

Van Lang University's senior students' translation difficulties and methods in translating logistics terms

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Abstract

Translation is essential for many life aspects yet it is challenging to produce due to many linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Among the related problems, translating technical terms is difficult as it requires translators to use language fluently and have a in-depth understanding of the related field. The current study investigated translation difficulties and strategies in translating logistics terms. The participants were 38 English-majored students of Van Lang University. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected by using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, respectively. The results clarified several prominent translation problems, including the negative transfer from Vietnamese, the lack of expertise in logistics, and the lack of linguistic knowledge (vocabulary and grammar). Most students used word-by-word translation and utilized Google Translate to complete their translation task without taking the practical use of the terms into consideration. Then, solutions were suggested to deal with those problems. Local EFL lecturers are suggested to instruct the students to pay attention to self-improve expertise in the target field beside the language knowledge and skills for the sake of effective translation.

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translation, translation methods, translation difficulties, logistics

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1 Introduction

The era of globalization has promoted the development of Vietnam in many life aspects [1], one of which is logistics which distributes products to target customers in a right manner [2]. Besides, the need of information exchange, contract signing, and negotiations between Vietnamese companies and foreign counterparts requires heavily on translation [3]. Meanwhile, translation requires linguistic (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, and semantics) as well as non-linguistic knowledge (e.g. socio-cultural and topical knowledge) [4, 5]. Therefore, translating technical terms in logistics requires much expertise in this field, in addition to good command of both English and Vietnamese [3].

While many previous studies on translation difficulties and strategies in translating technical terms have been conducted in various fields: hotel management [6], marketing [7], logistics [2] and general translation [3], limited studies have focused on English-majored students.

Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate those at a local private university to address two following questions:

Research question 1: What are the English-majored students' difficulties in translating logistics terms?

Research question 2: What are common translation strategies employed by the English-majored students in translating those terms?



2 Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Logistics

Cooper et al. [8] noted that “logistics” refers to “planning, implementing, and controlling the efficient, cost-effective flow and storage of raw materials, in-process inventory, finished goods, and related information flow from point-of-origin to point-of-consumption for the purpose of conforming to customer requirements” (p.1). The primary responsibility of “logistics” is for “customer service, inventory control, transportation, warehousing, information systems, and lot size considerations”, which is related to “production set-up costs” and “purchase acquisition costs” [9]. Therefore, logistics is a complex field.

2.2 Translation Strategies

Translation strategies refer to ways of rendering texts from the original language into the target language [5]. Numerous translation strategies exist according to the real contexts. However, to achieve an effective translation, translators are suggested to flexibly and suitably use translation strategies to create a comprehensible translation for the target audience [4, 5]. The following section presents popular translation strategies.

2.2.1 Transposition translation

This translation strategy refers to the translation of compound terminologies from the original to the target text with a grammatical structure change [2]. It consists of two types: (1) “automatic translation” (only grammatical change in the target text) and (2) “rank-shift translation” (both grammatical change and further words in the target text). One example for the former type is “Survival objective” which is translated into Vietnamese as “Mục tiêu tồn tại” [10]. In this case, the syntactic structure of the original text (Adjective + Noun) is changed in the target text (Noun + Adjective). One example for the latter type is “General cargo” which is translated into “Hàng bách hóa” [10]. In this case, the target text has more elements (“bách hóa”).

2.2.2 Translation using related words

This translation strategy is used when Vietnamese term does not include all the meanings conveyed by the English term for the same concept [10]. For example, “non-guaranteed reservation” is translated as “đặt phòng không đảm bảo” [6]. In this case, more related words are added into the target text (“phòng”).

2.2.3 Translation using unrelated words

In contrast to translation using related words, this translation strategy is used when there is no easy equivalent in the target text. Translators need to paraphrase the whole text to produce a comprehensible text in the target language [2]. For instance, the term “market share” is translated into Vietnamese as “thị phần” [10]. In this case, the translator has to rewrite the whole Vietnamese text, as there are no ways of keeping the common meaning of all individual words of the source text.

2.2.4 Translation by using loan words

This translation strategy is used for technical abbreviations or acronyms in which translators use loan terminologies written and read in the target text to replace the English terminologies completely [10]. For example, the term “AV” (or “Allowance Voucher”) is translated into Vietnamese as “Phiếu ưu đãi” [6]. In this case, the Vietnamese text has loan words “ưu đãi” to clarify the meaning of the term “allowance voucher”.

