

THE THIRD-YEAR ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENT'S PROBLEMS IN DEALING WITH EQUIVALENCE ERRORS IN TRANSLATION AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract: *In line with the tendency of using a student-centered model, the lecturer conducted this study so as to identify the translation equivalence problems encountered by 86 among 163 from the 5 classes (26A3,4,5,6,9) third-year English major students at the Faculty of English in Hanoi Open University when they studied the subject "Basics of Translation" and to propose solutions. The task-based approach with groupwork was proved to be effective with 87% of the translation tasks containing fewer translation errors. The data are translation errors of formal, syntactic, stylistic, pragmatic and content equivalents. The main instruments utilized in the study included pre-test, post-test, document observations, questionnaires and interviews. The application of the qualitative approach enabled the lecturer to analyze the data and get the most reliable findings. It is expected that the study will be helpful for both the lecturer and the other colleagues.*

Keywords: *Strategies, task-based approach, equivalence, translation errors, methods, groupwork*

I. Introduction

Translation is closely related to foreign language learning. It is one part of the language learning process. Any students who translate well can take the most essential advantages of using or mastering the language. Translation skill can be a good tool for students to practise using language and it can be done at any places or time. As a matter of fact, translation can be a means of communication. Many students see that

it is necessary to study translation but in reality they face a lot of difficulties and challenges in doing the translation. After the first two weeks of learning the subject "Basics of Translation", a number of the third-year English major students at English Faculty in Hanoi Open University found it hard to deal with some translation problems. In some cases, they could not overcome the obstacles and they met with failure in translating some texts. The lecturer interviewed the students in class

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and gave them a questionnaire to find out the real reasons why they made a number of certain translation errors repeatedly. The lecturer tried to identify the type of the translation errors they made so that the suitable advice or guides on translation could be given to them. The lecturer's thoughts and concerns are always focused on how to improve the students' translation competence and teaching methods. This study can be a good guide to help the lecturer do the job more effectively.

The main aims of the study are to find out the answers to the two research questions: (1) What are the problems of equivalence that the third-year English major students at HOU encounter in practising translation? (2) What can be the solution for students to make use of equivalence in translation?

II. Literature review

2.1. Definitions of translation

There are many definitions about translation made by translators, linguists and researchers. Those definitions are often seen from different perspectives. Larson (1984) stated: "Translation consists of transferring the meaning of the Source Language into the Target Language. It is the meaning which is being transferred and must be held constant. Only the form changes.". We all know that translation is actually a kind of operation or process, but actually translation is also a product: Translation is an abstract and broad concept and it contains both the process and the product (Bell, 1991, p. 13). To put it another way, translation is a process of transference occurring among languages. We need to interpret all the verbal

symbols and transfer them in one language through the symbols of other languages. Catford (1965) was both a translator and researcher, regarding translation as an operation which is performed on language: Translation is a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another (1965, p. 27). Nida and Taber (1974:14) claimed that "Translation consists of reproducing in the receptor language and secondly in terms of style". They consider that the translator has to produce the message of the source language again in the target language, with the focus on the style of the expression as well.

2.2. Translation errors and correction

There are many types of errors such as, functional, absolute, systematic, random errors or errors in the product and errors in the process. Newmark (2006) simply mentioned two kinds of mistakes: referential and linguistic. According to him, referential mistakes are the kinds relating to facts or information in the reality. Whereas linguistic mistakes refer to the translator's lack of proficiency in the foreign language. They include words, collocations, and idioms. Kade, O. (1968) had a different concept about translation errors: "What rightly appears to be linguistically equivalent may very frequently qualify as 'translationally' nonequivalent". Errors in translation mostly come from the non-equivalence between the source and target languages (Baker: 1992). Pym (1992) pointed out that there are some types of errors in translations: "countersense, faux sense, nonsense, addition, omission, unresolved extralinguistic references, loss of meaning

and inappropriate linguistic variation (register, style, dialect, etc.)”. According to Nord (1997: 73), Translation errors belong to the following facts: “1. the function of the translation, 2. The coherence of the text, 3. The text type or text form, 4. linguistic conventions, 5. Culture- and situation-specific conventions and conditions, and 6. the language system”. While Koller, W. (1979) considers a translation error as an offence against a norm in a linguistic contact situation. Students must first understand the situations or circumstances of what they translate. They should combine both imagination and the source-text surface structures to do their translations.

