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Strategies used by English interpretation and translation-majored seniors to solve linguistic difficulties in English-Vietnamese advertising translation

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ABSTRACT

This article reports a part of the bachelor graduation thesis (academic year of 2017) on the extent to which Can Tho University's seniors majored in English Interpretation and Translation can translate printed informative advertisements from English into Vietnamese. The purpose of the article was to rank the linguistic difficulties, particularly lexical and grammatical ones, that translation-majored seniors faced in advertising translation and identify the strategies that they applied to overcome such challenges. Forty-one seniors majored in English Interpretation and Translation, Course 39 of Can Tho University, were asked to translate two printed informative advertisements from English into Vietnamese within 90 minutes. The findings showed that regarding linguistic difficulties in translation, vocabulary was more problematic than grammar. In terms of translation strategies, the students used equivalence to deal with polysemy, paraphrasing with terminology and idioms, addition with proper nouns and imperative mood, borrowing with proper noun, transposition with passive voice and noun phrases, and reduction with plural nouns. They did not, however, apply word-for-word translation to solve any difficulties in question. The findings of this study could help students become aware of their professional knowledge and skills so that they would employ appropriate ways of translation learning and practicing, and be well-prepared to work as translators, especially in the field of advertising translation.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Advertising has played an important role in helping businesses provide potential customers with information about a certain product or service and eventually persuade them to purchase it (Frolova, 2014). Worldwide advertising has developed dramatically because more and more companies have expanded to international markets in the

context of globalization. However, in order to popularize a product or service internationally, advertisements are required to be written in the target customers' language. This requirement has led to the growth of advertising translation (Ghobadi and Rahimian, 2015).

When an advertisement is translated from one language into another, problems may arise and lead to ridiculous, yet serious consequences (Smith, 2002). For instance, Asian translators find it

absolutely normal to say “*Customers are God*”. However, in the eyes of Westerners, God occupies the sacred position and should be specially respected (Minghe and Jing, 2015).

In Vietnam, the need for advertising translation has been rapidly growing thanks to the global integration (Nguyen Anh Viet, 2013). Particularly, advertising translation has been introduced to Can Tho University’s (CTU) students majored in English Interpretation and Translation (EIT) in the Translation 3 Course. These students may accumulate some professional knowledge and skills but still encounter a number of difficulties in translating advertisements (Huynh, 2016). However, use of appropriate strategies can help translators overcome linguistic challenges and produce good advertising translations (Smith, 2002; Phung, 2008; Cui, 2009; Phan, 2011; Ghobadi and Rahimian, 2015; Trieu, 2015).

Yet, most of the existing literature examines advertising translation as a whole rather than focuses on the linguistic difficulties in translating advertisements, especially informative ones. Furthermore, no research into CTU’s EIT-majored students’ ability to translate advertisements has been found so far. This study is to describe CTU’s EIT majored seniors’ ability to translate informative advertisements from English into Vietnamese as well as identify their linguistic difficulties and the strategies that they use to solve such problems.

1.2 Research questions

This study was conducted to answer three following questions:

1. To what extent can seniors majored in EIT at Can Tho University translate printed informative advertisements from English into Vietnamese?
2. What is the ranking of the linguistic difficulties, particularly lexical and grammatical ones, that they have faced when translating printed informative advertisements from English into Vietnamese?
3. What strategies have they applied to overcome these linguistic difficulties?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Advertising translation

2.1.1 Definition of advertising translation

Advertising translation is a process in which an advertisement is rendered from one language into another with the primary purpose to help the company popularize its product with customers of the target culture. Thanks to translated

advertisements, companies can gain insights into other countries and territories’ goods markets. Having said that, translators should consider advertising translation as a form of art requiring a high level of creativity, precision, good linguistic and stylistic skills, and deep awareness of ideological and cultural factors of the target customers (Christelle, 2012).

2.1.2 Procedure of advertising translation

The process of translating advertisements includes five stages, (1) choosing the publisigne for translation (a translation unit formed from a linguistic sign and an iconic sign), (2) translating the text with the focus on the strategic content of the advertising messages, (3) undertaking quality control through back-translation, (4) editing the publisignes so that there is coherence between the source text and the translation, and (5) testing the effectiveness of the translated advertisement on monolingual, disinterested readers (Guidère, 2001).

2.1.3 Requirements of advertising translation

Advertising translations are supposed to present typical linguistic and stylistic features of their original versions so that they can preserve the intended messages and approach would-be buyers in a way that is in accordance with the culture and regulations of the target market (Cui, 2009).

2.2 Linguistic difficulties in advertising translation

The transference of advertising texts from one language into another, particularly from English into Vietnamese, may pose some difficulties for translators. Such challenges are due to the differences in vocabulary and grammar between the two languages.

