

HYPERBOLE IN JOHN STEINBECK'S OF MICE AND MEN: A STYLISTIC AND TRANSLATION ANALYSIS INTO VIETNAMESE

Nguyen Duong Hieu

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the translation of hyperbole in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* from English into Vietnamese. Drawing from a corpus of 17 hyperbolic expressions identified in the novel, the study investigates how these exaggerations contribute to Steinbeck's themes of loneliness, power, and the unattainability of dreams, and how effectively they are rendered into Vietnamese. Utilizing a qualitative stylistic approach supported by quantitative description, the analysis applies Leech and Short's (2007) three-level stylistic framework, as well as the translation theories by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) and Baker (2018). The findings reveal that most hyperboles are translated through literal rendering and equivalence, with modulation frequently employed to preserve rhetorical force and one case of cultural substitution identified. Overall, the Vietnamese translations tend to maintain the exaggerative intensity and emotional resonance of the source text, though some absolute expressions are softened in line with Vietnamese linguistic norms. The study highlights the challenges of translating figurative language and provides practical insights for cross-cultural literary translation.

Keywords: hyperbole, literary translation, stylistics, Steinbeck, Vietnamese translation, translation strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

Hyperbole is one of the most effective tools in literary language, offering compressed insight and deep emotional resonance. In John Steinbeck's novella *Of Mice and Men*, hyperbole serves as a vital stylistic device that shapes character portrayals, illuminates thematic concerns, and deepens narrative texture.

Published in 1937, *Of Mice and Men* is a seminal work by American author John Steinbeck, known for its concise yet powerful narrative style and its exploration of friendship, loneliness, and the American Dream during the Great Depression.

This article focuses on the translation of 17 hyperboles from the original English into Vietnamese, assessing how their figurative meaning and literary impact are preserved, transformed, or lost. In the Vietnamese translation by Pham Van (2018), hyperboles are treated with varying degrees of fidelity and creativity, reflecting the tension between preserving the source text's artistic integrity and adapting it to the cultural and linguistic norms of the target audience. This study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How does Steinbeck employ hyperbole as a stylistic device in *Of Mice and Men*? (2) How are these hyperboles rendered into Vietnamese in Pham Van's 2018 translation? (3) What translation strategies are employed, and how do they affect fidelity, cultural appropriateness, and emotional impact?

* Corresponding author:

Email: nduonghieu@gmail.com

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hyperbole is a figure of speech that uses deliberate exaggeration to emphasize a point or evoke strong feelings, often creating a vivid or dramatic effect. For example, the expression “I’ve told you a million times” is not meant to be taken literally; rather, it serves to emphasize the high frequency or intensity of the statement. According to Kennedy and Gioia (1995), hyperbole was widely used in the life as well as in prose and poetry. It aims to emphasize a point with a statement containing exaggeration. Hyperbole, or deliberate exaggeration, was a rhetorical device to emphasize a particular quality, emotion, or situation beyond realistic limits (McCarthy & Carter, 2004). It serves various functions in literature, such as creating dramatic effect, evoking humor, or intensifying emotions. Its examples can be found easily in daily conversations, such as “I’ve told you a million times”, “I’m dying of laughter”, “I’m so hungry I could eat a horse” etc. In this study, hyperbole is defined as a figure of speech involving deliberate exaggeration for emphasis or effect, rather than literal truth. It differs from metaphor and personification in that its primary function is intensification rather than substitution or animation. Following this definition, only instances that clearly exhibit intentional overstatement were selected for analysis.

The conceptual framework combines literary stylistics and translation studies. Stylistically, the analysis is grounded in the model proposed by Leech and Short (2007), which examines linguistic choices on lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic levels. This model provides a systematic approach to analyzing how language is used for literary effect by focusing on three main levels: lexical features (such as word choice and figurative language), grammatical structures (including syntax and sentence patterns), and contextual-pragmatic elements (such as point of view and implicature). By applying this framework, the study can closely examine how hyperboles in Steinbeck’s prose contribute to characterization, tone, and narrative emphasis, thereby laying a stylistic foundation for evaluating their translation into Vietnamese.

From the perspective of translation theory, to examine how hyperboles in *Of Mice and Men* are rendered into Vietnamese, this study draws on established models of translation procedures and strategies. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) propose a comparative stylistic approach that outlines seven main procedures: borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation. Among these, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation are particularly relevant for translating

hyperboles, as they enable the translator to preserve the rhetorical force or emotional exaggeration by altering structure or conceptual perspective in the target language. Baker’s (2018) framework further enriches the analysis by introducing strategies that respond to equivalence at different levels of meaning (word, idiom, and textual). Her concepts of translation by cultural substitution or translation by paraphrase using related or unrelated words are frequently observed in cases where hyperboles involve culturally loaded exaggerations that require reinterpretation to be meaningful in Vietnamese.

