COMMON ERRORS COMMITTED BY LINGUISTIC STUDENTS WHEN TRANSLATING FROM ENGLISH INTO VIETNAMESE

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Abstract

The study aimed to analyze the translation errors committed by English major students, Hung Vuong University, in their English-Vietnamese translation, and inform some implications of pedagogy to improve the translation ability of the students. 25 Vietnamese students, who at the time of the study were studying English as their major, were subjected to an English-Vietnamese translation test. Translation errors were analyzed using Guide Sheet for Translation Error Analysis adapted from Na Pham (2005). Findings showed that when translating from English to Vietnamese, students committed two types of errors: comprehension errors and translation (transfer) errors. Results were discussed and implications for the improvements of translation ability and recommendations for future research were presented.

Keywords: *Comprehension errors, linguistic students, transfer errors, translation errors.*

1. Introduction

Translation is not an easy work to do as it is not merely the substitution of words in one language by another language, but the transfer of meaning and sense that the author wants to convey in the most natural way. Translation is, therefore, an art, however, it is also a big challenge for those who are on the way to master it.

Awareness of students' errors in language learning process in general and in translation teaching in particular can help to avoid committing them and as a result, the translation quality will be improved

since errors play a crucial role as they "form part of the student's learning experience, suggesting that they are actively trying out and experimenting with linguistic structures in the foreign language" (Dodds, 1999, p.58). Furthermore, errors identification will also help unearth the translation training process (Seguinot, 1990; Waddington, 2001; Na Pham, 2005; Hansen, 2010; Popescu, 2013).

At Hung Vuong University, the major outcome of English linguistic curriculum is to train students to be capable of working in the field of translation, i.e. they can become translators or interpreters or their work requires their translation ability. Therefore,

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the translation ability of the graduates must be qualified to meet the demand of the labour market. From the researcher's observation and her teaching practice, it, however, should be noted that there have been errors committed by English linguistic students in their translation. During the translation major study, any errors identified can be a valuable feedback for students and teachers to help improving their translation ability to meet the demand of their future coming soon jobs.

In the light of the importance of translation error analysis and the students' need, the purpose of the study is to analyze the translation errors that English linguistics at Hung Vuong University who may become translators in the future most commonly commit. Meanwhile, the specific objectives of this study were to (1) analyze the errors commonly committed by students in English-Vietnamese translation, (2) inform some pedagogical implications basing on the students' errors.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Translation

Translation, stated basing on the different viewpoints, can be considered as transferring meaning from the source language to the target language in written texts to give the sense of the original and the naturalness of the expressions. The 'sense of the original' emphasizes the transfer of meaning of the text and the ideas that the author wants to convey through the text and serves the purpose of the translation. By the term 'the naturalness of the expressions' it is recommended that

the translation must reflect the language style and other extra-linguistic elements of the target language in the translation.

2.2. Translation Errors

Translations errors are defined differently depending on translation theories and norms (Hansen, 2010). Viewed from the standpoint of equivalence, translation errors can be considered as non-equivalence between source text and target text, or non-adequacy of the target text (Koller, 1979: 216, cited in Dewi, 2015). Hatim and Mason (1997: 203) define translation errors as (1) significant (unmotivated) mismatches of denotational meaning between source and target text (subdivided into omissions, additions and substitutions); and (2) breaches of the target-language system (e.g. orthography, grammar).

Viewed from a functionalistic approach, Seguinot (1990: 172) defines translation errors as "an offence against: (1) the function of the translation, (2) the coherence of the text, (3) the text type or text form, (4) linguistic conventions, (5) culture- and situation-specific conventions and conditions, (6) the language system". Based on the 'skopos theory', a translation error is stated "as a failure to carry out the instructions implied in the translation brief and as an inadequate solution to a translation problem" and is the relative to the fulfillment of the target text function and the receiver's expectations (Nord, 2009: 190).

Based on the projects of this study, the concept of translation errors adopted in this study is stated by ATA Framework. According to ATA translation errors are

negative impact(s) on the understanding or use of a target text.

