

STRATEGIES IN THE TRANSLATION OF VIETNAMESE NOMINALISATIONS DENOTING MINDFULNESS INTO ENGLISH

KHẢO SÁT CÁC CHIẾN LƯỢC CHUYỂN DỊCH DANH HÓA THỂ HIỆN SỰ TỈNH THỨC TRONG TIẾNG VIỆT SANG TIẾNG ANH

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Abstract - Translation has long assumed an important role in the exchange of human mindsets and values. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, who is a global spiritual leader and peace activist, is well-known around the world for his powerful teachings and bestselling writings on mindfulness and peace. His works written in Buddhist terms have been translated into English and his teachings have thus reached a wider audience regardless of race, ethnicity or religion. This paper examines how Vietnamese nominalisations denoting mindfulness are translated into English. Based on samples of Vietnamese nominalisations denoting mindfulness and their English equivalents extracted from '*Old Path White Clouds: Walking in the 'Footsteps of the Buddha'*' (or '*Đường Xưa Mây Trắng*') and '*The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*' (or '*Phép Lạ Của Sự Tỉnh Thức*') by Thich Nhat Hanh, the paper looks at what strategies have been involved in the process of going from one language to another, using the methodology introduced by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995/2000) as well as that of Baker (1996) and Blum-Kulka (1986/2000). This paper is also intended to draw out some implications for English teaching, learning and for the practice of translation.

Key words - Strategy; nominalisation; mindfulness; explicitation; simplification.

1. Introduction

Nominalisation, as its name implies, refers to 'a process that derives nouns from roots or stems belonging to some other category' (Kroeger, 2005, p. 254). Nominalisations perform important ideological functions: deleting agency, turning processes into entities, or condensing long strings of shorter sentences into fewer longer sentences (Billig, 2008). In this way, nominalisations can make a text more succinct, more abstract, and more sophisticated, which is often characteristic of written discourses. For example, in the two published books by Thich Nhat Hanh zen master, the occurrence of such words as *sự giác ngộ*, *việc thực tập thiền quán*, *sự tỉnh thức*, *cái thấy*, *cái không*, *chơn tâm*, *tỉnh giác*, *chánh niệm*, *giác ngộ*,... could often be considered as Vietnamese nominalisations denoting mindfulness in Buddhism. However, through the prism of translation, the rendering of these Vietnamese nominalisations into English requires the adoption of several strategies, which this study wishes to examine under the overarching terms of universal strategies used in the process of translating nominalisations.

In fact, from a linguistic perspective, each language has its own features, and thus the representation of meaning embedded and the way nominalisations are worded in English may differ from that in Vietnamese. In English, nominalisations can be derived by means of affixation like *-ment* (e.g. *agreement*), *-ness* (e.g. *happiness*), but in Vietnamese nominalisations can be formulated by adding

Tóm tắt – Dịch thuật từ lâu đã đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc chuyển tải tư duy và giá trị của con người. Thiền sư Thích Nhất Hạnh là vị lãnh đạo tinh thần và là nhà hành động vì hòa bình toàn cầu. Ông được mọi người biết đến với những bài thuyết giảng sâu sắc và những tác phẩm bán chạy nhất về sự tỉnh thức và an bình. Các tác phẩm với từ ngữ Phật học của ông đã được chuyển dịch sang tiếng Anh và tiếp cận đến nhiều độc giả không kể sắc tộc hay tôn giáo. Bài báo nghiên cứu cách thức chuyển dịch các danh hóa thể hiện sự tỉnh thức trong tiếng Việt sang tiếng Anh. Dựa trên các mẫu danh hóa và các chuyển dịch tương đương trong "*Đường Xưa Mây Trắng*" và "*Phép Lạ Của Sự Tỉnh Thức*" của Thích Nhất Hạnh, bài báo phân tích các chiến lược chuyển dịch các danh hóa này, dựa trên cách tiếp cận của Vinay and Darbelnet (1995/2000), Baker (1996) và Blum-Kulka (1986/2000), đồng thời đưa ra một số khuyến nghị trong việc dạy học tiếng Anh cũng như trong thực hành dịch thuật.

Từ khóa - Chiến lược; danh hóa; tỉnh thức; hiển ngôn; ngầm ẩn.

nominal classifiers such as *sự* (e.g. *sự đồng ý*), or *niềm* (e.g. *niềm hạnh phúc*). Therefore, when coming from one language into another, the translator may well need some adjustments or alterations providing that the equivalent effect of communication (Nida, 2001) is maintained, especially when it comes to concepts in Buddhism whereby a proper rendition of meaning is not always straightforward.

