

## **SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN TRANSLATING LITERARY WORKS THROUGH DESIGNED EXERCISES: AN IDEA IN TEACHING ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE TO ENGLISH MAJORS**

**Nguyen Thi Quyet**

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**Abstract:** *The English and American Literature module causes many difficulties for students because of language barriers, especially metaphorical expressions. This study focuses on designing exercises that help students overcome those barriers to improve their ability in translating English metaphorical expression. The results show that the students appreciated these exercises and, at the same time, the test results of the experimental group were higher than the control group.*

**Keywords:** *English and American literature, metaphorical expressions, learning English.*

### **1. Introduction**

Teaching literature to English major students is a hard work for any teacher of English although the benefits of it are undeniable. As it “offers a bountiful and extremely varied body of written materials which is “important” in the sense that it says something about fundamental human issues, and which is ending rather than ephemeral.” (Collier & Slater, 1988: 5) Therefore, how to teach this subject well in the second language classroom puts forwards a challenge for teachers. Sell (1995), Short (1988), Thiong’o, Nwa (1986) also study about the teaching of literature in language classroom, showing the challenge that teachers and students have to face with. We bear in mind the idea that teaching English and American literature is to help students enrich their cultural knowledge, their language, and also help to summon the whole person (here the students) into the literary works. We also realize that our students have quite a lot of difficulties in understanding the content of the works thoroughly and mainly the difficulties come from the metaphorical expressions in the works. This is a prerequisite for us to design exercises to help students understand and translate them better, therefore, enforcing the ability in translating the whole work. Our application of exercises has proved to be useful in terms of the translation results as well as motivation creating for English majors at Hong Duc university. The results show positive results when we compare the translation assessment between the experimental and the control group.

### **2. A Brief description of the current teaching reality**

It is clear that for a foreign language learner who learns a literary work, they have both a linguistic and cultural gap to bridge, so preparing them with something so that it is within

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Nguyen Thi Quyet

Faculty of Foreign Languages, Hong Duc University

Email: Nguyenthiquyet@hdu.edu.vn (✉)

their normal reading proficiency is ideal. For the author recited their works not dependent on any goals for any level of readers, the choice is left to the teacher who should apply his or her knowledge, skills tactfully in choosing the appropriate material for his students.

The activities that have been carried out in our literary classroom are various such as role play, improvisation, creative writing, discussion, visuals etc. When we discovered that our students have problems in understanding the works and the obstacles were the metaphorical expressions, we decided to design the exercises to help them understand it better so that they can have a better translation of the works. The focal points of the course are:

Help students understand the works.

Equip students with the knowledge of culture.

Develop students' personal dimensions, i.e. behavior, ideology etc.

Build up students' translation competence.

Help students give their ideas on a certain issue generated from the works.

### **3. Some cornerstones of the study**

#### ***3.1. Metaphor***

There are different approaches to metaphor, in this study, we look at them in the view of cognitive approach. Metaphor is often considered a linguistic convention which implicitly compares two things. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) , it is a part of language usage, therefore, it is a part of cognition. Further, metaphor is not merely cognitive it is also a linguistic, sociocultural, neural, and bodily phenomenon. Metaphors are created based on conceptual ground, which is termed conceptual metaphor, and therefore it is not only understood as a separated one but in association with a system of many other metaphors, together, all of them form what is called a "conceptual metaphor". The distinction between the concept of metaphor in traditional approach and CL is that, in CL perspective, metaphor is considered as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. For example "He was in the highest spirits after you left" may mean "very happy" when one status of emotion is put into the domain of space (low or high). Bear in mind those ideas, we draw out metaphors from the works in the course and build exercises from them to helps students can understand the language better.

#### ***3.2. Procedure of exercise building***

First, we had to scrutinize into the work to define and pick out metaphorical expressions. After they were selected, they then were put into different types exercises with the purpose that they can help students understand those metaphors better in order to understand the works better. We designed exercises in three types.

*Type one:* Direct translation: This exercise gave students a list of metaphorical expressions and asked them to work in pairs to translate them before they translated the work. The purpose of this is to make students focus one and have a clear understanding of those expressions. For example, in the work: "The adventure of the cardboard box" (Conan Doyle), several metaphorical expressions were listed for students as follows:

*Translate the following expressions.*

1. First he dropped me.
2. Miss Cushing had come upon a subject on which she felt very deeply.
3. Holmes listened attentively to everything, throwing in a question from time to time.
4. He had caught her meddling, I suspect, and given her a bit of his mind. With this exercise, students see that the metaphorical expressions are highlighted and also they can have an opportunity to discuss with their friends and their teacher about the meaning of those.

