

An Analysis Of Common Errors In Vietnamese-English Translation

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Abstract:

This study investigates common errors made by Vietnamese students in translating from Vietnamese to English and explores their underlying causes. The research identifies a range of errors, including grammatical errors (tense, word form), lexical errors (word choice, words with similar meanings), and structural errors. These errors are attributed to several factors: differences between English and Vietnamese, inadequate linguistic competence in both languages, insufficient cultural background knowledge, and the influence of mother tongue interference. Based on these findings, the article proposes pedagogical suggestions aimed at improving the teaching and learning of translation, with a focus on enhancing students' grammatical and lexical proficiency and raising their cultural awareness.

Key Words: *Translation Errors, Error Analysis, Vietnamese-English Translation, Language Interference, Translator Training, Second Language Acquisition.*

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I. Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, translation plays a crucial role in facilitating communication, disseminating knowledge, and fostering cultural exchange. As Vietnam further integrates into the global economy and strengthens its international relationships, the demand for skilled translators is growing rapidly. English, as a dominant international language, is particularly important in this context. Consequently, Vietnamese students are increasingly motivated to develop English proficiency, including translation skills, to enhance their future career prospects and contribute to the nation's progress.

However, the process of translating from Vietnamese to English presents significant challenges for Vietnamese learners. Despite their efforts, students often commit errors in their translations, reflecting the complexities of cross-linguistic transfer and the differences between the two languages. These errors can hinder effective communication and may impede the successful exchange of information and ideas. Understanding the nature and causes of these errors is essential for improving translation pedagogy and enhancing the quality of translated materials.

This study aims to contribute to this understanding by investigating the common errors made by Vietnamese students in translating Vietnamese texts into English. By identifying the specific types of errors and exploring their underlying causes, the research seeks to provide valuable insights for both teachers and learners of translation. The findings can inform the development of more effective teaching strategies, targeted interventions, and improved curriculum design, ultimately leading to enhanced translation competence among Vietnamese students.

The analysis of errors in second language acquisition (SLA) has been a significant area of research for many years. Researchers have recognized that learners' errors are not merely random mistakes, but rather systematic deviations from the target language that can provide valuable insights into the learning process. In the field of translation studies, error analysis has also gained prominence, with scholars investigating the types of errors that learners and even professional translators make, and the factors that contribute to these errors.

Several previous studies have examined translation errors in the Vietnamese context. Pham Thi Kim Cuc (2017) conducted a study on translation errors made by Vietnamese EFL students, analyzing the ways in which students translate from Vietnamese to English. This research identified linguistic errors (particularly in lexical choice, syntax, and collocation) as the most frequent. Cuc attributed these errors to inter-lingual interference (influence from the first language), intra-lingual interference (difficulties within the target language itself), and inadequate comprehension of the source text. Cuc's study emphasized the need for improved vocabulary and syntax instruction, and more translation practice focused on addressing the specific challenges faced by Vietnamese learners.

Nguyen Thi Thu Hang and Trieu Thu Hang (2015) investigated translation errors made by second-year translation majors, aiming to contribute to the enhancement of translation standards. Their study revealed that

students encountered more difficulties with translational errors (e.g., lengthy and awkward expressions, accuracy, naturalness) than with basic linguistic errors (e.g., subject-verb agreement). The researchers identified several possible causes, including the influence of Vietnamese language structures, inadequate English proficiency, insufficient translation knowledge and skills, and a lack of practical translation experience.

More recent studies have further expanded on these findings. For instance, a 2022 study by Phan Thi Minh Uyen et. al at Tay Do University explored common errors in Vietnamese-English translation among English-major juniors, highlighting errors in noun and adjective phrases due to structural differences and limited vocabulary knowledge. This study suggested incorporating more contextual translation exercises to address these issues. Additionally, a 2021 study by Nguyen Thi Nhu Ngoc et. al analyzed translation errors in online Vietnamese-English menus, identifying lexical and cultural errors as significant barriers to effective communication in tourism contexts, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive translation training.

These previous studies provide a valuable foundation for the present research. They highlight the prevalence of translation errors among Vietnamese learners and underscore the importance of addressing both linguistic and translational challenges. The current study builds upon this existing research by further investigating the specific types of errors made by Vietnamese students, exploring the underlying causes in more detail, and offering pedagogical suggestions tailored to the Vietnamese context.

