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An investigation into common errors in Vietnamese-English translation made by college freshmen: A case study at Foreign Trade University - Ho Chi Minh Campus

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate students' common errors in Vietnamese-English translation. For the objectives, 70 first-year students at Foreign Trade University – Ho Chi Minh campus, were invited to participate in this study. To identify students' errors in Vietnamese-English translation, the participants were asked to complete five weekly assignments. The results revealed that students made grammatical, lexical, and spelling errors. The causes of these observed errors were also indicated, which included the difference between English and Vietnamese languages, inadequate culture background, students' insufficient linguistic competence in English language and Vietnamese language, lack of cultural background knowledge, students' inappropriate translation strategies, interference of Vietnamese, misunderstanding, and students' carelessness. In addition, some suggestions were offered in the light of the findings identified in the study to help students improve their translation ability.

Keywords: *grammatical errors, lexical errors, spelling errors, Vietnamese-English translation*

1. Introduction

Translation has played a prominent part in globalization and international integration for recent years. Xuelian (2012) stated that translation has greatly contributed to the

information exchange across cultural boundaries. With the help of translation, a minor community can reach out the world and show its unique culture, which implies that through translation people can learn how to appreciate different cultures, communities and countries (Serdihun & Sivasish, 2012). In spite of the importance of translation in intercultural communication and learners' language learning, the results of previous studies showed that the translator or the learner often has problems in translation like un-equivalence or unnaturalness in translation from his mother tongue into foreign languages (Aleksandra, 2009; Ahmad, 2010; Hambali, 2011; Khoshhal, 2017; Presada, & Badea, 2013).

Because of the reasons above, this study is an attempt to find out common errors in English-Vietnamese translation made by first-year students at Foreign Trade University – Ho Chi Minh Campus. On the ground of the major errors that may be found, some solutions will be suggested to help students translate effectively.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definitions of Error Analysis

In language learning, error is an inescapable natural part of language learning process made by learners in written or oral communication. There is a variety of definitions of errors. According to James (2013), an error is defined as failure of competence which is a systematic violation of rules to which the learners have been exposed; error also tells us something about the learner's current knowledge of the language that he has learned. An error also refers to systematic error of the learners underlying knowledge of the language. Dulay and Burt (1982) defined errors as "the flawed side of learner's speech or writing", which deviates from language performance. In this sense, an error is considered as a sign of language learning process and natural product in EFL learning which reflects the learner's knowledge. Besides, an error is also an idiosyncrasy in the interlanguage of the learner which is a direct manifestation of a system within which a learner is operating. Brown (1987) stated that an error is a noticeable deviation from the grammar of native speaker that reflects the interlanguage competence of the learners). According to Lennon (1991), an error is considered as a linguistic form which would not be produced by native speakers in the same context and under similar conditions of production. Although there have been various interpretations of errors, in this study, error is defined in terms of using language that is not complying with the grammar rule and not proper in the specific context in comparison with using language by native speakers.

2.2. Significance of Error Analysis in Language Learning, Language Teaching and Research

Error analysis has great significance for education and research since it brings benefits to language learners, language teachers and researchers. Firstly, error analysis plays an

important part in learners' language learning process. In some cases, learners' error analysis gives advantages helping learners know which errors they made. After errors are analyzed and corrected, they can be served as feedback of the hypothesis which the learners are using since errors are believed to contain valuable information in the strategies learners use to acquire language (Richards, 1974; Dulay & Burt, 1982). Additionally, errors may give a valuable insight into foreign language learning because they are goofs in the learner's underlying competence. Dulay and Burt (1982) also emphasized the significance of the error analysis for the learners because it provides important information from which inferences about the language learning process can be made. It also indicates which part of the target language is the most difficult problem for them and which types of error affect the learner's ability to communicate effectively.

Secondly, error analysis can bring benefits to language teachers as well. Language errors made by the learner can also be a good input for teachers to know how the learner's learning process goes and what areas need to be improved as well as enable teachers to find out the causes of errors and take pedagogical precautions towards them. Errors also provide information about learners' difficulties during L2 learning and the way they learn and develop their language learning process. The results of error analysis can tell teachers about the effectiveness of their teaching materials as well as teaching techniques. They also show which parts of the syllabus have inadequately been learned or taught and need further attention (Corder, 1973). It is supposed by James (2013) that error analysis tells the teacher what he or she should teach. Error analysis can inform the teacher "how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and, consequently, what remains for him to learn". Thus, error analysis is an undoubtedly valuable teaching tool, so the teacher should handle them cautiously with awareness (Tarone, 1983). Error analysis can help the language teacher identify the problematic areas of language learning by providing deep insights for learners' second language acquisition process. By studying the changes occurring in the errors of L2 learners in their continuous learning process, the teacher can predict the likely errors and prepare their instructional remedial materials accordingly (Falk, 1978).

