



Some Common Language Errors in Translation Practice by Students: A Case Study in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Phan Thiet University

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Abstract: The study aims to point out and analyze some common mistakes made by 124 third-year English-majored students in the courses of 2017, 2018, and 2019, including classes DH17TA2, K10NNA Group 2, and K11NNA Group 2 of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, at Phan Thiet University. Through interviewing three lecturers who teach the course Translation from Theory to Practice in the academic years 2020–2021 and 2021–2022, the writer synthesizes examples and translation techniques to correct the given errors as well as delivers recommendations on self-study methods and practice so that students can improve their learning results and improve their practical and application skills. The results show the frequency of students' language errors (67.8% of the total errors). From that, the writer attests to the experiences and recommendations from the lecturers in order to improve the students' results in the translation subject and, at the same time, to innovate the self-study method, forming skills to meet the requirements of actual translation work after graduating.

Key words: translation; error analysis; linguistics; cultural errors; language errors.

I. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

When it comes to the quality of the compiled product, even small errors still leave a bad impression on the readers, who doubt the professionalism and integrity of the translators, which can damage their reputation in professional activities. Because of that, it is essential to identify and draw up error correction methods. It should be done at the early stage of the training process to create the habit of editing and post-translating for students (ST) majoring in the English Language who choose the specialized knowledge block of Translation at Phan Thiet University (hereinafter referred to as "UPT").

Third-year and fourth-year students at the university usually make certain mistakes while practicing translation and interpretation due to difficulties such as the difference between two languages and are affected by the long-term habit of using their mother tongue. For students, there is no motivation for further training and no learning methods. These issues have a significant influence on the results and the course learning outcomes (CLO). Some students who practice at translation facilities in the province have not met the actual requirements and even made mistakes and errors during the internship and apprentice period. Therefore, they need to be equipped with knowledge, skills, and psychology from an early stage to be able to participate in the labor market right after graduation. The researcher conducted a study entitled "Some Common Language Errors in Translation Practice by Students: A Case Study at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Phan Thiet University" to identify common errors in the process of translating texts from English to

Vietnamese for students, then proceeded to find the cause and consult with teachers to propose solutions to correct them.

1.2 Research aim and questions

The aim of this paper is to provide a system for identifying and correcting frequent mistakes made when practicing translation exercises. The writer then provides strategies to help students avoid or reduce errors in translation, thereby assisting students at Phan Thiet University in their learning process. The study is centered on the following research questions:

- (1) What are the most frequent translation errors made by students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Phan Thiet University?*
- (2) What are the causes of the errors and how can they be corrected?*

1.3 Research methodology

The object of the research is the common mistakes in 328 translation exercises of 124 third-year students (n = 124) in the three courses of 2017, 2018, and 2019. Qualitative methods are employed in combination with error analysis (EA) and expert (translation teacher) interviews to correct those errors and suggest directions for improvement. The research design was adopted from Nguyễn Thị Kiều Thu and Nguyễn Lê Uyên Minh (2019). After transcribing all 328 translation practice exercises, quizzes, and end-of-course tests, the writer conducts coding by manually marking errors that appear in the texts. For example, 'L' stands for language errors where branching to 'L1' is an untranslatable/incorrect wording error, and 'L2' is an error that cannot be translated/incorrect polysemy, etc. The writer then uses AntConc software (version 4.0.10) to keep track of how often mistakes happen. Simultaneously, the writer synthesizes and analyzes the teacher's interviews about the experience in teaching this subject, the causes, and the teacher's recommendations to control the above-mentioned errors.

II. The Research Results

2.1 The general results

328 translation exercises contain a total of 161,376 tokens. Each student's mistake is illustrated with an example, and there is a translation suggestion suggested by the lecturer in the answer section when giving the question. After collecting all the information from the data processing, the writer finds that the students' translation ability is average, with a total of 7215 errors, including main groups of errors that are language errors. The results show the frequency of language errors. Language errors account for 67.8% of the total errors, besides cultural errors (32.2%). However, the writer just considers the language errors to narrow down the topic in this paper.

2.2 Error analysis combined with expert methods from interviews

From the above data, examples of linguistic and cultural errors with more detailed hierarchical errors are presented below for the purpose of illustrating each type. The topic from the translation practice is matched with the student's incorrect translation. The analysis is also based on the results of the expert methods, i.e., from interviews for advice, comments, corrections, and recommendations for translation techniques by teachers in charge of teaching this subject.

** L: Lexical Errors*

+L1: Unable to translate or incorrect terminology: the rate is 14.5% of the total. However, contrary to the teachers' anticipation, the percentage of students who do not remember the specified terms is as high as seen in the following example:

(1) Storm Over Pit Closure

A student's translation: Bão đóng cửa hố

A translation suggestion from one of the teachers: Tranh cãi về việc đóng cửa các hầm mỏ

This is a requirement of translating the news headline, which was introduced by the lecturers from the journalism discipline, and the rules of forming a headline for an article that is different from the common language. The teachers suggest to the translator that he/she should apply two translation techniques at the same time: (1) transposition in "storm" from a noun to a verb meaning "tranh cãi" (debate) in Vietnamese; and (2) communicative translation.