2.3. The concepts and kinds of translation equivalence

Equivalence is considered to be the essential matter in translation and Pym (1992), put a big emphasis on the use of equivalence in translation. On the one hand, equivalence is central to translation, and on the other hand, translation can define equivalence. Different experts, researchers, theorists of translation, and translators have different viewpoints on equivalence. In relation to the translation process, there are two kinds of approaches, namely quantitative and qualitative approach.

2.3.1. The quantitative approach and its translation equivalences

With regard to the quantitative approach, Kade (1968) claimed that there are four kinds of equivalence. The first kind is “one-to-one equivalence”. It means that the single word or phrase in the source language can be replaced by

an equivalent in the target language. The second one is “one-to-many equivalence”. This can happen when there are more than one target language word or expression for a single source language expression being used. Thirdly, when a target language concept or expression covers part of a concept referred by a single source language one, it is called “one-to-part-of-one equivalence”. Finally, nil equivalence occurs when there is no target language expression for a source language one.

2.3.2. The quantitative approach and its subdivisions of translation equivalences

With regard to the qualitative approach, There are also many translation theorists referring to the concepts of equivalence. It is subdivided into other approaches.

2.3.2.1. Functional-based approach

With the Functional-based approach, Nida and Taber (1982) mentioned two kinds of equivalence: (1) Formal equivalence: This phenomenon happens when the source language and the target language have the closest possible match of form and content of the message. (2) Dynamic equivalence/ functional equivalence: This kind of equivalence puts more emphasis on “equivalent effect”. In fact, with the Dynamic equivalence, the translators have to transfer the meaning in a manner that has the same effects on the target readers as it does on the source language.

2.3.2.2. Form-based approach

With Form-based approach, Mona Baker (1992, pp. 11-12) introduces six types of equivalence: (1) equivalence

at word level, (2) equivalence above the word level, (3) grammatical equivalence, (4) textual equivalence; thematic and word order, (5) contextual equivalence; cohesion, and (6) pragmatic equivalence. She discovered that grammatical rules may vary across languages and there can be some difficulties in finding a direct equivalence in the Target Language.

2.3.2.3. Meaning-based approach

With Meaning-based approach, Koller (1979) considered five types of equivalence: (1) Denotative equivalence, (2) Connotative equivalence, (3) Text-normative equivalence, (4) Pragmatic equivalence (5) Formal equivalence.

In order to deal with the cultural equivalence (cultural words), Newmark (2006, p.72) suggested using notes, additions or glosses in the translated texts during translation practice. The notes can be inserted within lines in the text (using brackets or parenthesis) at the end of the text or in a glossary as reference. Newmark also put an emphasis on the use

of functional equivalence (or dynamic equivalence). For the type of ‘cultural equivalence’, Bayar (2007) defines it as follows: “Cultural equivalence aims at the reproduction of whatever cultural features the source text holds into the target text.”

III. Methodology

3.1. Method design

The lecturer took an advantage of the qualitative approach to address the research questions side by side with the application of statistics, comparison and contrast, document observation and analysis. After some interviews about the ways students do the translating, the lecturer saw that most of the them work alone. They rarely shared or discussed any translation versions with each other. That is why their final results were not good as expected. In order to help students cooperate with each other in doing the translating, the lecturer used Task-Based Teaching in Translation (Li 2013) to make a trial in teaching them translation in 10 weeks.

Figure 1. Cycle of Task-Based Teaching in Translation (Li 2013)



In the pre-task stage, the lecturer introduced the different topics and give each group of students clear instructions on what they will have to do at the task stage. Translation methods and strategies were reviewed. Also, students were provided with translation resources such as related corpus or online research tools. Students had to study the translation task comprehensively and asked the lecturer any possible questions.

In the task stage, students had to complete the translation task in groups and they might do the further research on the related concepts or knowledge and resources necessary for revising the translated texts later. The lecturer's task in this stage is to monitor and facilitate the group work.

In the reviewing stage, students were required to summarize their translation processes, reporting difficulties they encountered and their solutions. The lecturer task was to coordinate the opinion sharings and give brief feedback on both the translated texts and translation process.

In the analysis stage, the lecturer had to emphasize the specific learning objectives and targets of the task. The students were required to analyze the certain selected translated texts with classmates or the lecturer.

In the revising stage, the students combined the feedback from sharings and analysis, revised and edited their translated texts in groups. The lecturer had to help students with their revisions and editings. The lecturer also coordinated the final assessment via peer review and self-evaluation on their translation tasks.

