

COMMON STRUCTURAL ERRORS IN VIETNAMESE - ENGLISH TRANSLATION MADE BY ENGLISH MAJORED STUDENTS AT DUY TAN UNIVERSITY

NHỮNG LỖI THƯỜNG GẶP KHI DỊCH CÁC CẤU TRÚC TIẾNG VIỆT SANG TIẾNG ANH CỦA SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGỮ TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DUY TÂN

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Abstract - This article investigates common errors that Vietnamese students often make in the process of translating Vietnamese sentence structures into English. The analysis focuses on the types and frequency of errors in translating Vietnamese structures into the English language such as sentences with elliptical subjects, passive sentences, subordinate clauses in complex sentences, and negative sentences. The subjects of the investigation were 150 English -majored students in four Translation 1 classes of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Duy Tan University. Common errors made by the students included Omission of Subject, Inappropriate Choice of Subject or Predicate, Inappropriate Choice of Negative Form, and Lack of Main Clause in Complex Sentences. Noticeably, errors caused by "hidden" elements in Vietnamese sentences were the most common. The researcher wishes to provide some practical guidelines for teachers to help students prevent these errors in doing Vietnamese - English translation.

Key words - translation errors; error analysis; structures; Vietnamese - English translation; English major

1. Introduction

In recent years, studies of second language acquisition have tended to focus on learners errors since they allow for prediction of difficulties involved in acquiring a second language. In this way, teachers can be aware of the difficult areas to be encountered by their students and devote special care and emphasis to them.

Although there have been many studies on error analysis and contrastive analysis in second language learning and teaching, very few studies focus on types of analysis made by Vietnamese university students in translation. This present study aims to fill this gap in the field of error analysis in Vietnamese-English translation.

The study's main hypothesis is that students face challenges with certain grammatical structures when they want to render Vietnamese sentences into English. In addition, the Vietnamese empty elements can cause some difficulties for the translation process. It is hoped that the present study will throw light on common types of errors made by English-majored students in translating different Vietnamese structures. What is more, the problems found in this present study may help teachers and material designers choose an appropriate pedagogical method.

2. Research Questions

The following research questions are raised by this study:

1. What types of errors do students usually make in translating Vietnamese structures into English?
2. What pedagogical implications for teachers can be drawn to help students deal with such errors?

Tóm tắt - Bài báo khảo sát những lỗi sinh viên Việt Nam thường mắc phải khi dịch các loại cấu trúc câu từ tiếng Việt sang tiếng Anh. Bài viết tập trung phân tích các loại lỗi và tần số xuất hiện của lỗi trong các bản dịch của sinh viên bao gồm một số cấu trúc như câu rút gọn chủ ngữ, câu bị động, mệnh đề phụ thuộc trong câu phức hay câu phủ định. Đối tượng khảo sát bao gồm 150 sinh viên chuyên ngữ tại bốn lớp Biên Dịch 1, Trường ch tiếng Anh bao gồm câu thiếu chủ ngữ, câu có thành phần vị ngữ, chủ ngữ hoặc yếu tố phủ định không phù hợp, hay câu phức thiếu mệnh đề chính. Đặc biệt, lỗi do yếu tố "ẩn" trong câu tiếng Việt gây ra là phổ biến nhất. Người viết mong muốn cung cấp chỉ dẫn cho người dạy nhằm hạn chế các loại lỗi do dịch cấu trúc từ tiếng Việt sang tiếng Anh của sinh viên.

Từ khóa - lỗi dịch; phân tích lỗi; cấu trúc; dịch Việt - Anh; chuyên ngành tiếng Anh

3. Theoretical Background

3.1. Errors and error analysis in language learning and use

Errors have long been the obsession of language instructors and researchers. With the emergence of the generative-transformational theory in linguistics and the cognitive movement in psychology, the attitude towards errors has significantly changed. Students' errors are therefore treated as a surface phenomenon. In the light of errors analysis theory, some terms have been coined to describe the legitimacy of learners' second language systems.