II. Research Methodology

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

- What are the common errors that Vietnamese students make when translating from Vietnamese into English?
- What are the causes that lead to these errors?
- How can these errors be analyzed based on established error classification frameworks?
- What pedagogical suggestions can be offered for improving the teaching and learning of Vietnamese-English translation?

The primary subjects of this research are Vietnamese students who are learning English and developing their translation skills. The study focuses on analyzing their written translations from Vietnamese to English to identify recurring patterns of errors. The errors are examined in the context of general translation tasks, reflecting the kind of translation activities that students typically encounter in their academic studies. This study is focused specifically on the analysis of errors in Vietnamese-to-English translation produced by Vietnamese students. It does not aim to provide an exhaustive account of all possible translation errors, but rather to identify the most common and significant ones. The study also seeks to explore the primary causes of these errors, drawing upon insights from second language acquisition theory, contrastive linguistics, and translation studies. While the findings of this study are specific to the Vietnamese context, they may also have broader implications for translation pedagogy in other language learning situations.

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to collect and analyze data. The research methodology involved the following steps:

Data Collection:

Translation Tasks: Written translations produced by Vietnamese students in response to Vietnamese source texts were collected. These source texts were representative of the types of materials that students would typically translate in an academic setting.

Interviews: Interviews were conducted with both students and teachers to gather further information about the perceived difficulties in translation and the factors contributing to translation errors.

Error Identification and Classification: The collected translations were carefully examined to identify errors. The identified errors were classified into different categories based on established error classification frameworks in translation studies and second language acquisition. These categories included grammatical errors, lexical errors, and structural errors.

Data Analysis:

Quantitative Analysis: The frequency of different error types was calculated to determine the most common errors made by the students.

Qualitative Analysis: The errors were analyzed in detail to identify the underlying causes, drawing upon insights from contrastive linguistics (comparison of English and Vietnamese), second language acquisition theory, and the researcher's own experience as a translator and language teacher. The interview data was also analyzed to provide further context and explanation for the observed errors.

Pedagogical Suggestions: Based on the findings of the error analysis, the study proposes practical suggestions for improving the teaching and learning of Vietnamese-English translation. These suggestions are

aimed at addressing the specific errors identified in the research and promoting more effective translation strategies.

III. Result

This part presents the findings of the study, detailing the common errors made by Vietnamese students in translating from Vietnamese into English. It also discusses the causes of these errors and offers pedagogical suggestions for improving the teaching and learning of translation.

Common Errors

The analysis of the students' translations revealed several recurring patterns of errors. These errors can be broadly classified into the following categories:

Tense Errors

One of the most common errors observed in the students' translations was the incorrect use of verb tenses. This reflects the differences between the tense systems of English and Vietnamese.

Example 1:

Vietnamese: Tuy công nghệ mới đang được thử nghiệm nhưng Giáo sư Clark lạc quan về tiềm năng tương lai của nó trong việc chế biến tất cả chất thải thành nhiên liệu sinh học.

Incorrect English:

(1) *Although new technique are trying, Professor Clark is optimistic of its future potential to processing all waste into biology fuel.*

(2) *Although new technique will be tested, but Professor Clark is optimistic about its future potential that processing all waste run into biology fuel.*

(3) *New technique is trying, but Professor Clark is optimistic about its future potential in processing all waste into biology fuel.*

Correct English: Although new technique is being tried/tested, Professor Clark is optimistic about its future potential in processing all waste into biology fuel.

In sentence (1), there are three errors. The first is that it is not appropriate to use active voice present continuous in this situation because the subject "new technique" is not able to try by itself. The second error is that it is incorrect to use the word "are" for the subject "new technique" which is singular form. Furthermore, it isn't exact for the students to write "to processing" in this sentence because to express purpose of using the technique here it is a rule to write "to process". It's also acceptable to change this into "in processing" or "about processing".

In the second sentence, there are also three errors. The first is using passive voice of simple future to express the idea. Because the action of trying the techniques is occurring in the present, so it's incorrect to write "will be tried". The second error is that the students used both "although" and "but" in the sentence. In order to express the idea "Tuy...nhưng" or "mặc dù...nhưng", it is a grammar rule to use just one of them as "Although...", "...but...". The third mistake is the phrase "that processing". It is unclear to know what the students mean to use "that" here.