Thirdly, error analysis can be a source of information for researchers. Errors can be considered as evidences for researchers on how to learn a language, what kinds of strategies to learn and what kinds of errors the learner has made. Thus, "learner's errors are significant because they provide researchers evidences of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language" (Corder, 1981). They are also "the source of information for researchers about how the learning proceeds" (James, 1998). The studies of learners' errors have also been focused on language learning. It is a part of investigation of the language learning process. It also provides researchers with the picture of linguistic development of learners and may give us indication to learning strategies.

In general, error analysis can be a useful tool for an effective foreign language teaching program. It can be a source of information for the teachers and the researchers about language teaching and learning, remedial courses, appropriate teaching materials and teaching strategies based on the findings of error analysis. Additionally, error analysis can be served as effective feedback for language learners throughout their language learning process.

2.3. Related Concepts in Translation Theory

2.3.1. Definitions of Translation

Translation has been variously defined. Catford (1965) and Hartmann & Stock (1972) agreed that translation is the replacement of textual materials in one language (source language) by equivalent textual material in another language (target language). In addition, Nida & Taber (1974) believed that translation consists of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, in terms of both meaning and style. Wills (1982) also stated that translation is a procedure which leads from a written source language text to an optimally equivalent target language text, and which requires the syntactic, semantic, stylistic, and text pragmatic comprehension by the translator of the original text.

In conclusion, translation can be defined as the replacement of a source language text by a target language equivalent text in which the meaning of the text and author's intention are preserved.

2.3.2. Translation Strategies

Bader and Abu (2010) found out that students usually use five strategies when they translate. These strategies use synonyms, generalization, paraphrasing, reduction strategy, and literal translation. However, this study focuses on six translation strategies, namely literal translation, borrowing, calque or loan translation, transposition, modulation, and adaptation.

2.3.2.1. Literal Translation

According to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), literal or word for word translation is the direct transfer from a source language text into a grammatically and idiomatically appropriate target language text in which the translators' task is limited to the target language form. Similarly, literal translation is considered as a method in which the translator mainly focuses on the form not on the content. In other words, translation generally refers to all the process and methods used to transfer the meaning of the source language text into the target language as closely as possible. It means that the meaning is translated in relation to grammar, style, and sounds of the target language. The method of translation depends on the choice of the translator and his competence (Ghazala, 2012).

Bader and Abu (2010) also added that this strategy is the source language based strategy in which the translator simply transfers all the words into the target language without

considering the cultural or contextual aspects. The following examples will be illustration for this strategy.

English	Vietnamese
I. I go to school.	Tôi đi đến trường.
II. He is playing football.	Anh ấy đang chơi bóng đá.
III. I put the book on the table.	Tôi để quyển sách trên bàn.

2.3.2.2. Borrowing

Borrowing strategy is defined as a method in which the source language word is transferred directly to the target language text without being translated (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995). This strategy involves directly taking some words from one language into another. Such borrowing is usually known as “loan word” (Crystal, 1990). For instance, the terms such as “email”, “cassette”, “radio” and “laptop” have come into Vietnamese from English. Though borrowed words are very effective in the transmission of cultural information, the effectiveness of this strategy depends on the user’s familiarity with these borrowed words (Iver, 1987). As mentioned above, some translators apply this translation method when there is no appropriate equivalent in the target language. In other words, they cannot find a lexical correspondence for the concept that needs to be translated.

2.3.2.3. Calque or Loan Translation

Calque or loan translation is considered as a special kind of borrowing which the source language expression or structure is transferred in a literal translation (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995). In other words, calque is a special kind of borrowing, whereby an expression form of the source language is borrowed in the target language. Each of the expression form’s units is literally translated. The result of a calque is either a lexical calque or a structural calque. Firstly, a lexical calque is a calque which respects the syntactic structure of the target language, whilst introducing a new mode of expression, e.g.: This contest is sponsored by Hyundai → Cuộc thi này do Huyndai tài trợ.

Secondly, a structural calque is a calque which introduces a new construction into the language. For example, the sentence “This contest is sponsored by Huyndai” can also be translated as “Huyndai tài trợ cuộc thi này”. In Vietnamese language, active voice tends to be used more frequently than passive voice in English language.

2.3.2.4. Transposition

Transposition involves replacing one-word class by another without changing the meaning of the message. According to Vinay & Darbelnet (1995), transposition can also be considered as the change of one part of speech for another without changing the sense. For example, “*We had to hurry indoors because it was raining*”, can be re-expressed by transposing a subordinate verb with a noun, thus: “*We had to hurry indoors because of the rain*”. In translation, transposition is considered as one of the

most common strategies. The first example is considered as the base expression, while the second one is the transposed expression. Vinay & Darbelnet (1995) state that there are two types of transposition in translation, obligatory transposition and optional transposition. The following example has to be literally translated, but must also be transposed:

Khi cô ấy đến	When she arrives
	Upon her arrival.....

