

DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSLATION FROM VIETNAMESE INTO ENGLISH OF ENGLISH MAJORED JUNIORS AT TAY DO UNIVERSITY IN VIET NAM

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, English is a popular language that people use to communicate and transfer messages to each other. Translation has become an essential skill for linguistic learning and acquiring knowledge all over the world. In the process of translation, students may encounter obstacles when translating from Vietnamese into English. This research is conducted to find out the difficulties of English-majored juniors when translating from Vietnamese into English. The questionnaire is used as the main instrument to collect the data. The participants are sixty English-majored juniors in classes at Tay Do University. The result will point out that the English language students have difficulties in Vietnamese-English translation as background knowledge, vocabulary, grammar and idioms.

Key words: *difficulty, translation, English-majored students, university*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Nowadays, no one can deny that English is a global language in this internationalization. English is becoming more and more popular in many fields such as economy, culture, politics, etc. English serves as an important bridge to connect cultures, exchange information and communicate between countries around the world. According to Alfitri (2012), "On the internet, more than 80% of the sites use English as the medium language while 20% of the rest use the other languages such as Indonesian, Chinese, and the others." Therefore, teaching and studying English is also very necessary in many schools and universities. In reality, English has become one of the main subjects today.

Vietnam is increasingly developing, innovating and expanding its international relations continuously. The demand for foreign languages and also the requirement for Vietnamese to have expert English skills are increasing day by day. The translation is considered a tool the Vietnamese can connect with international friends. English translation makes people understand each other more in the process of diplomatic relations, economic cooperation and other fields in today's era when countries tend to integrate for the whole development. English translation has gradually become indispensable and set the path for the global success of individuals, organizations, and even businesses in the modern time when society is more developed and competition relentless. "Translation, as the process of conveying the message across linguistic and cultural barriers, is an eminently communicative activity, one whose use could well be considered in a wider range of teaching situations than may currently be the case." (Duff, 1996), translation skill is necessary for Vietnamese students of English to have an expert translation in order to meet the demand of integration into the world economy and exchange of culture with other countries. Undoubtedly, learning translation skills is an advantage for Vietnamese students to have an ideal job in the future.

The practice of translation is not easy. It requires translator's comprehensive competence in both the source language and the target language. As it is said by Al-Darawish (1983), "General difficulties in doing translation are no two languages are exactly the same in terms of phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic features. They are divergent in the arrangement of sentences or syntax." The translator must understand the author's ideas and expressions. That way, the new translation is not obscured. Translators also have to perfectly use the languages. If you want to translate well, you must be successful and fluent in both languages. Being good at translation is not only reading and writing well, but also understanding every nook and cranny of the hidden source of language.

At Tay Do University, English-majored juniors usually face many challenges when practicing translating from Vietnamese into English. The problem relates to background knowledge, vocabulary, grammar and idioms. To investigate this point deeply. The research "Difficulties in translation from Vietnamese into English of English-majored juniors at Tay Do University" is conducted with the hope that English-majored juniors can realize difficulties in translation, overcome them and improve translation skill.

1.2 The significance of the study

This study mainly focuses on finding out the factors causing difficulties related to translation from Vietnamese into English of the English majored juniors at Tay Do University, and through those issues, it is expected to help students realize problems in translation. On the basis of the findings, students find some appropriate solutions to improve translation skill.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definitions of translation

Numerous definitions of translation have been discussed by linguists in the field with different perspectives. The following definitions are chosen selectively as they include fully the contents of the translation.

The translation is the equivalent conversion of the word, meaning and style of a document from the source language into the target language. According to Catford (1965), "Translation is the replacement of textual material in one language (source language) by equivalent textual material in another language (target language)." Moheiddin (2005) also defined that, "Translation consists of reproducing in the target language the closest natural equivalence of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style." The translator discovers the meaning behind the forms in the source language and does his/her best to produce the same meaning in the target language - using the forms and structures of the target language. Consequently, "What is supposed to change is the form and the code and what should remain unchanged is the meaning and the message." (Larson, 1984). Besides, Koller (1995) also indicated the equivalence relation among languages, "Translation can be understood as the result of a text-processing activity, by means of which a source-language sentence is transposed into a target-language sentence. Between sentence in the target language sentence and the source language sentence, it exists a relationship which can be designated as translational or equivalence relation."