The Translation Errors Analysis model utilized in the study is adapted from Na Pham (2005). Originally, Na Pham's Guide Sheet for Translation Error Analysis focuses on three dimensions including comprehension errors, linguistic errors and translation (transfer) errors. As it is aimed to use English as the source language and Vietnamese as the target in the translation in the current study, the two types of translation, comprehension errors and transfer errors, are adapted and reviewed here.

Comprehension Errors pertains to the translation errors coming from the misunderstanding of the syntax of a sentence in the source text or misread of a word, causing the translation is based on a misunderstood source text (Na Pham, 2005).

Translation (transfer) errors refers to the errors in the sense that they happen during the process of translation, they are related to the 'transfer competence' and accordingly they can be called 'transfer errors' (Na Pham, 2005: 148). Translation (transfer) errors show the inability of the students in expressing the meaning of the source text in the target text, or some distortion of the source text, even though the sentences may be grammatically correct. Under the umbrella of transfer errors are the following specific types of errors: pragmatic errors, cohesion and coherence errors, and transfer errors.

Pragmatic errors occur when learners produce a grammatically and semantically correct phrase/sentence, but the use of the phrase/sentence is not appropriate for the communicative situation. They refer to the failure of transfer the intentions of the writer, his expectations, or the conventional implicatures in the target language.

Cohesion and coherence errors have two indicators: too literal translation and too free translation. 'Too literal translation error' means the students tend to focus only on the surface structure and translate each word or sentence from the source text. In contrast, 'Too free translation errors' occur when the students try to rewrite or improve the original message in too 'creative' way.

Transfer errors occur when there is the omission of something essential to the meaning of the source text, there is the addition of an unnecesary part which is not expressed in the original text, there is the distortion or change at a level of meaning of the source text, there is wrong lexical choice and wrong focus of attention.

2.3. Related Studies

Popescu's (2013) identified translation errors into three main types: linguistic errors, comprehension errors, and translation errors. In this study, he found that the highest number of errors was detected in the areas of linguistic errors and translation (transfer) errors.

In another study, Lan Le (2006) conducted a study to define and describe mistakes - the translation unnaturalness - frequently seen in English - Vietnamese translation which, does not completely ruin the whole work though, may confuse or puzzle readers of the target language. The study systematized unnatural English - Vietnamese translations on two

grounds, the linguistic, and the cultural grounds. Causes to the unnaturalness of the translation were categorized into subjective causes, which included the incompetency in both the source and target languages and limited cultural background, and objective causes coming from the linguistic differences between English and Vietnamese language and cultural differences. The thesis then boldly suggests possible solutions, i.e. a number of strategies translators and would-be translators can employ to address or, at least, minimize these common mistakes.

Do (2018) conducted a paper to investigate how Vietnamese EFL college learners undertake translation tasks and the effectiveness of those translated versions in comparison with the Vietnamese documents. Examining 10 translated texts of 10 participants, the findings reveal a high volume of inaccurate translated items caused by word-by-word translation technique and the influence of Vietnamese language. The unawareness of the meaning conveyed in the original language also caused inaccurate translation. Advices are provided to help educators and learners modify the program and teaching methods.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The population of the study was a group of 25 fourth year English major linguistic students, Department of Foreign Languages, Hung Vuong University in the academic year 2018-2019. Their current translation course was Translation Practice 2 (the third course in the series of translation courses including

Translation Theory, Translation Practice 1, Translation Practice 2, and Translation Practice 3) in which students sharpen their translation skills at intermediate level with translated texts of various themes ranging from Tourism, Culture, Education, just named a few.

3.2. Instrumentation

To serve the purpose of the study, an English-Vietnamese Translation Test was administered to the participants. The translation text was adopted from the sample translation text provided by ATA (2011). It was part of the introduction of a traveler's guide to Madagascar with 270 words, requiring the translators to translate it for an interested reader who is planning a trip to Madagascar. In addition to the text to be translated, each included translation instructions, specifying the context within which the translation was to be performed (text source and translation purpose, audience, and medium) (ATA Guidelines, 2011). To further make sure that the test was suitable for the participants, it was piloted for validation through the two steps following Suskie's (1996) guidelines. The first step involved the 'Informal pilots' and the second step was 'Accompanied interviewing'.

