DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLISH-VIETNAMESE TRANSLATION FACED BY ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
		This paper presents a study into difficulties in English – Vietnamese translation faced by English-majored students. Although basic knowledge of English with four main skills is delivered to the students at the beginning of their academic courses at university, translation in general causes tons of troubles for them. Therefore, this research was conducted to figure out what makes translating, especially English-Vietnamese written translation, rather difficult for English majors in their acquisition of knowledge. Besides that, this paper also aims to suggest some feasible ways – an initial step towards enhancing students' translation quality. The research was conducted with a survey and the data were analyzed quantitatively. A questionnaire of 10 questions and a list of 20 English words for translation practice were employed to find out the student's attitudes and strategies to translate specialized English. The results show that most of the surveyed students found it hard to translate from specialized English into Vietnamese. This is because specialized English is quite different from everyday English and the students are only familiar with the basic meanings of their vocabulary. This paper is a practical reference for students and it can help teachers better understand their students' weaknesses and difficulties in translation.

KHÓ KHĂN TRONG BIÊN DỊCH ANH - VIỆT CỦA SINH VIÊN NGÀNH NGÔN NGỮ ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC KỸ THUẬT CÔNG NGHIỆP

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
		Bài báo này trình bày nghiên cứu về khó khăn của sinh viên Ngôn ngữ Anh trong dịch thuật Anh – Việt. Mặc dù sinh viên được cung cấp kiến thức cơ bản về tiếng Anh với 4 kỹ năng chính ngay khi theo học chuyên ngành tại trường đại học, việc dịch thuật vẫn luôn gây ra vô số phiền phức cho các em. Do đó, nghiên cứu này được thực hiện nhằm tìm ra nguyên nhân khiến việc dịch thuật, đặc biệt là dịch viết Anh - Việt, trở nên khó khăn đối với sinh viên ngôn ngữ Anh. Bên cạnh đó, nghiên cứu này cũng nhằm đề xuất một số giải pháp khả thi – bước đầu nâng cao chất lượng dịch thuật của sinh viên. Nghiên cứu được thực hiện bằng khảo sát và phân tích định lượng. Một bảng khảo sát với 10 câu hỏi và một danh sách 20 từ tiếng Anh chuyên ngành được sử dụng để tìm hiểu thái độ cũng như chiến lược của sinh viên đối với dịch thuật chuyên ngành. Kết quả cho thấy hầu hết sinh viên gặp khó khăn trong dịch thuật Anh – Việt chuyên ngành. Lý do là bởi tiếng Anh chuyên ngành rất khác biệt với tiếng Anh giao tiếp. Nghiên cứu này là một tham khảo thực tế cho sinh viên cũng như giúp giáo viên hiểu rõ hơn về những điểm yếu cũng như khó khăn của sinh viên trong dịch thuật Anh-Việt.

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1. Introduction

"The study of translation and the training of professional translators is without question an integral part of the explosion of both intercultural relations and the transmission of scientific and technological knowledge" [1]. Newmark once wrote: "The first traces of translation date from 3000 BC, during the Egyptian Old Kingdom, in the area of the First Cataract, Elephantine, where inscriptions in two languages have been found" [2]. Over millennia, it is not only an instrument for exchanging one's thoughts, ideas, concepts, etc. with another, but it has also been a professional occupation that lucratively benefits a translator or an interpreter a lot. Moreover, "There must always have been interpreters for people, in spite of their differences, their rivalries and perhaps because of these, they have always experienced the need to communicate and there have always been many languages" [3]. Translation may be defined as "the replacement of textual material in one language (source language) by equivalent textual material in another language" [4]. Equivalence means equal value. Sometimes the value is on the level of form (two words translated by two words); sometimes it is reference (Friday is always the day before Saturday); sometimes it is function (the function "bad luck on 13" corresponds to Friday in English, to Tuesday in Spanish) [5]. According to Tytler, a perfect translation should be an exact copy of original ideas, feelings, and style [6]. In Skopos theory, "to translate means to develop a target text in a target setting or a target purpose in target situations" [7]. This theory assumes that a translation always has an aim, which is the decisive factor influencing the translator's decisions [8]. In order to produce a high-quality translated text, a translator is required much more than proficiency in multiple linguistics. Cultural factors are often classified as non-linguistic knowledge (equivalence above word level) which can cause a lot of difficulties for translators [9].