For example:

(1) Tôi rất hối hận đã không nhất tâm với *việc tu học*. (OPWC)

→ I feel terrible, but I don't seem to have enough resolve to *practice the Way*.

(2) Ngài dạy cho vị sa môn về lòng tin, về sự tỉnh cần, về cách thở và về *sự tập trung tâm ý*. (OPWC)

→ Alara spoke to the new monk about faith and diligence and showed him how to use his breathing to develop *concentration*.

As shown in the above examples, *việc tu học* in (1) which literally means *the studying and practising* is translated into a verbal phrase *practice the Way*. *Sự tập trung tâm ý* in (2) is transposed into a nominalisation *concentration* in English; however, the factor *tâm ý* (i.e. *mind*) in the source language (SL) text is lost in the target language (TL) text. Changes in wording like this often pose a challenge to foreign language learners and translators especially when encountering Buddhism texts. This paper is thus conducted to shed light into the strategies adopted

in translating nominalisations denoting mindfulness by Thich Nhat Hanh in the two texts that will be mentioned in the next section.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Design

In this piece of paper, a combined qualitative and quantitative approach has been adopted to examine how Vietnamese nominalisations denoting mindfulness are translated into English. The two Vietnamese texts, namely '*Đường Xưa Mây Trắng*' and '*Phép Lạ Của Sự Tỉnh Thức*' by Thich Nhat Hanh are the SL texts and their translated versions '*Old Path White Clouds: Walking in the Footsteps of the Buddha*' (or (OPWC) and '*The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*' (MoM) by Mobi Ho are the TL texts. These TL texts have been chosen because Mobi Ho is an American translator, bilingual in English and Vietnamese while mastering Buddhist terms and often initiating exchanges with the author.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

A total of 800 nominalisations denoting mindfulness are extracted from the two texts (650 from OPWC and 250 from MoM) together with their English equivalents. These Vietnamese nominalisations are then categorized according to how they are formulated and examined what changes that have occurred in the process of translating these nominalisations into English, using the model proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995/2000) and Baker (1996).

3. Translation and Nominalisation – An Overview

3.1. Translation and Translation Universals

As a concept, translation is rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text (Newmark, 1988), or in Catfold's terms (2000), it is the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL). This process of rendering the meaning, structure and style of a text from the SL to the TL for equivalent effect of communication necessitates the adoption of strategies or universals in the position of Vinay and Darbelnet (1995/2000) or features of translation by Baker (1996).

Among these, *Explication* is considered as common, referring to as the process of introducing information into the TL which is present only implicit in the SL, but which can be derived from the context of situation. *Simplification*, on the other hand, is conceived as "the idea that translators subconsciously simplify the language or message or both" (Baker, 1996, p. 176).

3.2. Nominalisation in English and Vietnamese

3.2.1. The Notion of Nominalisation

Nominalisation is 'the process of forming a noun from some other word-class such as *redness* (*red* + *ness*) or the derivation of a noun phrase from an underlying clause, for example, '*her answering of the letter*' from '*she answered the letter*' (Crystal & Davy, 1997, p. 260).

In English language, nominalisation is often done

through affixation, either suffixation or prefixation. Nominalisers - abstract nouns formed by means of a suffix – often fall into two basic types, including *de-verbal* nominalisers and *de-adjectival* nominalisers (Kroeger 2005). Besides nouns deriving by affixation, nominalisations are also formed by means of conversion, which is "the derivational process whereby an item changes its word class without the addition of an affix" (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 441).

In Vietnamese, nominalisation is formed by adding some specialized elements labeled nominalisers such as *việc, sự, cuộc, cái, nỗi, niềm, cơn, trận, chuyến, những, mỗi, một, mọi*, etc. before a verb (Nguyễn Thị Bích Ngoan, 2013). Besides, nominalisations in Vietnamese can be the product of conversion or zero-suffixation. In examining the category in Vietnamese, there are words which function either in one category or another. For example, *thuận lợi* in (a) *Công việc tiến hành rất thuận lợi* functions as an adjective whereas in (b) *Những thuận lợi ấy làm anh ta rất phấn khởi* performs the function of a noun (Trương Thị Diễm, 2005).

4. Strategies in Translating Nominalisations Denoting Mindfulness in OPWC and MoM into English

4.1. Literal Translation

Literal translation as an approach is defined by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995/2000) as "a word-for-word rendering which uses the same number of TL words in the form of established equivalents as well as the same word order and word classes" (in Munday, 2009, p. 182). In other words, it is the direct transferring of a SL text into a grammatically and idiomatically appropriate TL text. This literal rendering, first of all, is commonly used with *sự* nominals denoting mindfulness as can be seen in (3) and (4) below.