The Guide Sheet for Translation Error Analysis was adapted from Na Pham (2005). The main reason for choosing this kind of model as the main theoretical framework for this study is its suitability and friendly use with detailed guidelines for Vietnamese learners. As mentioned above, the original guide sheet analyzed the translation errors on three-fold perspectives including comprehension errors, linguistic errors, and

translation (transfer) errors. The current study adapted focuses on two types of errors namely comprehension errors and translation (transfer) errors as the translation ability evaluated in the study was narrowed into English-Vietnamese translation only with the recognition that the linguistic errors would be more common in Vietnamese-English translation.

3.3. Data Analysis

The translation error analysis was done by the researcher herself and another translation teacher. The researcher carefully identified the translation errors by using the Guide Sheet for Translation Error Analysis. Then the two translation teachers worked together to re-consider the errors and classified them.

Data were then computerized using Excel (2018) for frequency and percentage.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Common Errors Committed by Students When Translating from English into Vietnamese

The errors committed in English-Vietnamese translation occurred in two types of errors namely: comprehension errors and translation (transfer) errors. The following table presents the error types and the occurrences of the types.

TABLE 1: Frequencies and Percentage of Students' Translation Errors

Types of Errors	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Comprehension Errors	48	27.5
Translation (Transfer) Errors	126	72.5
Pragmatic errors	29	16.7
Cohesion and coherence errors	41	23.6
Transfer errors	56	32.2
Total errors	**174**	**100**

As seen in the table, comprehension errors account for 27.5% with the frequencies of 48 errors while Translation (transfer) errors happen more commonly with 126 errors making up 72.5%. Within the subtypes of errors, the most common errors of translation errors committed by the students are transfer errors (56 errors, equals to 32.2%), cohesion and coherence errors (41 errors, or 23.6%), and pragmatic errors (29 errors, or 16.7%). The findings support study results by Popescu (2013) in which transfer are among errors that occurs the most frequently in the students' translations.

4.1.1. Comprehension errors

Comprehension errors refer to the mistranslation caused by the misunderstanding of the syntax of a sentence, the inability to clarify the meaning of one sentence in the source text (Na Pham, 2005). In the study, comprehension errors occur most with English-Vietnamese translation in which some English sentences are feedbacked as challenging for the students. Here are some examples to illustrate this type of error.

Source text: *Of remote Madagascar, the wider world holds two principal landscape impressions.*

Translated text: *Ở vùng Madagascar xa xôi, thế giới rộng lớn thu bé trọn vẹn trong hai cảnh tượng chính.*

In this example, the meaning that the writer wants to convey through the sentence is that what the remote Madagascar makes the wider world impressed are the two principal landscapes. In this case, students misunderstood the meaning of the sentence. In the informal interview with the students who committed this error, they said that they were not able to identify the function of the phrase "of remote Madagascar" in the sentence, thus, the sentence seemed very difficult for them to understand causing the mistranslation of the sentence.

The example below provides more evidence when students wrongly render the meaning of the sentence as they cannot analyze the sentence structure:

Source text: *But there is another dimension of Madagascar little known to the world outside and even to most of Malagasy people ...*

Translated text: *Nhưng có một nơi khác của **Madagascar nhỏ bé** mà thế giới và mọi người Malagasy **đều biết đến** ..*

In this case, the students fail to understand the function of the phrase 'little known to the world outside and even to most of Malagasy people ...' as a modifier to the noun 'dimension of Madagascar'. Thus, most of the students understood that the word 'little' modifies Madagascar so they translate into "little Madagascar". In the informal interview,

almost all students admitted that they could not recognize the reduced relative clause in this case, which caused the misunderstanding and mistranslation of the sentence. If the sentence had been written in the form *"But there is another dimension of Madagascar **which is** little known to the world outside and even to most of Malagasy people ..."*, they would have not committed such an error.