Translators may be called upon to translate about anything. The most widely-known subcategories of translation are those of materials with specialized subject matter: technical translation, commercial translation, financial translation, information technology translation… [10]. Fortunately, English-majored students at Thai Nguyen University of Technology (TNUT) get the chance to study almost all of these materials. However, when it comes to specialized translation, it is obvious that they might experience considerable difficulties. The first common difficulty is that translators do not master both the source language and the target language [11]. The second but more serious difficulty is that it is impossible to gain deep knowledge in every specialized field. With so many gaps in vocabulary, students will not only fail to achieve high results in practical subjects, but will also face many difficulties when studying specialized subjects [12]. People might encounter specialized materials everywhere, especially in printed newspapers, magazines or online press. For example, advertising translation has become increasingly important for today's globalization of products and service [13]. In order to translate these contents, translators must have general knowledge of journalism, especially the characteristics of language in printed or online media [14]. Throughout the four academic years of pursuing the Bachelor's degree in the English Language, the researchers assumed that every student may get into trouble reproducing an English text into Vietnamese. Understanding the significance of finding out difficulties and possible solutions is the motivation to the researchers for conducting this study with the hope that it will be a valuable reference to English-majored students at Thai Nguyen University of Technology. Hence, they will be able to enhance the quality of their translation projects in the university and in their career.

2. Methodology

2.1. The subjects

The participants were K55, K56, and K57 students who were doing Bachelor's degree in the English language at Thai Nguyen University of Technology. They partly consisted of K55 students who had attended the written translation subject for a period of time. The rest were K56 and K57 students who were about to officially study this subject in the following years. However,

they were all taught the same curriculum which regards a wide variety of topics such as economics, mechanics, electronics, electrics, etc.

2.2. The instruments

For this study, the questionnaire was thoughtfully designed for students to have the real-life perspective of studying English-Vietnamese written translation in addition to difficulties in their learning journey in this field. It was composed of 10 multiple-choice questions, along with 20 English words and phrases. Twenty-three copies were delivered to the English-majored students ranging from K55 to K57, and twenty-three copies were collected. The multiple-choice questions were to determine purposes as the following:

The first three questions were for the purpose of identifying students' attitude towards written translation subjects in general. The first question was to figure out students' feelings about studying written translation and if they find it interesting or not. The second was employed to pinpoint their response to what they could obtain through the process of learning translation, or the reasons motivating them to get into this subject. The third one was to recognize whether English-Vietnamese or Vietnamese-English written translation is more challenging for the students. The last seven questions were created in a hope that the authors would be capable of describing what the students tend to take into consideration whenever they have to confront roadblocks during the rendition process.

In order to make the study more practical and reliable, the English-Vietnamese translation practice was combined at the end of the questionnaire. Twenty words and phrases were selected from various topics, i.e., economics, engineering, environment, or even politics, to serve the purpose of examining the students' ability to translate those items into Vietnamese.

2.3. Data analysis

IBM SPSS 20.0 statistics software was used to encode, process, and analyze collected data from the questionnaire. The method of data analysis was the descriptive statistics method. The translation practice was received and evaluated by the authors who have experience in the topics given in the third part of the questionnaire. With regard to strategies for translation, the most correct translation versions were selected to identify the methods used by the students during the translation process.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. The students' attitude towards learning written translation

More than half of the students (56.52%) responded that studying written translation was interesting but they did not really take a keen interest in the subject. On the contrary, only 4.35% of the students found learning the subject exceptionally interesting. This ratio is identical to the group that considered the written translation subject boring, which may account for the difficulty of the subject to some extent. That said, the minority of students really struggled to pursue the written translation field. Whereas, a great number of learners had a neutral perspective (34.78%) that they might or might not be into studying the subject. It is likely that they thought translation is kind of exciting but rather difficult to pursue consistently.