Richards (1974) identified six major sources of errors as follows: (1) interference, (2) overgeneralization, (3) performance errors, (4) markers of transitional competence, (5) strategies of communication and assimilation and (6) teacher – included errors.

Later, Brown (1980) further classified sources of errors into the following categories:

1. Interference transfer: the negative influence of the mother tongue of learners;
2. Intralingual transfer: the negative transfer of items within the target language, i.e. the incorrect generalization of the rules within the target language;
3. Context of learning: this overlaps both types of transfer. In a classroom context, the teacher or the textbook can lead the learner to make wrong generalization about the language;
4. Communication strategies: it is obvious that a communication strategy is the conscious employment of verbal mechanisms for communicating an idea when

linguistic forms are not available to learners for some reasons.

In his book *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (2010), Richard defined learners' error as "the use of a linguistic item (e.g. a word, a grammatical item, a speech act, etc.) in a way which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning" [9].

His study showed different types of errors relating to production and distribution of verb groups, prepositions, articles, and the use of questions. He classified errors, according to their causes, into two categories as follows:

1. Interference errors: errors resulting from the use of elements from one language while speaking/writing another. These errors are caused by mother tongue interference.

2. Intralingual errors: errors reflecting general characteristics of rule learning such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply. This type of errors occurs during the learning process of the second language at a stage when the learners have not really acquired the knowledge.

In summary, the analysis of errors in language learning and use can be a positive experience in order to help the learners improve their language and use English flawlessly. All of the theories can be considered as important factors in second language acquisition.

3.2. Teaching Translation to English-majored students at Duy Tan University (DTU)

Translation 1 is one of the compulsory courses in the teaching curriculum for English-majored students at Duy Tan University. This course is applied for sophomore and junior students who have already finished the courses of Translation Theory and Advanced English Grammar. Therefore, most of the students are qualified enough in analyzing sentence structures as well as realizing some strategies for translating different types of structures. The course focuses on 9 types of structures:

1. Translation of Sentences with Expanded Comment;
2. Translation of Sentences with Expanded Subjects;
3. Translation of Existence Structures;
4. Translation of "Empty Elements";
5. Translation of Conditionals;
6. Translation of the Passive Voice;
7. Translation of Inverted Structures;
8. Translation of Compound Sentences;
9. Translation of Complex Sentences.

All of the texts are taken from various sources such as books, newspapers and the Internet. Especially, the followings are used as reference books:

1. Hùng, N.Q. (2007). *Hướng dẫn kỹ thuật biên dịch Anh-Việt – Việt-Anh*. Nhà xuất bản Văn hóa Sài Gòn (Saigon Culture Publishing House);
2. Du, N.H. (1997). *Luyện dịch Việt-Anh qua những mẫu câu thông dụng*. Nhà xuất bản Đồng Nai (Dong Nai Publishing House);
3. Can, L. M. (2011). *Kỹ năng luyện dịch tiếng Anh*. Nhà xuất bản Thanh Niên (Youth Publishing House);

In order to conduct a successful translation class, first, it

is important that the teacher gives students techniques for translating a specific structure. Then, students are required to practise themselves. The exercises must be well-prepared and challenging enough so that they feel motivated. Students can discuss with their classmates about the terms or structures they intend to use in their translation. After that the teacher randomly chooses some students and asks them to write down their translated version on the board. Before the teacher checks and gives feedback, students are encouraged to give their comments and suggestions for correction if they identify any errors in the versions. For the final step, the teacher gives some feedback and instructs students to correct the errors if needed.

4. Research Methodology

For the purpose of making an investigation into students' errors in translation of structures of Vietnamese into English, this research was designed as a descriptive one with a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Firstly, the investigation attempted to identify common errors that English-majored students make when they render given Vietnamese sentence structures into English language. Then, the quantitative method was used to gather the data so that the frequency of errors could be identified.

