ERRORS IN THE TRANSLATION OF TOPIC-COMMENT STRUCTURES OF VIETNAMESE INTO ENGLISH

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Abstract

Previous research on the syntactic typology of Vietnamese has led to two controversial findings. One set of studies has claimed that the language is a subject-prominent language (Ly 1948, Chinh & Le 1973, Ban 1987, Thin 2001). The other set states that the basic structure of Vietnamese manifests a topic-comment relation rather than a subject-predicate relation (Thompson 1965, Dyvik 1984, Hao 1991, Anh 2000). This uncertainty between these two schools of thought has resulted in an undeniable inconsistency in the definitions and classification of different types of Vietnamese sentences among Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese scholars.

With the assumption that Vietnamese is a topic-prominent language, the aim of the study is to investigate to what extent the typological differences between the two languages influence the process of translating authentic Vietnamese sentences into English, through a preliminary report on an error analysis of the Vietnamese-English translations of Vietnamese EFL students. The subjects include 95 students from the first, second, third, and fourth years of the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The data will be the translation texts of about 95 students from the same source text. As a translation error may be attributable not only to a lack of linguistic competence but also to a lack of translation competence and a deficiency in comprehension ability of the source text, the study hopes to build up a taxonomy of specifically translation errors, especially in the field of translation into a second language. Hopefully this taxonomy will open up a possible way to prevent future errors from learners in translating the topic-comment structures of Vietnamese, as well as helping teachers in teaching Vietnamese-English Translation.

This study also suggests some practical guidelines in applying the techniques of error analysis into the teaching of Vietnamese-English translations, especially topic-comment structures of Vietnamese.

Introduction:

Although many studies have been carried out in error analysis and contrastive analysis in second language learning, language teaching and materials development, not much research has been done in the Vietnamese context with Vietnamese university students as informants. To illustrate, in a comprehensive bibliography by Spillner in the field of error analysis (1991), of the 2% (108) of studies focusing on translation out of a total of 5,398, none looked at the syntactic errors in Vietnamese-English translation. This study aims to fill this gap in the field of error analysis, especially errors in Vietnamese-English translation, with the hypothesis that the Vietnamese topic-comment structure

and its empty elements can cause some difficulty in the translation process. It is hoped that the present study will shed light on the most common types of errors by Vietnamese students in translation and that it will have implications for translation pedagogy.

Although these errors cannot be completely considered as translation errors as students do not receive official training in a four-year course specialising in translation, they are errors made during the course of studying translation. Therefore, any problems found from these errors can help the material designers and teachers to choose an appropriate method for their teaching. It is stressed that this study is more to serve the translation and language teaching rather than translation per se and the subjects are also advanced second language learners.

Literature Review
Error Analysis in Translation
Firstly, even excellent translators make mistakes in translations. Secondly, some errors are almost unavoidable given the fact that translators and interpreters inevitably have vocabulary and knowledge gaps. Neubert & Shreve (1995) describe a translation error in the following statement:

> What rightly appears to be linguistically equivalent may very frequently qualify as 'translationally' nonequivalent. And this is so because the complex demands on adequacy in translation involve subject factors and transfer conventions that typically run counter to considerations about 'surface' linguistic equivalence (1995:415).

This statement partially describes the complication and difficulty in defining and identifying translation errors. Translation errors are different from errors that would occur in spontaneous native language production. In translation, working with a source text induces errors under the influence of source language morphology, whereas in spontaneous second language production, native morphological system of language learner tends to interfere with knowledge of the second language system. In the case of second language learners, identifying translation errors is tricky as translation errors may be mixed up with linguistic errors.

In the literature of translation training, many studies have been done to find out what types of errors translators/interpreters/student translators often committed in their process of rendering a certain structure from one language into another (Altman 1994, Coskun 1997, Dodds 1999, Gile 1994, Seguinot 1990). These studies are based on the premise that the insight into the act of making error can shed light to the psycholinguistic (mental process) of translators/interpreters/student translators and contribute to the training of translators.

Topic-Comment Structures in Vietnamese
Topic and Comment are the two concepts which have been constructed differently by various linguists. Different definitions on these two terms have existed, under a number of different names and guises: presupposition and focus (Chomsky 1971, Jackendoff 1972), theme and rheme (Firbas 1972) topic and comment (Gundel 1974, 1978) open proposition and focus (Ward 1985 and Prince 1986) and ground and focus (Vallduvi 1990). Despite of the difference in the details of these various descriptions, the concept of topic and comment are in general based on the intuitions that utterances we say are 'about' something (topic) linking up with information the speaker assumes the hearer is

aware of, and that utterances contain information the speaker is presenting as new relative to this topic (comment).

The topic of a sentence is basically what the sentence is about. It always appears at the very beginning of a sentence, referring to something that the speaker assumes the listener would have some knowledge. A topic does not equal to a subject of a sentence in that a subject must always have a direct semantic relationship with the verb as the one that performs the action or exists in the state indicated by the Verb, yet a topic need not. It can be followed optionally by a pause in speech or a comma in writing, showing what is being talked about, apart from the rest of the sentence.

Topic is often defined in terms of its linguistic structures, either syntactic or phonetic. It has been defined in terms of linear order – as the first expression of the sentence (e.g. Halliday, 1967), in grammatical terms – as the subject (Gundel 1974) and in intonational terms – as the non-stressed expression (Chomsky 1971). However, the shortcomings of these definitions lie in their inability to answer the question related to the discourse conditions under which a given expression would count as topic.