+ T2: Can't translate/wrong polysemy

This is the type of error that students make the most (17.9%) even though they have been instructed to look up the dictionary to choose the right meaning for the context. This reflects that the skill of making a decision to choose the meaning of a word needs to be trained more.

(3) *I don't think a single person thought I was the worst in my class.*

A student's translation: Tôi không nghĩ người độc thân nào tin tôi là học sinh tồi nhất lớp.

This sentence should be translated as "*Tôi nghĩ không ai tin tôi từng là học sinh tồi nhất lớp*". According to the teacher's suggestion, the translation method for this sentence is a literal translation because it involves choosing the right meaning in accordance with the context of the word.

+ T3: Repetition of unnecessary words

(4) *Vietnam and Cambodia have expressed satisfaction at the new progress made in their relations since the establishment of the Royal Government and both since their friendship best to further improve the traditional and multiple-faceted cooperation between them.*

A student's translation: Việt Nam và Campuchia bày tỏ sự hài lòng trước những tiến triển mới trong quan hệ T3 của họ kể từ lúc thành lập Chính phủ Hoàng gia và cả hai T3 cam kết sẽ làm hết sức mình để cải thiện hơn nữa quan hệ hữu nghị truyền thống và hợp tác nhiều mặt giữa hai nước.

There is no intention of using allusions (repeated words or phrases) to emphasize or draw attention. The researcher only encoded "T3" on the first occurrence of the repeated word and labeled it only once. The reason is due to the lack of flexibility in the ability to use synonyms to express. For example, "tình hữu nghị" can be replaced by "song phương", "hai bên", "hai nước", và "hai quốc gia". Those terms can be interchangeable. In translation, the vocabulary of both languages also determines the flexibility in expression that students need to cultivate through reading many books, newspapers, and documents.

A translation suggestion from one of the teachers: Việt Nam và Cam-pu-chia đã bày tỏ sự hài lòng về những bước tiến mới trong các mối quan hệ giữa hai nước từ sau khi chính phủ Vương quốc Cam-pu-chia được thành lập. Song phương cam kết sẽ làm hết sức mình để củng cố và phát triển tình hữu nghị truyền thống và hợp tác nhiều mặt giữa hai quốc gia.

The method here is to replace synonyms with the technique of translating the meaning of general words or phrases to specific words or phrases, or vice versa, from specific to general.

* N: Grammatical (syntax) errors

+ N1: Incorrect word order

(5) *The old Ian Fleming is famous for his James Bond series.*

A student's translation: Lão nhà văn Ian Fleming nổi tiếng với seri James Bond.

The cause of the error in word order is that the noun phrase structure of English has the reverse order of components compared to Vietnamese. The number of these errors made by students is not high (1.5%), so it is not a cause for concern.

The phrase "the old Ian Fleming," if the student translates it as "lão nhà văn Ian Fleming," will insert a disdain (an old and unrespected man), so it should be changed to "nhà văn lão thành - Ian Fleming." The translation measure that should be applied in this case is to change the phrase into the Vietnamese structure.

+ N2: Incorrect grammar sentence pattern (12.3%)

(6) *The maps used in this book, when necessary, are noted where they appear.*

A student's translation: Những tấm bản đồ trong sách, khi cần thiết, chúng sẽ được ghi chú ngay ở nơi mà chúng xuất hiện.

A complete sentence in both English and Vietnamese includes a subject, predicate, and auxiliary components. In the above sentence, "maps in the book" is a subject, and adding one more subject, "them,"

would be redundant. Therefore, it is best to omit the words "them" and "where they appear" so that the sentence has a clear meaning.

A translation suggestion from one of the teachers: Khi cần thiết, những tấm bản đồ trong sách sẽ được ghi chú ngay tại chỗ.

The translation method here is to omit unnecessary words/phrases because the existence of these words does not cause confusion or loss of any important information in the original text.

+ N3: Errors cause ambiguous meanings or incorrect logic (7.7%)

Students make this mistake, perhaps because they do not read the source text carefully, so they do not understand the inner content, causing the phenomenon of understanding more than two meanings in one sentence at a time.

(7) *The daughter did not stop crying and begging for her parents.*

A student's translation: Cô con gái không ngừng khóc lóc cầu xin thay bố mẹ.

For this translation by a student, the reader can understand this sentence in at least three ways: (i) the daughter is on behalf of her parents; (ii) the daughter cries and begs for her parents to do something; and (iii) the daughter cries and begs to replace her parents with someone else. If we read the source text carefully, it is easy to choose the first meaning.

A translation suggestion from one of the teachers: Cô con gái không ngừng khóc lóc cầu xin thay cho bố mẹ mình.