In above example, when translating Vietnamese into English, the translator has opportunities to choose between applying a calque and a transposition, because English permits either construction.

Transposition occurs since nominalizations are translated as verb forms in Vietnamese because the Vietnamese tend to use verbal structure (Them 2004) rather than nominalization (Martínez 2002). In the following example, the nominalization “her refusal” is translated as verbal construction “Cô ấy từ chối” rather than “Sự từ chối của cô ấy”.

English	Vietnamese
He is sad because of <i>her refusal</i> .	Anh ấy buồn vì <u>cô ấy từ chối</u> .

2.3.2.5. Modulation

According to Van Hoof (1989), modulation is a type of transposition at the global level, not grammatical categories. Modulation is also defined as the change of the semantic and the point of view of the source language text (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995). In other words, modulation is a strategy utilizing some target phrases which are different from ones of the source language in order to convey the same idea. For example, the sentence “It is not difficult to learn English” can be translated into “Học tiếng Anh thì dễ”.

Although literal and transposed translation results in grammatically correct utterance, they are considered unsuitable, unidiomatic or unnatural in the target language. Vinay & Darbelnet (1995) asserted that modulation is “the touch stone of good translator, whereas transposition simply shows a good command by the target language”. They also added that the level of message is subdivided along the following categories: abstract for concrete, cause and effect, part and whole, part and another part, reversal of terms, negation of opposites, active to passive (and vice versa), space form time, rethinking of intervals and limits and changing of symbol (including fixed and new metaphors).

2.3.2.6. Adaptation

Adaptation can be described as a special kind of equivalence, a situational equivalence. This method involves changing the cultural reference when a situation in the source language does not exist in the target language. Similarly, adaptation occurs when something specific to one language culture is expressed in a totally different way that is familiar and appropriate to another language. For example, in English culture, that an

English father who would think nothing of kissing his daughter on the mouth is quite normal. However, it is not acceptable in literal rendering into Vietnamese. Therefore, if the translator translated the sentence “He kissed his daughter on the mouth” as “Ông ấy hôn môi con gái”, it would be not acceptable in Vietnamese culture. Consequently, adaptation should be used in this situation. A more appropriate translation would be “Ông ấy hôn con gái”.

The translator has free choices of translation methods or translation strategies through which he would conduct his translation. Indeed, choosing appropriate translation strategies is very important. Therefore, when selecting translation strategies, the translator should understand what he wants to transmit in the text message and how to keep the essential properties of the original text.

2.4. Factors Affecting Translation Process

2.4.1. Linguistic Aspects

According to Mildred (1984) and Le Phuong Lan (2006), characteristics of language, grammatical features and lexical features can affect translation process.

Firstly, in terms of grammatical features, parts of speech are specific. Each language has its own division of the lexicon into parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. Each language has its own different classes and subclasses. Therefore, it may not always be possible to translate a source language noun into a noun in the target language (Le Phuong Lan, 2006).

Secondly, in terms of lexical features, each language has its own idiomatic way of expressing meaning through lexical items such as words and phrases, etc. In other languages, single specific verbs are used in place of the English phrasal verbs. The construction as such is highly problematic because each English word has numerous meanings. Moreover, both Mildred (1984) and Le Phuong Lan (2006) agreed that a word in the source language may be translated into many words in the target language.

2.4.2. Cultural Aspects

Culture is considered as an important factor affecting translation process since translation is not only a linguistic transformation of texts but also a rendering of cultural concepts from one language to another. Nida (2005) pointed out that “For truly successful translating, biculturalism is even more important than bilingualism, since words only have meanings in terms of the cultures in which they function”. According to Serdihun and Sivashish (2012), there is a close relationship between culture, language and translation since translation involves both linguistic and cultural activities. Supporting this point of view, He (2012) stated that translation involves two different languages entailing two different cultures, the translators should develop a good understanding of the comprehensive culture knowledge as well as be familiar with the language symbols to be able to recognise the cultural differences and comprehend the

language implications in translation through the way people express their beliefs, thoughts, ideas and cultures, etc. Furthermore, the social context in translating a text is probably more important variable than its genre (Hatim & Mason, 1990).

3. Research methods

This study was conducted in order to find out common errors in Vietnamese-English translation made by students at Foreign Trade University – Ho Chi Minh campus. In addition, investigating the causes of these errors was also the aim of the study. To gather necessary data, the researcher utilized descriptive methods since descriptions of phenomena occur naturally without intervention of an experiment or treatment (Seliger & Shohamy, 2000).