Nida (1964) considered translation as "Reproducing in the target language the closest natural equivalence of the source language message, first in term of meaning and secondly in term of style." It can be said that Nida believes that translation is not only conveying the messages of the source language but also conveying the culture of the place where the source language is used. In the process of translation, a translator needs not only the meaning of each word in the text but also its communicative value, its place in time and space and information about the participants involved in its production and reception. Besides, according to Merriam (1974), translation consists of changing from one state or form to another, to turn into one's own or another's language. Newmark (1991) also said that, "Translation is rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text." The translation is basically a change of form. When we mention a change in the form of a language, we change to the actual words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, etc. The forms are referred to as the surface structure of a language. The translation is the structural part of language which is actually seen in print. In translation, the form of the source language is replaced by the form of the receptor/target language. In addition, Bassenett (2002) suggested that, translation can be known as "Rendering the source language text into the target language text, which fairly remains the similarity of the meaning and oreserves the source language structure as closely as possible but not to distort the target language structures seriously."

Hamtim & Mason (1990) said that, "Translating is a communicative process which takes place within a social context." Hamtim & Mason (1997) also informed, "Translation is an act of communication which attempts to relay, across cultural and linguistic boundaries, another act of communication." Nord (1991) described, "Translation is the

production of a functional target text maintaining a relationship with a given source sentence that is specified according to the intended or demanded function of the target.” Briefly, it can be said simply that translation is the process of changing something that is written into another language.

In short, when talking the notions above into account, it comes to the conclusion that translation is the replacement or substitution of written text from one language into another language; providing equivalence in content and pragmatics is retained.

2.2 The importance of translation

In the era of globalization, the development of a country is greatly influenced by its ability to exchange culturally, economically, politically and socially with the world. However, the process of exchange between countries is always difficult because of the language barrier. The translation industry is to erase that language barrier. The role of the translation industry can be clearly seen in many fields such as trade, tourism, investment cooperation and so on. The translation is the bridge that helps the process of cooperation and exchange with the world be easier, faster and more convenient. Newmark (1988) emphasized the crucial role of translation that, “Translation facilitates mutual understanding among different and conflicting racial, ethnic, religious and cultural groups.”

Steiner (1975) said that, “Without translation, we could be living in provinces bordering on silence.” Bui and Dang (1997) also mentioned that, “Still people want to read what other people want to write and what people say, translation and interpretation may be considered as the most universally accepted solution for surmounting the obstacles. Thus, there is a need for professional translators and interpreters.”

Nowadays, English has been used as the universal language all over the world, but there are still some people who do not use this language. If a person does not understand the English language fluently, it will lead to miscommunication when participating in a conversation. This is the reason why we need translation; it allows us to communicate more effectively.

In short, translation is important in the process of bridging the gap between citizens all over the world, expanding one's knowledge and supporting other language skills. Because of its importance, translation should not be taken lightly and without a doubt, translation practice should be done daily to master the translation skills of a professional translator.

2.3 The difficulties in translation

When practicing translation from Vietnamese into English, it is not easy and it is hard to be a good translator. Students at Tay Do University have faced difficulties with the translation skill. In the study, four common factors that students meet in translation skill are background knowledge, vocabulary, grammar and idioms.

2.3.1 Background Knowledge

Depending on the area of expertise, there will be special topics, cultures, and contexts that translators need to have the solid background knowledge to be able to understand the field they are translating and fully translate the text. Tenaha et al. (2019) said, “Background knowledge plays a key role in students' reading comprehension -- our findings show that if students don't have sufficient related knowledge, they will probably have difficulties understanding a text.” Background knowledge is essential to have a good translation. Students meet difficulty to translate a text because of lacking general knowledge of special topics, cultures and situational context.