Through studying written translation, 34.78% of the students confirmed that they could gain numerous benefits such as a large amount of vocabulary and grammar, insights into other cultures, and more. Besides, 39.13% of them only agreed that they could enrich their source of vocabulary and grammar, and expand more about the different cultures of other nations in the path of pursuing translation. The number of learners who only partly agreed with the advantages represents 21.74%; it can be seen that a specific percentage of learners had not yet recognized the merits of studying written translation, or the merits were not really obvious to them. Still, there are 4.35% of the students who did not agree with the benefits they could gain by learning the subject. This is a minor rate, but it reflects that the awareness on the translation subject was not

very high. Based on the collected results, it can be stated that most of the English-majored students were generally conscious of the advantages of studying translation. Hence, they presented a great attitude towards the process of language learning, and they felt motivated to pursue the subject so that they were able to learn it effectively in their own ways.

3.2. Strategies for translation used by the students to deal with difficulties

Table 1 shows 5 questions which were created in a hope that the authors would be capable of describing what the students tend to take into consideration whenever they have to confront roadblocks during the rendition process.

Table 1. *The students' opinion about strategies for dealing with difficulties in translation*

Code	Label	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. Deviation
Q4	When I encounter an English source text, I usually take into account the meaning of new words, grammatical rules, expressions, and contexts as well.	2.09	1.00	4.00	0.79
Q5	When I have to deal with new words, I first guess their meaning from contexts, then look them up in the dictionary (either online or paper-based).	1.96	1.00	3.00	0.71
Q6	In case I must face a difficult grammatical rule, I often render it into Vietnamese by what I think it might be.	2.04	1.00	4.00	0.64
Q7	If I encounter non-equivalent elements in the source language, I will translate them by more specific or general ones, omission, illustration, or paraphrasing.	2.57	1.00	4.00	1.12
Q8	If I do not understand the characteristics of a culture, I tend to search for its meaning online via Google. If not, I will consult experts such as lecturers.	2.17	1.00	5.00	0.94

At first glance, it is apparently noticeable that all the means are around 2.0, but there is a slight disparity arising from question seven (mean 2.57). In detail, the students are all aware of considering the whole text with regard to new words, grammatical structures, expression or tone, and contexts instead of solely translating word to word, or sentence to sentence. That signals a right approach to take the next step into the field of translation.

Particularly, in terms of understanding the meaning of new words, they all share the idea that it is necessary to guess the notion of a word through the examination of the context being presented (mean 1.96). Then, if the meaning cannot be inferred from the context, they will take advantage of the power of dictionaries to seek the best appropriate meaning. In contrast, they tend to reproduce a tough grammatical rule just by their knowledge but not by any research on the connotation of this grammatical point.

With respect to non-equivalents – an element that offers a translator most of the challenges, the mean is approximately 2.57. It can be seen that the students may perceive strategies for dealing with non-equivalents, i.e., translation by more specific or general ones, omission, illustration, or paraphrasing, yet they may not utilize those techniques frequently and effectively.

Finally, the aspect of culture is one of the factors that might be strange to some students; however, it is indeed surprised at the result shown in the table (mean 2.17). This figure demonstrates a consensus among the English-majored students that culture plays an intensive impact in the final translated text. Thus, they are in the view of consulting trustable sources of information such as trusted websites or lecturers who have profound insights.

3.3. Data analysis from the translation practice

In the final section of the questionnaire, all participants were required to translate a series of twenty words and phrases from English to Vietnamese, using supportive tools in addition to their knowledge of the language. The aim of this part was to clarify how precisely the students could be able to understand and then translate those words and terms. The findings are shown in table 2.