It took about two months to carry out the research. First, the researcher chose the topic, collected the related previous studies and materials from the reliable internet sources and reference books. After that the weekly assignments were designed and taken by 70 first-year students at Foreign Trade University – Ho Chi Minh Campus. Finally, the study was implemented to find out students' common errors and their causes in Vietnamese-English translation made by first-year students at Foreign Trade University – Ho Chi Minh Campus.

Students were assigned to take five assignments during the course. Each assignment included six Vietnamese sentences which were in popular topics such as daily life, education, health, etc. Students translated these Vietnamese sentences into English within twenty minutes.

The data collected from the assignments was subjected to Microsoft Excel for data analysis. In addition, error analysis was also applied in data analysis procedure. Based on the procedure suggested by Ellis (1997), error analysis procedure of the study includes four steps: (1) identification of errors, (2) classification of errors identified, (3) explanation of the causes of the errors, and (4) evaluation of errors.

- Step 1: The researcher identifies the errors by underlining them with a pencil. Correcting errors is done in this step.
- Step 2: After identifying errors, their systematizing and classifying are done only by the researcher. In the current study, errors are classified into five main categories: misuse of an element, omission of a required element, addition of an unnecessary item, inappropriate choice of an element, and misplacement of an element based on the surface strategy taxonomy by Dulay (1982).
- Step 3: Errors are explained to identify their possible causes.
- Step 4: Errors are evaluated to decide the frequency they appeared. This evaluation reaches prevention and correction of errors.

4. Results and discussion

According to the results of the study, students made three types of translation errors, namely grammatical errors, lexical errors, and spelling errors. These types of translation error are described in the following chart.

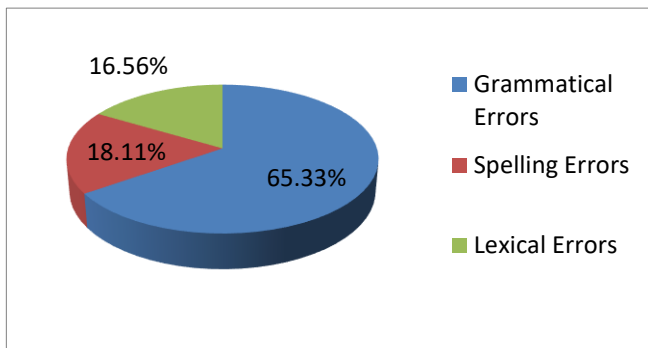


Chart 1. Distribution of translation error types

Chart 1 described the distribution and percentage of errors made by the students in the assignments and the translation tests. Of all translation error types, grammatical errors appeared most frequently (3315/5074) and occupied the highest proportion (65.33%). The second error type which the students made was the spelling error (919/5074, 18.11%). Following this error type was the lexical error (840/5074, 16.56%). Generally, students made grammatical errors, lexical errors, and spelling errors in Vietnamese-English translation. In next sections, each type of errors will be described and analyzed in detail.

4.1. Types of Grammatical Errors

From the results of the study, students made about 3315 grammatical errors. These errors occupied the highest proportion (65.33%) of all translation errors. The grammatical error types found in the study are illustrated in the following chart.

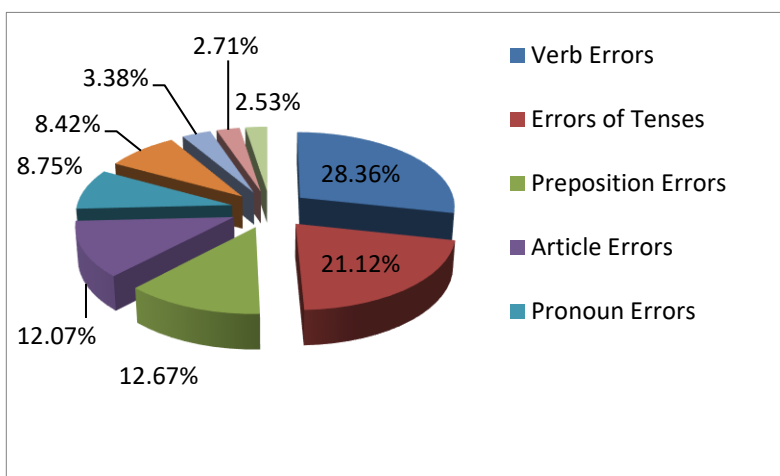


Chart 2. Distribution of grammatical error types

4.1.1. Verb Errors

According to the results of the weekly assignments, students frequently made errors in verbs. Of all grammatical errors made by students, verb errors appeared most frequently (940/3315) and made up for the highest proportion (28.36%). The verb error types found in the study were omission of verbs, addition of verbs, misuse of verb forms, and inappropriate choice of verb voice.

