THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE THIRD-YEAR STUDENTS OF THE ENGLISH LINGUISTICS PROGRAM AT VINH UNIVERSITY TOWARDS THE TRANSLATION 1 COURSE AND SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE THE TEACHING OF VIETNAMESE - ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Nguyen Duy Binh, Nguyen Thi Lan Phuong
Department of Foreign Languages, Vinh University, Nghe An, Vietnam

ABSTRACT

Translation 1 is a compulsory course in the undergraduate English Language program at Vinh University. However, the quality of teaching this course is not yet up to expectations. This requires instructors to understand student feedback on this course and survey the translation errors they commonly make in order to propose optimal pedagogical solutions. This paper uses a qualitative research method through a series of survey questions to investigate student evaluations of the Translation 1 course and the Vietnamese - English translation errors. Based on the research results, we propose specific solutions to enhance the effectiveness of teaching the translation course.

Keywords: Translation errors; Vietnamese-English translation; translation teaching.

1. Introduction

In the English Language Program at Vinh University, the modules related to translation and interpretation constitute a significant portion. There are a total of 6 subjects: Translation Theory, Translation 1, Translation 2, Translation 3, Interpreting 1, Interpreting 2, accounting for 21 credits out of a total of 126 credits for the entire program (over 16%). This indicates that the English Language Program at Vinh University emphasizes translation and interpretation as a core professional field. Through observation, feedback, and evaluation from translation and interpretation lecturers, it is noted that many students still make errors in translation and interpretation. However, to date, there has been no comprehensive study on the perspectives of English Language students at Vinh University regarding the Translation modules and the necessary solutions to limit translation errors, especially from Vietnamese to English. This research first attempts to explore how English Language students evaluate the translation course and then surveys the errors made by students in translating

sentences from Vietnamese to English. Some optimal solutions are proposed to improve the quality of teaching translation modules and meet the program's learning outcomes.

2. Research overview

Translation is the process of transferring a written text from the source language to the target language while preserving at least two elements: meaning and style. This is also Eugene Nida's definition: "Translation is the attempt to reproduce in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (Nida, E. A., 1969). According to Nida, a translation must meet at least two criteria: fidelity to the meaning of the original text and style for the translation. Style is the factor that creates the naturalness of the translation. Meanwhile, Wilss believes that translation is "Translation is a transfer process which aims at the transformation of a written SL text into an optimally equivalent TL text, and which requires the syntactic, the semantic and pragmatic understanding and analytical processing of the SL" (Wills, W., 1982). This definition is very useful in understanding the translation process as well as setting translation criteria. Edmond Cary argues that the degree of equivalence of a translation depends on the nature of the text, the purpose of the text, the relationship between the source culture and the target culture, and the conditions of mentality, intellect, and emotion (Cary, E., 1985).

The analysis and classification of translation errors can be based on the translation evaluation criteria proposed by Larson, 1998:

1. Accuracy: This refers to accuracy in meaning. The meaning of the original text is faithfully conveyed in the translation, without additions, omissions, or distortions. The accuracy criterion encompasses both surface meaning and deep meaning.

2. Clarity: The translation must be clear in terms of meaning, avoiding ambiguity and misunderstanding. This criterion is directly related to grammatical issues. Incorrect grammar leads to ambiguity in sentences.

3. Naturalness: The style of the translation must be natural, meaning there should be no linguistic oddities, no awkward expressions, and no traces of word-for-word translation.

Regarding naturalness, Nida observes that: The message has to be tailored to the receptor's linguistic needs and cultural expectation and 'aims at complete naturalness of expression". […] This receptor-oriented approach considers adaptations of grammar, of lexicon and of cultural references to be essential in order to achieve naturalness; the TT language should not show interference from the SL, and the 'foreignness' of the ST setting is minimized (Nida, E. A., 2009).

