AN INVESTIGATION INTO COMMON ERRORS IN VIETNAMESE-ENGLISH TRANSLATION MADE BY THIRD-YEAR ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT THU DAU MOT UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate students' common errors in Vietnamese-English translation. Eighty-two third-year English major students (69 female, 13 male) of the Foreign Language Faculty, Thu Dau Mot University participated in the study. To identify students' errors in Vietnamese-English translation, the participants were asked to take five weekly assignments and one translation test. The results revealed that students made grammatical, lexical, and spelling errors. The causes of the observed errors were also indicated, including interferences of native langue due to differences between English and Vietnamese, students' inadequate culture knowledge, insufficient linguistic competence in the English and Vietnamese languages, inappropriate translation strategies, misunderstanding, and carelessness. In addition, some suggestions are provided in the light of the findings identified in the study to help improve translation learning and teaching at the University.

Key words: Vietnamese-English translation, grammatical errors, lexical errors, spelling errors

1. Introduction

According to the latest research, translation has played a prominent part in globalization, and international integration in recent years. Xuelian (2012) believes that translation has greatly contributed to the information exchange across cultural boundaries. With the help of translation, a minor community can reach out to the world and show its unique culture, which implies that through translation people can learn how to appreciate different cultures, communities and countries (Serdihun & Sivasish, 2012). In addition, translation can be applied as an effective means of promoting learners' language learning since using learners' mother tongue in language learning process can intensify learners' confidence and also give them positive feeling of relaxation (Husain,1996; Sayuki, 2011).

In the context of Thu Dau Mot University, translation is a compulsory subjects. However, a majority of the students cannot achieve good results in the subject, which can be shown through the students' final exams at the end of the last semester (March, 2016). In addition, from the classroom observations during translation course in the academic year 2014-2015, the researcher found that the students encounter many problems and difficulties.

To improve translation teaching and learning at Thu Dau Mot University, it is necessary to identify students' common errors in translation as well as their causes. Moreover, both of the

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teacher and students need to work out suitable solutions to improve students' translation performance and the teacher's translation teaching methods.

The study is carried out in an attempt to find out the answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the common types of errors in Vietnamese-English translation made by third-year English major students of Thu Dau Mot University?
2. What are the possible causes leading to those errors?

2. Review of related literature

2.1. Error analysis

Error analysis is defined as "an analytical tool, as are the specification or transitional construction, the computation of acquisition orders, and the delineation of special utterance types" (Dulay et al., 1982). Based on analysis as a process, Ellis (1997) states that error analysis involves suitable and effective teaching and learning strategy, and remedy which are needed in certain clearly marked out areas of foreign language. In general, error analysis is the study of error about its types and the amount of errors that occurred, which is usually used by researchers or language teachers.

2.2. Definitions of translation

Translation has been variously defined. Catford (1965) and Hartmann & Stock (1972) agree that translation is the replacement of textual material in one language (source language) by equivalent textual material in another language (target language). Wills (1982) also adds that translation is a procedure which leads from a written source language text to an optimally equivalent target language text, and which requires the syntactic, semantic, stylistic, and text pragmatic comprehension by the translator of the original text. To conclude, translation can be defined as the replacement of a source language text by a target language equivalent text in which the meaning of the text and author's intention is preserved.

2.3. Kinds of Translation

Larson (1984) divides translation into two main kinds: literal and idiomatic translation. According to the author, literal translation is translation which attempts to follow the form of the source language text. In other words, literal translation is a "word-for-word" translation which follows closely the form of the source language. Otherwise, meaning-based translation makes every effort to communicate the meaning of the source language text in a natural form of the target language. Such translation is called idiomatic translation. Newmark (1988) looks at kinds of translation from the reader's point of view. He makes a distinction between semantic and communicative translation. For Newmark, communicative translation is reader-oriented while semantic translation is author-oriented.

2.4. Factors Affecting Translation Process
2.4.1. Linguistic Aspects

According to Mildred (1984) and Le Phuong Lan (2006), characteristics of language, grammatical features and lexical features can affect translation process.