Among the verb errors, misuse of verb forms occupied the highest proportion (38.3%). Misuse of verb forms referred to the use of a verb that was not correct with the word structure. As can be seen in the students' assignments, they frequently misused the verb forms such as "to infinitive", "bare infinitive", and "gerund". It might be inferred that some students forgot these grammar rules when they were translating. In this sense, the cause of misuse of verb form could be students' insufficient linguistic competence because they were not able to recognize and use appropriate verb forms. The second common verb error type was the inappropriate choice of verb voice. This error type accounted for 31.91% of verb errors. This error type happened when the grammar item was used correctly but the specific voice was inappropriately chosen. According to the results of the study, students usually misused between active voice and passive voice. The reason for this error type might be the difference between English and Vietnamese. In fact, the passive voice is quite common in English, while the active voice is popular in Vietnamese.

Addition of verbs was another frequent type of verb errors made by students in Vietnamese-English translation. This error type made up for 17.13%. Addition of verb referred to the presence of the verb which must not appear in academic phrases and sentences.

As found in the study, omission of verb was also popular in Vietnamese-English translation. Among verb errors, omission of verb occupied the lowest proportion (12.66%). The omission of verbs was characterized by the absence of a verb that must appear in a correct sentence in English.

4.1.2. Errors of Tenses

The results of the study indicated that the error of tenses was the second popular error type of grammatical errors. In the study, students made about 700 errors of tenses which accounted for 21.12%. Two tenses misused by the students were the simple past tense and the present perfect tense. The second common error type was the confusion between simple past tense and past continuous tense. Besides, misuse between simple present tense and simple past tense came in the third place as errors which were frequently made by students. Last but not least, some students even had problems in recognizing the difference between the simple present tense and the future tense.

As can be seen in the study, errors of tenses might result from the difference between English and Vietnamese. Actually, English goes by very strict syntactical structures,

while Vietnamese language is much more flexible. In Vietnamese language, the concept of tense is not expressed through a different verb form. There is no change in the verb form to indicate the period of time. People usually use the particles “đã”, “đang”, or “sẽ” to indicate the action happening in the present, past, or future, respectively. For this reason, the difference between English and Vietnamese might be the cause of errors of tenses. In this sense, the reason leading to errors of tenses could be the interference of the mother tongue, Vietnamese.

4.1.3. Preposition Errors

According to the results of the study, students also made preposition errors. Among grammatical errors, this error type was the third common error type, making up for 12.67%. Preposition errors were divided into three categories such as inappropriate choice of preposition, addition of preposition, and omission of preposition.

First, inappropriate choice of preposition was one of the most common preposition errors. This error type occurred when the students knew that it was necessary to have a preposition after a verb or a noun. However, they chose the preposition inappropriately. As can be seen in the study, most of students translated word for word since they always translated “về” as “about”, “với” as “with”, “trong” as “in”, and “trước” as “before”. However, these prepositions were not suitable for the context of the sentences in English.

Second, addition of preposition was also considered as a common preposition error type. Addition of preposition was related to the appearance of a preposition that was not required by the preceding verb or noun. In the study, some students made this error type because of the interference of Vietnamese.

Last but not least, students also omitted prepositions when they were translating. Omission of preposition was the absence of a preposition that must appear after a noun or a verb.

According to the results of the study, it was inferred that the students tended to choose the English prepositions based on Vietnamese meanings without paying attention to their variation. It was also said that the errors resulted from the influence of Vietnamese. They might misunderstand that different word classes of a word were followed by the same preposition or all of them would have no preposition. All these proofs might indicate that the students lack linguistic competence.

4.1.4. Article Errors

As found in the assignments, article errors were also made by the students. They made about 400 article errors, accounting for 12.07%. These article errors were divided into two categories, including omission of article and inappropriate choice of article.

Omission of article referred to the absence of necessity of an article that must appear in the sentences. The cause of this error type might be the interference of Vietnamese since there is no article before the noun in Vietnamese language. In addition, some students

only added the article before the noun. However, they forgot adding the article before an adjective when the adjective was used as a noun. It could be inferred that students' insufficient linguistic competence might lead to omission of article in translation into English.

Inappropriate choice of articles appeared when the students saw the necessity of using an article, but they chose an inappropriate one. As found in the study, some students inappropriately chose between the articles "a" and "an". This error type might also result from students' insufficient linguistic competence. Additionally, students' carelessness could also be the cause of inappropriate choice of articles.

4.1.5. Pronoun Errors

Pronoun errors were also frequently made by students in Vietnamese-English translation. In the study, students made about 290 pronoun errors. These pronoun errors made up for 8.75% of all grammatical errors. They included omission of relative pronoun and inappropriate choice of relative pronoun.