Regarding the difficulty of translation, Newmark argues that the loss in translation arises from the peculiar elements of each language, the lexical, grammatical, and sound differences between two languages, the non-coincidence of individual uses of language between the author and the translator, and the differences of theories of meaning and different values between the author and the translator (Newmark, P. (2001). Larsen-Freeman and Long argue that "Where two languages were similar, positive transfer would occur; where they were different, negative transfer, or interference, would result" (Larson, M. L. and Long, M. H., 1991). Meanwhile, Marina and colleagues argue that "The interference of the native language implies that it prevents the speakers of a particular

language from using a foreign language correctly by transferring the rules and standards of their native language to that foreign language. […] Therefore, nationally - specific and international patterns of nomination exist, with the former presenting the main difficulties to speakers of other languages, causing mistakes and misunderstanding" (Marina *et al.*, 2005). This means that when there is a similarity between the foreign language and the mother tongue, accepting the foreign language will be very convenient, but when there is a difference, the influence of the mother tongue on acquiring the foreign language will be negative because learners tend to apply the rules of the mother tongue to learning or using the foreign language. This language interference naturally occurs in translation and interpretation. We know that students study translation as learners rather than as translators. The language, cultural, pragmatic, and stylistic gaps between the original text authors and student translators are still too significant. Therefore, student errors in the translation process are inevitable. Moreover, student errors should not be criticized but should be used by lecturers as a teaching tool.

There have been many studies on translation errors from the mother tongue to English. Bunyarat Duklim surveyed Thai-Vietnamese translations by 32 students enrolled in the International Communication English class at Rajamangala University of Technology, Thailand (Duklim, B., 2022). The results showed that most students made grammatical, semantic, and miscellaneous errors. Regarding grammatical errors, the article shows that singular-plural errors and tense and aspect errors are the most common. Regarding this classification, in our opinion, the author should specify what are called "miscellaneous errors" because it is too general. Kim Cuc presented the results of a survey of 36 English major students at Hung Vuong University (Kim Cuc, P. T., 2018). The author categorized student errors into three main types: language errors, comprehension errors, and translation errors, with understanding errors and translation errors having the highest frequency. However, in our opinion, separating vocabulary errors from language errors is not reasonable because vocabulary is part of language. Quynh Na presented the results of a study on structural translation errors by 4 groups consisting of 95 students from the Faculty of English Linguistics, Social Sciences and Humanities University, Ho Chi Minh City (Quynh Na, P. P., 2019). The author proposed an error analysis model which includes three main types of errors (similar to the classification method of Kim Cuc): Understanding errors (comprehension errors), linguistic errors, and translation errors. From that model, the author classified errors into syntactic errors, grammatical errors, morphological errors, combinative errors, word formation errors, understanding errors, and translation errors. The author concluded that the most common translation errors in translating sentences according to the thesis structure are the lack of subject, repeated subject, inappropriate subject selection, lack of logical coherence between subject and predicate, and lack of logical coherence between subject and verb in the passive voice. This article is very elaborate and detailed. However, what may confuse readers is that the survey results show that fourth-year students make more grammatical errors than first-, second-, and third-year students (Quynh Na, P. P., 2019). In this study, to analyze errors, we followed Duklim's error classification model (Duklim, B., 2002). Duklim divided translation errors into 3 types: syntax, semantics, and mixed. We classify them by language, meaning, and style because, as mentioned above, we believe that mixed errors are somewhat general whereas the quality of the translation lies in the style, or the naturalness, of the translation.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research subjects and scope

Our research subjects are 2 classes of third-year students (71 students) majoring in English Language. They are all taking the Translation 1 course and completing midterm exams as required by the course. The scope of the research is the Department of Foreign Language, Vinh University.

3.2. Research tools

Qualitative data collection and analysis methods have been used. Data collection is carried out through two methods: survey questions and in-class tests. The survey questions include 3 questions collecting respondent information, 5 questions assessing students' evaluations of the Translation 1 course using a Likert scale (5 levels), and 2 open-ended questions. Data was collected using Google Forms and then analyzed it using SPSS software.