Researchers such as Awwad (1990), Péter (2002), Le (2006), Luu Trong Tuan (2009), Hamlaoui (2010), Vo (2010), Nguyen (2014), and Khotaba and Tarawneh (2015) suggest that linguistic difficulties include lexical and grammatical ones. The former relates to *terminology*, *polysemy*, *proper nouns*, and *idioms* while the latter is about *noun phrases*, *imperative mood*, *passive voice*, and *plural nouns*.

2.3 Strategies to solve linguistic difficulties in advertising translation

In order to overcome linguistic difficulties, translators need to apply suitable translation strategies. The studies by Smith (2002), Nguyen Thuong Hung (2005), Tran (2008), Pham (2010), and Ghobadi and Rahimian (2015) suggest some commonly used translation strategies to translate

advertisements, especially informative ones. They include *word-for-word translation, equivalence, addition, borrowing, paraphrasing, transposition, and reduction*.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

Quantitative and descriptive research methods were used in this study. The former served to exploring the linguistic difficulties that the participants faced when translating advertisements and the strategies they used to overcome such challenges. Meanwhile, the latter was applied to describe the results of the study.

3.2 Research participants

The participants of this study were 41 seniors majored in EIT at School of Foreign Languages, CTU. Their ages ranged from 21 to 23. They had taken several theoretical and practical courses in translation and also finished their internship at translation centers.

3.3 Research instrument

In the study, the translation test was used to collect the data. It consisted of two printed informative advertisements, each of which was 80 words in length on average and extracted from the website: saxonleaflets.co.uk and Organic India Company in Reader's Digest Magazine (2016). The two chosen advertisements carried the lexical and grammatical difficulties that advertising translators might face. Finally, the translation texts were analyzed to rank these challenges and then describe the strategies that the participants used to overcome them.

3.4 Procedure

First of all, the translation test was designed and piloted on three seniors majored in EIT at School of Foreign Languages, CTU. After the three students had submitted their feedback, the test was edited and finalized. Finally, the advertisements were printed.

The data-collecting process started in August 2016. The translation tests were brought into class and given to the students who would finish them with help of dictionaries and the Internet within 90 minutes and then hand in their translations to the researcher. The translations were marked by a translation lecturer at CTU with reference to three criteria proposed by Trong Tuan (2009), namely accuracy, naturalness, and communicativeness.

3.5 Data analysis

The data collected from the translation tests were encoded into Excel 2013, and the translations fell

into two categories. The first was "*acceptable*" if the translation was marked 5.0 as the average or above on the scale of 10, and the other was "*unacceptable*" if it was marked below 5.0. Regarding the translation strategies, a word, phrase, or sentence that represented one typical lexical or grammatical challenge in question was analyzed. All data were checked carefully so that mistakes could be minimized.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Students' ability to translate printed informative advertisements

The present study focuses on the linguistic difficulties, including vocabulary (proper noun, idiom, terminology, polysemy) and grammar (noun phrase, imperative mood, passive voice, plural noun).

The results from the translation tests showed that the mean value of 41 translations was 5.5. Specifically, 82.9% of the translations were marked "*acceptable*" ($M \geq 5.0$), and 17.1% "*unacceptable*" ($M < 5.0$). The minimum value was 3.75, and the maximum was 6.75. Therefore, it could be concluded that the participants' ability to translate printed informative advertisements was *average*, and that they faced certain difficulties in their translating.

The findings are similar to those of Huynh's (2016) study, which researched difficulties in translating advertising slogans challenging 30 seniors majored in EIT at CTU. She concluded that these students encountered difficulties related to linguistic devices and cultural aspects, and that they commonly applied five translation strategies, namely *paraphrasing, equivalence, adaptation, word-for-word, and addition or reduction*. However, the difference between the present study and Huynh's is that the former focused on the content of advertisements while the latter did on slogans. In addition, this study analyzed the students' translations to identify the strategies to solve linguistic difficulties in advertising translation. Yet, in her study, Huynh used the multiple-choice test of given translations and strategies, which might be hard to gain insights into the students' real ability to translate advertising slogans.

In particular, the reason why the students in this study did not perform well in the test could be that advertising translation, an aspect of technical translation, was very problematic. It often related to a variety of sophisticated lexical and grammatical features that might not be familiar to translators (Byrne, 2006). As a result, they misunderstood or

failed to catch the contextualized meaning of a word and could not produce well-translated texts. Another reason could be that a lot of new, unfamiliar vocabulary and unusual grammatical structures were used in advertisements to meet the rapid development of consumerism; therefore, advertising translators found it very hard to catch up with this continuous change. Also, English and Vietnamese were different in terms of vocabulary and grammar, causing many challenges to the participants. Finally, the students in this study were inexperienced would-be translators, even though they might study all the lexical and grammatical difficulties in question thanks to the translation courses and the translation internship that they had taken.