5. Data Collection and Analysis

The study investigated 150 sophomore and junior English-majored students from Faculty of Foreign Languages, Duy Tan University. The samples were 150 progress test papers of the students from four Translation 1 classes ENG 271A, ENG 271B, ENG 271C and ENG 271D. Of the 150 students, 106 were juniors and 44 were sophomores. In the test, students were asked to translate 30 Vietnamese sentences with different structures into English in 60 minutes. No dictionaries or translation tools were permitted. The errors listed were mainly identified through Richards' distinction of learners' errors-interlingual and intralingual (1974).

In addition, four EFL teachers who have at least three years' experience in teaching Translation for English-majored students were asked to answer questions about frequent errors that students make in their Translation 1 classes. To add more to the validity of the common errors, 10 randomly chosen students in the four classes were also asked about their difficulties in learning Vietnamese-English translation.

6. Findings and Discussion

The initial results from the interviews collected in this study indicate that English-majored students at Duy Tan University usually experienced difficulties in Vietnamese – English translation practice. A large number of students feel really nervous about the agreement of subjects and verbs, negative forms, passive structures as well as connecting clauses together. Especially, they often make mistakes with empty elements in Vietnamese sentences.

Further results from the collected test papers implicate certain interesting facts concerning these errors and some

others. The analysis of the translations produced by 150 students shows six frequent types of errors. They are: Omission of Subject, Inappropriate Choice of Negative Form, Inappropriate Choice of Predicate, Inappropriate Choice of Subject, Inappropriate Usage of Passive Form, and Lack of Main Clause.

Table 1. Distribution of errors relating to the translation of Vietnamese structures

No.	Types of errors	A	B	C	D	Total	Percent-age
1	Omission of Subject	18	16	15	14	63	42%
2	Inappropriate Choice of Negative Form	3	2	0	4	9	6%
3	Inappropriate Choice of Predicate	11	6	10	11	38	25.3%
4	Inappropriate Choice of Subject	13	11	15	12	49	32.7%
5	Inappropriate Usage of Passive Form	14	12	8	11	45	30%
6	Lack of Main Clause	10	7	4	8	29	19.3%

Table 1 shows the distribution of errors relating to the translation of structures of students in four classes. Of the 150 test papers, 63 identified Omission of Subject as the most frequent error. Closely following this item was Inappropriate Choice of Subject (49) while Inappropriate Choice of Negative Form and Lack of Main Clause were the least frequent errors.

A large number of students usually make the Omission of Subject error when the empty pronoun or elliptical subject appears in Vietnamese sentences. They do not always correctly identify the referent of the missing subject when they need to transfer those sentences into English. Therefore, the subject in their translated version is often left out. For example:

Original Text	Students' Translation	Suggested Version
Về mùa hè, trên Đà Lạt hay có sương mù.	<u>In Da Lat in the summer</u> is often foggy.	It is often foggy in Da Lat in summer.
Nếu có đủ tiền, chúng tôi sẽ mua căn nhà ấy.	<u>If have enough money</u> , we will buy that house.	If we have enough money, we will buy that house.
Thật ngớ ngẩn khi câu cá mà không có mồi câu.	<u>Really fool when go fishing</u> with no baits.	It is really fool to go fishing with no baits.

In Vietnamese, negation of the content of the predicate is expressed by means of negative particles such as “*không*”, “*chẳng*”, “*đâu*”, “*chả*”, or “*chưa*” which is placed before the head verb in “the comment”. Similarly, there are some adverbs in English to indicate negative meaning such as “*no*”, “*not*” or “*not yet*”.

In addition, plenty of verbs in English denoting prohibition, refusal, forgetting or omission take “*no*” itself. Students tend to ignore the negative meaning of these verbs and add a negative adverb before them as in the examples below:

Original Text	Students' Translation	Suggested Version
Nó chẳng nói, chẳng rằng.	He <u>not speak not say</u> .	He did not say a word.
Anh chẳng phải là gì cả đối với cô ấy.	You are <u>not nothing</u> to her.	You are not anything to her.
Tôi quên không gửi thư.	I <u>forgot not to mail</u> the letter.	I forgot to mail the letter.
Không ai không khen nó.	<u>Nobody didn't</u> praise him.	Everybody praised him.
Mẹ tôi không bao giờ không làm gì cả.	My mother <u>never doesn't do anything</u> .	My mother never stops working.

