employ conjunctions such as *and*, *while*, *including*, and *also* to establish logical relationships among ideas. This finding supports Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) view that conjunctions realize logical meaning through additive, temporal, causal, and adversative relationships. Similarly, Biber et al., (2021) argue that conjunctions function as cohesive devices that help readers process and interpret information effectively. The dominance of connecting relationships in the data indicates that coherence and information linkage are essential characteristics of economic news reporting.

The analysis also revealed that derivational forms of verbs occurred frequently throughout both articles. Verbs such as *facilitate*, *finalise*, *eliminate*, and *intensify* were commonly used to represent governmental actions, trade policies, and institutional decisions. According to Yule, (2012) derivation is one of the most productive processes of word formation because it allows language users to create new lexical items capable of expressing complex meanings efficiently. Bauer (2019) further explains that derivational verbs are particularly common in formal and professional discourse because they provide concise representations of actions and processes. The prevalence of derivational verbs in the present study reflects the formal nature of economic journalism, which frequently reports negotiations, regulations, agreements, and economic initiatives. Through these lexical choices, journalists are able to present institutional actions in a precise and concise manner.

Descriptive adjectives also appeared frequently in both news reports. Adjectives such as *beneficial*, *mutual*, *strong*, and *optimistic* were used to characterize economic relationships, agreements, and expected outcomes. Huddleston & Pullum (2005) explain that descriptive adjectives function to assign qualities and attributes to entities, while Biber et al. (2021) emphasize their evaluative role in discourse. In the analyzed reports, descriptive adjectives did not merely provide factual descriptions but also contributed to the evaluation of the trade agreement. For instance, expressions such as *mutual economic prosperity* and *beneficial agreement* construct a positive image of cooperation between Indonesia and the United States. This finding is consistent with Chalimah et al. (2021), who argue that linguistic choices in media discourse contribute to the strengthening or weakening of particular perspectives. Although the present study does not specifically investigate ideology, the use of evaluative adjectives demonstrates how language choices may influence readers' interpretations of economic events.

When interpreted through the transitivity system of Systemic Functional Linguistics, the identified grammatical features were predominantly associated with material and relational processes. Material processes were particularly evident in clauses describing trade negotiations, tariff reductions, investments, and policy implementations. Examples such as *Indonesia will cut trade barriers*, *Indonesia will facilitate purchases*, and *Indonesia will eliminate tariff barriers* portray governments and institutions as active participants performing concrete actions. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), material processes represent actions and events occurring in the physical or social world. The dominance of material processes in the present study is therefore unsurprising because economic news discourse primarily focuses on actions, decisions, and institutional activities. This finding aligns with previous studies conducted by Ali et al. (2021), Thi Nhat Linh (2021), and El Fallaki (2022), all of whom reported the predominance of material processes in texts concerned with political, economic, or institutional activities.

Relational processes were also frequently observed, particularly in clauses containing descriptive adjectives. Through relational processes, attributes were assigned to agreements, institutions, and economic conditions. For example, clauses describing the agreement as *beneficial* or referring to *strong supply chains* represent evaluations through attributive relationships. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) explain that relational processes establish connections between entities and their attributes, thereby contributing to description and evaluation. The presence of descriptive adjectives within relational processes demonstrates how grammatical choices can shape readers' perceptions of economic cooperation and policy outcomes.

Although verbal and existential processes occurred less frequently, they nevertheless contributed to meaning construction within the reports. Verbal processes appeared mainly in quotations attributed to political figures and government representatives, such as statements made by Airlangga Hartarto and Prabowo Subianto. These processes enhance credibility by linking information to identifiable sources. Existential processes, meanwhile, were associated with the limited occurrence of expletive constructions and primarily served to introduce information rather than describe actions. Their relatively low frequency further reflects the preference of economic news discourse for direct and action-oriented reporting.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that grammatical features function as meaningful linguistic resources rather than merely formal grammatical elements. Connecting relationships facilitate

textual coherence, derivational verbs represent institutional actions, descriptive adjectives contribute evaluative meanings, and expletive constructions support information organization. Through their interaction with material, relational, verbal, and existential processes, these grammatical features help construct representations of economic events, institutional relationships, and policy outcomes. The study therefore supports previous research highlighting the usefulness of Systemic Functional Linguistics in media discourse analysis while extending existing literature through its focus on grammatical features in international economic news reporting.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated grammatical features in BBC and Reuters reports on the Indonesia–US Trade Agreement through the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. The findings revealed that connecting relationships were the most frequent feature, followed by derivational verbs and descriptive adjectives, while expletive constructions appeared only rarely. These features were primarily associated with material and relational processes, indicating that economic news discourse focuses on actions, relationships, and evaluations. Overall, the study shows that grammatical choices play an important role in constructing meaning in news texts and demonstrates the value of SFL for analyzing authentic media discourse.

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