4.2 Linguistic difficulties

It could be seen from Table 1 that *vocabulary* was a bigger challenge to the students than *grammar* when students translated printed informative advertisements from English into Vietnamese. In terms of *vocabulary*, the most difficult challenge was translating *terminology* while translating *polysemy*, *proper nouns*, and *idioms* ranked second, third, and fourth. Such findings are similar to those of previous studies by Luu Trong Tuan (2009) and Hamlaoui (2010). They showed that translating terminology and polysemy correspondingly was problematic to translators. On the contrary, the findings of this study were different from P eter’s (2002) and Awwad’s (1990) viewpoints. These two researchers stated that proper nouns and idioms respectively posed a lot of challenges.

Table 1: The number of appropriate and inappropriate translations in terms of *vocabulary* and *grammar*

Category	Appropriate (n=41)		Inappropriate (n=41)		
	No	%	No	%	
Vocabulary	Terminology	3	7.3	38	92.7
	Polysemy	12	29.3	29	70.7
	Proper Noun	28	68.3	13	31.7
	Idiom	35	85.4	6	14.6
	Average	46.57		53.43	
Grammar	Noun Phrase	19	46.3	22	53.7
	Imperative Mood	25	61	16	39
	Passive Voice	30	73.2	11	26.8
	Plural Noun	37	90.2	4	9.8
	Average	67.67		32.33	

In terms of grammar, translating noun phrases held the first place as the most challenging whereas the second, third, and fourth place went to dealing with imperative mood, passive voice, and plural nouns, respectively. These conclusions conform Vo’s (2010) and Nguyen’s (2014) viewpoints on how difficult translators’ handling noun phrases and imperative mood respectively was. In contrast, the findings of the research are different from those of previous studies into dealing with passive voice by Nguyen (2009) and plural nouns by Le (2006). This study found that passive voice and plural nouns did not cause a lot of challenges while Nguyen (2009) and Le (2006) suggested that these two grammatical structures were very problematic.

In short, the students had been instructed to solve the lexical and grammatical problems mentioned in the present study thanks to the translation courses and

the internship that they had taken. Therefore, many of them were able to produce acceptable translations of the two English informative advertisements. However, the problem was that advertising itself covered a wide range of fields. Therefore, the students still faced many difficulties in their translating given advertisements.

4.3 Strategies used to deal with linguistic difficulties

In order to investigate the strategies that 41 seniors majored in EIT at CTU applied to overcome the linguistic difficulties in translating printed informative advertisements, each of such cases was examined to identify the use of *word-for-word translation*, *equivalence*, *addition*, *borrowing*, *paraphrasing*, *transposition*, and *reduction*.

Table 2: Statistics of strategies used to overcome linguistic difficulties

Strategies	Difficulties	Number of students (n=41)	%
Word-for-word Translation	None	0	0
Equivalence	Polysemy	12	29.3
Addition	Proper Noun	13	31.7
	Imperative Mood	25	61
Borrowing	Proper Noun	15	36.6
Paraphrasing	Terminology	3	7.3
	Idiom	35	85.4
Transposition	Passive Voice	30	73.2
	Noun Phrase	19	46.3
Reduction	Plural Noun	37	90.2

Table 2 shows the number of students using each of the seven translation strategies in question to solve linguistic challenges in the field of translation of printed informative advertisements. As can be seen from the table, the students used *equivalence* to deal with *polysemy*, *paraphrasing* with *terminology* and *idioms*, *addition* with *proper nouns* and *imperative mood*, *borrowing* with *proper nouns*, *transposition* with *passive voice* and *noun phrases*, and *reduction* with *plural Nouns*. However, they did not apply *word-for-word translation* to solve any difficulties investigated in the study.

First, the study found that *word-for-word translation* was not used by the students to solve linguistic difficulties. This might be because an advertisement required a high level of naturalness so that it could easily approach the target audience. On the contrary, word-for-word translation, also known as interlinear translation, was often applicable when the translator wished to study the structure of the source language or decode a complicated message through examining the exact meaning of every single word to get the gist of the text as a whole (Nguyen Thuong Hung, 2005). Therefore, this translation strategy was not generally suitable for advertising translation.

Second, *paraphrasing* was normally used for the word or phrase that could be understood but not lexicalized in the target language. In applying this strategy, the translator gave explanations and clarifications for a word or phrase to ensure the readability of the translation, especially in the case of translation of *terminology* and *idioms* (Pham, 2010). Likewise, in the study, 7.3% and 85.4% of the students dealt well with the given terminology and idiom respectively by paraphrasing them (Table 2).