The predicate of the kernel sentence can be a Verb phrase, a Noun phrase or a Prepositional phrase which is introduced by “*là*”. In that case, students tend to use “*to be*” followed by another main verb in their English version.

Besides, in Vietnamese the word “*có*” can be used to indicate existence. The equivalent structure in English is “*There + to be + Noun*”. However, Vietnamese “students tend to use the verb “*to have*” in this case. That is because “*to have*” in English often means “*có*” in Vietnamese.

Additionally, in case of an empty element, some students forget to add a suitable verb in their translated sentence, which is not accepted in English grammar. For instance:

Original Text	Students' Translation	Suggested Version
Ước muốn của tôi là học y khoa.	My wish <u>is study medicine</u> .	My wish <u>is to study medicine</u> .
Có nhiều cạnh tranh trong ngành du lịch và dịch vụ.	There <u>have</u> a lot of competition in travel and service industry.	There <u>is</u> a lot of competition in the travel and service industry.
Xe đạp của tôi phanh không ăn.	My bicycle <u>brakes not work</u> .	My bicycle' <u>brakes don't work</u> .

The Inappropriate Choice of Subject errors are found when the subject is a verb phrase in the source language. When rendering the language, students tend to use an equivalent verb phrase to function as the subject in their English sentence. In fact, the subject should be a noun, noun phrase or pronoun in the English language. This structure is used mostly in definitions and in explanations. For example:

Original Text	Students' Translation	Suggested Version
Tập thể dục là giữ gìn sức khỏe.	<u>Do exercise is preserve health</u> .	To exercise is to preserve one's health.
Chị cư xử như thế là rất đúng.	<u>You behave that way is very correct</u> .	It was very correct of you to behave that way.
Chạy cho cậu con cả sang Mỹ du học là nỗi lo âu của họ.	<u>Run for oldest son to study in the U.S is their worry</u> .	Their worry is to take the required steps to enable their oldest son to study in the U.S.

Sometimes the expressions of the passive in Vietnamese should be active in English and vice versa. In example 1, the original text is an active sentence which becomes a causative passive sentence in English. However, students used the active structure in their English version. Example 2 includes the terms “*được*” and “*bị*”, which are often used to indicate the passive voice in Vietnamese. Nonetheless, the use of the passive structure “*are not used*” is not correct. Instead, the expression should be rendered as “*cannot use*”. Example 3 the English version should include “*personal*” or “*impersonal*” passive which is seen as a difficult grammatical point for lots of Vietnamese students. The phrase “*bị đánh cắp*” in the original text should therefore be translated as “*to have been stolen*” rather than “*was stolen*”. Here are three examples of passive structures errors:

Original Text	Students' Translation	Suggested Version
Cậu cắt tóc ở đâu vậy?	Where <u>did you cut</u> your hair?	Where did you have your hair cut?
Khoảng 2 tỉ người không được dùng nước sạch và ¼ dân số thế giới sẽ bị thiếu nước trong 10 năm tới.	About 2 billion people <u>are not used</u> clean water and a quarter of world population will be short of water in the next decade.	About 2 billion people <u>cannot use</u> clean water and a quarter of world population will be short of water in the next decade.
Bức tranh được cho là đã bị đánh cắp.	The painting <u>is supposed was stolen</u> .	The painting is supposed to have been stolen.

Unlike the case in English, the second clause of a complex sentence in Vietnamese that follows some concession has to be introduced by the connective “*nhưng*” or “*song*”. Hence, some students added the terms “*but*” or “*however*” before that second clause.