Firstly, the translators can get both advantages and disadvantages from the positive and negative transfers from their mother tongue. During the process of learning a foreign language, mother tongue has considerable influence on the learners' thinking and using the target language. Mother tongue has, potentially, both positive and negative consequences: it may serve social and cognitive functions (Carless, 2008, p. 331). Negative impact of mother tongue use is that too much reliance on the L1 may undermine the interaction in L2. Numerous studies indicated that both negative and positive transfer between L1 and L2 was important for development of the inter-language, the complex system of the learners' L2.

Secondly, in terms of grammatical features, parts of speech are specific. Each language has its own division of the lexicon into classes such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. Therefore, it may not always be possible to translate a source language noun using a noun in the target language.

Finally, in terms of lexical features, each language has its own idiomatic way of expressing meaning through lexical items such as words and phrases, etc. Furthermore, according to Mildred (1984), meaning components are not only "packaged" into lexical items, but they are also packaged differently in one language than in another.

In short, linguistic aspects such as grammatical features and lexical features are considered as linguistic aspects affecting translation process.

2.4.2. Translators' background knowledge

Culture is considered as an important factor affecting translation process since translation is not only a linguistic transformation of texts but also a rendering of cultural concepts from one language to another. Nida (2005) points out that "for truly successful translating, biculturalism is even more important than bilingualism, since words only have meanings in terms of the cultures in which they function". According to Serdihun & Sivashish (2012), there is a close relationship between culture, language and translation since translation involves both linguistic and cultural activities. Supporting this point of view, Xuelian (2012) states that translation involves two different languages, which people use to express their belief, thinking, ideas and cultures, etc. Similarly, as a cross-cultural communication event, translation is believed to involve not only two languages but also two cultures (Lulu, 2012). Furthermore, the social context in translating a text is probably a more important variable than its genre. The act of translating takes place in the socio-cultural context (Hatim & Mason, 1990).

3. Methodology

This study was conducted in order to find out common errors in Vietnamese-English translations made by third-year English major students at Thu Dau Mot University. In addition, investigating the causes of these errors was also the aim of the study. To gather necessary data, the researcher utilized descriptive methods since descriptive research provides descriptions of phenomena that occur naturally without intervention of an experiment or treatment (Seliger & Shohamy, 2000).

It took about six months to carry out the research. First, the researcher chose the topic, collected the related previous studies and materials from the internet and reference books. After

that the weekly assignments and the test paper in Vietnamese-English translation were designed by the researcher and taken by 82 participants - third-year English major students at Thu Dau Mot University. Finally, error analysis was employed to find out participants' errors in their Vietnamese-English translations; the causes of these errors and some suggested solutions were identified as well.

4. Results of the Weekly Assignment and the Translation Test

As discovered by the study, students made three types of translation errors from grammatical, lexical errors, to spelling errors. The proportions of these translation error types are shown in figure 1.
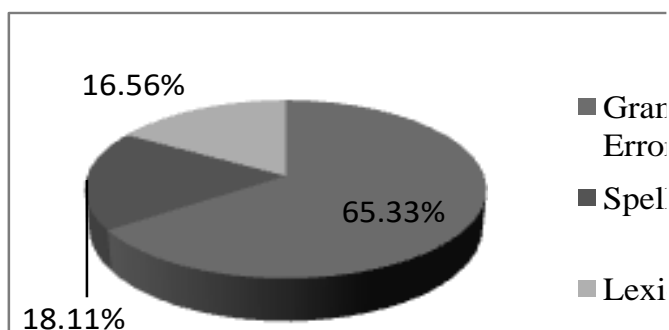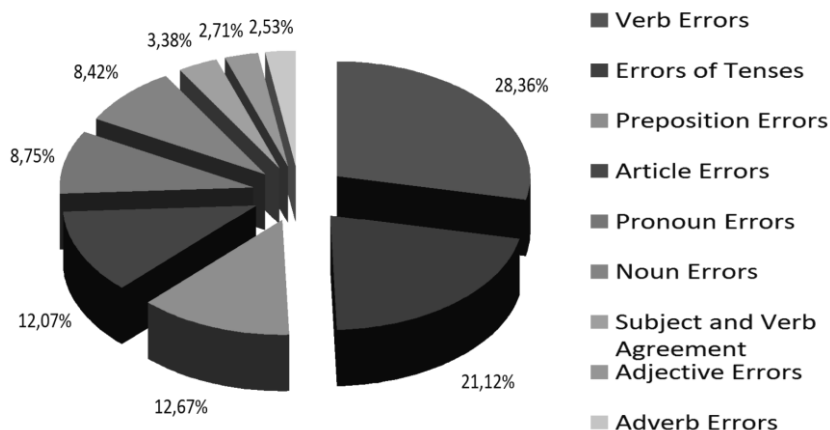