Table 2. *Results of translating English words and terms into Vietnamese*

No.	Source texts	Improper translation	Percentage (%) (N = 23)	Blank translation	Percentage (%) (N = 23)
1	Headline inflation	18	**78.3**	4	**17.4**
2	Telecommunication	2	8.7	3	13
3	Expansion	18	**78.3**	1	4.3
4	Recession	4	17.4	1	4.3
5	Poverty alleviation	1	4.3	1	4.3
6	Macro economics	0	0	1	4.3
7	Policy-makers	6	26.1	3	13
8	Allocate	22	**95.7**	1	4.3
9	Highlight	0	0	1	4.3
10	Downturn	1	4.3	1	4.3
11	Automation	0	0	1	4.3
12	Blue-chip	5	21.7	11	**47.8**
13	Conductor	22	**95.7**	1	4.3
14	Wear	22	**95.7**	1	4.3
15	Gear	6	26.1	2	8.7
16	Longitude	0	0	4	**17.4**
17	Equator	0	0	2	8.7
18	Iconic	7	30.4	3	13
19	Biosphere	0	0	3	13
20	Flora	6	26.1	2	8.7

As demonstrated in Table 2, it can be recognized at ease that students are in general able to render English words and terms into Vietnamese with a specific level of accuracy. This statement is proven by the percentage of improper translation of 30% and lower, which regards a majority of words and terms. Nonetheless, there remain five words that account for an extremely high rate of improper translation: headline inflation (78.3%), expansion (78.3%), allocate (95.7%), conductor (95.7%), wear (95.7%). The fact is that the training courses in written translation are concerned with economics, environment, mechanics, technology, and information. Therefore, those five words and terms should mean in relevant to those topics above.

   - **Headline inflation** is a term used very frequently in economics. Its meaning is "the raw inflation figure reported through the Consumer Price Index (CPI) that is released monthly by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)" [15]. In Vietnamese, it is so-called "lạm phát toàn phần", but most of the students only responded as "lạm phát". That said, they ignored the word "headline" because they do not know the meaning of headline in Vietnamese, or they cannot find it in bilingual dictionaries (English-Vietnamese). It can be concluded that the students almost completely rely on dictionaries during the translation process.

   - **Expansion** is extremely familiar to most of the students on regular basis, but if it is concerned with economics, a high ratio of them wrongly translated it into Vietnamese as these two words: "bành trướng, khai triển". Meanwhile, the exact connotation should be "thời kỳ hưng thịnh", which refers to, as conceptualized by Daniel Liberto from Investopedia.com, "the phase of the business cycle where real gross domestic product (GDP) grows for two or more consecutive quarters, moving from a trough to a peak. Expansion is typically accompanied by a rise in employment, consumer confidence, and equity markets and is also referred to as an economic recovery" [16].

   - **Allocate** is a word that might be somewhat strange and new to some students as they do not often touch it. This may contribute to the reality that their translation was incorrect. A majority of them chose to use the meaning "chỉ định" while it should be translated as "phân bổ".

   - **Conductor**, in respect of electrical engineering, is a material or object that permits an electric current to flow easily. Thus, it should carry the meaning "chất dẫn điện" as opposed to "nhạc trưởng" – the first definition suggested in any dictionary both monolingual and bilingual

dictionaries. This implies the fact that many students are likely to pick up the first meaning they found in the dictionary without any further search for the best appropriate definition. Then, it is one of the possible causes resulting in a poor translated text.

- **Wear** is considered the most familiar word to students in table 2. All of them immediately came up with the act of putting clothes and accessories on the human body, or "mặc" in Vietnamese. Yet, the word "wear" is relevant to the subject of English for mechanical engineering, which is amongst the training courses supporting written translation practice. Hence, it should be rendered as "mài mòn" - to diminish or decay through use.