Additionally, data from 71 midterm exams in the Translation 1 course, specifically translations from Vietnamese to English by third-year English Language students, was used. The original texts were selected from official Vietnamese electronic information sources. Translation errors were identified and classified into 3 types from the 71 midterm exams: syntactic errors, vocabulary errors, and stylistic errors.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Evaluation of English Language students on the translation course

4.1.1. Attitudes towards the Translation course

As mentioned earlier, translation courses account for a significant proportion of the English Language program at Vinh University. Therefore, understanding students' evaluations, attitudes, and aspirations regarding this course is crucial. We surveyed 71 students on this issue, and the results showed that most students are well aware of the role of translation courses in shaping their career orientation.

Table 1: *The students' perceptions of the importance of the Translation course*

How do you evaluate the necessity of the Translation course?										
Category	Very necessary		Necessary		Moderately necessary		Very slightly necessary		Not necessary	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
For career orientation	47	66.2	22	31.0	2	2.8	0	0	0	0
For English proficiency improvement	45	63.4	26	36.6	0	0	0	0	0	0

The survey results, presented in Table 1, show that up to 66.2% of the students surveyed believe that translation is extremely necessary for their career orientation; 31% consider this course necessary, and only 2.8% find its necessity level to be normal.

The survey results also indicate that the majority of students surveyed believe that translation courses are necessary for improving their English proficiency. 66.2% believe that translation is extremely necessary for improving their English proficiency; 36.6% of the students surveyed believe that the role of translation in enhancing their English language skills is necessary.

From the survey results, it can be concluded that studying translation in the English Language program not only aims at core professional fields such as translation and interpretation but also significantly contributes to enhancing English reading and writing skills. When studying translation, students reinforce and deepen their knowledge of the English language and recognize the similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese to avoid negative influences of cultural and linguistic interference when using English.

4.1.2. Evaluation of difficulties in translation

The majority of surveyed students (78.9%) believe that the primary difficulty in translation is the lack of cultural knowledge. This is consistent with the observations and assessments of the teaching staff. Students also spend little time reading books or news to expand their cultural knowledge. When lacking cultural knowledge, they face obstacles in understanding the text, leading to misunderstandings and translation errors.

Table 2: *The students' perceptions of the difficulty of the Translation course*

How do you evaluate the difficulty of studying translation?									
Category	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Difficulty in cultural knowledge	30	42.3	26	36.6	13	18.3	2	2.8	0	0
Difficulty in language	19	26.8	38	53.5	13	18.3	1	1.4	0	0
Difficulty in methodology	23	32.4	35	49.3	13	18.3	0	0	0	0

The second highest difficulty agreed upon by students is the difficulty in structural aspects (including verb tenses, complex sentences, compound sentences, etc.). This may be related to two issues. Firstly, the students' English proficiency levels are not uniform, with a high proportion of students weak in English grammar. Secondly, many students still do not fully understand the structural differences between English and Vietnamese.

The third difficulty with a high agreement rate is vocabulary difficulties. This is understandable given that students are not allowed to use dictionaries or smartphones during the exam, as they would be in the final exam. Additionally, the vocabulary of the surveyed students is limited, possibly due to their lack of reading. To develop their vocabulary, learners need to read more books or news to understand the contextual meaning of words.

The next highest difficulty with a high agreement rate is the difficulty in translation methods and techniques. Up to 81.7% of the surveyed students indicated that they are facing difficulties in applying the methods and techniques they have learned to translate texts from Vietnamese to English. This is also something we need to note because, in

addition to being equipped with cultural and linguistic knowledge, translators also need to further develop their translation strategies and techniques. Translation sometimes requires "tricks" (in the words of translator Phan Ngoc). To have more translation tricks, translators need to have more experience in translation. However, since English Language students are new to translation work, they still lack a certain level of technical sensitivity when translating.

4.2. Analysis of Vietnamese - English translation errors

Translation errors were counted from 71 midterm exams of students. In the exam, there is a section to translate 5 sentences from Vietnamese to English. From these 71 exams, we counted a total of 413 errors (excluding sentences where students left blank, without translation). The translation errors were classified as follows (Table 3).