The frameworks of Leech and Short (2007) and translation theorists such as Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) and Baker (2018) are integrated in a complementary way. While Leech and Short’s stylistic model provides a systematic lens for analyzing how hyperboles function at lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic levels in the source text, the translation frameworks by Vinay and Darbelnet and Baker allow for the evaluation of specific procedures and strategies in the target text. Together, they enable this study to move from a literary-stylistic description to a translation-oriented analysis, bridging form, function, and cross-cultural transfer. This dual integration ensures that stylistic interpretation and translation procedures are examined within the same analytic framework.

Recent research further deepens our understanding of translating figurative language in Vietnamese contexts. For instance, a study in Hanoi by Dang (2024) reveals that literal translation and lack of cultural equivalence often undermine the naturalness of idiomatic expressions, highlighting challenges directly relevant to hyperbole translation. Nguyen (2021) analyzes the difficulties of rendering English phraseological units with proper names into Vietnamese, emphasizing that effective translation of culturally embedded expressions requires deep cross-cultural awareness. Additionally, Le and Nguyen (2021) examine figurative language in Vietnamese folklore and idioms, offering insights into how figurative devices are encoded in Vietnamese – valuable background for understanding hyperbole adaptation in translation.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

A corpus of 17 hyperbolic occurrences was manually identified and selected from the original English version of *Of Mice and Men*, with corresponding Vietnamese translations. Each occurrence is assigned a unique identifier i.e. code (H1, H2, H3...) to ensure that they are easy to locate in both the original and the translated text. Each hyperbole was analyzed using a three-level stylistic framework: lexical (choice of words), grammatical (sentence structure), and pragmatic (contextual effect). The corpus for analysis consists of 17 instances of hyperbole identified across all six chapters of *Of Mice and Men*. These instances represent the complete set of deliberate exaggerations found in the novella, as defined for this study. Thus, the corpus is exhaustive within the text, rather than a partial or random selection.

Hyperboles were identified according to the definition of deliberate exaggeration provided by McCarthy and Carter (2004). Instances that could also be classified as metaphor, personification, or ironic compression were excluded to maintain clarity. After peer consultation, ambiguous cases were removed, leaving 17 unequivocal examples. While identification was carried out by the author, the process was guided by established stylistic criteria and cross-checked with scholarly sources to reduce subjectivity. This triangulated approach ensures that the data set is both rigorous and transparent.

To evaluate the Vietnamese translations of hyperbolic expressions, this study employs a rubric with three criteria: fidelity, cultural appropriateness, and emotional impact. It is important to note that this rubric is designed as a heuristic framework rather than a rigid measurement tool. The purpose of the scoring is not to produce absolute or statistical judgments of quality, but to provide a systematic basis for comparison across examples. As literary translation inherently involves subjectivity and interpretive flexibility, the rubric functions primarily to highlight patterns of strength and weakness in the translator's choices, rather than to rank translations in a definitive manner. Scores in the higher ranges reflect cases where the target text maintains a high degree of resonance with the source, whereas lower scores illustrate instances where rhetorical intensity or cultural nuance is partially diminished.

The study adopts a primarily qualitative design, analyzing each hyperbole through a three-level stylistic framework and translation procedures, supported by simple quantitative description of frequency and distribution.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Literary stylistic analysis

Hyperbole, or deliberate exaggeration, is a crucial stylistic device in *Of Mice and Men*, used by John Steinbeck to emphasize emotions, relationships, and the struggles of the characters. While the novel's setting and plot are deeply grounded in realism, Steinbeck's use of hyperbole serves to heighten dramatic effect, enhance characterization, and reinforce major themes such as loneliness, powerlessness, and the unattainability of the American Dream. By analyzing certain examples, we can see how hyperbole contributes to the novel's overall tone and meaning, creating moments of humor, intensity, and tragedy.

One of the most striking uses of hyperbole appears chapter 1: "*Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world*" (H4). George's statement is an exaggeration, meant to stress the extreme isolation experienced by itinerant workers. While there are undoubtedly lonelier people in the world, the phrase "the loneliest guys in the world" conveys the crushing solitude that defines the lives of men like George and Lennie. This hyperbole enhances the novel's theme of loneliness, reinforcing the idea that the migrant lifestyle strips men of deep, lasting relationships. It also serves as a contrast to George and Lennie's unique bond – their companionship, though imperfect, sets them apart from the typical ranch worker who drifts from job to job without forming real connections. The exaggeration in George's words highlights both his bitterness and his yearning for something better, a yearning that fuels his dream of owning land with Lennie.

Another example of hyperbole that underscores frustration and exaggeration is "*You'd drink out of a gutter if you was thirsty*" (H1). George scolds Lennie for his lack of caution when drinking water, exaggerating Lennie's impulsiveness by suggesting that he would drink from the filthiest possible source. The phrase "drink out of a gutter" conveys George's exasperation and reinforces the idea that Lennie lacks judgment, acting on instinct rather than rational thought. This hyperbole is not just about Lennie's thirst. It reflects a broader concern about his inability to navigate the world safely. Throughout the novel, Lennie's impulsiveness leads to trouble, from petting dead mice to accidentally killing Curley's wife. George's exaggerated warning, therefore, is more than just a moment of frustration; it foreshadows the larger dangers Lennie's uncontrolled actions will bring.