(3) Ông bắt đầu thấy rằng chìa khóa của *sự giải thoát* (NMLZ + V) nằm ngay trong từng hơi thở, từng bước chân hoặc từng hạt sỏi bên đường. (OPWC)

→ He began to see that the key to *liberation* (V + NMLZ-ation) lay in each breath, each step, each small pebble along the path.

(4) Chúng sanh không cần đi tìm *sự giác ngộ* (NMLZ + V) ở bên ngoài, bởi vì mỗi sinh vật chứa đủ trong tự thân tất cả trí tuệ và hùng lực của toàn vũ trụ. (OPWC)

→ Living beings did not need to seek *enlightenment* (V+ NMNL-ment) outside of themselves because all the wisdom and strength of the universe was already present in them.

Clearly, the rendering of nominals with *sự* is literally translated into nominals with different nominal markers such as *-ion* or *-ment* in English. The same logic applies to the rendering of *de-adjectival* nominalisations denoting mindfulness by their closest literal equivalents as can be seen in (5) and (6), or by means of conversion as in (7).

(5) Bụt nói phép quán niệm xứ này là con đường có thể giúp mọi người đạt tới *sự thanh tịnh* hóa thân tâm (OPWC).

→ The Buddha referred to it as the path which could help every person attain *peace* of body and mind.

(6) *Niềm an lạc* do cái đẹp ấy cống hiến cũng do đó mà

là *thứ an lạc* chân thực. (OPWC)

→ The *peace and joy* of that beauty is true *peace and joy*.

(7) Chánh niệm là con đường duy nhất để thực hiện *giải thoát và giác ngộ*. (OPWC)

→ This is the secret treasure of mindfulness: it leads to the realization of *liberation and enlightenment*.

The table below shows the representation of literal translation via the process of translating nominalisations.

Table 1. Distribution of occurrences of literal translation in translating nominalisations in both texts

LITERAL TRANSLATION	OPWC		MoM	
	Occurrences	Percentage (%)	Occurrences	Percentage (%)
De-verbal Nouns	173	62	19	51.4
De-adjectival Nouns	36	12.9	4	10.8
Conversion	70	25.1	14	37.8
Total	279	100	37	100

4.2. Transposition

Transposition is identified as a common feature in translation ‘involv(ing) replacing one word class with another without shifting the message meaning’ (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995/2000, p. 36). From the collected data, nominalisations have been found to be transposed into a verb, an adjective, and adverb, a noun phrase, or an adjective phrase, as can be seen in the table below.

Table 2. Types of Transposition of Word Class in Translating Nominalisations Denoting Mindfulness

TYPES OF TRANSPOSITION	VIETNAMESE	ENGLISH
Nominalisation → Verb	Ông sử dụng phần lớn thì giờ của ông vào <i>việc thực tập thiền quán</i> .	He spends almost all his time <i>meditating</i> .
Nominalisation → Adverb	Nên đề ra ít nhất là nửa giờ để tắm gội thông thả trong <i>chánh niệm</i> .	Spend at least a half hour taking a bath slowly and <i>mindfully</i> .
Nominalisation → Adjective	Một người ngồi trong rừng sâu mà nếu không có <i>chánh niệm</i> , ... thì người ấy vẫn không phải là người biết sống một mình.	If a person sitting alone in the middle of a forest is not <i>mindful</i> , ... he is not truly alone
Nominalisation → Noun Phrase	Thực hiện sự nghỉ ngơi, ta thực hiện được <i>sự tĩnh tâm</i> và nhiếp ý là đi được một quãng đường khá dài trong thiền tập rồi.	While relaxation is the necessary point of departure, once one has realized relaxation, it is possible to realize a <i>tranquil heart</i> and clear mind.
Nominalisation → Verb Phrase	Bụt bắt đầu nói chuyện về con đường thánh thiện, có khả năng đưa tới <i>sự diệt khổ</i> và đem lại an lạc.	The Buddha spoke about the path which can <i>end suffering</i> and lead top peace and joy.

	Người tỉnh thức nói theo tiếng Magadhi là Buddha.	A <i>person who is awakened</i> would be called ‘Buddha’ in Magadhi.
Nominalisation → Relative Clause		

4.3. Explicitation

Following Baker’s and Blum-Kulka’s approach, *Explicitation* is now observed from the perspectives of lexis, syntax and stylistics.