In their seminar article 'Subject and Topic: a New Typology of Language', Li and Thompson (1976) have set up many criteria to distinguish the difference between the notion of subject and that of topic. The main difference, according to them, lies in the idea that while topic is a discourse-related notion, subject is more integrated into the syntax of the sentence. They also argued that topic should be treated as a basic rather than a derived category. The treatment of topic as one basic category will entail the classification of language into two different types: Subject-prominent language and Topic-prominent language.

Using Li and Thomspson's (1976) argument as a theoretical standpoint, Hao (1991), a Vietnamese scholar, examines Vietnamese from a functional approach. According to Hao (1991), the way the Vietnamese express themselves is that 'when uttering a sentence, the speaker produces a topic and says something about that topic or within the range of that topic' (1991:79). That is to say, when re-organising the reflected reality, thought divides it into two parts by choosing a point of departure for establishing the relationship between these two. He assumes that the part that is chosen as the point of departure functions as topic and the remainder as comment (1991:33-4). In his opinion, the topic-comment structure in the Vietnamese sentence is a phenomenon which belongs to what he refers to as the 'logico-discursive domain'.

In support of his claim that Topic-Comment is the dominant structure of Vietnamese, Hao provides two reasons. His first reason is derived from the result of the study by Li & Thompson (1976), who claimed that there are four main types of language: (i) languages that are subject-prominent (e.g., Indo-European, Niger-Congo, Fino-Ugric, etc), (ii) languages that are topic-prominent (e.g., Chinese, Lahu, Lisu etc), (iii) languages that are both subject-prominent and topic-prominent (e.g., Japanese, Korean, etc.), and (iv) languages that are neither subject-prominent nor topic-prominent (e.g., Tagalog, Illocano etc.). Hao (ibid.) claims that like Chinese, Vietnamese belongs to category (ii). The second reason comes from his reality of using Vietnamese. According to Hao's calculations, only 30% of Vietnamese sentences are of Subject-Predicate type while about 70% of them are of Topic-Comment type.

However, this study will not use Hao's definition of topic-comment for data analysis, mainly because his classification is still ambiguous and not facilitating. The present study will utilise the classification that Rosen (1998) has proved in her PhD thesis. According to her, topic-comment structures and empty elements are basic

constructions in Vietnamese language. There are five types of relations that may exist between a Noun Phrase topic and the comment in Vietnamese.

(1) The topic may be understood as filling a gap in the comment.
(2) The topic may be co-referential with a noun phrase or pronoun in the comment.
(3) The topic may be semantically related to any specific constituent in the comment, its referent is simply what the comment is about.
(4) The topic may not be related to any constituents, empty or overt, in the comment.
(5) The topic may be a verb phrase, a clause or an embedded topic-comment construction.

Regarding the empty pronoun, there are four types in Vietnamese:

(6) Empty pronouns in simple sentences
(7) Empty pronouns in embedded clauses
(8) Empty Pronouns in consecutive clauses
(9) Empty Pronouns with indefinite reference

In the Elicitation Task of this study Sentence 1 has the empty pronoun in embedded clauses as stated in (7). The explanatory sentence at the end of Sentence 1 (inside the bracket), sentence 14, 15, 16 are examples of the empty pronouns in consecutive clauses as stated in (8). Sentence 2 and 13 are the examples of empty pronoun in simple sentences as stated in (6). Sentence 5 is the example of sentence where the topic is semantically related to a specific constituent in the comment, as stated in (3) (the topic is the object of the verb mentioned in the comment). Sentence 6 is the example where the topic is not related to any constituents, empty or overt, in the comment (the topic is the adverb of the comment) as stated in (4). Sentence 7, 8, 9, 10 are elliptical sentences. Sentence 17 consist of two comments, the first comment is an embedded topic-comment structure (leading to the so-called 'double-subject construction'[1]), the NP topic of which is co-referential with the main topic, as stated in (2). The second comment of sentence 17 is also an embedded topic-comment structure, the topic of which is semantically related to the main topic of the sentence, as stated in (3). Sentence 18 also has two comments: the first comment is an embedded topic-comment structure, the second one is an embedded one but there is a gap within this second comment which the main topic of the sentence fills up as stated in (3) [see Appendix A for numbered sentences in the Test and Appendix B for the analysis of topic-comment constructions and empty pronouns of 18 sentences)].

Research Questions

a. Do Vietnamese students have problems in translating Vietnamese sentence types in which the Topic-Comment structure is more prominent than a Subject-Predicate one? What sort of errors do they make in translating this specific type of structure?

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[1] Constructions have the basic form [NP1, [NP2 PREDICATE]]. NP1 has topic-like function with respect to NP2 and both noun phrases have some claim to being subjects.

    b. What error category accounts for the majority of errors? Does the percentage of errors differ in different groups of students from different years?

    c. What pedagogical implications can be drawn for teachers to help students deal with such errors?

Subjects

Four groups of students total of 95 of the Department of English Languages and Literature of University of Social Sciences and Humanities of Ho Chi Minh City were chosen to be the informants of this study. Most of the students have studied English for nine years at high school. The dominant teaching method at the school is still the Grammar-Translation method and the translation aspect plays an important part. At the time when the test takes place, the students of Year 1 will not have attended the obligatory course in translation, the students from year 3 has taken 1 module (60 periods or 45 hours), the students of Year 3 have finished 3 modules and Year 4 have finished 5 modules in Vietnamese-English translation.