Figure 1. Distribution of translation error types

Figure 1 described the distribution and percentage of errors made by the students in the assignment and the translation test. Of all translation error types, grammatical errors appeared the most frequently (3315/5074) and occupied the highest proportion (65.33%). The second frequent error type that the students made was spelling errors (919/5074, 18.11%), followed by the lexical errors, accounting for a similar proportion (840/5074, 16.56%). In next sections, each type of errors will be described in detail.

4.1. Types of grammatical errors

The participants made a total of 3315 grammatical errors, reaching the highest proportion (65.33%) of all translation errors. The grammatical errors found in the study were related to the use of verbs, tenses, prepositions, articles, pronouns, nouns, adjectives, adverbs and subject and verb agreement. The composition of grammatical errors is depicted in figure 2.

Figure 2. Distribution of grammatical error types

4.1.1. Verb Errors

As can be seen from the students' performance in weekly assignments and the translation test, students made the most errors with verbs (940/3315), which occupied the highest proportion (28.36%). The verb error types found in the study included verb omission, verb addition, misuse of verb forms, and inappropriate choice of verb voices.

Among the verb errors, misuse of verb forms represented the highest proportion (38.3%). Misuse of verb form is related to the choice of *to-infinitive*, *bare infinitive*, and *gerund*. Some students used a *gerund* instead of *to-infinitive* after certain verbs. In contrast, some used *to infinitive* after even a preposition. They also used *to infinitive* and *gerund* instead of *bare infinitive* after certain modal verbs. It might be inferred that some students forgot these grammar rules when they were doing their translation. In this sense, the cause of misuse of verb forms could be students' insufficient linguistic competence since they were not able to recognize and use appropriate verb forms.

The second common verb error type was inappropriate choice of verb voices, which accounted for 31.91% of total verb errors. This type of error happened when the specific voice was chosen inappropriately. Students frequently made the wrong choice between active voice and passive voice. The cause of this error type might be due to the difference between English and Vietnamese passive structures. In fact, the passive voice is quite common in English while the active voice is more popular in Vietnamese. As a result, Vietnamese students tend to make errors in using verb voice. The reason for inappropriate choice of verb voice might be the interference of the mother tongue.

Addition of verbs was also a frequent type of verb errors made by students in Vietnamese-English translation. This error type, which made up 17.13%, referred to the presence of a verb which must not appear in the sentence.

Omission of verb was also popular in the participants' Vietnamese-English translations. Of the verb errors, omission of verb appeared with the lowest percentage (12.66%). The

omission of verbs was characterized by the absence of a verb that must otherwise be in a grammatically correct sentence.

4.1.2. Errors of Tenses

The results of the study indicated that tense use errors were the second commonest type of grammatical errors. The study recorded 700 errors of tense use, accounting for 21.12% of grammatical errors. Two tenses that were incorrectly used by the students were the simple past tense and present perfect tense. They also plunged into confusion between the simple past tense and the past continuous. Besides, mischoice between the simple present and simple past tense came in the third place as errors made by the students. Last but not least, some students still had problems in distinguishing between the simple present and the future tense, and between the simple past and past continuous.

The errors of tense uses might result from the differences between English and Vietnamese. Actually, in the Vietnamese language, a system of tenses like that of English does not exist. There is no verb form change to indicate the aspect or time. For this reason, it is difficult for students to properly render the implication of tenses in Vietnamese into English.

4.1.3. Preposition errors

Among grammatical errors, preposition mistakes - the third commonest error type - made up 12.67%. Preposition errors were divided into three categories: inappropriate choice of prepositions, addition of prepositions, and omission of prepositions.