*Type two: Matching:* This exercise asks students to match the English expressions with Vietnamese equivalents. Both of them were given to students beforehand. The Vietnamese expressions are mixed so that students have to work in groups to sort them out. For example, in the story “The model millionaire” (Oscar Wilde), the exercise can be put in this way:

*Match the English expression on the left with the Vietnamese equivalent on the right.*

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. He never said a brilliant or even an <u>ill-natured thing</u> in his life.</li> <li>2. Hughie <u>lived on</u> two hundred a year that an old aunt allowed him.</li> <li>3. What was a butterfly to do among bulls and bears?</li> <li>4. That did not <u>answer</u>.</li> </ol>	<p>Anh được người cô già chu cấp cho số tiền hai trăm một năm để sinh nhai.</p> <p>Anh sống trên hai trăm một năm mà người cô già cho phép anh.</p> <p>Anh ta chưa bao giờ nói một điều gì sáng láng hoặc một điều xấu xa trong đời.</p> <p>Anh ta chưa bao giờ nói một điều gì thông minh hoặc một thứ tự nhiên óm đầu trong đời.</p> <p>Điều đó đã không trả lời.</p> <p>Một con bướm phải bay thế nào giữa những con bò và gấu?</p> <p>Người cô già cho phép anh sống trên hai trăm một năm.</p> <p>Nhằm nhò gì châu chấu đá xe?</p> <p>Nhờn nhờ vui chơi giữa bò và gấu?</p> <p>Nó đã không trả lời.</p> <p>Việc đó cũng chả đem lại ích lợi gì.</p>
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This exercise is similar to multiple choice exercise, however, it is different in the way that the Vietnamese expressions are mixed so that students would have to work together figure out what should be the best translation for the metaphor they are dealing with.

*Type three: Multiple choice:* In this exercise, students would be supplied with expressions and their meaning in English, students then had to find out which option was the best to fit with the metaphorical expression given. The following contains some sample questions from the work “A story of the bad little boy”. (Mark Twain)

*Choose the best option A, B, C or D for the similar expression with the bold one.*

1. She would be glad to lie down in the grave and **be at rest**.  
 A. relax                      B. sleep                      C. at home                      D. die peacefully
2. The world might be harsh and cold towards him when she **was gone**.  
 A. disappeared                      B. died                      C. went                      D. moved
3. She was not anxious **on Jim's account**.  
 A. because of Jim                      B. about Jim's calculation                      C. for his nickname                      D. for his explanation

4. He didn't kneel down and rise up with a **light, happy heart**.

- A. without trouble                      B. bright                      C. not heavy                      D. small

With this exercise, students also worked individually or in pairs to define the exact meaning of the phrase selected. The purpose is to help students understand clearly the English expressions which are challenging for them in dealing with the full text.

**4. Methodology**

The study was carried out within 14 weeks – a semester with a different treatment to the experimental group, K16B with 51 students, and a group without treatment (in this case the designed exercise), K16A with 5 students. The course contained 7 works with more than 30,000 words. First, we discovered our students’ difficulties in learning the subject after teaching one week, a questionnaire was handed to get their ideas on the subject. After it was obvious that they were very much concerned with difficult metaphorical expressions, we then decided to designed exercises to help them understand them better. Then during the time of application, we had some informal interview with them and got ideas to modify out exercises. At the end of the term, we handed another questionnaire to check see what is our students’ ideas of the exercises in terms of their helpfulness. We also compare the translation results between two groups.

**5. Findings and discussions**

In this section, we would like to present the results of the questionnaire related to students’ ideas of the difficulties they face as, the translation results as well as their evaluation of the exercises designed.

**5.1. Students ideas of the difficulties they face in the subject.**

With four dimensions related to language challenges which were supposed by the teacher, namely vocabulary, sentence structure, tense combination, and metaphorical expressions. The results collected are shown in the following table.

*Table 1. Difficulties students face in terms of language in literary works*

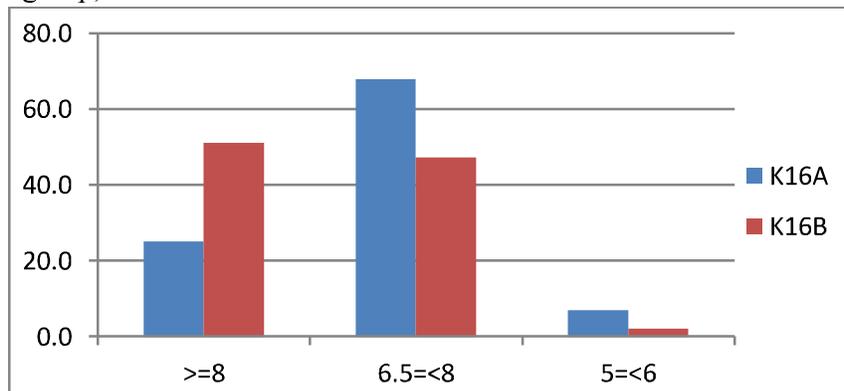
Level of difficult Dimension	Very difficult		Difficult		Not very difficult		Easy	
	Number	Ratio (%)	Number	Ratio (%)	Number	Ratio (%)	Number	Ratio (%)
Vocabulary	13	25.5	32	62.7	6	11.8	0	13
Sentential structure	10	19.6	32	62.7	9	17.6	0	10
Tense combination	1	2.0	18	35.3	30	58.8	2	1
Metaphorical expression	39	76.5	11	21.6	1	2.0	0	39

With vocabulary, among 51 students surveyed, a significant number, 13 students, equivalent to 25.5% selected the *very difficult* level, while a majority of the students chose *difficult* level as what they perceive in vocabulary, only 11.8% agreed upon the third choice, it is *not very difficult*.

