

A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF LINGUISTIC AND SOCIO-CULTURAL FEATURES OF WORDS DENOTING “MALE” CHARACTERISTICS IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

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Abstract: Having a good command of lexicology is considered one of the most important role in contrastive analysis of English and Vietnamese words. Linguistic and socio-cultural features of words have drawn much attention of the researchers. This study, however, has investigated the linguistic and social cultural features of words denoting “male” characteristics only. In order to conduct this research, experiential meaning in functional grammar is used as a theoretical base to classify words denoting male characteristics into specific categories. This research employed both a descriptive and contrastive approaches in qualitative method. A contrastive analysis of the linguistics and social cultural features of words denoting male characteristics in English and Vietnamese were conducted to find out the similarities and differences between the two languages. Besides, the findings of this paper would help Vietnamese learners to use words appropriately and to understand languages in cross-cultural communication. In addition, the findings would propose the implications in teaching, learning, and translating English – Vietnamese languages.

Keywords: Linguistic, socio-cultural features, male characteristics, cross-cultural communication, utterance.

1. Introduction

Language clearly saves the gender differences in language communication, in words denoting male and female characteristics and their meanings as well as the differences in the way they express their ideas. Katz (1998) [1] realizes that each language contains words which cannot be translated directly from this language into another. Therefore, one of the problems for the foreign learners is using words. In language communication, we have found words sometimes reflecting

the attributives of sexual features of two genders and the gender discrimination due to social division. This fact leads to subtle discrimination in the selection of words to describe men and women, for that reason the writers or speakers must consider carefully when using gender-specific terms used for this gender that is not used for the other. One of the special characters of words denoting male and female characteristics is the demarcation of a great number of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs used only for

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each gender and if not used properly it may lead to changes in content towards gender characteristics of which words are used incorrectly reflected.

E.g. *“I can describe her as handsome rather than beautiful.”* Is the word *“handsome”* used for men only in both Vietnamese and English or are there any exceptions? The discrimination of gender in the social *“respect men and despise women”* exposes obviously in language. Numerous English words which were composed of element *“man”* reflect the position of men in society. For example, *“chairman”*, *“spokesman”* and *“businessman”*. The words *“human, mankind”* also contain elements *“man”*. There are suggestions that famous saying *“all men are created equal”* [2] which is part of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson penned in 1776 during the beginning of the American Revolution. The word *“men”* refers to any person or men only? We all know that voting rights originally belonged to men only. The using of Words Denoting *“Male”* Characteristics (WsDMC) in real communication surely makes learners confused.

Gender and language have so far been discussed in a number of socio-linguistic course books. In reality, there are some research papers related to the role of gender in language acquisition, yet they are done monolingually. Some researchers have touched just the tip of the iceberg that is indicating words denoting male and female characteristics in English and Vietnamese. This study is expected to investigate similarities and differences of these features in English and Vietnamese. Through the study, learners can enrich their vocabulary and improve their ability of using words in

various situations of speech performance. The study would contribute to comparing the socio-cultural features of WsDMC in English and Vietnamese, which explains the existence of the meaning and the usage of words in contexts as well. The findings of this research would serve as the basic implications in teaching, learning, and translating English language.

2. Methods

The research was employed a descriptive approach and contrastive approach in qualitative method. English is chosen as the target language (L2) and Vietnamese the source one (L1). A contrastive analysis of grammatical, semantic and socio - cultural features of WsDMC in English and in Vietnamese that occur in different kinds of English and Vietnamese utterances was conducted so as to draw out some implications with particular reference to the teaching and learning of vocabulary and translation as well. For the reason, the subject itself was a study of the characteristics of language use and meaning of words in the English and Vietnamese based on the similarities and differences of specific social and cultural features of WsDMC in English and Vietnamese.

3. Data Collection

With the purpose of collecting sufficient data for the study, all relevant materials relating to the investigated subject to draw out theoretical basis were accumulated and extracted. The main materials used in the study are collected from the sources such as the bilingual magazines, novels and short stories, the internet sources, ... Once, necessary data have been collected, they were described, analyzed and contrasted to find out the similarities and differences in the use

of these words in both languages. From these results, we realized that words that are used in context are not different from those in theory. Therefore, the results that have been made in the thesis are relatively reliable and valid.