Table 3: *Classification of translation errors*

Error Type	Frequency	Percentage
Grammar	205	49.6
Vocabulary	150	36.3
Style	58	14.0

The analysis of student translations is presented below. The examples provided are excerpts from the original text in the exam, so we keep the errors intact to maintain the authenticity of the data. Translation errors made by surveyed students are classified into grammar errors, vocabulary errors, and stylistic errors.

4.2.1. Grammar errors

Table 3 shows that the frequency of grammatical structure errors is very high, accounting for 45.5% of the total errors made. This could reinforce the hypothesis that the grammar knowledge of many third-year English Language students is lacking. When translating sentences from Vietnamese to English, many students still make errors, even very basic ones.

Table 4: *An example analysis of translation errors*

Original Text	Translated Text	Recommended Translation
Nhận thức được giá trị của ngoại ngữ, nhiều bạn trẻ đã nỗ lực tự học để phát triển cơ hội học tập, làm việc khi thành thạo tiếng Anh.	**Text 1:** Understanding quality of English, young people hard learning to development learning, work when use English	Being aware of the importance of foreign languages, many young people have tried to learn them on their own in order to open up their working and learning opportunities
	Text 2: Found the benefit of English, many young people trying to self-study to enhance chance for study, work when master English	
	Text 3: Know what English can do, a lot of student try hard get more chance to learn and work when use English	
	Text 4: Understand of English, many young was developed learning myself, work while English	

Original Text	Translated Text	Recommended Translation
	Text 5: Understands about value of language, many young people was self-studied to develop opportunities, work when know perfect English	with their proficiency in these languages.

Through the analysis in Table 4, it can be seen that students make errors in using determiners, omitting the article "the" before "quality of English", verb tense errors, using the wrong type of word (development instead of develop), using past participles, infinitives, or third-person singular verbs without subjects instead of gerunds (*found* instead of *founding* or *having founded*; *when use* or *when know* instead of *when using* or *when knowing*), using verbs in passive voice (was developed, was self-studied instead of using verbs in active voice, in singular form instead of the plural form (many young people was instead of many young people were)…

4.2.2. Vocabulary errors

According to M. Baker, each word carries an individual property, and that personal stamp makes people choose to use this word rather than that word: "The lexical meaning of a word or lexical unit may be thought of as the specific value it has in a particular linguistic system and the 'personality' it acquires through usage within that system..." (Baker, M., 2018). Translation requires a very high level of accuracy in vocabulary because otherwise, it will affect the understanding of meaning as well as the style of the original author. Through the survey, we found that, after grammatical structure errors, vocabulary errors rank second. We know that vocabulary errors lead to semantic ones: using the wrong word will distort the meaning (semantic distortion). On average, for every 5 translated sentences, there are 2 vocabulary errors even though the English words are not too difficult. If analyzed with a measurement tool, the vocabulary errors only fall into the B2, and B1 levels. In the following are some examples of incorrect vocabulary usage.

Example 1:

Original: *Các chuyên gia cho rằng AI được ứng dụng trong nhiều lĩnh vực như sản xuất, kinh doanh, chăm sóc sức khỏe, giáo dục, giải trí.*

Translation: *For organization, AI is used in many departments like: health care, education, entertainment.*

In this example, the student didn't know the English equivalent of "các chuyên gia" so they translated it as "organization" instead of "experts" or "specialists"; they also didn't know the English term for "lĩnh vực" so they translated it as "departments". Furthermore, the student omitted translating "sản xuất, kinh doanh". Therefore, the translation led to a significant misunderstanding.

Example 2:

Original: *Sự mới mẻ, thách thức của ngành công nghệ thông tin (IT) trong đó có AI đang hấp dẫn giới trẻ.*

Translation: *The new things, challenges of the information technology industry including AI are attracting young people.*

In this translation, we see that the student didn't know the English equivalent of "sự mới mẻ" so they used a paraphrasing technique to say "new things". While the syntax of the translation is quite good, using "new things" instead of "novelty" changes the meaning of the sentence. A native English speaker would understand "new things" as referring to specific items or objects, rather than the abstract concept of "novelty".