At the same level of difficulty, vocabulary and sentence structure share similar proportion: 26 and 20 percent, respectively. Besides, with the *difficult* level, 22% of the students select metaphorical expressions at this level, while 64 and 62 percent of students thought that that vocabulary and sentential structure are of this level. Specially, no one chose the third and fourth levels, *not very difficult*, and *easy* for metaphors. All students realized that metaphorical expressions are difficult, if not very difficult. This was an outstanding result and it needs to have a treatment to deal with a phenomenon that no one thinks not very difficult. This fact is understandable as this language use (metaphor) is never easy, in many cases even for the native speakers, as it is the product of the author’s creativity.

**5.2. Results of the translation assessment**

After 14 weeks applying the exercises designed for the experimental class, we then synthesize the translation works and compare the two groups: K16A control group and K16B experimental group, and the results are shown as follows.

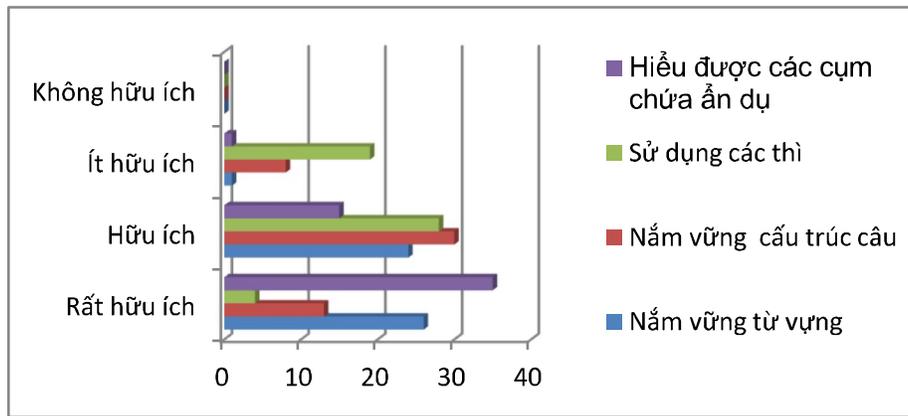


**Figure 1.** Translation assessment results from the control and experimental group

As can be seen from the chart, the marks from 6.5 to 8 in the control group are dominant (76%) while the number of the experimental group is 48%. Meanwhile, the experimental group outweighs the other in the rate of the mark 8 and higher. (50% compared to 28%). With the lowest mark group (from 5 to 6), the control group bears a higher number than the experimental one (6% compared to 2%). It is obvious that those who are helped with the metaphorical expressions beforehand have better accuracy in translating the work.

**5.3. Students’ evaluation of the designed exercises**

After applying the exercises into the course, we then issued a questionnaire to understand how far we had helped students with the proposed difficult dimensions we mentioned at the beginning of the term. We also focused on four dimensions: vocabulary, sentence structure, tense combination, and metaphorical expressions. We only wanted to know if the exercises were helpful to the students. The results drawn out are shown in the following table.



**Figure 2.** Students' evaluation of the helpfulness of the exercises

The table shows that among four level of helpfulness, 70 percent of students thought that the exercises were useful for them in understanding the metaphorical expressions, they also thought that the exercises were very helpful in learning vocabulary and structure (52 and 26 percent, respectively). Relatively equal numbers of students considered that those exercises were helpful for them in four dimensions, of which, the vocabulary, sentential structure and tense combination stand around 50 percent while 30 percent is the figure of metaphorical expressions. It can be seen that students think the exercises are very helpful and this is a good signal of what the teacher has carried out to help students understand the works in the course.

## 6. Conclusion

Teaching language to students is not an easy job, teaching language through literature is even more challenging. Being teachers, we know that, understanding clearly the language of the literary works would help students fulfill other goals we establish for the English majors in learning English and American literature, that is: Learning the language, the culture, perfect their personality etc. Beside several activities to teach the subjects which have been proved to be successful, designing exercises to help students understand clearly metaphorical expressions is a good way and has shown its significant effects in students' translation results as well as their positive feedback. Although it is not easy to design the exercises as it requires a lot of time and energy to design, it is worth doing so as we would come nearer to students' expectation.

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