Steinbeck also employs hyperbole to illustrate physical suffering and hardship, as seen in *"That means we'll be bucking grain bags, bustin' a gut"* (H2). The phrase "bustin' a gut" is an exaggeration of the physical strain required for farm labor, emphasizing the backbreaking nature of the work. While the characters are not literally tearing their muscles apart, the hyperbole effectively conveys the exhaustion and grueling effort demanded of them. This moment highlights the difficult conditions faced by migrant workers, reinforcing one of the novel's central themes: the harsh nature of labor in 1930s America. The exaggeration also adds to the novel's gritty, colloquial tone, capturing the way men on the ranch express themselves with colorful, exaggerated speech.

A particularly vivid hyperbole occurs in this saying *"I wish I could put you in a cage with about a million mice an' let you have fun"* (H3). George, frustrated by Lennie's obsession with petting soft things, exaggerates to an absurd degree, suggesting that he would give Lennie an impossible number of mice. The phrase "a million mice" is an intentional overstatement, meant to mock Lennie's desire. This hyperbole serves multiple purposes: it highlights the comedic aspect of their relationship, shows George's impatience, and underscores Lennie's childlike nature. At a deeper level, it also suggests the impossibility of fulfilling Lennie's desires – just as no one could truly provide him with a million mice, George and Lennie's dream of owning land is similarly unattainable.

Hyperbole is also used to describe physical violence in ways that make the events feel larger-than-life. A striking example is *"Looks to me like ever' bone in his han' is bust"* (H14). This exaggeration, spoken about Curley's injured hand after Lennie crushes it, makes the injury sound even more devastating. While Curley's hand is severely damaged, the phrase "ever' bone in his han' is bust" implies total destruction, adding to the dramatic effect of the moment. This hyperbole is particularly significant because it reflects the novel's preoccupation with power and weakness. Curley, a man who constantly asserts his dominance, is humiliated in the most exaggerated way possible – by having his hand, a symbol of strength, seemingly destroyed beyond repair. This moment serves as a turning point in the novel, emphasizing Lennie's uncontrollable power and foreshadowing the more tragic consequences of his strength.

Steinbeck also uses hyperbole to create moments of humor and levity, as seen in this saying *"I can smell that dog a mile away"* (H9). The exaggeration here is obvious – no one can actually smell an animal from such a great

distance – but the phrase humorously emphasizes just how bad the odor is. This moment of hyperbole contributes to the novel's portrayal of the ranch as a place of rough camaraderie, where the men express their feelings in exaggerated, often crude ways. The humor in this exaggeration also provides a brief respite from the novel's darker themes, making the harsh realities of ranch life more bearable for the characters.

A darker, more sinister use of hyperbole appears in *"I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't even funny"* (H17). This statement, made by Curley's wife to Crooks, is an extreme and terrifying exaggeration of the power dynamics at play. While it is unclear whether she truly has the power to have Crooks lynched, the hyperbole reveals how easily she can manipulate the racist and oppressive structures of society to her advantage. The phrase "so easy it ain't even funny" underscores the sheer cruelty of the threat, emphasizing how little agency Crooks has in this situation. This moment exemplifies how hyperbole is not just used for humor or emphasis – it can also be a tool of intimidation, reinforcing the novel's bleak portrayal of social injustice.

Another hyperbole that underscores the unattainability of dreams is *"Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land"* (H16). Crooks, expressing his deep cynicism, exaggerates the hopelessness of life for people like him. While this statement is not literally true – people do, in reality, own land – his hyperbolic phrasing emphasizes the sense of despair and futility that permeates the novel. The double negative ("nobody never") reinforces the absolute nature of his claim, making it seem as though hope itself is an illusion. This hyperbole connects directly to the novel's central theme: the failure of the American Dream. Just as heaven is an unattainable paradise, so too is the idea of economic stability and independence for the characters in *Of Mice and Men*.

Steinbeck also uses hyperbole to highlight the absurdity of certain emotions: *"If I was a relative of yours I'd shoot myself"* (H5). This is an extreme overstatement, meant to convey complete exasperation with another person's behavior. The hyperbole makes the sentiment clear – being related to Lennie would be so frustrating that death would seem preferable. While humorous on the surface, this exaggeration also speaks to George's deep frustration and exhaustion. He loves Lennie, but the burden of caring for him is overwhelming, and his hyperbolic statement reflects the inner turmoil he faces in trying to protect him.

Steinbeck's use of hyperbole in the novel serves a variety of purposes: it emphasizes emotions, creates humor, highlights the novel's themes, and adds dramatic weight to key moments. By exaggerating aspects of loneliness, labor, violence, and hopelessness, Steinbeck makes the characters' struggles feel more profound and urgent. Whether through George's sarcastic remarks, the exaggerated descriptions of Curley's injuries, or Crooks' bleak statements about the impossibility of dreams, hyperbole enhances the novel's impact on the reader. Ultimately, these moments of exaggeration reinforce the stark realities of the characters' lives, making *Of Mice and Men* not just a story of friendship and dreams, but also a powerful critique of a world where survival often depends on illusions that can never become reality.