As Proverb (1990) affirmed that, “Background knowledge includes knowledge of target culture, knowledge of current affairs, arts, politics and literature.” When the students face strange topics relating to many fields in social life, they will be confused to translate into English because of lack of the information about the new topics. Students can understand the information or not mainly depends on background knowledge. If the translator has background knowledge of the text and brings it to the reading, that background knowledge will provide information to understanding special topics.

Translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions. Larson (1984) defined culture, as "Culture is a complex of beliefs, attitudes, values, and rules which a group of people shares." and it is hard to achieve in non-native English countries. In the broad sense, it includes mode of production, production activities, community organization, spiritual life and so on. Language is regarded as both a component of culture and network. For example:

Vietnamese: “Áo dài là trang phục truyền thống của người phụ nữ Việt Nam.”

English: “A dress is a traditional cloth of Vietnamese women.” (incorrect)

“Ao dai is a traditional cloth of Vietnamese women.” (correct)

To sum up, we can state that culture plays a very vital role in translation and translators critically need to develop substantial awareness of source language and target language cultures. This cultural awareness is also verified in the following statement of Cook (2003), “Translation cannot be conducted at a purely linguistic level but must incorporate cultural and contextual factors too.”

Context refers to the entire environment in which a word or phrase is expressed. Each word in the text does not exist in isolation but interacts with other words in the text and the entire text. The context itself determines the meaning of words. Therefore, meaning should be solved in the context. Context helps us grasp what word we should choose to have a suitable meaning in our translated text. If we misunderstand the context, it leads to choose unsuitable meanings. Context partly contributes to creating a true translated text which is considered the most important requirement of translation. For example:

Vietnamese: “Toà nhà này cao hơn toà nhà kia.”

English: “This building is taller than that one.” (incorrect)

“This building is higher than that one.” (correct)

In short, if translators lack background knowledge when translating, they may not understand the content of the source language. Knowledge includes both basic knowledge and in-depth knowledge. If students only have basic knowledge, in the process of translating, they will not be able to easily deal with areas that require in-depth knowledge. Therefore, they need to always try to improve knowledge and translation skills.

2.3.2 Vocabulary

Vocabulary is one of the most important factors affecting translation skills. Wilkins (1972) once said that, “Without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed.” Without vocabulary, you will not be able to understand the exact meaning of a text. Vocabulary is one of the most important parts of helping a translator create a well-translated text. The difference in vocabulary system sometimes creates much confusion for translators. Students have difficulties with a meaning of a word, a word collocation and the order of a word in a sentence. It makes the translator has a big difficulty when translating a text. Paying more attention to vocabulary will partly help translation products look smoother and more exactly.

A single lexical item may have several meanings. The translators have a habit of translating literally and depending largely on the meaning in the dictionary due to the mother tongue interference. Depending on the context, words are used with different meanings, a word does not have only one fixed meaning.

For example, the word “head”: the upper part of the body

Vietnamese: Mặc dù anh ấy là người lãnh đạo công ty nhưng anh ấy lại không có đầu óc.

English: Although he is the head of the company, he has no head. (the first “head” means leader and intelligence)

In addition, word collocation consists of associations a word acquires on account of the meanings of words that tend to occur in its environment. Each language has its own principle in word collocation. But some translators do not realize it, which leads to wrong and funny collocation. For example, in Vietnamese, the word “uống” (drink) can go with many different kinds of liquid including water, beer, alcohol, medicine and even poison. However, in English these are clear distinctions as follows:

Drink beer/ water/ wine/ coffee

Take medicine/ poison

Besides, word order rules are to put the words together. Every language has its own order of words in the sentence and learners must respect that. Word orders in Vietnamese and English have many differences, because of the influence of the mother tongue, many juniors hardly avoid the mistakes – wrong English word orders. Although there are similarities between Vietnamese and English in regards to word order, Vietnamese it is a lot more flexible. For example, question words (who, what, where, when, why, etc.) can end up at the end of a question rather than at the beginning which must happen in English.