Omission of relative pronoun was considered as one of the most frequent pronoun errors. This error type might result from the difference between Vietnamese and English. In fact, there is no strict rule for relative pronoun in Vietnamese. Vietnamese people usually use "mà" to begin the relative clause after a noun phrase of time, place, person or thing. In contrast, there are specific rules for using different relative pronouns of time, place, person or thing in English.

Inappropriate choice of relative pronoun was also found in students' weekly assignments. This error appeared when the students knew that it was necessary to use a relative pronoun, but they chose an inappropriate one. According to the results of the study, inappropriate choice of relative pronoun might result from the difference between English and Vietnamese and students' carelessness.

4.1.6. Noun Errors

According to the results of the study, noun errors were also found in the students' assignments and translation test papers. The student made about 279 noun errors which accounted for 8.42% of all grammatical errors. These noun errors were omission of inflection *-(e)s* for plural noun and unnecessary addition of inflection *-(e)s* for plural noun.

First, students usually omitted plural forms of noun when they were translating. Omission of plural forms of noun might be caused by the difference between English and Vietnamese. Unlike English, in Vietnamese, there is no form of plural nouns such as ending *-s* or *-es*. Therefore, when Vietnamese people want to indicate plural nouns, they can use markers like "những", "các", etc. As a result, the interference of Vietnamese could cause omission of plural noun form since there was no change of noun to indicate the plural noun in English.

Second, addition of plural noun inflection was also found in the study. The error occurred when students used plural form of noun when it was not necessary. In the study, some students added *-s* or *-es* ending to the uncountable noun, which inferred that they could not distinguish between the countable and uncountable noun. As a result, students' insufficient linguistic competence might be the cause of this error type. The plural noun error in this case might also be the result of students' misunderstanding or carelessness.

4.1.7. Subject and Verb Agreement

Errors of subject and verb agreement were characterized by the mismatch between the subject and the verb. Among grammatical errors found in the study, errors of subject and verb agreement made up for 3.38%. Some students used plural verb form for a singular subject. In contrast, in some students' assignments and test papers, the singular verb form was used for a plural subject.

The cause leading to errors in subject and verb agreement might be the difference between English and Vietnamese. Actually, English language goes by very strict grammatical structures, while Vietnamese is much more flexible. In English, the singular subjects must take singular verb forms, while the plural subjects must take plural verb forms. In contrast, in Vietnamese, the concept of subject and verb agreement does not exist. Therefore, verb forms do not change to agree with the subjects. In this sense, the interference of Vietnamese might be the cause of errors of subject and verb agreement in English.

4.1.8. Adjective Errors

In the study, there were about 90 adjective errors accounting for 2.71%. Adjective errors were omission of possessive adjective and misplacement of adjective.

Omission of possessive adjective referred to the absence of an adjective which must appear in the phrase. In the study, some students omitted the possessive adjective in the phrase. This error type might be caused by students' translation strategies because they translated word for word from Vietnamese into English. This error type could also result from the nature of the source text because the possessive adjective was not revealed in the original text.

Misplacement of adjective was considered as one of the most popular adjective errors. This error referred to the placement of adjective in noun phrases that was not in grammatical order. Misplacement of adjective might be due to the influence of Vietnamese on translation. In Vietnamese, adjective always comes after a noun. In contrast, adjective always comes before a noun in English. It also mentions that the students mainly focused on the structures of the source language, Vietnamese, so they failed to construct the structures of the target language, English. Lacking of practice might also be the reason for misplacement of adjectives in noun phrases.

4.1.9. Adverb Errors

According to the results of the study, adverb errors occupied the lowest proportion (2.53%) of all grammatical errors. These adverb errors could be divided into two categories such as inappropriate choice of adverbs and misplacement of adverbs.

Inappropriate choice of an adverb happened when the students chose the form of an adverb inappropriately. The error type might result from the students' habit. They often added suffix *-ly* to an adjective to create an adverb. For example, many students used **“fastly”**, or **“badly”** instead of “fast” or “bad” as adverbs (e.g. Don't drive too fastly,..). Some students might make this error type because they lacked the knowledge of adverb's morphology.

Misplacement of adverbs referred to the placement of an adverb in a sentence that was not in grammatical order. In the study, some students misplaced the position of adverb in the sentence since they usually put the adverb before the verb. It might be considered that this error was attributed to the students' misunderstanding or lack of knowledge of the position of adverbs. In other words, it was misunderstood that adverb always goes after verb.

4.2. Types of Lexical Errors

From the results of this study, students made lexical errors in Vietnamese-English translation. These lexical errors were errors in word choice, errors in word collocation, and misuse of synonyms. These errors are described in the following chart.