Below is a summary of the assessment of how hyperbole contributes to the meaning and thematic development of *Of Mice and Men*, presented at three levels of analysis: lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic.

Code	Hyperbole expression	Context & interpretation	Lexical level	Grammatical level	Pragmatic level
H1	"You'd drink out of a gutter if you was thirsty."	Exaggerates Lennie's lack of concern for hygiene.	"Gutter" suggests filth and desperation.	Hyperbolic statement expressing extreme thirst.	Humorous insult; devaluation of character.
H2	"That means we'll be bucking grain bags, bustin' a gut."	Overstates the difficulty of farm labor.	"Bustin' a gut" implies extreme effort.	Hyperbole in describing physical strain.	Highlights the harshness of migrant work.
H3	I wish I could put you in a cage with about a million mice an' let you have fun.	Overstates the number of mice.	"A million mice" suggests an impossible scenario.	Hyperbole to emphasize Lennie's obsession.	Sarcastic punishment; comic exaggeration.
H4	Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world.	Exaggerates the isolation of migrant workers.	"Loneliest guys in the world" stresses emotional struggle.	Hyperbole in social commentary.	Universalizes loneliness among migrant workers.
H5	"If I was a relative of yours I'd shoot myself."	Overstates frustration with Lennie.	"Shoot myself" is extreme and unrealistic.	Hyperbole expressing impatience.	Harsh contempt; dramatic disapproval.
H6	He was capable of killing a fly on the wheeler's butt with a bull whip without touching the mule.	Exaggerates skill in using a whip.	"Without touching the mule" emphasize precision.	Hyperbolic skill description.	Highlights an almost superhuman ability, showing awe and admiration of a superior skill.
H7	There was a gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke.	Exaggerates Slim's presence and authority.	"So profound" intensifies the silence.	Declarative sentence.	Emphasizes Slim's leadership: his commanding presence and authoritative silence
H8	"I don't know why. Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other."	Overstates societal fear.	"Whole damn world" broadens the effect.	Hyperbole in reflecting human nature.	Reinforces themes of fear and mistrust: cynicism; bleak view of human nature
H9	"I can smell that dog a mile away."	Overstates the dog's stench.	"A mile away" exaggerates distance.	Hyperbolic sensory detail.	Highlights Slim's disgust in his complaint.

Code	Hyperbole expression	Context & interpretation	Lexical level	Grammatical level	Pragmatic level
H10	"He ain't mean," said Slim. "I can tell a mean guy a mile off."	Overstatement of Slim's perception to emphasize his insight.	"A mile off" as an unrealistic measure.	Colloquial structure.	Highlights Slim's wisdom: Moral clarity; strong personal judgment.
H11	"Darker'n hell in here," he said.	Overstates darkness in the room.	"Hell" intensifies description.	Hyperbole in atmospheric setting.	Creates a gloomy and oppressive mood in suffocating darkness.
H12	I don't know nothing that stinks as bad as an old dog.	Overstatement to emphasize the dog's smell.	"Stinks as bad as" intensifies the unpleasantness.	Double negative for emphasis.	Disgust; sets moral debate over mercy killing.
H13	They'll can me purty soon. Jus' as soon as I can't swamp out no bunk houses they'll put me on the county.	Exaggerates Candy's fear of becoming useless.	"Put me on the county" as a dire fate.	Informal, colloquial grammar.	Highlights fear of aging and being rejected.
H14	"Looks to me like ever' bone in his han' is bust."	Overstatement of injury severity.	"Ever' bone" implies total destruction.	Colloquial speech pattern.	Expresses pain and rage; intensifies violence.
H15	I seen hunderds of men come by on the road an' on the ranches, with their bindles on their back an' that same damn thing in their heads.	Exaggeration of number to highlight repetition.	"Hunderds of men" as an excessive figure.	Informal sentence structure. Non-standard use of the verb "seen" and a phonetic spelling (rural mispronunciation) of "hundreds."	Repetition of failed dreams; social disillusionment.
H16	Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land.	Overstatement of despair.	"Never" and "nobody" reinforce absolute negativity.	Double negatives for emphasis.	Highlights hopelessness. Negation of spiritual and material hope.
H17	"Well, you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain't even funny."	Overstatement of power to emphasize racism and violence.	"So easy it ain't even funny" heightens the racial threat.	Informal speech, aggressive tone.	Highlights racial oppression. Threat and control through racial terror.

4.2. Translation analysis

The translation analysis evaluates how Pham Van rendered the hyperboles in *Of Mice and Men* by applying a rubric based on three interrelated criteria. The first is fidelity, which considers whether the translation preserves the original meaning, tone, and rhetorical effect of the hyperbole. The second is cultural appropriateness, assessing whether the rendering sounds natural in Vietnamese and aligns with local linguistic and cultural norms. The third is emotional impact, examining whether the translated hyperbole retains the expressive power and resonance that it has in the source text. Together, these criteria provide a systematic yet flexible framework for assessing the quality of figurative language translation, focusing not only on accuracy but also on stylistic effect and reader response.