In the reflection stage, students were encouraged to reflect on their translation process and products as well as to share their reflection orally with the class. The lecturer in this stage had to reflect on the entire student's activities and came to the conclusion.

3.2. Participants

The samples of the study consisted of 86 third- year English major students. They were divided into 6 groups. The lecturer tried to direct students how to study with groupwork and translation tasks. In each group, there were both decent and weak ones basing on the results of the pre-test. The decent students could help the weak ones when they worked in group. The group leader would be the one who made the report and sent it to the lecturer. The study lasted for 10 weeks. For each week, each group of students would be given a translation task of both English- Vietnamese and Vietnamese- English texts. Each text consisted of about 1.000 words. The topics were varied among groups and the successive weeks. The lecturer acted as a facilitator or a coordinator and advised students to use Baker's 7 strategies to deal with the non-equivalence errors in translation.

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. Pre-test, post- test and document observation

The lecturer relied on the document observation and the results of the pre-test in order to find out the student's errors in translation equivalence. They are classified into formal, semantic, stylistic, pragmatic and content equivalents. The post-test is used to check what students

have achieved after the 10 weeks they have worked in groups.

3.3.2. Interviews

Interviews are the good ways to find out student's attitudes and methods of doing the translation. After each lecture, the lecturer asked several students some questions related to the translation methods that they often used and how they deal with their own translation obstacles. They were coded as S1, S2, S3 and so on.... The interviews were aimed at achieving in-depth answers to the two research questions. The questions can also be about how they cooperate with each other, their roles in each group, and what they have done for revising each translation task.

3.3.3. Questionnaire

The questionnaire is a good means for collecting information about student's reasons why they cannot do their translation well. It consisted of 20 questions and was designed in the form of Numerical rating scales and Multiple-choice items including both closed-ended and open-ended questions. It was aimed at finding out students' views and understandings of the most frequent translation equivalence errors they made as well as the possible causes.

3.4. Data analysis methods

The lecturer compared and contrasted the results of the pre-test and the –post test and tried to identify the changes in the numbers. Statistics on the student's views and understandings on translation matters were done. Basing on these, the lecturer had to find out the tendency of student's translation activities.

The data analysis from questionnaires and document observation was briefly relied on the counting and calculation of the average repetitions and frequency of the translation equivalence errors. Whereas, the interview transcription was coded into several categorizations, corresponding to the answers to the two research questions.

IV. Major findings and discussion

4.1. Major findings and discussion from the questionnaire

With the use of the questionnaire, the lecturer aimed at finding out the causes or the reasons why the third-year English major students made errors with translation equivalence. The lecturer put questions about the frequency of reading books, newspapers or magazines for background knowledge. Among the 86 students, there were about 38 (44,1%) students who always did the reading. 30 students (34,8%) sometimes did the reading and the rest were rare. The ratio of students who did the reading for gaining background knowledge is low. It is one of the causes that students failed in doing the translation.

Their methods, purposes of reading books, newspapers and magazines were not the same. 72% of the students read for the contents. 21% read for the writing styles. To my surprise, 87 % of the students read for entertainment and killing the time. 11% of them read for curiosity or trends. This is the reason why students can not use words or phrases in translation naturally.

With regard to checking the translated texts, 98% of the students paid attention to grammatical structures

and lexical accuracy. 33 % of them focused on the features of acceptability and readability. If students do not care about acceptability and readability, their translated texts cannot convey naturalness in translation. This is another reason that weakens student's translation competence.

Also, students often ignored cultural factors or words. 66% of the students used their own dictionaries. 21% relied on the contextual meaning in dealing with translation tasks. 77% of the students considered background knowledge, linguistic competence and translation materials to be the main factors influencing their translation capabilities. 22% of them did not care much about translation methods. There are totally 9 practical translation methods. Only 27% of the students paid attention to the Adaptive, Free, Idiomatic and Communicative translation. It means that students did not

pay much attention to target language/text. 59% of them used the Word for word, Literal, Faithful, and Semantic translation. They often put an emphasis on the source language. The rest used the mixture of the other methods. That is why most students failed to use the pragmatic equivalents.

The lecturer saw that most of the students cared much about the semantic equivalence and the syntactic equivalence. Only some of them concentrated on the pragmatic (cultural/ stylistic) equivalence. Because they paid much attention to the source text, they often use lexical, grammatical, and textual equivalence. This is the reason why the use of the dynamic, stylistic equivalence accounted for only 38 %. This is the big reason why students often get trapped with undertranslations. Most students (74%) did not highly appreciate the target audience, They only paid attention to the contents of the text.