***Example 3*:**

Original: *Thầy Xiêm không chỉ giảng dạy về chuyên môn, mà còn hướng dẫn Sang phương pháp tìm, đọc - hiểu tài liệu, tin tức tiếng Anh hiệu quả cùng các kỹ năng viết báo cáo bằng tiếng Anh.*

Translation: *Teacher Xiêm not only teach about skills, but also orient Sang to learn seeking skills, fully understand documents, news with writing assignments by English.*

In this translation, we observe that the student translated "chuyên môn" as "skills," possibly because they were unaware of the English equivalents of these terms. In this context, "chuyên môn" could be understood as "knowledge" or "academic knowledge." However, when the translator rendered "chuyên môn" as "skills," the translation became ambiguous, especially when followed by "seeking skills".

4.2.3. Stylistic errors

Stylistic errors are the stylistic flaws in students' writing. Translations into English do not sound natural even though they may seem fine in terms of grammar and vocabulary. According to us, stylistic errors should only be considered when the translation does not have serious grammatical and vocabulary errors. In the following are some specific examples.

Example 1:

Original: *Tôi đến với nghiên cứu khoa học vì đam mê lẫn tình cờ.*

Translation: *I started to be involved in scientific research with my desire accidentally.*

With this translation, the student could transfer the meaning from the original sentence to English quite well in terms of grammar. However, when translating the phrase "vì đam mê lẫn tình cờ," this student seemed confused about maintaining word balance in English, using both a noun (desire) and an adverb (accidentally). The expected translation should have a unified type of word for both "đam mê" and "tình cờ" (for example: "by passion as well as by accident"). This also demonstrates that using vocabulary with the wrong type of word can affect the style of the translation.

Example 2:

Original: *Phải nói rằng, nhà khoa học nữ có những đóng góp to lớn cho sự nghiệp đổi mới giáo dục, đào tạo nước nhà.*

Translation: *It's obvious that female scientists have great contribution to educational and training reform of the country.*

Ignoring the absence of the definite article "the" before "educational" we see that this translation is relatively fine in terms of meaning and grammar. However, the phrase "have great contribution to", while not incorrect grammatically, is an awkwardly phrased expression from Vietnamese. Googling this exact phrase yields mostly results from Vietnam. A more natural way of saying this is "to make an outstanding contribution to".

Additionally, by using both the adjective "educational" and the noun "training" to modify "reform" the naturalness of the translation is somewhat lost due to the lack of consistency in word type.

Example 3:

Original: Sang cho rằng để trau dồi tiếng Anh, sinh viên có thể tham gia câu lạc bộ tiếng, tìm kiếm tài liệu từ các nguồn thông tin trên Internet bằng tiếng Anh, theo dõi các mạng xã hội có liên quan đến học ngoại ngữ.

Translation: Sang thinks that, in order to enrich English, students can join English club, finding documents from the internet in English, following social network that involves learning English.

Overall, this translation does not have serious errors in terms of grammar. In fact, in terms of meaning, viewed holistically, the translation can be fully understood by native speakers. Aside from the lack of the determiner "the" before English, which could be misleading as it might be understood as enriching the English language rather than improving English proficiency, this translation also suffers from stylistic errors in using gerunds following "can join English club": finding, following, creating a lack of consistency in word type. Consequently, this translation does not sound natural in language.

Through the statistics and analysis of translation errors made by third-year English Language students, we can explain the reasons why they make Vietnamese-English translation errors as follows:

- Many students have limited proficiency in both English grammar and vocabulary. In fact, many students have not grasped the basic grammar rules of English, especially verb forms and tenses. Limited vocabulary often leads many students to leave untranslated words they do not know or translate words that are not semantically equivalent.