4.1.2. Translation (Transfer) Errors

Translation (Transfer) errors occurred in three types namely pragmatic errors, cohesion and coherence errors, and transfer errors.

- **Pragmatic errors** indicate that the students fail to transfer the intentions of the writers, the conventional implicatures of the source text. That is, the students fail to render the meaning and sense that the author wants to convey through the implication of the linguistic choice. Consider the following example:

Source text: ***People have been there less than 2,000 years,*** *and have been largely responsible for the removal of some 85% of the original forest.*

Translated text: *Con người đã ở đây **gần 2000 năm** và đã **làm ảnh hưởng** đến 85% rừng nguyên sinh.*

In this case, what the writer wants to convey is that although people have lived there not for a long time (less than 2000 years, and the phrase 'in a short time' in the previous sentence), they destroyed most of the original forest. The intention of the writer in this case is to blame people - human beings for the runout of the forest. However,

the translations produced by the students are not able to make that point clear.

The translated text cannot clearly express the intention of the author when the phrase 'less than 2000 years' is translated into Vietnamese 'gần 2000 năm' (for nearly 2000 years) and the phrase 'largely responsible for the removal of' is only translated into 'làm ảnh hưởng' (have affected). The translated text seems not able to express the strong idea that is included in the source text.

- **Cohesion and coherence errors** have two indicators: too literal translation and too free translation.

* Too literal translation means the students tend to focus only on the surface structure and translate word by word following the source text. Too literal translation, the word-by-word translation, causes unnatural rendition in the targeted language. An example of too literal translation is as follows:

Source text: ... *The other is **a tropical paradise of lush forest and unparalleled high rates of endemism** in both flora and fauna.*

Translated text: *Cái khác đó là thiên đường nhiệt đới của rừng tươi tốt và tỷ lệ đặc hữu cao không song song về cả hệ thực vật và động vật.*

The above translation follows the source text exactly resulting to awkward and incorrect rendition, causing the unnaturalness of the translation. In this case, the expression *'a tropical paradise of lush forest'* should be rendered into *'thiên đường nhiệt đới với những cánh rừng xanh tươi tốt'* and the expression *'unparalleled high rates of endemism'* can be translated into *'hệ động thực vật đặc hữu dày đặc, khó nơi nào sánh được'.*

* Too free translation, on the other hand, means the students try to rewrite or improve the original message in too 'creative' way. The following example illustrates a too free translation that leads to a change in meaning.

Source text: ... *a tropical paradise of lush forest and unparalleled high rates of endemism in both flora and fauna.*

Translated text: ... *một **rừng nhiệt đới** với một rừng cây sum xuê và **vẻ đẹp tuyệt vời** của các loài sinh vật bao gồm cả thực vật và động vật.*

The translation in example goes too far from the source text that change the meaning of 'a tropical paradise' into 'a tropical forest', and the word group 'unparalleled high rates of endemism' into 'a great beauty of'.

- **Transfer errors** occur when there is the omission of something essential to the meaning of the source text, there is the addition of an unnecesary part which is not expressed in the original text, there is the distortion or change at a level of meaning of the source text, there is wrong lexical choice and wrong focus of attention.

* Omission and Addition

Omission in translation happens when something essential to the meaning of the source text is missing. Let us look at an example of omission when such words and expression as 'Most of the country's', 'roughly', 'an interrupted band' are intentionally skipped in the translation.

Source text: ... *Most of the country's roughly 35,000 square kilometers of karst terrain occur in an interrupted band down the west coast.*

Translated text: *35,000 ki lô mét vuông đá vôi phong hóa xảy ra theo hướng bờ biển phía Tây.*

Addition in translation means the students add new elements which are not in the source text. In the following example, the phrase ***'điều kiện kinh tế xã hội'*** is the new element which is not included in the source text and this is the case of addition error.