Inappropriate choice of prepositions was the most frequently found, occurring when students used the wrong preposition after a verb or a noun. Addition of prepositions occurred when a preposition was used by students after a verb that requires no preposition at all. Omission of prepositions was the absence of a preposition that must have appear after a noun or a verb.

Most of these errors resulted from interferences of Vietnamese. The students tended to choose the English prepositions based on Vietnamese patterns, which indicated their insufficient linguistic competence in English.

4.1.4. Article errors

There were about 400 article errors, accounting for 12.07%. They might be divided into two groups including omission, addition of articles and inappropriate choice of articles.

Omission of article referred to the absence of an article that must be before a noun. In contrast, addition of articles was when students added an article before a noun that requires no article. Inappropriate choice of article appeared when the students saw the necessity of using an article, but they chose the wrong one. On the whole, these article errors might stem from the interference of Vietnamese, which possesses no articles at all, and students' insufficient linguistic competence.

4.1.5. Pronoun errors

Pronoun errors were also frequently committed by the students in their Vietnamese-English translation. In the study, about 290 pronoun errors were recorded, accounting for 8.75% of all grammatical errors. These errors included omission of and inappropriate choice of relative pronouns.

Omission of relative pronouns was considered as one of the most frequent pronoun errors. This error type might result from differences between Vietnamese and English. In Vietnamese relative word "mà" can be frequently omitted in the clause even when it serves as the subject, whereas in English relative pronouns can only be omitted in certain cases. Inappropriate choice of relative pronouns was due mainly to students' insufficient linguistic competence and carelessness.

4.1.6. Noun errors

Noun errors were also found in the students' translations with 279 errors accounting for 8.42% of all grammatical errors, including omission and addition of plural inflections. Most of these errors came from differences between the two languages and students' insufficient linguistic competence and carelessness.

4.1.7. Subject verb agreement

Subject-verb concord is probably one of the most difficult parts of the English language for new learners to master. Errors of this kind were characterized by the mismatch between the subject and the verb and found in the study with a proportion of 3.38%.

The cause leading to errors in subject verb agreement might be the difference between English and Vietnamese. Actually, the so-called subject verb agreement does not exist in Vietnamese and the verb never changes its forms.

4.1.8. Adjective Errors

The study examined about 90 adjective errors, making up 2.71%. Adjective errors were omission of possessive adjectives and misplacement of adjectives.

Omission of possessive adjectives referred to the absence of a possessive adjective which must have appeared in the phrase. Errors of this type might be caused by students' translation strategies - translating word for word from Vietnamese into English. In Vietnamese in certain context most functional words denoting possession are omitted whereas this is not the case in English.

Misplacement of adjective was considered as one of the most common adjective errors. This error referred to the placement of adjectives in a noun phrase that was grammatically in correct. Misplacement of adjective might be due to negative transfers from Vietnamese, where adjectives in a noun phrase have a word order markedly different from that of English.

4.1.9. Adverb errors

Adverb errors occupied the lowest proportion (2.53%) of all grammatical errors. They might be divided into two categories: inappropriate choice and misplacement of adverbs.

Inappropriate choice of adverbs happened when the students use an incorrect form of an adverb. This might be an intra-language negative transfer when students add suffix "ly" to an adjective to have an adverb (fast - fast*ly*). Some students might make errors of this type because their incomplete language knowledge.

Misplacement of adverbs referred to the placement of an adverb in a sentence that was not in proper order. This type of error was attributed to students' misunderstanding and/or lack of knowledge in word order in the English sentence.

4.2. Types of lexical errors

The recorded lexical errors included errors in word choice, errors in word collocation, and misuse of synonyms. These errors are presented in Figures 3 below.
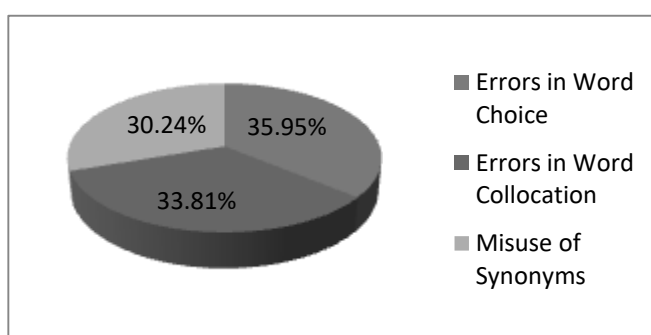
Figure 3. Distribution of lexical error types

4.2.1. Errors in word choice

As recorded by the study, the errors in word choice appeared the most frequently (302/840) and occupied the highest proportion (35.95%). Students used inappropriate words when they did not know the correct ones in the target language. This error type might result from students' lack of language competence.