Data Collection and the Test

The subjects were asked to translate a 250-word text from Vietnamese into English in 180 minutes without being told which structure is being tested. The Vietnamese text is an extract from an article named '*Mê Thảo-thời vang bóng*' of *Tuổi Trẻ* (The Youth), a well-known newspaper in Vietnam. The text is chosen because of its richness in sentence types: many different types of 'authentic' Vietnamese sentences can be found in the text, including minor sentences, i.e. elliptical sentences, sentences without either Topic or Comment, sentences in which the Topic is identical with the Subject, sentences in which the Topic is not identical with the Subject, sentences in which the Topic or Comment itself is another Topic-Comment structure. With such a variety in sentence types, the text promises to be a good environment for the author to discover what the most problematic structures are for the subjects when translating from Vietnamese to English. The text is also chosen because it contains traces of the topic-prominence of Vietnamese languages, which is hypothesized to pose a number of translation problems for students.
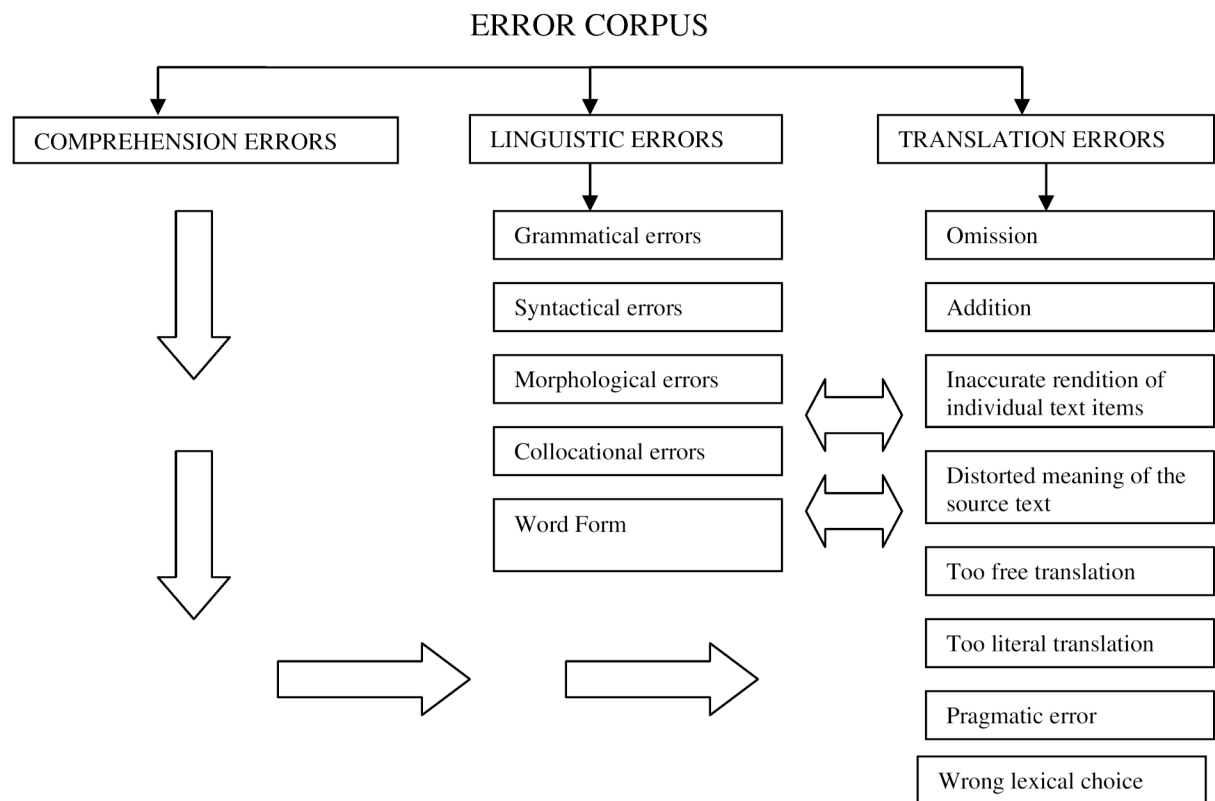
Content Analysis

Models of analysing

When the translators are concurrently the second language learners, the model of analysing errors and translation assessment must be based on the learning model, which is intended for teaching linguistics and training translation at the same time. Campell & Hale (2003: 218) mention the relationship between these factors in the following quotation:

> Validity in interpreting and translation testing is tied up with knotty issues such as the nature of the competencies assessed, the models of learning underpinning educational programs, and the extent to which tests should reflect professional tasks. (Campell & Hale, 2003:218)

The present study suggests the following model of analysing errors, which is based on the learning model and context of translation training in Vietnam, where translation is

taught as a votional skill for students at the universities, rather than as a tool for language teaching or an independent discipline by itself.

ERROR CORPUS

Figure 1: *Models of analysing the error corpus*

Data Analysis

These errors were first detected and corrected by an American academic (Professor of History at National University of Singapore) who is highly competent in Vietnamese. He has used Vietnamese to teach Vietnamese history at Vietnamese National University and taught English as a second language at some Vietnamese universities. After the American examined the 95 translations to detect the errors, the author and two other Vietnamese ESL teachers double-checked the error correction of the native speaker to ensure that it is appropriate. The first step of correcting errors is to identify the linguistic errors, i.e. syntactic errors, grammatical errors, morphological errors. After all the linguistic errors had been sorted out, the 95 translations were re-examined from the communicative point of view to detect translation errors.

Definition of Errors used in the Data Analysis:

All errors will be divided into 3 types for this study: comprehension errors, linguistic errors and translation errors

Comprehension errors: These errors happen when the learners misunderstand the syntax of a certain sentence of the source text, or misread a word and their translations were accordingly based on a misunderstood source text.

Linguistic errors: Under the umbrella term of 'Linguistic errors', there are following specific types of errors: grammatical errors, syntactic errors, morphological errors, collocational errors, incorrect word form.