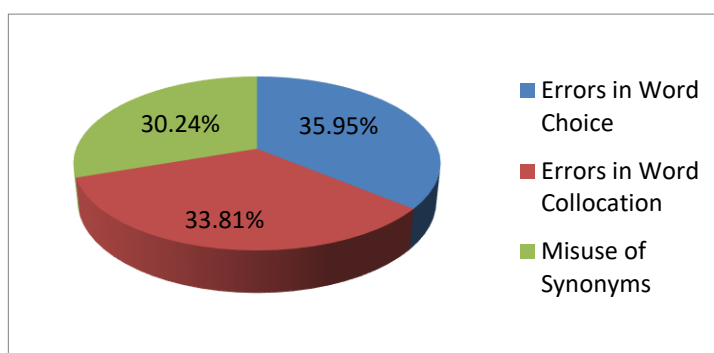


Chart 3. Distribution of lexical error types

4.2.1. Errors in Word Choice

According to the results of the study, the errors in word choice appeared most frequently (302/840) and occupied the highest proportion (35.95%). Errors in word choice occurred when students did not use the correct words. In some cases, some students used inappropriate words when they did not know the correct ones in the target language. This error type might result from students' lack of vocabularies or word power. In the assignments and the tests, students also made errors when they did not use correct words. The following examples illustrate this error type.

Some students translated Vietnamese sentence “Các chuyên gia cho rằng hệ thống ngữ âm giúp học sinh đọc to nhiều từ mà chúng không nhận dạng được mặt chữ” as follows:

1. Experts say **pronunciation system** can make it possible for children to sound out many words that they do not recognize by sight.
2. The Vietnamese sentence “Ngân quỹ nhà nước dành cho giáo dục tăng lên và giáo viên sẽ nhận được mức lương cao hơn, do đó họ có thể chú tâm vào công việc giảng dạy của họ” was translated by some students as follows
3. **The money fund** for education has increased, enabling schools to raise the salaries of the teachers so that they can concentrate all their effort on teaching.

4.2.2. *Errors in Word Collocation*

The results of the study indicated that students also frequently made errors in word collocation. They made about 284 errors in word collocation. Among lexical errors, the error type accounted for 33.81%. In the study, some students translated word for word without paying attention to word collocation. It could be inferred from the results of the study that students made errors in word collocation due to the lack of knowledge of word collocation. The following examples extracted from the students’ test illustrate this error type:

1. The government has **made many measures** to stop the drug smuggling.
2. After **making a market research**, we decided to launch an impressive product which can complete against the imported ones.
3. People with sense of **fun** easily make others sympathetic.

In general, it might be the mother tongue interference that leads to the mechanic collocation which is unacceptable in the target language. In fact, each language has its own principles of word collocation. Neither English nor Vietnamese is an exception. The causes of errors in word collocation might be students’ translation strategies and students’ insufficient linguistic competence.

4.2.3. *Misuse of Synonyms*

In the study, students also misused synonyms when they were translating. There were about 254 errors of synonyms found in the students’ assignments and test papers. This error type made up for 30.24% of all lexical errors. Among lexical errors, this error type was considered as the lowest popular one. It occurred when the students depended mainly on the word’s denotative (not connotative) meaning in dictionary to choose the word without paying attention to the context of the sentence. The following examples illustrate the misuse of synonyms:

1. The Vietnamese people are really **stubborn**.
2. The Vietnamese people are really **disobeyed**.
3. The government plans to build thousands of **homes** for homeless people.

4.3. Spelling Errors

The results of the assignment and the translation test showed that the student participants also made spelling errors when they were translating. The following examples extracted from the students' test illustrate spelling errors:

1. People with sense of humor **usuallys** make others sympathetic.
2. People with sense of humor **alway** make others **sympathi**.

Spelling errors occurred when students did not have much time to reread their translation products before submitting. Students' carelessness could also be one common cause of spelling errors. Besides, the misuse of two similar words in written form may also lead to spelling errors. Another major source of spelling errors might be a word distortion.

5. Suggestions/ Recommendations

In the light of main findings of the current study and conclusions in the earlier part, some suggestions are especially offered to teachers and students to help improve students' translating abilities.

5.1. Suggestions for Teachers

In the light of main findings concluded earlier in this chapter, this part of the chapter offers some suggestions to help teachers improve their teaching efficiency.