Criteria	Excellent (5)	Good (4)	Acceptable (3)	Weak (2)	Poor (1)
Fidelity (Accuracy to the Source Text)	The hyperbole is translated with full semantic and stylistic accuracy, preserving the original meaning, tone, and effect.	The translation is mostly accurate, with minor deviations that do not significantly alter meaning or impact.	The meaning is conveyed but with some loss of nuance or shifts in tone.	Significant distortions or omissions occur, affecting meaning or tone.	The translation fails to reflect the original hyperbole, with major distortions, omissions, or misinterpretations.
Cultural Appropriateness (Adaptation to Vietnamese Language and Culture)	The translation is highly natural and idiomatic, effectively adapting the hyperbole to Vietnamese culture without losing its essence.	The translation is culturally appropriate, though some minor unnatural expressions may be present.	The translation is understandable, but awkward or not fully adapted to Vietnamese cultural norms.	The translation feels unnatural or culturally inappropriate, affecting readability.	The translation completely fails to adapt the hyperbole to Vietnamese culture.
Emotional Impact (Effect on Vietnamese readers)	The translation fully retains the emotional depth, resonance, and expressive force of the original hyperbole.	The translation is emotionally engaging but with slight reductions in intensity.	The emotional effect is partially weakened or lacks full resonance.	The emotional impact is significantly diminished, making it less compelling for the reader.	The translation fails to evoke the intended emotional response, making it ineffective.

In *Of Mice and Men*, John Steinbeck employs hyperbole to intensify emotions, highlight character traits, and reinforce the novel's themes of dreams and desperation. Through exaggerated descriptions and overstatements, the author amplifies the hardships faced by itinerant ranch workers, the grandeur of George and Lennie's dream, and the brutal realities of their world. These hyperbolic expressions not only enhance the novel's dramatic effect but also shape the reader's perception of the characters' struggles and aspirations. Understanding how hyperbole functions in the source text is essential for assessing its translation into Vietnamese, where cultural and linguistic differences may influence its impact and interpretation. Below is the detailed analysis of 17 occurrences of hyperbole in the novel and their Vietnamese translations.

H1: You'd drink out of a gutter if you was thirsty.

The Vietnamese rendering "Lúc khát thì đến nước cống mà cũng uống" is a highly effective translation. It demonstrates high fidelity, as the exaggeration of drinking from a gutter is preserved. The choice of "nước cống" is culturally natural and idiomatic, making the hyperbole resonate with local imagery. The emotional impact remains strong, retaining George's scornful tone and the sense of desperate exaggeration. Here, the translator applies modulation by shifting "gutter" to "nước cống" and equivalence to restructure the phrase idiomatically, producing a colloquial expression that conveys both stylistic force and pragmatic function.

H2: That means we'll be bucking grain bags, bustin' a gut.

The translation "Nghĩa là mình sẽ phải vác bao lúa mạch vút lên xe, mệt đứt ruột" captures the hyperbole effectively, with "mệt đứt ruột" reflecting the exaggeration of "bustin' a gut." The expression is idiomatic in Vietnamese, showing cultural appropriateness, and its emotional resonance vividly conveys the sense of exhaustion. In this case, the translator employs modulation and functional equivalence, replacing the English idiom with a colloquial Vietnamese phrase

that retains the hyperbolic tone and rustic oral style of the source.

H3: I wish I could put you in a cage with about a million mice an' let you have fun.

The translation “Ước gì tao nhốt được mày trong lồng với cỡ một triệu con chuột cho mày chơi” conveys the numerical exaggeration directly, preserving fidelity to the original hyperbole. The phrase “cỡ một triệu con chuột” is both idiomatic and culturally acceptable, ensuring naturalness. The emotional impact is intact, maintaining the blend of ridicule and playful frustration. Here, the translator adopts literal translation, rendering both the structure and exaggeration without modification, so that the sarcastic voice and absurd imagery of the source are preserved.

H4: Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world.

The translation “Mấy đứa làm việc ở nông trại như mình là tụi cô đơn nhất trên đời” achieves close fidelity, retaining the hyperbolic claim of absolute loneliness. The word “tụi” reflects colloquial Vietnamese, making the line culturally natural and consistent with Steinbeck’s rustic tone. The emotional weight of isolation is well conveyed. The translator combines literal translation with equivalence, preserving the absolute degree of loneliness while adapting the phrasing to the idiomatic rhythm of Vietnamese.

H5: If I was a relative of yours I'd shoot myself.

The rendering “Nếu tao là bà con với mày thì tao tự sát” mirrors the hyperbolic extremity of the source, showing high fidelity. The bluntness of “tự sát” is natural in Vietnamese, ensuring cultural appropriateness. The emotional tone – sarcastic and dramatic – is well preserved. This case reflects the use of literal translation, transferring both imagery and sarcasm directly into Vietnamese, so that the interpersonal insult and rhetorical force remain intact.

H6: He was capable of killing a fly on the wheeler's butt with a bull whip without touching the mule.

The translation “Ông có thể dùng chiếc roi bò giết con ruồi trên mông con la buộc gần bánh trước mà không đụng tới con la” preserves the hyperbolic imagery of Slim’s extraordinary skill. The lexical choice “chiếc roi bò” is natural in Vietnamese, showing cultural appropriateness.