4. Data analysis

Data are analyzed by the two basic methods: descriptive method in the basic of linguistic knowledge from the school and contrastive method to find out the similarities and differences between the grammatical, semantic, and socio-cultural features of WsDMC in English and Vietnamese. The results of the analysis are then from which we draw conclusions and generalize the rules applied in the teaching and learning as well as in translation.

5. Reliability and validity

The data collection is mainly based on written and spoken discourses by native speakers of English and Vietnamese, and the data ensures to include variants in each language that aligns to objective findings. However, due to the manual counting process and rather small corpus, the reliability of the research is, to some extent, not as expected.

6. Finding & discussion

6.1. The similarities and differences of grammatical features

a) The Similarities

- *Word structures:* English and Vietnamese WsDMC can be free morphemes which can stand alone such as *man, boy, father, ông, cha, etc.*

- *Types of word:* Both English and Vietnamese WsDMC are classified into simple and complex words (compound words) like *man, boy, gentleman, chairman, anh, hẳn, anh rể, tán tỉnh, etc.*

- *Word classes:* English and

Vietnamese WsDMC belong to nouns, verbs and adjectives such as *businessman, rape, handsome, hoàng tử, hiệp dân, đẹp trai, etc.*

- *Syntactic functions:* English and Vietnamese nouns denoting male characteristics can be subjects, predicate nominatives, direct objects, object complements, indirect objects, prepositional complements, noun phrase modifiers, possessive modifiers, appositives.

b) The differences

- *Types of word:* English WsDMC are classified into complex words (derived words) such as *actor, manly, etc* whereas there are no Vietnamese derived words. Vietnamese makes use of compound words such as *nghệ sỹ*, noun phrases such as *tính đàn ông* as equivalents.

- *Syntactic functions:* Both English and Vietnamese adjectives have the same syntactic functions. English adjectives are often followed by noun or noun phrase. However, Vietnamese adjectives are usually preceded by noun or noun phrase.

- *Adverbs:* English WsDMC belong to adverbs and they have the syntactic functions as adverbial, predicative, attributive whereas Vietnamese WsDMC do not have adverbs. However, Vietnamese WsDMC make use of adjective phrases containing *một cách + adj.* to express instead.

- *Verbs:* English WsDMC under the form of non-finite verbs (*infinitive* or *ing-verbs*) can function as subjects, objects whereas Vietnamese WsDMC have no form of non-finite verbs but use verbs or verb phrases or their nominalizations as equivalents. For example: *Learning how to flirt involves recognizing a mix of communication, humor, non-verbal*

signals and interpersonal chemistry. But *flirting* is not rocket science... [3]; *Tán gái phải có vũ khí, vũ khí ở đây có thể là đẹp trai, có thể là chai mật, có thể ...*[4].

c) *The similarities and differences of the semantic features*

- *The similarities:* Both English and Vietnamese WsDMC contain the common marker [male], the semantic feature shared by them. We can find the inherent semantic property and the gender-discrimination or socio-cultural semantic property in English and Vietnamese WsDMC. The similarities denote *man in particular*, *VIPs* (very important people), *man's characteristics* (under the form of adjectives, nouns), *kinships* (under the form of pronouns, nouns), *man's actions*, *man's ways of performing actions* (under the form of adverbs, verbs). Both English and Vietnamese have words that reflect religious beliefs considering man as *God*, *Creator*, *Chúa*, *Đấng sáng tạo* who gave human births, who created our world...

- *The differences:* There are some differences in terms of the semantics features of WsDMC that need to be taken into consideration. *Man in general*. English have the connotative meanings of men in general. The words such as "*mankind*", "*human*", "*humanity*" have the word "*man*" that denotes man in particular. Meanwhile, Vietnamese does not have this connotative meaning. Vietnamese people use Sino – Vietnamese word "*nhân*" in Vietnamese means "*người*" to form words denoting men in general.