According to the results of the study, the students frequently made grammatical errors in Vietnamese-English translation. Among grammatical errors, the verb error was the most popular error type. Inappropriate choice of verb voice and verb tense accounts for the largest proportion of verb errors. As a result, the implications are made that the teachers should explain the rule of these aspects in English clearly and make a comparison or distinguish between English and Vietnamese, which is necessary since it does exist in each language, but has another structure! It is expressed differently. For example, there is no agreement of subject and verb related to "tenses" in Vietnamese and there is no strict rule for the aspect "voice" in the Vietnamese language. The word "Đã" is used in Vietnamese when people express something happening in the past. For the mode of passive voice in Vietnamese, the word "**Được**" is used to refer to the positive action, and the word "**Bị**" is used for the negative action (e.g. "He **was awarded** the Nobel Prize" is translated into Vietnamese as "Ông ấy **được** trao giải Nobel whereas "In those days murder **was** always **punished** with the death penalty" is translated into Vietnamese as "Ngày xưa, kẻ giết người luôn **bị** kết án tử hình").

Furthermore, the teacher should provide his/ her students with various examples on verb tense and verb voice. In voice, the student frequently made errors in both passive and

active voice. Therefore, the teacher should explain his/her students in which cases the passive voice is used and in which cases the active voice is used when they are teaching the verb voice.

The study also indicated that students had preposition errors such as inappropriate choice of prepositions, addition of prepositions, and omission of prepositions. Therefore, it is suggested that the teacher should give students more exercises on prepositions so that they can use them appropriately in specific contexts.

For the nouns, the student omitted or added plural nouns incorrectly. Thus, the teachers should help his/ her students distinguish between countable and uncountable nouns, between which nouns take *-s* or *-es* for plural forms and which ones do not. They can provide students the rules of adding *-s* or *-es* after the nouns and more exercises on these grammar points.

In the current study, adjective errors, adverb errors and article errors resulted also from the difference between English and Vietnamese. Therefore, when teaching these grammar items, the teacher should indicate the differences between two languages such as the position of adjectives in noun phrases and the position of adverbs in the sentences. In addition, the exercises on adjectives, adverbs and articles should be introduced and put into grammar exercises and translation exercises as much as possible.

As shown in the study, students also made lexical errors when they were translating. Hence, the teacher should help the students enlarge their vocabulary knowledge. They should help the students form a habit of regular reading. They can introduce and encourage students to read newspaper, magazine, article or news which supply much knowledge about vocabularies, grammar rules and ways of translation. Furthermore, regular reading might help students not only expand their vocabulary but also have more cultural background knowledge, which is useful for the effective translation.

5.2. Suggestions for Students

In the light of main findings concluded earlier in this chapter, this part of the chapter offers some suggestions to help students improve their translation performance.

As shown in the study, the student made grammatical errors in translation. Therefore, it is suggested that they should review the grammar points that they have learned and write down in their notebooks. They should also apply the grammar points more frequently in writing and speaking activities. Additionally, the students themselves should practice doing more exercises on grammar.

According to the results of the current study, students also made lexical errors in translation. Therefore, to reduce lexical errors made by students in translation, it is suggested that regular reading is an effective way to help students diversify vocabularies. When the students read, they can see a lot of words being used in certain context. As a result, they can memorize the words. In addition, students should try to

frequently use and review their newly learned words in many ways as possible. Moreover, students should make up as many word family or word power as possible. When learning a new word, students should relate this word to the words that they have already learned. Connecting the new word with its family words can help them easily remember and increase their vocabulary knowledge. They also need to improve their vocabularies by learning more word collocations and how to use them in specific contexts appropriately. Furthermore, there are some recommendations to help students avoid misuse of synonyms. They should carefully take the synonyms into consideration before using them. It would be better for them to consider the differences of pairs of synonyms when translating. The meaning of the word which is found in Vietnamese-English dictionaries should be checked in reliable English-English dictionaries or thesaurus before using it to translating texts.

The current study also indicated that the student participants frequently made spelling errors. Therefore, it is suggested that students should pay much attention to spelling. It is necessary for them to spend time re-reading and checking their translation products before submitting their written or printed work. Moreover, the misuse of the two similar words in written form can lead to spelling errors. It is suggested that extensive reading and handwriting can be an effective way in the long-term to learn English spelling patterns.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study pointed out that there were three types of errors made by students in Vietnamese-English translation. These error types were grammatical errors, lexical errors, and spelling errors. These errors might result from the differences between English and Vietnamese, inadequate cultural background, students' insufficient linguistic competence in English and Vietnamese, lack of cultural background knowledge, students' inappropriate translation strategies, interference of Vietnamese, misunderstanding, and students' carelessness.

Therefore, teachers should focus more on helping their students master English grammar (*verb tenses or voice, how to use correct prepositions/ nouns/ adjectives or adverbs, ..*) and widen their word power to improve the learners' skills of translation. Vietnamese learners should spend more time reviewing English grammar or practising doing many exercises on grammar to be able to write English well. Furthermore, the students need to read more texts/ articles or authentic resources in English to have better understanding of how the English words are used in specific contexts. They also need to practise speaking English with native speakers to help them improve their English skills. Proofreading also plays a key role in students' translation.

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