The humorous admiration in the original is successfully conveyed, maintaining the emotional effect. The translator relies on literal translation combined with lexical adaptation, ensuring that the striking exaggeration of Slim’s skill resonates clearly with Vietnamese readers.

H7: There was a gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke.

The translation “Về nghiêm nghị và lặng lẽ trong cử chỉ của ông thâm trầm tới nỗi khi ông cất tiếng thì mọi cuộc nói chuyện đều ngưng” preserves the exaggerated depiction of Slim’s presence, showing strong fidelity to the source. The phrase “mọi cuộc nói chuyện đều ngưng” is culturally natural and idiomatic, reflecting Vietnamese conversational style. The emotional effect, portraying reverence and awe, remains intact. The translator applies grammatical modulation, omitting the existential “There was...” and restructuring into a more idiomatic noun phrase. Combined with literal translation, the rendering maintains the abstract intensity of “a quiet so profound” and preserves the hyperbolic consequence of Slim’s commanding aura.

H8: I don't know why. Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other.

The translation “Tao không biết tại sao. Có lẽ mọi người sợ nhau trên cái cõi đời quái ác này” slightly shifts emphasis, showing fidelity with some modulation. The choice “cõi đời quái ác” is idiomatic in Vietnamese, making the phrase culturally appropriate, though it leans more toward moral fatalism than universal fear. The emotional impact is somewhat softened, as the raw bitterness of “the whole damn world” is transformed into a broader reflection on life’s harshness. Here, the translator uses modulation and cultural adaptation, replacing the literal scope with a culturally resonant phrase that still conveys frustration and cynicism, though with a less confrontational edge.

H9: I can smell that dog a mile away.

The Vietnamese version “Cách cả cây số tui cũng hửi thấy mùi con chó đó” accurately conveys the hyperbole, showing high fidelity. The colloquial verb “hửi” and the localized measurement “cây số” are culturally natural, making the line resonate strongly. The emotional impact, mixing humor and disgust, is well maintained. The translator employs literal translation with cultural adaptation, converting “mile” into the more familiar “cây số” and adding a colloquial verb that enhances immediacy and humor in Vietnamese.

H10: “He ain’t mean,” said Slim. “I can tell a mean guy a mile off.”

The rendering “Nó không thâm hiểm. Thằng nào thâm hiểm thì cách cả cây số tao cũng biết” keeps the hyperbolic claim of recognizing deceit from afar, reflecting high fidelity. The expression “cách cả cây số” sounds idiomatic, reflecting cultural appropriateness. The emotional impact, Slim’s calm confidence, is much retained in Vietnamese. The translator applies modulation and adaptation, shifting the sentence order for fluency and localizing “a mile” into “cây số.” This maintains both the stylistic tone and the hyperbolic exaggeration of Slim’s perceptiveness.

H11: “Darker’n hell in here,” he said.

The translation “Trong này tối còn hơn địa ngục” faithfully mirrors the hyperbole, achieving high fidelity. The comparative “còn hơn địa ngục” is culturally natural in Vietnamese, retaining the exaggerative imagery. The emotional resonance of extreme darkness is preserved, conveying vivid immediacy. The translator applies modulation to adjust syntax while keeping the literal referent “địa ngục,” ensuring that the visual extremity of the original remains forceful in Vietnamese.

H12: I don’t know nothing that stinks as bad as an old dog.

The Vietnamese version “Tui chưa thấy cái gì hôi bằng con chó già” maintains the hyperbolic superlative, showing fidelity to the source. The use of “chưa thấy” is idiomatic and culturally appropriate, giving the translation a natural flow. The emotional tone of disgust is preserved, though framed in a colloquial Vietnamese register. Here, the translator uses modulation and colloquial equivalence, shifting from the English double negative (“I don’t know nothing”) into a smoother Vietnamese idiom, while still maintaining the rhetorical exaggeration.

H13: They’ll can me purty soon. Jus’ as soon as I can’t swamp out no bunk houses they’ll put me on the county.

The Vietnamese version “Hổng lâu nữa họ sẽ đuổi tao. Khi nào tao hết dọn dẹp dãy nhà ngủ được nữa thì họ sẽ đưa tao ra trại tế bần ngoài tỉnh” preserves the inevitability of Candy’s fear with high fidelity. The phrase “trại tế bần” is culturally natural, drawing on a historically resonant image in Vietnamese society. The emotional impact, his despair of obsolescence, is effectively conveyed. Here, the translator combines modulation to shift the temporal emphasis

of “purty soon” and cultural substitution, rendering “the county” as “trại tế bần.” This choice situates the hyperbole in a culturally meaningful context, reinforcing both the pragmatic meaning and emotional depth.

H14: Looks to me like ever’ bone in his han’ is bust.