4.2. Major findings and discussion from the pre-test, the post-test and document observations

4.2.1. The roughly estimated results of the pre-test and post- test

Table 1. The results of the pre-test

Pre-test	semantic errors	syntactic errors	cultural errors (cultural words)
86 papers	104	211	82

The pre-test shows that the students had a lot of difficulties in using words and collocations. There were fewer errors in the syntactic equivalence and the cultural equivalence.

Table 2. The results of the post-test

Post-test	semantic errors	syntactic errors	cultural errors (cultural words)
86 papers	25	47	9

Looking at the table of the post-test, the lecturer could see the big changes in the number of the equivalence errors the students made. The number of the errors has reduced. This proved that the task-based approach applied to the translation

teaching has been effective enough. Giving translation tasks to students in group work was helpful to them. The semantic errors decrease to 24%, syntactic errors to 22,2% and cultural errors to 10, 9%, respectively.

4.2.2. The document observations

4.2.2.1. Semantic equivalence errors

Table 3. The typical semantic equivalence errors in in student's Vietnamese- English translations

The source text	Student's versions	Corrections
1, Anh ấy có chân trong ủy ban nhân dân.	1, He has got a seat on the commune committee.	1, He is an executive member in the People's Committee.
2, Nó rủ tôi cùng đi chạy việc.	2, He invited me to go out to work.	2, He asked me to apply for a job.
3, Chị tôi tiêu tiền như nước.	3, My sister spends money like water.	3, My sister throws her money around.
4, Con sông này sâu lắm.	4, This river is very profound.	4, This river is very deep.

There is a problem of understanding words and phrases among the above versions. The lecturer sees that students are hasty in doing their translation. They did not analyze the texts carefully.

They only considered the direct/ lexical meaning. They didn't refer to the contextual or associative meanings so no suitable pragmatic equivalents were used.

Table 4. The typical semantic equivalence errors in in student's English- Vietnamese translations

The source text	Student's versions	Corrections
1, Hà Nội is on the move now.	1, Hà Nội bây giờ đang di chuyển.	1, Hà Nội bây giờ đang chuyển mình.
2, Quang Hải, the boy from Đông Anh, is a famous footballer.	2, Quang Hải, đến từ Đông Anh, là một cầu thủ nổi tiếng.	2, Quang Hải, quê ở Đông Anh, là một cầu thủ nổi tiếng.
3, My brother runs for governor.	3, Anh tôi chạy đến với ngài thống đốc.	3, Anh tôi chạy đua giành chức thống đốc.

The lecturer sees that the student's influence of the mother tongue on their translations is rather big. The above versions show that students use the Word for word and Literal translation

methods to do their translating. This is why their translations can not convey the Vietnamese naturalness. In some cases, the meanings of the translations can be distorted.

4.2.2.2. Syntactic equivalence errors

Table 5. The typical syntactic equivalence errors in in student's Vietnamese- English translations

The source text	Student's versions	Corrections
1, Ở Hà Tây có nhiều hồ lắm.	1, In Hà Tây has a lot of lakes.	1, In Hà Tây there are a lot of lakes.
2, Tôi thích cam hơn nho.	2, I like oranges than grapes.	2, I prefer oranges to grapes.
3, Cam này bán giá 20 nghìn đồng.	3, Those oranges are selling at 20 thousand đồngs.	3, Those oranges are sold at 20 thousand đồngs.
4, Cô ấy bị ngã	4, She is fallen.	4, She falls.

It is hard for students to identify the functions of the main parts of the sentences. Beside the meanings, students have to look at the logical matters of

both animate and inanimate things. From this, they can make a decision on forming a sentence in passive or active voice.

Table 6. The typical syntactic equivalence errors in in student's English- Vietnamese translations

The source text	Student's versions	Corrections
1, The shelf is too high for her to reach.	1, Cái giá quá cao cho cô ấy để mà với tới.	1, Cái giá ấy cao quá, cô ấy không với tới được.
2, The restaurant doesn't open until 7:00	2, Nhà hàng sẽ không mở cửa cho đến lúc 7 giờ.	2, Hàng ngày nhà hàng sẽ mở cửa vào lúc 7 giờ.
3, I don't think you are right.	3, Tôi không nghĩ là anh đúng.	3, Tôi nghĩ là anh sai rồi.
4, It is worth living in Bắc Ninh.	4, Bắc Ninh là một nơi đáng sống.	4, Sống ở Bắc Ninh thật tuyệt.