4.3.1. Lexical Explicitation

Explicitation of this type is often found by means of

(a) *adding determiners*, or rather pre-determiners like *thiền quán* in (8) being rendered into *my meditation*

(8) Đó là đạo lý duyên sinh mầu nhiệm mà tôi đã khám phá được bằng *thiền quán*. (OPWC)

→ This is the wonderful law of dependent co-arising which I have discovered in *my meditation*.

(b) *filling out the elliptical units*. An example of this is the filling out of *sixteen* in translating *những phép quán niệm hơi thở* to make explicit the elliptical units in the SL segment.

(9) Bụt kết thúc buổi pháp thoại bằng cách yêu cầu chú Rahula lặp lại *những phép quán niệm hơi thở*. (OPWC)

→ The Buddha then concluded the Dharma talk by asking Rahula to recite *the sixteen methods of conscious breathing*.

(c) *making vague Buddhism terms become more precise*. More specifically, some Buddhism terms have vague or abstract meanings, and thus being rendered by a more precise expression as in (10).

(10) *Chánh niệm* bùng tỏ nơi ông như một mặt trời. (OPWC)

→ *Mindful awareness* blazed in him like a bright sun.

4.3.2. Syntactic Explicitation

At the syntactic level, *Explicitation* can be found by

(a) *restructuring the elements of nominalisations*, as seen in cases where de-adjectival nominalisations denoting mindfulness shift their grammatical functions, and perform those of a verb as in (11):

(11) Có khi Bụt dạy chúng cách đi thiền hành để học nếm *sự thanh thoi*. (OPWC)

→ He taught them walking meditation to *refresh* their minds and bodies.

or (b) *making the grammatical structures become more complicated*, as in (12), where ‘tâm ý’ was lost in translation, showing semantic simplification while an embedded case of syntactical explicitation is found with an added verb phrase ‘*to develop* concentration’.

(12) Ngài dạy cho vị sa môn về lòng tin, về sự tinh cần, về cách thở và về *sự tập trung tâm ý*. (OPWC)

→ Alara spoke to the new monk about faith and diligence and showed him how to use his breathing *to develop concentration*.

4.4. Stylistic Explicitation

As for *Stylistic Explicitation*, we can see cases where

there is a tendency to *expand condensed meanings* with ‘*deeper*’ being added in (13), for example.

(13) Bà học được rằng phát triển **sự hiểu biết** cũng là nuôi dưỡng được tình thương. (OPWC)

→ She learned that by developing **deeper understanding**, she could deepen her capacity to love.

We can also observe the tendency towards *making information become precise*, with attributive adjectives being added to elaborate on the nuance of ‘*silence*’, as in

(14) Xếp áo ngoài lại thành bốn bề trải thành tọa cụ trên bờ cỏ, Bụt ngồi đoạn nghiêm thọ trai trong **im lặng**. (OPWC)

→ The Buddha neatly folded his outer robe into a cushion and sat up on it, eating in **mindful silence**.

4.5. Simplification

4.5.1. Lexical Simplification

Lexical Simplification can occur either by *embedding information in references*, i.e. lexical elements being replaced by a possessive adjective (e.g. **sự đi vào quán niệm** in (15) (i.e. *go into mindfulness*) being rendered into **your mindfulness** in the English version; or by *embedding the information* by means of making implicit some information inherent in the SL text without influencing or changing the meaning of these nominalisations in the translated version (e.g. **trạng thái tỉnh thức** being simplified into **awakening** as in (16) with *trạng thái* being made implicit)

(16) Chỉ cần một hơi thở thôi, ta đã có thể thiết lập **trạng thái tỉnh thức** trong ta. (OPWC)

→ With just one breath, you can attain **awakening**.

Alternatively, we can see simplification by *using the same lexical word to refer to similar concepts*. In fact, the translator tends to use a more general word for a specific concept, as can be seen in (17).

(17) Con biết là Thế Tôn sống thường trực trong **tỉnh thức và chánh niệm**. (OPWC)

→ I know that you dwell constantly in **awareness**.

Although **tỉnh thức** and **chánh niệm** are two different nominalised constructions, their meaning which is similar shows the mind of awareness of something happening around us. And in (17) the sharing of nominalisation with **-ness** like **awareness** in translating two converted nouns like **tỉnh thức** (i.e. *awareness*) and **chánh niệm** (i.e. *mindfulness*) are typical cases of lexical simplification.

4.5.2. Syntactic Simplification

Simplification of this type is often found with efforts by the translator to break out long sequences or sentences.

For example, **những hành động xuất phát từ tâm từ bi** has been translated into **all compassionate actions**. However, we can see that in (18) an overlapping of both *lexical and syntactic simplification* (i.e. the simplification in structure and the omission of *tâm*).