The translation “Tao thấy hình như xương bàn tay nó nát hết” conveys the full intensity of exaggeration, showing fidelity to the source. The use of “nát hết” is idiomatic, culturally natural, and intensifies the injury in Vietnamese. The emotional impact is vivid, preserving the shock of the original. The translator employs equivalence and semantic modulation, converting “ever’ bone... is bust” into a colloquial, visceral image. This ensures the rustic oral tone of the English is reflected in Vietnamese while heightening the stylistic force of the exaggeration.

H15: I seen hunderds of men come by on the road an’ on the ranches, with their bindles on their back an’ that same damn thing in their heads.

The Vietnamese version “Tao đã thấy cả trăm thằng ở ngoài đường và trong các trại, với tay nải trên lưng và cũng cái ý khốn khổ đó trong đầu” partially softens the quantitative exaggeration but retains fidelity to the core message. The use of “tay nải” is culturally appropriate, making the translation accessible and natural. The emotional impact is strong, though “cả trăm thằng” slightly diminishes the overwhelming repetition implied by “hunderds.” The translator applies equivalence and modulation, adapting the cultural item “bindles” to Vietnamese usage while maintaining the rhetorical critique of futile dreams.

H16: Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land.

The translation “Chưa ai lên thiên đàng, chưa đứa nào tậu được đất” conveys the futility of dreams with relative fidelity, though the choice of “chưa” softens the finality of “never.” The expressions “lên thiên đàng” and “tậu được đất” are idiomatic and culturally natural, situating the line in a rural Vietnamese register. The emotional impact remains strong, but the absolute pessimism of Steinbeck’s original is lessened. The translator uses semantic equivalence and modulation, simplifying the double negatives for clarity while preserving the dual symbolism of spiritual and material frustration.

H17: Well, you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain’t even funny.

The Vietnamese version “Ồ, vậy thì mày giữ lấy thân phận mày, đồ mọi đen. Tao có thể cho treo cổ mày lên cây để dàng tới nỗi trò đó chẳng còn gì hay” reflects fidelity to the violent threat, though the menace of the last phrase is slightly softened. The rendering “giữ lấy thân phận mày” is culturally natural, and the hyperbolic ease of the threat remains recognizable. The emotional impact of racial hostility and intimidation is conveyed, though it could be intensified further. The translator applies literal translation for much of the line, combined with modulation of “it ain’t even funny” into a more serious tone. These strategies preserve the pragmatic weight of the threat, even if some sarcasm is lost.

Below is a summary table of hyperboles and translations analyzed above:

Code	Source Text Hyperbole	Vietnamese Translation	Strategy/Technique	Evaluation
H1	You'd drink out of a gutter if you was thirsty.	Lúc khát thì đến nước cống mày cũng uống	Modulation + Equivalence	High fidelity; idiomatic; strong emotional impact
H2	...bucking grain bags, bustin' a gut.	...vác bao lúa mạch vút lên xe, mệt đứt ruột	Modulation + Functional Equivalence	Faithful; colloquial Vietnamese; vivid intensity
H3	...a cage with about a million mice...	...trong lồng với cỡ một triệu con chuột...	Literal Translation	Accurate rendering; natural phrasing; sarcastic humor preserved
H4	...the loneliest guys in the world.	...tụi cô đơn nhất trên đời	Literal Translation + Equivalence	Strong fidelity; culturally natural; emotional weight well conveyed
H5	If I was a relative of yours I'd shoot myself.	Nếu tao là bà con với mày thì tao tự sát	Literal Translation	Blunt fidelity; culturally straightforward; sarcastic impact preserved
H6	...killing a fly... with a bull whip...	...dùng chiếc roi bò giết con ruồi...	Literal Translation + Lexical Adaptation	Exaggeration intact; natural phrasing; humorous admiration conveyed
H7	...a quiet so profound that all talk stopped...	...lặng lẽ... tới nỗi... mọi cuộc nói chuyện đều ngưng	Modulation + Literal Translation	Accurate fidelity; natural syntax; reverent emotional impact preserved
H8	...ever'body in the whole damn world is scared...	...mọi người sợ nhau trên cái cõi đời quái ác này	Modulation + Cultural Adaptation	Fidelity with slight shift; idiomatic phrasing; emotional tone softened
H9	I can smell that dog a mile away.	Cách cả cây số tui cũng hửi thấy mùi con chó đó	Literal Translation + Cultural Adaptation	Faithful exaggeration; colloquial humor enhanced; strong disgust conveyed
H10	I can tell a mean guy a mile off.	...cách cả cây số tao cũng biết	Modulation + Adaptation	Preserves hyperbole; natural phrasing; Slim's confidence effectively conveyed