With regard to the grammatical structures, students have to identify the typical features of English sentences and then adjust them into Vietnamese manner of expressions. If they don't adjust meanings in sentences, undertranslations will happen.

4.2.2.3. Cultural equivalence errors

Table 7. The typical cultural equivalence errors in student's translations

The source text	Student's versions	Corrections
1, The peasant's hard life.	1, Cuộc sống người nông dân khổ cực, vất vả.	1, Cuộc đời của người nông dân một nắng hai sương.
2, No guide, no realization.	2, Không hướng dẫn thì làm sao biết được.	2, Không thầy đố mày làm nên.
3, Sự bất cẩn của người lái xe đã gây ra tai nạn thương tâm đó.	3, The carelessness of the driver caused that atrocious accident.	3, The careless driver caused that atrocious accident.

The culture of the Vietnamese in speech is that they often overuse words and phrases (redundantly). In some cases their sentences are wordy. They always have a habit of using lengthy sentences. This is the reason why sometimes students' sentences are ambiguous or even meaningless. Their sentences are likely to be explanatory. This tendency is reflected clearly in their translations. Moreover, students haven't formed the habit of using English sentence structures. They just put words and phrases in linear time. Another matter is that students didn't pay attention to the nature of the event or actions so they misunderstood the writer's message.

The lecturer directed students to use the 7 strategies mentioned by Baker.

M (1992) so as to deal with the matters of non-equivalence in their translations.

- (1) Translating by a more specific word.
- (2) Translating by a more general word.
- (3) Translating by cultural substitution.
- (4) Translating using a loan word or loan word plus explanation.
- (5) Translating by paraphrase (using notes, additions or glosses).
- (6) Translating by omission.
- (7) Translating by illustration.

With the help of Baker's 7 strategies to deal with non-equivalence cases and the task-based approach, the lecturer gained student's better results of the 6 groups in the number of the translation equivalence errors they made in thier documents for 10 weeks, as follows:

Table 8. The results of the student's manipulation on dealing with equivalence errors in their documents

Week	Formal equivalents	Syntactic equivalents	Stylistic equivalents	Pragmatic/ cultural equivalents	Content/ semantic equivalents
1	54	252	57	123	97
2	41	223	53	118	75
3	33	175	48	101	75
4	28	155	41	97	68
5	23	145	34	83	56
6	18	121	31	76	47
7	15	103	27	65	41
8	11	98	23	55	32
9	11	90	23	47	25
10	9	71	18	27	21

In 10 weeks, the translation errors of Formal equivalents decreased to 16,6%, Syntactic equivalents to 28,1%, Stylistic equivalents to 31,5%, Pragmatic/ cultural equivalents to 21,9%, and content equivalents to 21,6%. The numbers of the equivalence errors in student's translations from the first to the 10th week have been much smaller. They drop to the minima. The data in the 10th week prove that there are big changes in student's translation competence to deal with equivalence errors. Students have made fewer errors in translation equivalence.

4.3. Major findings and discussion from the interviews

The lecturer asked a number of students in the online class with questions during and after each lecture to check their understandings and maintain their online activities. About 62% of the students when asked claimed that they met difficulties with identifying the indirect/ figurative meanings of the words as well as the contextual equivalences. 26% of the students encountered the obstacles of using styles and cultural words. 23% of

the students got used to using the Word for word, Literal, and Semantic translation methods. They agreed that when they only pay attention to the source texts, they cannot make clear the complete message of the texts. Only 77% made use of the Free, Communicative, and Adaptive translation methods. They all agreed that when they paid attention to the target audience and texts, they had to spend more time adjusting their sentence structures, word choice and styles but they had better results.

V. Conclusion

With eagerness to improve the methods of teaching translation, the lecturer has made an attempt to apply the task-based approach to teaching 86 third-year English major students at the Faculty of English in Hanoi Open University. By means of questionnaire, interviews, document observations and analysis, the lecturer has found out a number of reasons why students cannot deal with the equivalence problems in translation. The biggest hinderance for them is still background knowledge. With

the maxim “Practice makes perfect”, different translation tasks for group work were given to the 6 groups of students in 10 weeks and many equivalence problems appeared. Most of them were solved with Baker’s strategies. The lecturer followed the trend of shifting translation class from a teacher-centered model to a student-centered one, and the task-based approach was proved to be effective in teaching activities and studies as well. It is hoped that the study will be helpful for both the lecturer and the other colleagues.

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