Vietnamese: “Em sống ở đâu?”

English: “You live where?” (incorrect)

“Where do you live?” (Correct)

Some learners focus so much on the source language (Vietnamese) that they fail to convey all the explicit meanings of the target language (English). In fact, it is not essential to keep the form at all. The most significant thing is that the renderings must be done on a basis for the target language word order that is familiar to the readers. This principle states that the translators should not largely depend on the structures of word order in the source language, but they should break them to convey the meaning as well as appropriate word order in the target language.

In short, words play a crucial role for any language learner to build their own vocabulary system to get advantages in learning. Vocabulary is the fundamental component of translation. The more vocabulary you have, the more advantages you obtain in effective communication. Having a solid vocabulary will make it easier for you to translate a text.

2.3.3 Grammar

The differences in the grammar or grammatical structure also cause difficulties for translators. English is a very flexible grammar language. It goes by very strict structures while the Vietnamese language is much more flexible in the way it does not always use rules. When Vietnamese sentences are translated into English, translators often have difficulties with passive voice, relative clauses and prepositions.

Vietnamese people tend to use active constructions to express ideas whereas English people prefer to use passive ones. Therefore, it is not uncommon that passive construction needs to be translated with an active construction or vice versa, depending on the natural form of the target language. For example:

Vietnamese: “Người ta xem Victor Hugo là một nhà thơ vĩ đại.” (active)

English: “Victor Hugo is considered to be a great poet.” (passive)

A relative clause (adjective clause) is a subordinate clause of a sentence used to clarify the meaning of the noun or pronoun that precedes it. It is connected to the main clause by a word such as “who, whom, which, that and whose”. Thomson & Marinet (2003) classified relative clause into two basic types, defining relative clause and non-defining relative clause. Although relative clauses are of high frequency written texts in English, the concepts of such clauses are non-existent in the Vietnamese language. This makes the translation complicated for Vietnamese students when translating relative clauses from Vietnamese into English. Bui (1980) indicated that relative clauses or relative pronouns are rarely seen in Vietnamese grammar. Instead, a clause connector or conjunction (i.e. “mà”, “cái mà”, “người mà”) is used in the place of relative pronoun.

Paul (2014) defined a preposition, as “A word or group of words used before a noun, pronoun or noun phrase to show direction, time, place, location, spatial relationships, or to introduce an object.” Some examples of prepositions are words like “in”, “at”, “on”, “of” and “to”. In Vietnamese, each preposition has a fixed meaning which does not change regardless of the noun, adjective or verb proceeding it. On the contrary, the meaning of a preposition in English depends on its preceding word. And the errors relate to the misuse of prepositions are common and unavoidable. It often occurs when the translators keep Vietnamese structures to translate the Vietnamese sentence into English. For example:

Vietnamese: “Thầy Nam có nhiều kinh nghiệm về việc giảng dạy học sinh.”

English: “Mr. Nam is experienced about educating and teaching the pupils.” (incorrect)

“Mr. Nam is experienced in educating and teaching the pupils.” (correct)

In short, grammatical structures in English are so complicated and not easy to master. The most important thing is that the translations must be done on the basis of the target language grammar that is familiar to readers. This principle suggests that the translator should not depend largely on the structures of the source language but break them to convey the meaning as much as possible in an appropriate structure in the target language. There is no way to master it without practice. It requires the learners to find out effective ways of learning and practice more if they want to limit grammar errors in using English in general and especially in studying translation.

2.3.4 Idioms

'Idioms' is an expression that functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separate parts. Idiomatic expressions are notoriously untranslatable. These include similes, metaphors, aphorisms, and sayings. Since idioms cannot be literally interpreted, they become acute problems for students in translating them from a language into another one.