Source text: *Due to the island's poor transportation infrastructure, some of the cave areas are extremely difficult to visit, even in the best of circumstances.*

Translated text: *... Do điều kiện cơ sở hạ tầng, **điều kiện kinh tế xã hội** khó khăn trên đảo, rất khó đến thăm một số hang động, thậm chí trong các tình huống tốt nhất..*

* Distortion errors

A distortion error dramatically changes the intended meaning of the source text and can impede the reader's translation. Following examples present such kind of errors committed by the students in translation.

Source text: *Many of the island's caves are home to unique wildlife, ...*

Translated text: *Nhiều hang động trên đảo là những ngôi nhà hoang dã độc đáo.*

In this case, the meaning of the sentence in the source text is distorted. While the source text expresses that the island's caves are the home, the habitat of the unique wildlife, the translation means the island's caves are houses which are unique and wild. The translation produces a completely different version from what the author means in the source text and cause severe misunderstanding.

Source text: *On the one hand, the island is a lesson in how badly humans can misuse resources in a short time.*

Translated text: *Một mặt, hòn đảo là một bài học về sự lạm dụng tài nguyên trong thời gian ngắn **của những con người xấu xa, tồi tệ.***

The example further shows the inability to preserve the intended meaning of the source text. In this case, the error comes from the confusion of students in understanding syntax. In the source text, the adverb 'badly' is used to go in the how-clause to modify the verb 'misuse'. However, in the translation outputs, 'badly' is transfered as an adjective modifying the noun 'people', causing the mistranslation and change in meaning. Based on the informal interview, this happens because of their inability in analyzing the sentence and clause structure.

* Wrong lexical choice errors

Wrong lexical choice errors happen when students fail to choose the appropriate meaning of the word. The inaccuracy in the choice of a lexical item that slightly distorts the intended meaning.

The translation of the word 'home' in the following example causes an error since the choice of the equivalent word in Vietnamese sounds unnatural in Vietnamese. In this case, the students elaborate on the word, in the way they understood it. In other words, they just render the literal meaning or the surface meaning of the words, rather than using a word appropriate to the context. It is better for the word *'home'* to be translated into *'nơi trú ngụ'* to sound idiomatic Vietnamese, instead of translating it into *'ngôi nhà'* or *'quê hương'*.

Source text: *Many of the island's caves are home to unique wildlife …*

Translated text 1: *Nhiều hang động trên đảo là **ngôi nhà** của nhiều loài động vật hoang dã độc đáo.*

Translated text 2: *Nhiều hang động trên đảo là **quê hương** của nhiều loài động vật hoang dã độc đáo.*

* Wrong focus of attention

Wrong focus of attention means the students try to change the word order so much that it changes what the author intends to say. In this present study, the case of wrong focus of attention error occurs when the student transforms an active sentence into a passive sentence when the active is more natural in Vietnamese:

Source text: *Both impressions reflect realities.*

Translated text: *Thực tế được phản ánh bởi cả hai ấn tượng.*

Though there has not existed a clear distinction among errors, i.e. one error is not purely comprehension error or pragmatic errors, the analysis of errors in the study, for a certain, can be roled as a base to help improving the teaching and studying of translation in Vietnamese context.

4.2. Pedagogical Implications

The observation of the researcher during her translation class and informal interview with the students about the errors and causes of errors base some of her pedagogical implications in training linguistic students.

Firstly, as comprehension of the source text can cause the rendition into target language, reading comprehension with a focus on lexical and lexis components should be highlighted. The training curriculum for linguistic students should pay special attention to English reading comprehension skills. Furthermore, the translation teachers, on the base of the source text, can design some reading comprehension activities to help students understand deeply about the text, thus, enhancing the translation quality.

Secondly, the transfer errors are the commonest type of errors committed by students indicates the need to focus on improving the students' ability in understanding and rendering correctly the pragmatic implicature, the meaning and sense of the source text into Vietnamese. Different kinds of exercises training students in pragmatic field, in choosing the appropriate lexical terms to produce the best translation must be carefully designed basing on the need of the students and the current situation of their translation competence.