- Many students also have limited proficiency in Vietnamese. Therefore, they face some difficulties in understanding sentences in Vietnamese to express them into English in the most understandable, clear, and natural way.

- Many students are still not proficient in applying the translation strategies /techniques they have learned to their translation activities. The tendency to translate literally (word for word) still exists, reading the original text and immediately writing the translation without analyzing the sentence, converting the sentence beforehand, leading to errors.

5. Recommendations

To improve the effectiveness of teaching Translation 1, firstly, in translation classes, instructors need to spend time reinforcing English grammar structures, and explaining English sentence formation rules. Especially, teaching translation according to sentence patterns is very important to create cross-linguistic reflexes for students. Besides, helping students expand their vocabulary is also essential. Instructors can assign students to read news, novels, non-fiction books, etc., at home on topics taught in class. Only by reading and listening more can students remember vocabulary in context. In addition, instructors also need to spend more time guiding students to enhance their Vietnamese proficiency, making them aware that as Vietnamese, they may not necessarily be good at

writing Vietnamese. Analyzing and comparing the two languages, English and Vietnamese, will help minimize language interference in students. As Fries said: "The best means should be based on a scientific description of the language being learned, carefully compared to the description of the learner's native language" (Fries, C. C., 1945). Furthermore, providing thorough corrections and error analysis for students is what translation instructors need to do regularly so that students can constantly draw translation lessons, and avoid language, usage, and style traps. Last but not least, equally important, instructors need to have students practice more translation techniques and methods. If students are proficient in the language and have a cultural background but are not equipped with reasonable translation techniques and methods, they cannot translate well.

6. Conclusion

In this article, we presented the survey results on the attitudes and evaluations of third-year English Language students at Vinh University as well as analyzed errors in grammar, semantics, and style in translations of sentences from Vietnamese to English. From there, we attempted to explain the reasons for students' translation errors and then propose solutions to improve the effectiveness of teaching this subject. We hope to provide certain insights for English language instructors in general and translation-interpreting instructors in particular so that they can adjust their content and teaching methods.

Within the scope of this article, we could neither analyze other aspects of translation errors such as errors due to gaps in cultural knowledge nor delve deeper into classifying errors in grammar or vocabulary-semantic errors. We also did not address the psychological factors as well as the fact that students were not allowed to use dictionaries during the translation process, which affected the quality of their work. These could be potential research directions for us in the future.

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TÓM TẮT

ĐÁNH GIÁ CỦA SINH VIÊN NĂM THỨ BA NGÀNH NGÔN NGỮ ANH TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC VINH VỀ HỌC PHẦN BIÊN DỊCH 1 VÀ GIẢI PHÁP HẠN CHẾ LỖI DỊCH TỪ TIẾNG VIỆT SANG TIẾNG ANH

Nguyễn Duy Bình, Nguyễn Thị Lan Phương
Khoa Sư phạm Ngoại ngữ, Trường Đại học Vinh, Nghệ An, Việt Nam

Học phần Biên dịch 1 là học phần bắt buộc trong chương trình đào tạo đại học chính quy Ngôn ngữ Anh của Trường Đại học Vinh. Tuy nhiên, có thể thấy chất lượng dạy học môn học này còn chưa được như kỳ vọng. Điều này yêu cầu người dạy phải tìm hiểu phản hồi của sinh viên về học phần này cũng như khảo sát lỗi dịch mà họ thường mắc phải để đưa ra những giải pháp sư phạm tối ưu. Bài báo sử dụng phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính qua chuỗi câu hỏi khảo sát đánh giá của sinh viên về học phần Biên dịch 1 và kết quả khảo sát lỗi biên dịch Việt - Anh từ các bài kiểm tra trên lớp. Trên cơ sở kết quả nghiên cứu, chúng tôi đề xuất các giải pháp cụ thể nhằm nâng cao hiệu quả dạy học môn biên dịch.

Từ khóa: Lỗi sai dịch thuật; biên dịch Việt-Anh; dạy biên dịch.