The aforementioned issues are all concerned with homonyms which students struggle to translate the most. In contrast, terms and words with a single meaning, i.e., telecommunication, automation, longitude, equator, and biosphere, are much easier for students to search for their meaning. In contrast, there remain some words and terms with a high percentage of "blank" translation. Particularly, those are "headline inflation" (17.4%), "blue-chip" (47.8%), and "longitude" (17.4%). Moreover, a specific number of students were unable to translate those three words due to a range of difficulties; one of them is probably that they have a dearth of searching skills for finding the correct meaning in a sentence, which is also a cause leading to a substandard translated text.

3.4. Discussion

Reading has always been an effective method to accumulate vocabulary. It is due to the fact that a wide variety of new words would be used in the most natural and appropriate way by natives. Then the students can infer the meaning of a word from the context being presented. That is an exceptionally effective way to guess the words' meaning because no one is able to remember all English words, even natives. Therefore, if the students come across new vocabulary arising from the source text, they will be capable of tackling unexpected obstacles more easily instead of ignorance. With regard to sources of reading, the students should endeavor to embark on easier documents that match their current level of English on regular basis, then the habit of reading would be built firmly.

On the other hand, consuming a huge volume of new words at a time may not be an intelligent solution because those learnt items could be gradually lost corresponding to the amount that the students attempt to take in. Hence, unless they build the habit of reviewing and revising new words as frequently as they can, they will never move closer to mastering English and then translation. Many effective methods have been introduced throughout the history of learning and teaching English; the students can try to note down new vocabulary – both words and their definition – perhaps on each side of memory cards for further review. Periodically, these cards should be reviewed to see if the students have forgotten any words or not. In fact, most students now work with personal computers, tablets, or smartphones almost all the time, so these devices must be made use of; they can download some note-taking applications and then write any new words on them. In that way, they will have much more opportunity to interact with English words, and of course, better memorization. Moreover, the lexicology subject should be a focus, which provides how lexis is coined and structured. It would have a significant impact on the way the students memorize an English word.

Using incorrect grammar may result in regretful miscommunication, thus English learners must develop the habit of obtaining the words in the correct sequence. A grammatical mistake can alter the meaning of what the writers intend to portray and, in certain cases, generate a negative impression for the readership. Grammatical mistakes in a translated text are unacceptable for the reasons stated above.

Besides vocabulary and grammar, the two most fundamental elements, non-equivalents appear to be not less important. It is simple to prove that the students absolutely must face non-equivalents in almost all documents. "As in the case of "privacy", which is, in fact, a relatively new concept in general, and a very difficult concept to understand and explain in many

languages. It may also be that the concept is known or understood but there is no specific word in Vietnamese used to express it" [17]. In addition, some words with special connotations do not mean the same thing in Vietnamese. Therefore, it is necessary to figure out strategies for coping with these difficulties so that the students can avoid confusion and hesitation.

4. Conclusion

Through the processes of surveying and analyzing data collected from the questionnaire, this paper has demonstrated some top emerging issues relevant to studying written translation subjects. Firstly, it is noticed that the majority of the English-majored students consider translation an interesting but tricky subject. Besides, when they have to deal with unexpected difficulties in translating, some effective strategies have been taken advantage of. For instance, if the students encounter strange words or phrases, they are initially conscious of techniques such as guessing the meaning or looking up those words in dictionaries. Furthermore, the necessity of improving English level as well as translation skills is also taken into careful consideration by the English-majored students.

Since the English Language major has been newly found for a few years, research on translation subjects is a need to enhance learning and teaching quality step by step. While time and experiences had a great impact on the generalizability of the study, making mistakes is inevitable. Besides, the procedure of conducting the survey and collecting results witnessed a variety of challenges, and therefore, some of the collected information can only reflect the students' perspectives to some extent. However, there is a strong hope that the paper will serve as a realistic reference and somewhat contribute to both the students and lecturers.

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