     Grammatical errors: errors occur in the handling of word structure, including lack of agreement between subject and verb, incorrect verb tenses or verb forms, incorrect case of noun, pronouns, adjectives, and the use of an adjective when a verb is needed [American Translators Association (ATA) Framework for Standard Error Marking[2]]. The word classes where grammatical errors happen include Noun, Pronoun, Verb, Conjunction, Adjective, Adverb, Preposition, Article and Determiner. The classification of error type was narrowed to the use of the following terms: Omissions, Additions, Inappropriate Combination, Inappropriate construction, Misordering or Inversion.

     Syntactic errors: errors made when learners have to handle any items larger than word, i.e. phrase, clause or sentence (James 1998). Errors in this category include sentence fragments, inappropriate use of relative clause, inappropriate sentence construction, improper modification, lack of parallelism, and misordering (unnatural word order) (ATA Framework for Standard Error Marking). The explanation of the nature of error type was narrowed to the use of the following terms: Omission, Addition, Inappropriate Combination, Inappropriate Choice, Inappropriate construction, Misuse, Misordering or Inversion, Misplacement

     Morphological errors: errors which involve a failure to comply with the norm in supplying any part of any instance of these word classes: six book*, aboli*shment… are noun morphology errors. (James 1998)

     Collocational errors: errors committed in the idiomatic usage of the target language. The errors in grammatical collocation (wrong use of preposition, etc.) are treated as grammatical errors, not as collocation error.

     Incorrect word form refers to cases where the *word form* is not correctly chosen, i.e. the learner uses the noun instead of the adjective to express in the target language. The root of the word is correct but the wrong form is used. This kind of error is put under the section of linguistic error, not translation error.

Translation errors: These errors happen when the students show the inability to render the original meaning of the source text into the target text. In other words, a sentence is considered to have 'translation errors' when it shows traces of distortions of the source text, although the sentence may be grammatically correct. In my analysis, translation errors include the omission of something essential to the meaning of the source text, the addition of unnecessary parts not intended in the original text, inaccurate renditions of some text items, the distortion at a certain level of meaning of the source text, too freely translated version or too literal translation'. Translation errors also include the pragmatic error and wrong lexical choice which will be defined as below.

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[2] See http://www.atanet.org/bin/view.pl/12438.html for the explanation of the ATA's Framework for Standard Error Marking.

All of the errors mentioned in this study can be named with the general term 'translational error' in the sense that they happen during the process of translation. However, by classifying a certain error as a 'translation error', but not a 'comprehension error' or a 'linguistic error', the present author wants to refer to the error occurring in the process of transferring one sentence from the source text into the target text in the condition that the sentence grammar is acceptable. In other words, these 'translation errors' are more related the 'transfer competence' in the three-stage process of Nida (1964) and Nord (1992) as they are errors made in the process of transferring meaning. Accordingly they can be termed as 'transfer errors'. However, to avoid the confusion between 'language transfer errors' in second language acquisition and the errors made in the 'transfer process' of translation, the term 'translation errors' is utilised intead of 'transfer errors'.

Pragmatic error: errors made when learners produced a grammatically and semantically correct phrase/sentence but the use of the phrase/sentence is not appropriate with the communicative situation set out in the source text and target text.

Wrong lexical choice refers to the cases when the learner cannot find the right word to translate. To illustrate, the student translator might not have selected the most appropriate word among several that have similar (but not identical) meaning. This error is considered as a translation error because it may impair the comprehension of the readers.

Quantitative Analysis and Discussion

Table 1 reports the percentage of different types of errors in each year. The percentage of error reported in each cell will reflect the proportion of this type of error (i.e. syntactic error, grammatical error, etc.) compared to the overall number of errors of the same year. To illustrate, the percentage of Syntactic Errors in Year 2 column, which is 24.61%, means that syntactic errors occupies 24.61% of the total number of errors in Year 2. The comparison will be made between 1) distribution of different types of error in the same year (vertically) and 2) the distribution of the same type of error over the 4 years (horizontally)

Table 1: *Percentage distribution of different types of errors over 4 years*

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Syntactic Errors	121	175	285	82	663	**28.27%**	24.61%	27.32%	19.85%
Grammatical Errors	**124**	**230**	**325**	**157**	**836**	28.97%	32.34%	31.16%	**38.01%**
Morphological Errors	44	75	127	52	298	10.28%	10.54%	**17.86%**	12.59%
Collocation Errors	29	37	66	23	155	**6.77%**	5.20%	6.30%	5.56%
Word Form	2	4	8	1	15	0.46%	0.56%	0.76%	**2.42%**
Comprehension Errors	19	32	49	22	122	4.34%	4.50%	4.69%	**5.32%**
Translation Errors	89	158	183	76	509	20.79%	**22.22%**	17.54%	18.40%
Total number of errors	**428**	**711**	**1043**	**413**		100%	100%	100%	100%
Number of students	15	27	36	17	95				

Distribution of different types of errors in the same year
The highest proportion of errors observed in all 4 years is grammatical errors (28.97% for Year 1, 32.34% for Year 2, 31.16% for Year 3, 38.01% for Year 4). The kind of errors that occupies the second highest percentage of errors in all 4 years is syntactic errors. This proves that linguistic competence is really one of the hindrances to the students.The errors that occupy the third highest proportion fall into the category of translation errors. In short, even though students may have problems with comprehension, they seems to have more difficulty in the second and third phase of translating process 'transfer' and 'restructuring' rather than 'analysis' phase.