(8) *Combating corruption is such a difficult and sensitive issue that many national political leaders who support such forts in principle are hesitant to undertake them in practice.*

A student's translation: Chống tham nhũng là một vấn đề khó khăn và nhạy cảm mà nhiều nhà lãnh đạo chính trị quốc gia hỗ trợ về các quy tắc còn đang do dự, không nhất quyết với nhau để cam kết thực hiện trong thực tế.

A translation suggestion from one of the teachers: Đấu tranh chống tham nhũng là một vấn đề hết sức khó khăn và nhạy cảm đến nỗi rất nhiều nhà lãnh đạo chính trị các nước vẫn chưa quyết tâm thực hiện mặc dù đã ủng hộ trên thực tế.

This translation seems to have been translated word by word by the student, very close to the usual meaning on the surface of the words, causing illogical and meaningless situations. The sentence structure, word order, and word meanings in this sentence all need to be rearranged and changed. Therefore, the measure to be used here is the transposition technique.

+ N4: Wrong orthographic rules (10.9%): Third-year university students are subject to a certain extent of knowledge, so spelling mistakes in their own native language account for 7.3%, wrong use of punctuation is 2.8%, and incorrect capitalization is 0.8%. The teacher thought that this mistake was made because the students were not paying attention, and did not reread the lesson. It was not a big, systematic mistake and didn't happen many times.

(9)... *both to do their best to further improve the traditional friendship and multiple-faceted cooperation between them.*

A student's translation:... cả hai cam kết sẽ **nỗ lực** hết sức để nâng cao hơn nữa quan hệ hữu nghị truyền thống và hợp tác về nhiều mặt giữa hai nước.

The misspelled "nỗ lực," should be corrected to "nỗ lực".

+ N4 (2) Using incorrect punctuation: Misuse of punctuation is also limited for university students, accounting for only 2.8%.

(10) *She said, "I was on his way."*

A student's translation: Cô ấy nói, "Tôi đang trên đường đi".

A suggested translation from teachers: Cô ấy nói: "Tôi đang trên đường đi".

In indirect sentences, Vietnamese will use a colon, while English will use a comma immediately after the introductory clause to quote.

+ N4 (3) Incorrect capitalization rule:

(10) *Côte d'Ivoire is a country located on the coast of western Africa.*

A student's translation: Bờ Biển Ngà là một quốc gia nằm ở miền Tây Châu Phi.

Teachers' suggestion for translation: Bờ biển Ngà là một quốc gia nằm ở bờ biển phía tây châu Phi.

In general, for errors in spelling rules (including misspellings, incorrect punctuation, and wrong word capitalization), teachers conclude most of the time it is because students are negligent, do not have enough time, or are lazy to re-read the translation after doing the assignment. The teacher gives a solution to the group of spelling mistakes by saying that students should read carefully the translation to check and correct the mistakes after completing parts or all of the work.

Based on interviews with teachers, the causes of making mistakes while doing exercises are divided into two categories:

Subjective factors: students who do not pay attention to the lectures, do not read the topic carefully, do not re-read to check for errors after the translation is completed, or are too confident about their translation;

A rare but still existing reason is that although Vietnamese is the mother tongue, some students still make mistakes when expressing themselves, making the translation confusing, difficult to understand, and difficult to accept.

Objective factors: English and Vietnamese are completely different in origin, structure, and vocabulary, even though they are all expressed in the form of Latin letters. That is why translators who are dominated by their mother tongue have difficulty in the translation process and make mistakes. Besides, students may be tired and stressed during the test, so they lack concentration. Another reason comes from the fact that the translation course is only designed for 1 semester (2.5 months), making the approach to this subject only general but not in-depth; the practical part is limited. Therefore, students' translation skills have not been mastered.

For giving solutions to students' translation errors, teachers need clear and specific theoretical guidance; explain exercises and give similar exam/test questions to test students' memorization ability; increase the practice time; assign lots of practice exercises at home and in class to promote self-motivation. Active, learner-centered teaching methods through lesson-related game design, pair and group discussions, and the use of vivid visual aids (images, videos, audio, PowerPoint, etc.) should also be implemented in the classroom, simulating the classroom into "office hours" so that students can access the working methods of a professional translation agency, helping students visualize future work in order to encourage self-discipline, creative thinking, and avoid surprises when entering the real working environment.

II. Conclusion

Based on document analysis, students' self-study method is still low. Students do not know how to apply lectures in class to expand their knowledge. Students must improve their reading skills by reading a variety of books, newspapers, and documents. The errors of wrong word order are mostly caused by the impact of their mother tongue, causing students difficulties because of the strange structure of foreign languages compared to their familiar native languages.

As a result, teachers need to include content about error types and error avoidance methods in teaching so that students can identify errors, thereby forming editing capabilities to correct mistakes and at the same time avoid repeating those mistakes.

The writer proposes to write a new and updated curriculum to support the convenient and consistent teaching of the subject among teachers. To transmit theoretical and practical knowledge, an additional three learning credits for the advanced translation course are required, making it a mandatory subject and introducing it in earlier semesters. Teachers should prepare students to approach the translation environment right from the school stage to get used to the real work.

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