(18) ... đều là **những hành động xuất phát từ tâm từ bi** có thể chuyển đổi được tình trạng hiện tại và gây niềm vui cho cha mẹ. (OPWC)

→ ... these are **all compassionate actions** which can

transform the present situation and bring happiness to our parents.

4.5.3. Stylistic Simplification

Simplification of this type can be found by means of *replacing elaborate phraseology with shorter collocations*, which can be shown in (19).

(19) **Quán niệm** khi rửa bát

→ Washing the dishes. (MoM)

Besides, we can observe cases when *simplification* has been adopted by means of *loss in translation*. In the investigated data, some cases are often found when the translator has decided to refer to a simpler representation of the meaning of **sự tỉnh thức** (i.e. *awakening*), but in (20), it has been reduced to a general word **foremost**, a non-obligatory shift in translation.

(20) Hạnh phúc trước tiên là **sự tỉnh thức**. (OPWC)

→ Happiness is **foremost**.

In fact, **sự tỉnh thức** is a term in Buddhism which means ‘*the state of mind*’ with *tỉnh* referring to ‘*alertness of mind*’; and *thức* to ‘*consciousness of mind*’. In some cases, **sự tỉnh thức** can be translated into *mindfulness* or *awakening*; however, in (20) it is an example of under-translation, a showcase of the strategy of what has been called *stylistic simplification*, where the alteration via translation depends on the choice made by the translator, not out of the differences between two language systems. Table 3 as shown below summarises the strategies adopted via the process of translating these English nominalisations.

Table 3. Summary of frequencies of strategies used in ‘OPWC’ and ‘MoM’

No.	STRATEGIES	OPWC		MoM	
		Occurrences	Percentage (%)	Occurrences	Percentage (%)
1	Literal Translation	260	41.9	68	24.2
2	Transposition	60	9.7	42	14.9
3	Explicitation	149	24	65	23.2
4	Simplification	151	24.4	106	37.7
TOTAL		620	100	281	100

As revealed in Table 3, *Literal translation* has the highest tendency in both texts with 328 occurrences out of 901, making up one-third of all strategies used. However, in ‘MoM’ text alone, this strategy has almost equal occurrences compared with *Explicitation*, but it is lower than *Simplification* (68 against 106 occurrences). *Simplification* in both texts, however, is shown more commonly than *Explicitation*, ranking second of the four strategies. This may be because nominalisations used by Thich Nhat Hanh are often explicit in meaning, or that the author wishes to make the Buddhist terms easily comprehensible to any layman to read his texts; and thus, the translator wants to simplify the expression of meaning in order to make the conveyed messages more easily comprehensible for the reader.

5. Conclusion

The phenomenon of nominalisation can be seen as one of the linguistic features, characteristic of written discourses (Thompson 2000) with more condensed and complicated expressions of meaning. Efforts to render nominalisations in the act of going from one language to another facilitate necessary changes or alterations in terms of wording, which explains why strategies have been adopted in rendering the message conveyed in nominalised constructions in Vietnamese. Besides the common strategy of literal rendition, transposition and other alternative approaches – explicitation and simplification, which have been proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995/2000) and Baker (1996) and Blum-Kulka (1986/2000) are seen as prevalent too in efforts to transfer the meaning embedded in the Vietnamese nominalisations denoting mindfulness in OPWC (or ‘*Đường Xưa Mây Trắng*’) and MoM (or ‘*Phép Lạ Của Sự Tỉnh Thức*’) by Thích Nhất Hạnh. The findings presented in this paper may provide better insight into the features as well as representation of meaning in nominalised constructions in Vietnamese as well as the various ways whereby they can be reproduced in the TL text for the equivalent effect of communication (Nida 2001), and in this case the teachings and philosophies of Buddhism via the lens of nominalisations denoting mindfulness. Some similarities and differences in terms of typology - word order and word classes – can be seen as attributable to the different strategies found in the English translation of nominalisations denoting mindfulness in Vietnamese.

For language teaching and learning, it is important, first of all, that language learners understand how nominalisations in English and Vietnamese are formed, and that the teacher needs to point out the differences in wording for the expression of the meaning represented by means of nominalization between English and Vietnamese. Also, the teacher should build exercises involved in using the strategies in rendering Vietnamese nominalisations into English, providing learners with more exposure to practice translating nominalisations. Through examples of different pairs of SL and TL texts, the teacher can show instances of explicitation or simplification in different terms – lexical,

syntactic and stylistic, or the adoption of several strategies when comparing both SL and TL texts. Besides, the teacher should direct learners to cases where an overlapping of strategies is needed for an effective rendition of meaning.

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