Distribution of the same type of error over the 4 years
The table also helps to compare the distributions of one single type of error across four groups of students. Regarding grammatical errors, Year 4 students had the highest percentage of errors (38.01%) compared to all other 3 years (28.97%, 31.16%, 32.34%). In the field of morphological errors, Year 3 students had the highest percentage distribution (17.83%). Year 2 students had the highest percentage of translation errors (22.22%) among 4 years and Year 1 students had the highest number of errors in collocation handling (6.77%) and syntactic errors (28.27%).

The fact that grammatical errors occupy the largest percentage in the total number errors of Year 4 does not necessarily mean that Year 4 students made more grammatical errors than students of other years. It may simply mean that Year 4 students seemed to focus more on the retaining the context's meaning, rather than on the processing of each individual sentence. Knowing that word-by-word translation is not the correct way of translating, they tended to concentrate more on the 'transferring' phase rather then the 'restructuring' phase[3]. Therefore, they seemed to ignore the specific task of guaranteeing the correct grammar of each individual sentence. Year 4 students also had high percentage of comprehension errors compared to other years, probably because they had so much self-confidence in their comprehension ability of Vietnamese and therefore took no notice of the details of the test.

It is understandable that Year 1 students made more syntactic errors and collocation errors compared to three other years. Year 1 students seemed not to have high linguistic competence, which hindered them from transferring the complex syntactic structure of Vietnamese sentences to fit the subject-predicate structures of English sentences. Also Year 1 students may have limited knowledge of collocation and they tend to make errors in this field. Year 1 students may have known that their linguistic competence is limited and were likely to be more careful in reading and comprehending the text as well as in the translating of each individual sentence.

Year 2 students made more errors in the process of transferring sentence from Vietnamese into English, not in the process of comprehending/analysing the text or restructuring the sentence. Possibly because Year 2 is the first year when the students have just been taught Translation at the university, they want to attempt more strategies in their translation. However, their still limited knowledge prevented them from having exact translational strategy.

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[3] Nida's model of translation

Table 2: *Percentage of all type of errors across 18 sentences*

SENT.NO		ERROR TYPE							Total
		1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	2	3	
1.00	Frequency	6	148	70	26	5	3	35	293
	Percentage	2.0%	<u>17.7%</u>	10.6%	16.8%	<u>33.3%</u>	2.5%	6.7%	11.2%
2.00	Frequency	6	20	28	3	0	0	33	90
	Percentage	2.0%	2.4%	4.3%	1.9%	.0%	.0%	6.3%	3.4%
3.00	Frequency	39	52	34	1	0	8	28	162
	Percentage	13.1%	6.2%	5.2%	.6%	.0%	6.6%	5.3%	6.2%
4.00	Frequency	66	42	52	3	1	20	38	222
	Percentage	<u>22.1%</u>	5.0%	7.9%	1.9%	6.7%	<u>16.5%</u>	7.2%	8.5%
5.00	Frequency	5	20	68	0	1	1	43	138
	Percentage	1.7%	2.4%	10.3%	.0%	6.7%	.8%	8.2%	5.3%
6.00	Frequency	14	32	10	0	0	4	45	105
	Percentage	4.7%	3.8%	1.5%	.0%	.0%	3.3%	<u>8.6%</u>	4.0%
7.00	Frequency	5	21	4	0	0	1	4	35
	Percentage	1.7%	2.5%	.6%	.0%	.0%	.8%	.8%	1.3%
8.00	Frequency	2	15	2	0	0	1	3	23
	Percentage	.7%	1.8%	.3%	.0%	.0%	.8%	.6%	.9%
9.00	Frequency	2	21	2	0	0	1	4	30
	Percentage	.7%	2.5%	.3%	.0%	.0%	.8%	.8%	1.1%
10.00	Frequency	3	17	2	0	0	1	3	26
	Percentage	1.0%	2.0%	.3%	.0%	.0%	.8%	.6%	1.0%
11.00	Frequency	8	97	7	0	0	0	17	129
	Percentage	2.7%	<u>11.6%</u>	1.1%	.0%	.0%	.0%	3.2%	4.9%
12.00	Frequency	25	65	61	85	0	0	31	267
	Percentage	8.4%	7.8%	9.3%	<u>54.8%</u>	.0%	.0%	5.9%	10.2%
13.00	Frequency	2	60	14	0	0	1	43	120
	Percentage	.7%	7.2%	2.1%	.0%	.0%	.8%	8.2%	4.6%
14.00	Frequency	16	81	39	34	3	2	32	207
	Percentage	5.4%	9.7%	5.9%	<u>21.9%</u>	20.0%	1.7%	6.1%	7.9%
15.00	Frequency	25	39	56	0	0	0	33	153
	Percentage	8.4%	4.7%	8.5%	.0%	.0%	.0%	6.3%	5.9%
16.00	Frequency	1	6	31	0	0	0	38	76
	Percentage	0.03%	.7%	4.7%	.0%	.0%	.0%	7.2%	2.9%
17.00	Frequency	69	49	84	3	1	78	35	319
	Percentage	<u>23.2%</u>	5.9%	<u>12.8%</u>	1.9%	6.7%	<u>64.5%</u>	6.7%	12.2%
18.00	Frequency	4	51	94	0	4	0	61	214
	Percentage	1.3%	6.1%	<u>14.3%</u>	.0%	<u>26.7%</u>	.0%	<u>11.6%</u>	8.2%
Total		298	836	658	155	15	121	526	2609
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

1.1 Morphological Errors 1.2 Grammar Errors 1.3 Syntactic Errors 1.4 Collocation Errors 1.5 Word Form 2 Comprehension Errors 3 Translation Errors