In sentence (3), the student used incorrectly the tense present continuous' active voice like in (1). The students did not realize that the subject "new technique" has to be "tried" by people or professors. Therefore, it is suitable and appropriate to use passive voice.

Vocabulary Errors

Errors in vocabulary were also frequent, including errors in word choice and the use of words with similar meanings.

Word Choice: Students often struggled to choose the most appropriate English word to convey the meaning of a Vietnamese word, particularly when there was not a direct equivalent.

Example 2:

Vietnamese: Làng ẩm thực Việt Nam

Incorrect English:

(1) *Vietname eating circles*

(2) *Cuisine Village of Vietnam*

(3) *Village of Vietnam's culinary*

(4) *Culinary industry in Vietnam*

The suggested translation phrase is “Vietnamese cuisine”. Most of the students did not clearly understand that “làng” in the Vietnamese phrase means as aspects or a field. It does not mean “village”-“làng” or “xã” in Vietnamese. Moreover, it is incorrect to use the word “industry”-“ngành công nghiệp” –or the word “circles” which does not make any sense in this case.

Errors with Words with Similar Meanings: Students also had difficulty distinguishing between English words with similar meanings, leading to inaccurate translations.

Example 3:

Vietnamese: Trong buổi gặp mặt thường niên, ban tổ chức mời đại diện hiệp hội lên sân khấu nói chuyện.

Incorrect English: In the annual meeting, the organizing board invited the representatives from the association to come to stage to say.

Correct English: In the annual meeting, the organizing board invited the representatives from the association to come to stage to speak.

Errors in Word Forms

Another common error was the misuse of word forms, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

Example 4:

Vietnamese: Tôi gặp khó khăn trong việc học tiếng Anh.

Incorrect English: I have difficult in learning English.

Correct English: I have difficulty in learning English.

Misuse of Verb Forms

Students often made mistakes in the use of verb forms, such as infinitives, gerunds, and participles.

Example 5:

Vietnamese: Vụ Đông Xuân 2017-2018, tỉnh Kiên Giang có kế hoạch xuống giống hơn 295,000 ha.

Incorrect English:

(1) In 2017-2018 winter-spring crop, Kien Giang province has planed to plant over 295000 ha.

(2) In winter-spring rice crop 2017-2018, Kien Giang province have plant over 295000 ha.

In sentence (1), the error is the word “planed” which must be changed into “planned” to form past participle following the word “has” for the present perfect tense here. The students forgot that the word “plan” contain the consonant “n” following the vowel “a”, so in its past participle form, it’s a rule to add an “n” before adding ‘-ed’ like “planned”.

There are two errors on verb forms in the sentence (2). The first is “have”. The subject “Kien Giang province” is singular, so it is correct to use “has” instead of “have”. The second mistake is the word “plant”. The students used present perfect to express idea, so after the word “has”, it must be past participle form of verb “plant”. For that reason, “plant” must be changed into “planted”.

Incorrect Structures

Errors in sentence structure were also observed, reflecting the differences in word order and sentence patterns between English and Vietnamese.

Example 6:

Vietnamese: Tên địch nào lọt vào đây thì đừng hòng quay trở ra.”.

Incorrect English: The enemy was not return when they came here.

In this sentence “was not return” is incorrect English structure because “return” is a verb, it must be used “did not” instead of “was not” to express negative point.

Example 7:

Vietnamese: Nơi đây từng tiếp đón các tàu buôn tơ lụa, gốm sứ đến mua bán.

Incorrect English: This place welcame silk and ceramic merchant vessels”.

The students used “welcame” which is not existed in English because “welcome” is a regular verb. Therefore, the word “welcame” must be changed into “welcomed”.

Results from Data Collection

Results from the Test Papers

205 test papers including 100 final test papers of the students in English classes 2010 borrowed from their teacher and 105 extra test papers edited from the researcher, delivered to the students and all collected. The table below shows the results collected.