In example 2, the first clause that denotes a cause and is often called “circumstantial clause” can be placed after the second clause. In that case, the element “*nên*” as a “result” should be deleted.

Original Text	Students' Translation	Suggested Version
Tuy nó mới có mười tuổi thôi nhưng nó thông minh bằng người mười bốn mười lăm.	<u>Although</u> he is only ten years old, <u>but</u> he is as intelligent as somebody 14 or 15 years old.	<u>Although</u> he is only ten years old, he is as intelligent as somebody aged 14 or 15 years.
Tại họ chủ quan nên họ mới bị thất bại.	<u>Because</u> they were subjective, <u>so</u> they failed.	They failed <u>because</u> they were subjective.

7. Discussion and Implications

Errors are simply inevitable in the process of language perception. The causes of errors vary from student to student.

Firstly, the main possible cause of students' errors is the inability to overcome the negative influence of the mother tongue in language learning. In fact, English and Vietnamese share both similarities and differences. A lot

of errors are the interference of Vietnamese as students' mother tongue and they have to be overcome in the progress of learning until they are completely eradicated.

Secondly, it is necessary to be aware that in Vietnamese sentences the subject is often dropped, but not in English. Consequently, students should carefully analyze and comprehend the source text to find the missing subjects, direct or indirect objects and so forth.

Thirdly, because of “poor language competence”, sometimes students feel “extremely embarrassed” if they cannot find out any equivalent structure in English to match to the source language which is Vietnamese. Frankly speaking, English grammar is extremely complicated for most of Vietnamese learners. The limitation of grammar knowledge leads Vietnamese students to translate word by word. As a result, this may lead to content misunderstanding and then wrong translation.

What is more, it is really interesting to find out that lack of motivation can affect students' psychology. A lot of students consider Vietnamese - English translation to be far more challenging to them than English - Vietnamese translation. Thus, whenever facing difficulties, they leave them out.

Some other students confess that because of time pressure, they only had time to look over the translated text once and made some minor adjustments. Lack of concentration while translating also led them to transfer the message inappropriately.

From the possible causes proposed by the teachers and students, some suggestions are given as follows:

First of all, students should try to overcome the negative influence of the mother tongue in Vietnamese-English translation. Students should avoid word by word translation or getting the wrong choice of structure in English as the target language.

Besides, it is important that students set up their time to read books, newspapers every day. It is not just reading for information but reading intensively. In doing so, not only will they learn more words, structures as well as writing styles in English but also consolidate their knowledge in culture and specific industry fields.

Furthermore, sufficient grammar enables students to feel more confident in using English structures, succeed in conveying targeted texts' ideas and particularly avoid awkward expressions.

Last but not least, it is obvious that practice is the best way to improve students' translation skills and to reduce translation errors. Practice also helps find differences between English – Vietnamese structures of sentences. Consequently, students' translation becomes smoother and more fluent.

8. Conclusion

Errors have been regarded as a significant part to both teachers and students in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language. For the teachers, errors can tell them how far towards the goal a learner has progressed and what remains for him or her to learn. Hence, students' errors are valuable feedbacks for the teachers. For students, making

mistakes, to some extent, can be beneficial to the learning process. Therefore, the teachers should learn to tolerate some errors. However, some other errors need to be handled to prevent them from becoming a fossilized habit.

One of the efficient teaching strategies is that we explore learners' psychological process in language learning to understand more about their errors. By realizing the causes of their errors, we know when we should give our students some help or support. In addition, it is important that teachers care about the teaching objectives, students' linguistic competence as well as their affective factors and the effectiveness of the error correction. As a result, we can apply more flexible strategies to error correction and make more contributions to the EFL classroom teaching and learning.

The number of errors found in the data may not be large enough to announce that Vietnamese English-major

students always have a great deal of difficulty in handling Vietnamese – English translation exercises. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that these errors still need to be identified and collected during the process of translation training.

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(The Board of Editors received the paper on 07/5/2018, its review was completed on 09/6/2018)