Table 2 shows the distribution of different types of error (respectively, morphological errors, grammar errors, syntactic errors, collocation errors, word form, comprehension errors, translation errors) across the 18 sentences. That is to say, the

rows represent the sentences and the columns represent the types of error; each number appearing in the box will show the corresponding percentage of one specific type of error in that sentence. The percentage in each row will be calculated by the frequency of error in each sentence divided by the overall number of errors of the same type, considered as 100% at the end of each column. The numbers highlighted in red show the errors that account for the highest percentage. Among all morphological errors of 18 sentences, the morphological errors have the highest frequency and proportion in sentence 17 (23.2%) and sentence 4 (22.1%). The highest percentage of grammatical errors across the 18 sentences are seen in sentence 1 (17.7%) and sentence 11 (11.6%). Among the 8 sentences, syntactic errors appear with highest frequency and percentage distribution in sentences 18 (14.3%) and 17 (12.8%). Collocation errors are seen with the largest percentage in sentences 12 (54.8%) and 14 (21.9%). Students have the greatest problems with the formation of word in sentence 18 (26.7%) and sentence 1 (33.3%). The largest distribution of comprehension errors is seen in sentences 17 (64.5%) and 4 (16.4%). Translation errors have a rather even dispersion in the 18 sentences. This shows that although students may have certain text-specific or linguistic-specific problems posed by some syntactic structure, collocation or comprehension points in some sentences, translation skills are still problematic for them. Translation errors are the most dominant in two sentences, sentence 18 (11.7%) and sentence 6 (8.6%).

Findings

1. Among all types of errors, grammatical errors represent the largest proportion. Next come errors of syntax, translation, word form, comprehension and collocation. Although the comprehension errors account for only a small proportion, they seem to have serious consequences as they may lead to mistranslation and thus misunderstanding to the readers.

2. Among all types of syntactic errors, the four main types that account the highest percentage at the level of sentence structure are Inappropriate Sentence Construction (19.14%), Omission of Main Verb (13.2%), Misuse of Relative Clause (7.01%), and Not Parallel Combination (7.01%). These four types of syntactic errors can be said to be more or less attributable to the Topic-Comment Structure of Vietnamese.

3. In sentences whose topic-comment structure is remarkably different from the subject-predicate structure, students did have problems in locating the subject. However, they seem to have more problems in the task of handling the relationship between the subject and the verb: they are puzzled to recognise the difference between verbal predicates (in the form of a verb) and substantival predicates (in the form of an adjective) in Vietnamese and they often omit the verbs in the target text versions. They also have difficulty in handling the relative clause in sentences having two topic-comment structures and in building the sentence in an appropriate way.

4. The syntactic errors are observed in the specific task of translating subjects, to see whether students can handle the subject in the context where the initial constituent at the beginning of each sentence is always the topic, which may or may not coincide with the subject. Five types of syntactic errors occur in this task of locating and rendering the subject into the target text: Omission of Subject, Repetition of Subject, Inappropriate Choice of Subject, No Logical Connection Between Subject and Predicate, Inappropriate Connection Between Subject and Passive Verb. Observation shows that Omission of Subject is the most frequent type of error, followed by

Repetition of Subject and No Logical Connection Between Subject and Predicate. However, it is worth noting that these errors are not the most frequent among the various kinds of syntactic errors in this study.

5. Among four years, Year 1 make more syntactic and collocation errors compared to three other years. Year 4 make more grammatical errors than other years. This fact does not neccesarily mean that the linguistic competence of Year 4 is lower than other years. It can be explained by the fact that Year 4 seem to focus more on the context's meaning, rather than on the processing of each individual item in the sentence. Year 3 have the highest percentage distribution of morphological errors. Year 2 make more errors in the process of transferring the sentence from Vietnamese into English, not in the process of comprehending the text.

Pedagogical Implication

The impression extracted from the data is that the students have a rather limited knowledge of both Vietnamese and English. The lack of a thorough knowledge of Vietnamese grammar imposed a certain level of difficulty to students. Their failure to master the basic characteristics of Vietnamese as a topic-prominent language and to understand the structural difference between Vietnamese and English impeded students from choosing a suitable equivalent for a certain Vietnamese syntactic structure. The students also seemed to take up lexical and grammatical knowledge of English expressions but not their pragmatic and discoursal use. As a consequence, the most regular mistranslations by the Vietnamese students were the use of unconnected combination of some words or phrases. This tended to produce sentence forms that were very cumbersome and unnatural in English. The students were not well-equipped with the knowledge of the function of the English language. Such knowledge would have helped them to maintain the focus (or prominence) of information presented when translating from the one language (Vietnamese) to the other (English). In some instances where the students were proficient enough to select the correct equivalent structure in English, they still had problems locating the subject that best conveyed the meaning in the source sentence without changing its focus of information.

To deal with the phenomena presented above, the following strategies are recommended in the teaching of Vietnamese- English translation:

1. In the program of Vietnamese-English translation, a certain number of hours should be spared for teaching Vietnamese grammar and the special role of topic-prominent structures in Vietnamese language. Recognising these typological differences in syntactic structures between Vietnamese and English, students can become more alert when choosing the suitable structure in translation.

2. In teaching any new word or phrase, the teacher should provide the students not only its semantic use but also its pragmatic and discoursal use.

3. It is a tradition in Vietnamese universities that, in translation classes, 200-word texts in the source language are usually given to students and the teacher will work with the students on that text. Although this makes it easy for students in terms of their choice of vocabulary, it fails to provide students with a good resource of available 'equivalent structures' they can use when faced with a specific type of Vietnamese topic-prominent language. It is recommended that, instead of being given 200-word text, students should be given 10 sentences of the same syntactic structures in Vietnamese on different topics in order that they can master the way of handling

subjects in a given structure. It may be argued that this way of teaching may encourage word-for-word translation. However, for learners of English with very limited competency, this way of teaching at least can help them to handle the text correctly, before they are competent enough to make it perfect and natural in the whole text.