Table 1: Common errors

Common errors	Grammar errors related to verb tenses	Vocabulary errors related to word choices
Test paper with errors/total papers	175/205 (85.4%)	182/205 (88.8%)

This part only focuses on analyzing the errors which are related to verb tenses. Errors which are related to other points of grammar and vocabulary will not be analyzed in detail in this part. Vocabulary errors will be mentioned in next part. There are about 30 test papers which were done fairly well and had few minor and acceptable mistakes. The grammar errors related to verb tenses found in 205 test papers are shown in the chart below:

Table 2: Grammar errors about verb tenses

Grammar errors about verb tenses	The number of errors	Percentage (%)
• Misuse of verb tenses	88	50.3%
• Misuse of verb forms	22	12.6%
• Incorrect structures	65	37.1%

The analysis of the students' test papers provided quantitative data on the frequency of different error types. The most common errors were grammatical errors, particularly tense errors and errors in word forms, followed by lexical errors. Structural errors were also observed, but less frequently.

Results from the Interview Questions

The interviews with students and teachers provided qualitative data on the perceived difficulties in translation and the factors contributing to translation errors. Students reported that they found it challenging to choose the correct English words, particularly when there were not direct equivalents in Vietnamese. They also mentioned that they struggled with English grammar, especially verb tenses and sentence structure. Teachers confirmed these observations, noting that students often made errors due to a lack of English proficiency and the influence of Vietnamese language structures.

Discussion of Error Causes

The findings of this study highlight the challenges that Vietnamese students face in translating from Vietnamese into English. The errors observed in the students' translations can be attributed to several factors:

Causes of Grammar Errors Related to Verb Tenses

The differences between the tense systems of English and Vietnamese are a major source of errors. English has a complex system of tenses, with subtle distinctions in meaning and usage. Vietnamese, on the other hand, expresses time and aspect primarily through the use of adverbs and aspect markers, rather than through verb inflections. This difference can lead Vietnamese students to oversimplify English tense usage or to apply Vietnamese tense concepts to English. Some students focused on the structures of the source language – Vietnamese – so much that they failed to convey all the implicit meaning of the target language – English. In fact, it is not important to keep the form at all. The most interesting thing is that the translation must be done on the basis of the target language grammar points. One of the fundamental reasons of this problem is that the students have not realized the different between the two languages. The concept about tenses does not exist in Vietnamese, but in English there are strict rules of uses and forms of verb tenses. They did not pay attention to the forms of the verbs which they used and the function of the words in a sentence. All of that are their weaknesses about grammar structures as well as the uses of tenses in English.

Causes of Errors in Word Choice

Errors in word choice often stem from a lack of vocabulary knowledge and an overreliance on direct translation. Students may not be aware of the subtle differences in meaning and connotation between English words, leading them to choose an inappropriate word. They may also tend to translate Vietnamese words directly into English without considering the context or the intended meaning. Some students mechanically have used word-for-word translation and depended largely on the meaning of words in dictionaries. They also picked out the synonyms without taking the context into consideration. In reality, the pairs of synonyms just share at least

one sense in common but do not the same all their senses. Therefore, the students must recognize that a word is only suitable in some certain cases and in these cases other words can not be used appropriately although they have near meanings. In other words, to some extent, they are able to hardly substitute for each other and most of the synonyms just have the same meaning in certain context. For those reason, if the students use synonyms without basing on the context, they can make their translation funny and nonsense. Their weaknesses about background knowledge and the mother tongue are also the difficulties in choosing suitable and appropriate words for Vietnamese-English translation.

IV. Conclusion

This study has investigated the common errors made by Vietnamese students in translating from Vietnamese into English. The findings reveal that students often struggle with grammatical errors, lexical errors, and structural errors. These errors can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the differences between English and Vietnamese, inadequate linguistic competence in both languages, insufficient cultural background knowledge, and the influence of mother tongue interference.

Based on these findings, the study has offered several pedagogical suggestions for improving the teaching and learning of translation. These suggestions emphasize the importance of providing explicit instruction in English grammar and vocabulary, raising students' cultural awareness, and providing them with a structured approach to undertaking translation projects. The results of this study have implications for translation pedagogy in Vietnam and potentially in other contexts where students are learning English as a foreign language. By addressing the specific errors identified in this research and implementing the suggested pedagogical strategies, teachers can help students develop more effective translation skills and improve the overall quality of translated materials.

Future research could explore the effectiveness of different pedagogical interventions in reducing translation errors. Additionally, further investigation could be conducted into the role of cultural background knowledge in translation and the development of more effective methods for teaching cultural competence in translation programs.

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