Regarding technical translation, advertising translation, by nature, covered a wide range of

fields; therefore, it required that the translator have a vast interdisciplinary knowledge (Khotaba and Tarawneh, 2015). This might explain why only 7.3 % of the participants in the study could give appropriate translations for the technical term in the test (Table 2). They chose to explain and clarify the terminology “*hard landscaping*”, which helped them to produce acceptable translations.

In terms of translating idioms or fixed expressions, as can be seen from Table 2, the majority of the students (85.4%) paraphrased the expression “*take their toll on*” to make sure that the translation was readable to the receivers. This finding is similar to Akbari’s viewpoint (2013) that *paraphrasing* was the most common strategy to translate idioms when a match could not be found due to linguistic differences between two languages.

Third, *addition* was used by 31.7% of the students to translate the *proper noun* successfully (Table 2). In fact, it was an effective strategy to translate proper nouns because extra information was added to the source language name so that it could be clearer and more understandable to the target audience (Fernandes, 2006, cited in Pour, 2009). Moreover, proper nouns could be dealt with by copy, transcription, re-creation, substitution, deletion, transposition, and phonological replacement, all of which, however, were not applied by the participants of this study.

As shown in Table 2, *addition* was also applied by 61% of the students who produced good translations for the *imperative* in the test. The finding conforms Nguyen’s (2014), stating that the translator needed to add such phrases as “*vui lòng*” or “*xin*” in order for the translation to sound appropriate since imperatives were not widely used in Vietnamese for some restrictions on politeness. Furthermore, many of the students were also aware of the omitted subject in the English advertisement. Hence, they added “*quý khách*” to their translations.

Fourth, the study found that 90.2% of the participants relied on *reduction* to translate the *plural noun* in the translation test. They removed the word “*các*” or “*những*” that normally presented the plurality of nouns in Vietnamese but sounded unnatural if overused. This finding is similar to Le’s (2006), suggesting that using these two words too often could result in clumsiness in the translations.

Fifth, 29.3% of the students decided to employ *equivalence* to solve problems related to *polysemy*. They might know that the verb “*re-sand*” covered more than one sense, so they perhaps considered choosing the most suitable one based on the given context. Similarly, Ali et al. (2014), who studied three available translations of the Holy Quran, concluded that their participants also used this strategy to translate polysemous words from Arabic into English. However, many chose the inappropriate sense because they did not know that a familiar word might have some referential meanings. Consequently, they took the most common one for their translations (Hamlaoui, 2010).

Sixth, 73.2% of the students employed *transposition* to translate the sentence written in *passive voice*. They possibly knew that the translation would sound strange if they copied the English passive structure. The finding is different from that of Luu Trong Tuan’s (2009) study. Particularly, he found that most of the participants in his study did not change the word order. They even used “*bởi*” instead of changing the passive structure to the active one or placing the agent behind the words “*bị*” or “*được*”.

Furthermore, *transposition* was also applied by 46.3% of the students who were able to give acceptable translations for the *noun phrase* in the test. They might be aware that the word order of Vietnamese noun phrases was different from that of the English equivalents, so they put the head noun first and then its modifiers when translating the given advertisements. This application was mentioned by Vo (2010) in her study.

Finally, 31.7% of the participants used *borrowing* to translate *proper nouns*. This is different from Wang’s (2002) viewpoint that brand names (a case of proper names) should be fully translated to be familiar with the target customers. However, the findings of the present study are supported by Péter (2002), who claimed that if a brand name consisted of a proper noun and a common noun, then the latter was translated, and the former was not. The brand name in the study was “*Brett Cleaning*”, which consisted of a proper noun and a common noun.

Therefore, the students kept the *Brett* part and translated the *Cleaning* one, producing a well-translated text.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study showed that the ability to translate printed informative advertisements of seniors majored in EIT at CTU was *average*. Therefore, it could also be concluded that they had certain difficulties when translating such advertisements.

The research revealed that *vocabulary* was generally a bigger challenge to the students than *grammar*. In terms of *vocabulary*, the most difficult challenge was translating *terminology* while translating *polysemy*, *proper nouns*, and *idioms* ranked second, third, and fourth, respectively. Regarding *grammar*, translating *noun phrases* held the first place as the most difficult challenge to the students whereas the second, third, and fourth place went to dealing with *imperative mood*, *passive voice*, and *plural nouns*.

The study also found that the students used *equivalence* to deal with *polysemy*, *paraphrasing* with *terminology* and *idioms*, *addition* with *proper nouns* and *imperative mood*, *borrowing* with *proper nouns*, *transposition* with *passive voice* and *noun phrases*, and *reduction* with *plural nouns*. They did not, however, apply word-for-word translation to solve any difficulties in question.

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