- *Man in particular:* In English, people also use the metonymy of the part for the person to name men by using their typical features such as *beard*, *moustache* with the article *THE* standing before them, Vietnamese also use *mày* and

râu to name men. However, In English, the word *beard*, *moustache* can stand independently. In Vietnamese, the words *mày*, *râu* can combine with each other in *cánh mày râu*, *đấng mày râu* or these words can combine with other words to form phrase to describe men. *Râu hùm*, *râu kẽm*, *râu xanh*, *mày ngài*.

d) *The similarities and differences of the socio-cultural features*

- *The similarities:* Although each country has different degree of discrimination, the discrimination of gender in the any society is still "respect man and despise women". The main decision makers are still almost all men; women also face a lot of resistance from men. The similarities in terms of socio - cultural features of English and Vietnamese WsDMC are *man in particular* such as "*beard*", "*moustache*", "*mày*", "*râu*" referring to men. *VIPs* like "*King*", "*President*",... in English while "*Vua*", "*Tổng thống*" in Vietnamese, *Kinships*, namely "*ancestor*" or "*tổ tiên*", "*parents*" or "*cha mẹ*",..., *Occupations* e.g "*teacher*" or "*giáo viên*",... and man's actions such as "*flirt*" compared with "*tán tỉnh*",...

- *The differences:* While English belongs to individualist cultures. Vietnam belongs to collectivist cultures expect people to identify with and work well in groups which protect them in exchange for loyalty and compliance. So the differences appear in *Man in general*. To English people, "man" is the nuclear of "*mankind*" we have found the evidence in some english words such as "*mankind*", "*human*", "*humanity*". Meanwhile, Vietnamese words such as "*nhân loại*" "*nhân đạo*", "*nhân tạo*" do not denote man but people "*nhân*" in general. Vietnamese

people use Sino – Vietnamese word “nhân” - means “người” - to form words denoting humankind in general. Another difference is *Occupations*. The word “Thầy” in English is “teacher” to refer to a man with wider knowledge. However, the word “Thầy” in Vietnamese can be *father, bonze or fortune teller*.

7. Conclusion

Not many differences in WsDMC in the two languages grammatically, semantically and socio - culturally are recognized. That is, a word denoting male characteristics in English and Vietnamese is equivalent except for some special cases. The words shown in the Vietnamese against the English have quite rich and diverse means. Besides denotative meaning, there is a connotative meaning, too. The capture the whole structure of the semantics of this phrase is not a simple matter. So before teaching the semantics of this phrase, learners should be equipped to study a generalized notion of ability to perform the many meanings of the word. We need to know that the rich sense of the word is a common phenomenon in language in both English and Vietnamese.

8. Implications

8.1. Implications for language teaching and learning

In written and spoken English and Vietnamese, the use of WsDMC has much sense. With its help, an object can be identified suitably; an action can be expressed correctly; an object can be described particularly; an action, an event or feeling of people have been described much more colorfully and thoroughly.

The differences as well as the similarities pointed out in the study would, to some extent, help the teachers to predict

those areas of English vocabulary which cause some problems for Vietnamese learners. They also help them to diagnose errors by pinpointing the sources of errors that have been committed by the learners when learning. The contrastive analysis may provide teachers with understanding of the nature of the mother tongue and the foreign languages and it would enable teachers to find ways to deal with any problem raised by the nature of the differences and similarities and to take them into consideration when teaching.

8.2. Implications for translation

As for translation, it is obvious that misunderstanding the meanings of word can cause mistakes. One of the mistakes is the translation unnaturalness. This kind of mistake is frequently seen in English – Vietnamese translation. Although it does not completely ruin the whole work, it may confuse or puzzle readers of the target language. We often pay attention to the grammatical aspects while it is crucial for translators to be aware of all linguistic aspects and even many cultural and social aspects.

At word level, the common mistake is losing of connotative meanings. In English, there are words which carry a positive or negative connotation according to the phrases or sentences with which they co-occur. For example, the word *ladykiller* in English usually co-occurs with words or phrases which can carry either a positive or a negative meaning.

Cultural and social background are so important to people who practice translating as their profession. Without which, they would probably produce unnatural translations because just like any other, the English culture has gone through a long time of existence and development.