Carter (1993) defined idioms as, "Special combinations with restricted forms and meanings that cannot be deduced from the literal meanings of the words which make them up." Accordingly, an idiom is learned and used as a single unit. It should not be analyzed into its constituents, it is unchangeable and always carries a figurative meaning. Idioms are products from the world conceptualization process of the human. Because the constituent units of idioms have a connection with the thinking activities, the meaning of idioms can be generated from the meaning of the constituent units through the cognitive mechanisms governing the conceptualization activity. As a result, the traditional view claiming that idioms' meaning should be learnt by heart. However, there are many idioms used, the number of which is very large, so it is difficult to remember all of them one by one. This is a big obstacle for translators when translating.

There have been quite a few studies on idiom translation strategies. Newmark (1981) emphasized, "Never translating word-for-word of an idiom", but he also argued, "translate the literal meaning of idioms is also useful to foreign language learners as a way to understand and remember idioms" (Newmark, 1991). However, it is necessary to clearly distinguish the meaning of each word from the meaning of all idioms. The real danger is translating the idiom literally since the result will often be meaningless in the target language. Due to cultural differences, it is sometimes difficult to find a suitable equivalent idiom which leads students to apply word-for-word translation to the idiom sentence. One should translate an idiom that has no equivalent using an explanation. For example:

Vietnamese: "Liệu cơm gắp mắm."

English: - Word- for-word "Does rice get lucky." (incorrect)

- Using explanation "One has to match his spending to his income." (correct)

There are two cultures which create a big difference: Oriental culture (Vietnam) and Western culture (England). Each nation has its own characteristics of geography, history, physical life, etc. which are reflected in the language clearly, especially in vocabulary of each ethnic group. The source language word may express a concept which is totally unknown in the target culture. There are words that carry a specific concept but that concept only appears in a certain community. Because idioms are cultural factors, when translating, it is important to convey the message of the source language, not the visual meaning. Therefore, to be able to translate idioms, the translator needs to have a deep understanding of the cultures of both Vietnamese and English. For example:

Vietnamese idiom: "Chở củi về rừng"

English: "To carrying firewood to the forest." (incorrect)

"Carry coals to Newcastle." (correct)

In this idiom, if the translator does not understand England geography well, they will not know where Newcastle is and cannot translate smoothly. It will make the idiom sound strange and funny.

In fact, idioms can be translated satisfactorily by considering the context, if not, it is difficult to find the exact meaning. A Vietnamese idiom must be translated into English by an equivalent one. It is very important to be aware that we must not choose the equivalents of every word forming the idiom but we do find the equivalent ways of expression which exist in both languages. If we stick to each word, the meaning becomes strange, unnatural and funny.

Thus, translation is an important skill for students majoring in English. It contributes to improving their ability to learn English. However, learning translation is not easy because it is accompanied by many problems that hinder students in the learning process. Chapter 2 has analyzed the importance of translation. In parallel, there are difficulties in translation from Vietnamese into English, through which students can find solutions to learn this skill well.

3. RESEARCH AIMS, RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPHOTHESIS

3.1 Research aims

This study expects to find out some common difficulties in the Vietnamese – English translation of the junior English majors at Tay Do University.

3.2 Research question

To obtain the above stated purposes, the study has to answer the following question:

What are difficulties that English majored juniors at Tay Do University encounter when translating from Vietnamese into English?

3.3 Hypothesis

Translating is a difficult subject. English majored juniors at Tay Do University have been learning practice translating in three terms. They have many difficulties in translating from Vietnamese into English. Depending on the literature review and questionnaire, it is hypothesized that English majored juniors have a lot of difficulties as background knowledge, vocabulary, grammar and idioms

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research design

The research is performed to find out the difficulties that English majored juniors at Tay Do University. The questionnaire and interview paper will be delivered to investigate the problems in translating from Vietnamese into English. This study can help students realize some problems they have faced in translation skills. This study is a combination of quantitative research and qualitative one.