Code	Source Text Hyperbole	Vietnamese Translation	Strategy/Technique	Evaluation
H11	Darker'n hell in here.	Trong này tối còn hơn địa ngục	Modulation	High fidelity; natural idiom; vivid visual intensity
H12	I don't know nothing that stinks as bad...	Tui chưa thấy cái gì hôi bằng con chó già	Modulation + Colloquial Equivalence	Preserves exaggeration; idiomatic; disgust strongly expressed
H13	...they'll put me on the county.	...họ sẽ đưa tao ra trại tế bần ngoài tỉnh	Modulation + Cultural Substitution	Faithful; culturally resonant choice; despair conveyed effectively
H14	Looks to me like ever' bone in his han' is bust.	...xương bàn tay nó nát hết	Equivalence + Semantic Modulation	Strong fidelity; colloquial phrasing; vivid shock effect
H15	I seen hunderds of men...	Tao đã thấy cả trăm thằng...	Equivalence + Modulation	Partial fidelity; idiomatic and natural; emotional impact retained though softened
H16	Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land.	Chưa ai lên thiên đàng, chưa đứa nào tậu được đất	Equivalence + Modulation	Faithful but softened; idiomatic Vietnamese; strong symbolic impact
H17	I could get you strung up on a tree so easy...	Tao có thể cho treo cổ mày lên cây dễ dàng...	Literal Translation + Modulation	Fidelity preserved; threat recognizable; emotional menace somewhat softened

General observations on the Vietnamese translation of hyperbole: retaining exaggeration and emotional intensity

The analysis of 17 hyperboles shows that the translator generally succeeds in retaining both semantic intensity and stylistic force. From a comparative linguistics perspective, the translation of hyperbole in *Of Mice and Men* reveals clear contrasts between English and Vietnamese strategies of exaggeration. Hyperboles in *Of Mice and Men* often rely on absolute generalizations (e.g., "the loneliest guys in the world," "every bone... is bust," "nobody never gets to heaven") or numerical exaggerations ("a million mice," "hunderds of men"). In Vietnamese, these are frequently rendered through idiomatic colloquialisms such as "tụi cô đơn nhất trên đời" or "cả trăm thằng," which moderate the absolutes but remain effective. This indicates a systemic tendency in Vietnamese to foreground sensory immediacy and colloquial tone over rigid absolutes.

Across the corpus, translation strategies fall mainly into literal translation, modulation, equivalence, and cultural substitution. Literal translation predominates (e.g., H3, H4, H5, H6, H7, H9, H17), ensuring fidelity while maintaining colloquial tone. Modulation appears frequently where structural shifts are needed (e.g., H1, H2, H7, H8, H10, H11, H12, H13, H14, H15, H16, H17). Equivalence (e.g., H1, H2, H4, H12, H14, H15, H16) enables idiomatic re-expression, while adaptation (H6, H8, H9, and H10) is less applied. Cultural substitution appeared once (H13), situating the text in a historically resonant Vietnamese frame. This comparative overview shows that while literal rendering dominates, modulation and equivalence play a crucial role in preserving rhetorical force, and cultural substitution is rarely but strategically employed. This pattern highlights how strategies interact flexibly to preserve rhetorical force while adapting to target-language norms.

Importantly, the categorization of translation strategies remains interpretive rather than absolute. A single case may reasonably be analyzed under more than one procedure, reflecting the fluidity of literary translation. Overall,

the Vietnamese rendering demonstrates strong fidelity, cultural appropriateness, and emotional impact, even though certain absolutes are softened. These findings underscore both the challenges and possibilities of translating hyperbole across cultural and linguistic systems.

These strategies allow the translator to preserve both the semantic intensity and stylistic character of Steinbeck's prose while adjusting for the cultural and linguistic norms of the target language. The study also highlights that the categorization of translation strategies, particularly for figurative language, is often interpretative and flexible, depending on both textual nuance and theoretical lens.

These findings carry several implications for translators of literary works. First, they highlight the need to balance fidelity to the source with naturalness in the target language. While literal translation preserves exaggeration effectively, translators should remain sensitive to the risk of producing awkward or culturally opaque renderings. Second, the frequent use of modulation and equivalence suggests that translators benefit from flexibility: hyperbole can often be recreated through culturally resonant idioms rather than strict word-for-word renderings. Third, the single case of cultural substitution illustrates that translators must sometimes choose domestication strategies to ensure accessibility for the target readership, especially when dealing with culture-specific references. Finally, the study demonstrates that evaluating translation quality requires a holistic view, considering fidelity, cultural appropriateness, and emotional impact together. For practicing translators, this means prioritizing rhetorical effect and reader response over formal equivalence when rendering figures of speech across languages.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the study not only clarifies how Steinbeck's hyperboles are rendered into Vietnamese but also sheds light on broader challenges in literary translation. Translators must decide when to preserve absolutes and when to soften them for cultural naturalness, all while retaining stylistic intensity. By foregrounding strategies such as modulation and equivalence, the analysis emphasizes the importance of creativity and cultural sensitivity. These insights contribute to translation pedagogy by offering concrete examples of how hyperbole – an often overlooked trope – can be effectively handled in cross-cultural contexts.

The analysis underscores the translator's role not only as a linguistic mediator but also as a cultural interpreter. The study advocates for more nuanced and creative approaches in handling hyperboles, encouraging translators to consider not just fidelity, but also emotional and cultural equivalence. The study not only contributes to the understanding of Steinbeck's stylistic use of hyperbole but also provides practical insights for literary translators facing cross-cultural challenges. Further research might expand this analysis to comparative translations or to the translation of hyperbole in other Steinbeck works, contributing to the broader field of hyperbole studies in cross-cultural literary translation.

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