4.2.2. Errors in word collocation

Collocation refers to which words can go together. 284 errors of this type were recorded in this study, amounting to 33.81%. It could be inferred from the results of the study that students made errors in word collocation because they lacked a knowledge of word collocation. It might also be the mother tongue interference that leads to unacceptable collocations in target language.

4.2.3. Misuse of synonyms

In the study, students also misused synonyms when doing translation. There were about 254 errors of synonyms found in the students' translations, accounting for 30.24% of all lexical errors. This error type occurred when the students depended largely on the dictionary to choose their words without paying attention to the context.

4.3. Spelling errors

Spelling errors occurred when students did not have much time for proofreading and checking their translation before submitting. Students' carelessness could also be a major cause of spelling errors. Mistaking two words similar in written form may also lead to spelling errors.

5. Suggestions

In the light of main findings of the current study, some suggestions were especially offered to teachers and students to help improve translation teaching and learning at the University.

The teacher should explain to the students English grammar rules clearly and make comparison with Vietnamese equivalents and/or distinguish between English and Vietnamese. It is also suggested that the teacher should give students more exercises on different items of grammar so that they can use them appropriately in specific contexts. The teacher should help the students form a habit of regular reading because regular reading might help students in not only enlarging their vocabulary but also improving their grammar and broadening their background knowledge, which are useful for their translation work.

It is suggested that the students should review the grammar points that they have learned on a regular basis. They should also apply the grammar points more frequently in writing and speaking activities. They should have a habit of reading. Besides, it is necessary for them to save time for proofreading and checking their translation thoroughly.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study pointed out that there were three main types of errors made by students in Vietnamese-English translation, which were grammatical, lexical, and spelling errors. These errors might result from the differences between the English and Vietnamese languages, students' inadequate culture background, insufficient linguistic competence in English and Vietnamese, lack of cultural background knowledge, students' inappropriate translation strategies, interference of Vietnamese, misunderstanding, and students' carelessness.

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ĐIỀU TRA VỀ LỖI DỊCH VIỆT-ANH
CỦA SINH VIÊN TIẾNG ANH NĂM 3
TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC THỦ DẦU MỘT

Tóm tắt: Bài nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích khảo sát các lỗi sinh viên thường gặp trong bài dịch từ tiếng Việt sang tiếng Anh. Có 82 sinh viên năm thứ ba chuyên ngành tiếng Anh (69 nữ, 13 nam) tại khoa Ngoại ngữ thuộc trường đại học Thủ Dầu Một tham gia nghiên cứu này. Để khảo sát các loại lỗi sinh viên thường gặp trong bài dịch tiếng Việt sang tiếng Anh, sinh viên được yêu cầu hoàn thành 5 bài tập và một bài kiểm tra dịch thuật. Kết quả cho thấy, sinh viên thường mắc phải các nhóm lỗi bao gồm lỗi ngữ pháp, lỗi về từ vựng, và lỗi chính tả trong bản dịch Việt - Anh. Các nguyên nhân gây ra các lỗi này bao gồm sự khác biệt giữa tiếng Việt và tiếng Anh, thiếu kiến thức nền về văn hóa, phương pháp dịch của sinh viên không thích hợp, sự hiểu nhầm và sự thiếu thận trọng của sinh viên. Bên cạnh đó, một số giải pháp cũng được đưa ra dựa trên các kết quả tìm được trong bài khảo sát nhằm giúp cải thiện việc học và giảng dạy môn dịch tại trường.

Từ khóa: dịch Việt - Anh, lỗi ngữ pháp, lỗi từ vựng, lỗi chính tả