4.2 Research participant

In this study, the participants are sixty juniors from English language courses at Tay Do University. There are forty-two females and eight males who participate in the research. Their ages range from 20 to 21. They all live in the Mekong Delta. Besides, Vietnamese is their mother tongue, and English as their foreign language. At the time of the research, this group of students are exposed to translation skill, so they could give an overview of common errors when translation. They all study Practice Translation 1, 2 and 3 with the materials compiled by lectures of Tay Do university. Students have an opportunity to participate in the improvement process by practicing translation with classmates and teachers through diverse topics which are close to their life, such as Health, Sport, Environment and so on. In addition, they also practice many extensive topics given by the teachers.

4.3 Instrument

The instruments used in this research are the questionnaire and the interview, which was taken from English-majored juniors at Tay Do University to find out their problems in an English translation process. The questionnaire and the interview are delivered to them with a clear and careful explanation to collect the students' ideas.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire is used as the most useful and important instrument for many reasons. First, this was the best way to get a lot of information from many people in a short time. Second, it was easier and quicker to quantify the research. The questionnaire uses simple English words and is translated carefully to avoid students' misunderstanding, which influenced the analysis results. It consists of 9 multiple-choice questions and 39 statements in a table with 5 points scale: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neutral, (4) disagree, (5) strongly disagree, and it is classified into groups: student's attitude toward translation, problems in translating, problems in background knowledge, vocabulary, grammar and idioms.

Interview

The interview is designed to get specific information from juniors about difficulties when translation from Vietnamese into English. It includes five questions. Ten students are randomly selected out of sixty students that take part in the survey. This instrument aims to confirm difficulties and to understand the students' attitude towards translation skill.

5. EXPECTED OUTCOME

Translation is one of the necessary skill for students. It helps them learn English better and find a good job in the future. Juniors majoring in English usually face some problems when practicing translation. This research figures out difficulties then helps students know and correct the mistakes.

5.1 Background knowledge

Background knowledge has a big influence on translating. It effects on the topic of the text. Students with poor background knowledge are difficult to translate many topics relating to culture, history, science, news, etc. On the other hand, students cannot identify the topic and guess or perspective of the source text if they lack of background knowledge. The translation is not only the conversion from one language to another, it is also the transmission of knowledge and culture from the source language to the target language. Lack of background knowledge makes it difficult for students to properly convey messages about special topics, cultures and contexts. Those are the reason why background knowledge is the core problem of English majored juniors at Tay Do University.

5.2 Vocabulary

Lack of vocabulary causes many difficulties in translation. Furthermore, some Vietnamese words cannot be translated into English. It makes English majors feel that the vocabulary is the largest in Vietnamese - English translation. A word often has many meanings, students do not understand the meaning of words to choose them in the most suitable way for their translation. A word collocation and the order of words in a sentence are also a big problem that students face when practicing translating a text from Vietnamese into English.

5.3 Grammar

Using English grammar points is also a challenge for students in the process of translating Vietnamese - English texts. It requires some effective and workable ways to help them overcome other problems so that their Vietnamese - English translations flow more smoothly and achieve more success. The research has shown that students often have many grammatical difficulties when translating from Vietnamese into English because of the structural difference between the two languages. They often have difficulty translating sentences with passive voice, relative clauses, and prepositions.

5.4 Idioms

Idioms are a big obstacle for students when practicing Vietnamese - English translation. Idioms are fixed phrases, so students need to be memorized when using them. At the time, students' word-by-word technique seemed to be a major obstacle to them actually conveying the intended meaning of the translated texts. Besides, Vietnamese and English are two distinct cultures. This means that the way each culture reflects its own idioms is not always identical.

In conclusion, the aim of the research was to find out the difficulties that English-majored juniors at Tay Do University often face in translating. The participants of this study are the English majored students studying their third year at Tay Do University. To achieve the goal, a questionnaire and an interview paper are used for collecting data. After collecting and analyzing data, the research points out that the main causes of translation difficulties in background knowledge, vocabulary, grammar and idioms. The work is to investigate and recognize the key causes of difficulties in translating from Vietnamese into English of English majored juniors.

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