4. This study suggests the use a choice network analysis based on the error corpus of students. According to Campbell & Hale (2003), a choice network is in effect a psycholinguistic model of the options facing the translator, based on the evidence of the target texts of groups of subjects translating the same text. The suggestion is that different translations from many students from the same source text should be collected. These different ways of translating will be listed and systematised into a 'choice network', which can be used and referred to any time the same source text is used again for teaching purpose. This way, students of different classes or from different years can avoid the possible errors and discuss all available ways of translating a certain structure before they can choose the most suitable to convey the source text.

Conclusion

The study investigated three questions: a) whether the students have problem translating sentences in which the Topic of the topic-comment structure does not coincide with the Subject, b) what kinds of errors students made in translating this specific type of structure and c) whether the percentage of errors differ in different groups of students from different years. The number of errors found in the data may not be large enough to substantiate the fact that Vietnamese EFL students always have a great deal of difficulty in handling the typological differences between Vietnamese and English. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that these errors still need to be identified and collected during translation training. Grammatical errors still occupy the highest percentage errors among all other types. The study has identified some typical syntactic errors in the Vietnamese-English translation caused by the influence of the Vietnamese topic-comment structures. The most common errors in the translation of these structures include Omission of Subject, Repetition of Subject, Inappropriate Choice of Subject, No Logical Connection Between Subject and Predicate, Inappropriate Connection Between Subject and Passive Verbs. Some strategies were suggested that can be applied to prevent the possible problems arising from translating topic-prominent structures of Vietnamese into English. Although the percentages of errors differ in different groups of students, there is no clear evidence to show that this variation is the direct result of the discrepancy in their language competence.

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Appendix A

ELICITATION TEST

Translate the following passages into English:

(1) Là kẻ từng chăm chú dõi theo cuộc 'hành trình thai sản' của bộ phim, tôi mê mẩn với Mê Thảo (giá chỉ đặt tên phim là Mê Thảo thôi thì nghe giản dị hơn và 'đã' hơn). (2) Trước hết là mê mẩn với những hình ảnh 'rặt ngôn ngữ điện ảnh'. (3) Cảnh đốt bàn ghế, tiếng nổ của đồ đạc và phát súng bắn vào con búp bê khiến người xem lạnh gáy. (4) Cảnh nong tằm ngo ngoe đòi ăn và bàn chân giẫm nát những con tằm làm ta sởn gai ốc. (5) Cảnh thả đèn trời tưởng như chỉ có ma thuật mới làm nổi. (6) Cảnh quay nào cũng thấy mồ hôi. (7) Mồ hôi của ý nghĩ. (8) Mồ hôi của sự đi tìm. (9) Mồ hôi dàn dựng. (10) Mồ hôi tập luyện và diễn xuất. (11) Hầu như mỗi đoạn phim đều thấm đượm tâm hồn Việt. (12) Trong trí nhớ tôi, chưa có một phim nào của nước Việt ta được thực hiện công phu và đạt chuẩn như vậy.

(13) Lại mê mẩn với những nhân vật có tên và không tên. (14) Trong nhiều nhân vật phụ thành công, ông bõ già rất sinh động và cảm động, xứng đáng được bầu là vai phụ xuất sắc nhất. (15) Nhân vật chính nào cũng mỗi người một vẻ, độc đáo, đầy thân phận, được diễn tả tự nhiên và sâu sắc làm sao. (16) Nguyễn hào hoa, hào hiệp, lập dị ra mặt, rõ là anh điền chủ bất đắc chí, khật khùng. (17) Tam, cây đàn nguyệt tuyệt vời tới mức tuyệt vọng, u uẩn, bế tắc mà nghĩa khí, cử chỉ thật chính xác với tâm trạng. (18) Tơ, cô đào hát hồng nhan bạc phận, phiêu dạt mà cao sang, đa tình mà chung tình, vừa quyến rũ vừa nghiêm trang, nhỏ nhoi mà không hèn mọn… khó có ai nhập vai hay hơn Thuý Nga (với 'giọng ca vàng' Thanh Hoài và lời bài hát chầu văn do nhà thơ Văn Lê viết).

Title: Từ Chùa Đàn đến Mê Thảo - thời vang bóng

Author: Nguyễn Duy
Source: Tuổi Trẻ Chủ Nhật (Sunday Youth)
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lix B

CTURAL CONFIGURATION OF 18 SENTENCES IN THE ELICITATION TASK

Là kẻ	từng	chăm chú	dõi theo cuộc	'hành trình	thai sản'	của	bộ phim,
As one	tense marker	attentively	follow itinerary		gestation	of	film
L TOPIC	COMMENT						
L SUBJECT	PREDICATE						

mê mẩn	với *Mê Thảo,*
be charmed	with Me Thao
COMMENT	
T	PREDICATE

(người ta/đạo diễn)	chỉ	đặt tên	phim	là	*Mê Thảo*	thôi
(people/film director)	only	name	film	to be	Me Thao	only
TOPIC	COMMENT 1					
NULL TOPIC 1	PREDICATE 1					
NULL SUBJECT 1						

ker	*(bộ phim)*	nghe	giản dị	hơn	và	'đã'	hơn.]
MARKER	*(film)*	hear	simple	more	and	exciting	more
	COMMENT						
	NULL TOPIC 2	COMMENT 2					
	NULL SUBJECT 2	PREDICATE 2					