Thirdly, transfer errors such as omission, addition, distorted meaning, wrong lexical choice and wrong focus account for a great number of errors. In order to help students avoid such errors, the translation training in class should be demonstrated very carefully with the analysis of particular cases in translation and provide students with strategies and techniques to cope with the challenges.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of errors committed by students when translate a text from English into Vietnamese opens a window for us to see the translation competence of the students and tell us something valuable about the current situation of translation teaching and studying in Vietnamese context. Basing on the analysis, specific pedagogical implications

focusing on translation process including reading comprehension and transfer have also been suggested in the paper with a hope to improve the translation performance of the students and the effectiveness of translation training. The future study relating to this matter should be conducted with more participants of different English ability level to confirm the study results, or more studies need to be done using other error analysis models to provide readers with greater view about the research problem.

Appendix
ENGLISH VIETNAMESE TRANSLATION TEST
Time allowance: 60 minutes
Paper dictionaries are permitted.

Read the instructions carefully and then translate the following text into Vietnamese

Instructions: A U.S. publisher specializing in tour guides intends to publish one of its most successful products, a traveler's guide to Madagascar, in various countries. The text below is part of the introduction. It should be translated for an interested reader who is planning a trip to Madagascar. Translate the following text for the specified purpose.

Of remote Madagascar, the wider world holds two principal landscape impressions. One is a land utterly denuded of vegetation by human activity, a parable of reckless and irreversible destruction. The other is a tropical paradise of lush forest and unparalleled high rates of endemism in both flora and fauna.

Both impressions reflect realities. On the one hand, the island is a lesson in how badly humans can misuse resources in a short time. People have been there less than 2,000 years, and have been largely responsible for the removal of some 85% of the original forest cover. On the other hand, in that remaining forest cover (including the dry spiny forest of the island's southeast) the fauna and flora are truly rich, and an excursion to any of the country's protected areas is likely to reward the visitor with breathtaking encounters with lemurs, chameleons, and other species found nowhere else on earth.

But there is another dimension of Madagascar little known to the world outside, and even to most Malagasy people: the underground landscape of caves and associated karst features. Karst refers to the characteristic surface and subterranean landscape that develops in limestone, including sinkholes, caverns, sinking streams and other features. Many of the island's caves are home to unique wildlife, and also have considerable significance in the cultural histories, economies and belief systems of local peoples.

Most of the country's roughly 35,000 square kilometers of karst terrain occur in an interrupted band down the west coast. Due to the island's poor transportation infrastructure, some of the cave areas are extremely difficult to visit, even in the best of circumstances.

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CÁC LỖI KHI DỊCH ANH-VIỆT SINH VIÊN NGÀNH NGÔN NGỮ ANH THƯỜNG MẮC PHẢI

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Tóm tắt

Nghiên cứu được thực hiện nhằm phân tích các lỗi dịch mà sinh viên chuyên tiếng Anh, trường Đại học Hùng Vương thường mắc phải khi dịch từ Tiếng Anh sang Tiếng Việt, đồng thời có những đề xuất sư phạm nhằm nâng cao năng lực dịch của sinh viên. Đối tượng tham gia nghiên cứu gồm 25 sinh viên ngành ngôn ngữ Anh. Công cụ lấy số liệu là bài kiểm tra dịch Anh-Việt. Các lỗi dịch được phân tích sử dụng Hướng dẫn phân tích lỗi dịch đề xuất bởi Na Pham (2005). Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy khi dịch từ tiếng Anh sang tiếng Việt, sinh viên thường mắc hai loại lỗi là lỗi hiểu văn bản và lỗi truyền tải. Kết quả nghiên cứu được thảo luận và các khuyến nghị đề xuất nhằm cải thiện năng lực dịch của sinh viên cũng như các hướng nghiên cứu tiếp theo được đưa ra trong bài báo.

Từ khóa: Lỗi dịch, lỗi hiểu văn bản, lỗi truyền tải, sinh viên ngành ngôn ngữ Anh.