During this time, many concepts unique to the culture have been universally accepted by its members by many ways.

Translation is not simply a linguistic transformation of texts, but it is also a rendering of cultural concepts from one language to another. No matter how excellent a translator may be in terms of both linguistic and cultural backgrounds, there are always concepts that cannot be translated from one language to another. Referring to these concepts, quite a few scholars in translation studies have used the term “cultural untranslatability”.

Besides, due to the differences in geographical features, history, and development level, the English language hold concepts that cannot be translated in a way that Vietnamese people can easily comprehend and accept. To avoid unnaturalness over issues of culture, translators should keep in mind that sometimes an effort to translate correctly is not as valuable as a suitable substitution. Things unfamiliar with the vietnamese culture have been altered with ones that are close to Vietnamese people’s daily life. Moreover, things that may seem improper or unpleasant due to Vietnamese cultural norms are also replaced so as to avoid causing any aversion to readers. For example: *No man is indispensable. Vắng Mợ thì chợ vẫn đông.* [5]; *Like father, like son. Con nhà Tông không giống lông cũng giống cánh.* [6]; *He who pays the piper calls the tune.*

Có tiền là có quyền, Có tiền mua tiên cũng được. [7]. Consider the Vietnamese versions of the above examples. Words and phrases like “Mợ” “con nhà Tông”, “lông, cánh”, “tiền”, “quyền” “tiên” are so near and dear to ordinary Vietnamese people that they evoke pleasant feelings when properly used in translated texts. An attempt to translate literally English words like “man”, and “piper”, “tune” would surely sound far and away and fail to communicate to Vietnamese readers. For example, the third one, “*Ai mua cây sáo thì người đó có quyền thôi*”.

Above are some practical issues worth mentioning on unnaturalness in translation. These types of mistakes are different in many ways but they all to some extent damage the quality of the translation. In the time to come, Vietnam will further integrate into the world economy and culture. This progress requires translations of high quality, especially from English to Vietnamese and vice versa. Thus, more studies should be carried out to identify and how to cope with common mistakes in using word in these translations. Besides, studies on what can be called a pure Vietnamese language and how to maintain it through the processes of translation should be implemented. These studies are supposed to bring readers an overview of the contemporary situation of Vietnamese’s translating words, its strengths and limitations, and how to improve it./.

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PHÂN TÍCH ĐỐI CHIẾU VỀ ĐẶC ĐIỂM NGÔN NGỮ VÀ VĂN HÓA XÃ HỘI CỦA TỪ VỰNG BIỂU THỊ GIỚI TÍNH NAM TRONG NGÔN NGỮ ANH-VIỆT

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Tóm tắt: Có vốn từ vựng nhiều được coi là một trong những vai trò quan trọng trong việc phân tích đối chiếu từ vựng Anh – Việt. Rất nhiều nhà nghiên cứu đã quan tâm đến việc nghiên cứu đặc điểm ngôn ngữ và văn hoá – xã hội của từ vựng. Tuy vậy, nghiên cứu này chỉ xem xét đến đặc điểm ngôn ngữ và văn hoá – xã hội của từ vựng biểu thị giới tính nam. Để thực hiện nghiên cứu, tác giả so sánh về nghĩa theo chức năng ngữ pháp được sử dụng như là nền tảng lý thuyết để phân loại từ thể hiện giới tính theo những loại khác nhau. Nghiên cứu này sử dụng phương pháp mô tả và đối chiếu định tính. Phân tích đối chiếu của đặc điểm ngôn ngữ và văn hoá xã hội của từ vựng biểu thị giới tính nam nhằm tìm ra sự giống và khác nhau giữa hai ngôn ngữ. Ngoài ra, kết quả của nghiên cứu giúp người học Việt Nam sử dụng từ phù hợp và hiểu được sự giao thoa văn hoá trong ngôn ngữ. Hơn nữa, kết quả của nghiên cứu sẽ đề xuất việc dạy, học, và dịch thuật giữa hai ngôn ngữ Anh – Việt.

Từ khoá: Từ vựng, đặc điểm văn hoá – xã hội, giới tính nam, giao thoa văn hoá, cách nói.