Trước hết là	*(tôi)*	mê mẩn	với	những	hình ảnh	'rặt	ngôn ngữ	điện
First of all	*(I)*	be charmed	with	classifier	images	tyical	language	movi
RANGE TOPIC	NULL TOPIC	COMMENT						
	NULL SUBJECT PREDICATE							

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Pham Phu Quynh Na

Cảnh   đốt   bàn ghế,   tiếng   nổ   của   đồ đạc   và   phát súng   bắn   vào   con búp bê
scene   burn   furniture   sound   explode   of   furnitureand   the shoot   shoot   preposition   the doll
TOPIC
SUBJECT

khiến   người xem   lạnh   gáy.
make   audience   cold
COMMENT
PREDICATE

Cảnh   nong   tằm   ngo ngoe   đòi   ăn   và   bàn   chân   giẫm   nát   những con tằm
Scene   frying basket   silkworms   wriggle   demand eat   and   foot   tread   crushed   silkworms
TOPIC
SUBJECT

làm   ta   sởn   gai ốc.
make   pronoun creep   goose-flesh
COMMENT
PREDICATE

Cảnh   thả   đèn   trời   (người ta/người xem..)   tưởng như   chỉ có   ma thuật   mới   làm r
scene   drop   light   sky   (people/audience)   seem   only   magic   in order to   do
TOPIC   COMMENT
OBJECT OF VERB 2   NULL SUBJECT 1   VERB 1   SUBJECT 2   VERB 2
OF THE CLAUSAL
COMMENT

Cảnh quay   nào   (người ta/người xem)   cũng   thấy   mồ hôi.
Scene   any   (people/audience)   also   see   sweat
TOPICALISED ADVERB
OF CLAUSAL COMMENT   COMMENT
ADVERBIAL CATEGORY   NULL SUBJECT   VERB   OBJECT OF VERB

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Errors in the translation of topic-comment structures

Mồ hôi | của | ý nghĩ.
Sweat | of | thought
TOPIC (NO COMMENT)

Trong | trí nhớ | tôi | chưa | có | một | phim | nào | của | nước Việt | ta
In | memory | I | not yet | have | one | film | any | of | Vietnam | pronoun
RANGE TOPIC | TOPIC (EXISTENTIAL CLAUSE)
EXISTENTIAL CLAUSE (THERE..)

được | thực hiện | công phu | và | đạt | chuẩn | như vậy
be/get | carry out | elaborate | and | obtain | standard | like that.

(Tôi) | Lại | mê mẩn với | những | nhân | vật | có | tên | và | không | tên.
(I) | again | be charmed | with | plural marker | character | have | name | and | no | name.
NULL TOPIC | COMMENT
NULL SUBJECT PREDICATE

Trong | nhiều | nhân vật | phụ | thành công, | ông | bõ | già | rất | sinh động | và | cảm động
In | many | chracter | secondary | successful | man | servant | old | very | lively | and | touching
RANGE TOPIC | TOPIC | COMMENT 1
SUBJECT | PREDICATE 1

(ông) | xứng đáng | được | bầu | là | vai | phụ | xuất sắc | nhất
(he) | deserving | be/get | nominate | be | character | secondary | excellent | best
NULL TOPIC 2 | COMMENT 2
NULL SUBJECT PREDICATE 2

Nhân vật | chính | nào | cũng | mỗi | người | một | vẻ, | độc đáo, | đầy | thân phận,
Character | main | any | also | each | person | one | style | original | full | condition
TOPIC | COMMENT
TOPIC 1 | COMMENT 1
SUBJECT | PREDICATE 1

(họ)	được	diễn tả	tự nhiên	và	sâu sắc	làm sao
(they)	manage	describe	natural	and	deep	how

COMMENT
NULL TOPIC 2 COMMENT 2
PREDICATE 2

Nguyễn	hào hoa,	hào hiệp,	lập dị	ra mặt,	(anh)	rõ là	anh điền chủ	bất đắc chí,	khật khùng.
Nguyen	chivalrous	generous	eccentric	overtly	(he)	really	landowner	frustrated	silly

TOPIC   COMMENT 1   NULL TOPIC 2   COMMENT 2
SUBJECT   PREDICATE 1   NULL SUBJECT PREDICATE 2

Tam,	cây đàn nguyệt	tuyệt vời	tới	mức	tuyệt vọng,	u uẩn,	bế tắc	mà	nghĩa khí,
Tam	moon-shaped guitar	excellent	to	degree	disappointed	hidden	deadlock	but	noble

TOPIC   COMMENT
           TOPIC 1   COMMENT 1
SUBJECT 1 APPOSITION   PREDICATE 1

cử chỉ	thật	chính xác	với	tâm trạng.
gesture	very	accurate	with	state of mind.

TOPIC 2   COMMENT 2
SUBJECT 2 PREDICATE 2

Tơ,	cô đào hát	hồng nhan	bạc phận,	phiêu dạt	mà	cao sang,	đa tình	mà	chun
To,	singer	beautiful gurl	ill fate	wandering	but	dignified	amorous	but	loyal

TOPIC   COMMENT
           TOPIC 1   COMMENT 1
SUBJECT   APPOSITION   PREDICATE

vừa	quyến rũ	vừa	nghiêm trang,	nhỏ nhoi		mà	không	hèn mọn
both	attractive	and	serious	petite		but	not	lowly

COMMENT (cont)

khó	có	ai		nhập	vai	*(Tờ)*	hay	hơn	Thuý Nga
difficult	have	anyone		play	role	*(Tờ)*	good	more	Thuy Nga

TOPIC (EXISTENTIAL CLAUSE)　　　　COMMENT

SUBJECT-RAISING CONSTRUCTION