2.2.5 Translation by Using Addition

This translation strategy is used when translators want to add further words or details into the target text to make the term clearer to the target readers [2]. For example, the term “guest survey” is translated as “phiếu điều tra ý kiến khách hàng” [2]. In this case, more words are added into the Vietnamese text (“ý kiến”).

2.3 Previous findings

Pham [3] researched translation errors among English-major students at a university. A total of 36 Vietnamese university students completed an English-Vietnamese translation test. The results clarified linguistic errors (“morphological, syntactic, and collocational”), comprehension errors (“misunderstanding of the lexis” and “misunderstanding of the syntax”), and translation errors (“distorted meaning”, “additions”, “omissions”, and “inaccurate renditions of lexical items”).

Le [6] explored translation strategies in translating hotel management terms. The author selected the related terms extracted from several sources to seek popular translation methods. The findings revealed six popular translation strategies: (1) “shift of transposition translation”, (2) “translation by paraphrase using related words”, (3) “translation by paraphrase using unrelated words”, (4)

“translation by using loan words”, (5) “literal translation”, and (6) “translation by using addition”.

Pham [7] conducted a study on translation difficulties and strategies in translating marketing terms. The author selected marketing terms extracted from dictionaries, books, and magazines to propose common translation strategies applied in translating those terms and the difficulties encountered in translation. The results showed five common translation strategies: (1) “shift of transposition translation”, (2) “translation by paraphrase using related words”, (3) “translation by paraphrase using unrelated words”, (4) “translation of abbreviation by using loan words plus explanation”, and (5) “literal translation”. Several difficulties in the translation have been found, including lack of the related expertise, language knowledge and competence, as well as translation strategies.

In another study, Do [2] explored translation strategies in translating logistics terms. The author selected the related terms from different sources to conclude common translation strategies. The results presented four popular translation strategies: (1) “shift of transposition translation”, (2) “translation by using loan words”, (3) “literal translation”, and (4) “translation by using addition”.

Those studies revealed that “shift of transposition translation”, “translation by paraphrase using related words”, “translation by paraphrase using unrelated words”, “translation using loan words”, and “literal translation” are common strategies applied into translating technical terms. Meanwhile, not many studies focused on English-majored students’ difficulties in translating these terms. Most studies extracted textual samples from different sources to clarify translation strategies. Therefore, it is feasible to conduct a study on Vietnamese EFL learners’ translation difficulties and strategies in translating logistics terms.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods. This helped consolidate the findings about EFL learners’ translation difficulties and strategies in translating logistics terms. In particular, the explanatory sequential mixed-method design was used, which was defined by [11] as the qualitative data

collected after the quantitative data to give further information to the statistics.

3.2 Research Setting

The research took place at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at a university in Ho Chi Minh City during the second semester of 2019-2020 academic year. At the time of the research, Translation, consisting of Translation 1 and 2, was a mandatory course for all junior and senior students. In these subjects, the students were supposed to study the underlying theories and techniques for translation between English and Vietnamese and vice versa in addition to translation practices.

3.3 Sampling and Participants

Convenience sampling method was used because the researcher could gain access to the available participants at the university. There were 38 senior English-majored students who completed the survey about the translation difficulties and strategies in translating logistics terms. These senior students were majoring in English Translation and Interpretation at the time of the survey. Because the researcher was just able to gain access to only one class and paid attention to the senior students only, the sample size was finalized at 38 students. The population had more female (N=28, 75.7 %) than male students (N=10, 24.3 %). All of them were aged 22 at the time of data collection. Also, there were 5 voluntary student who participated in the following semi-structured interview.

3.4 Instruments

Two research instruments were employed, namely the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. The questionnaire aimed to collect the students’ responses about their translation difficulties and strategies in translating selected logistics terms. The semi-structured interview aimed to collect the students’ further insights into the questionnaire results.

After being proofread, the final questionnaire includes four parts. The first part collects the students’ personal information, including age, gender, English learning experience, and experiences in logistics. The second part gives a translation task to the students. The task includes 10 randomly selected logistics terms extracted from [12]. There were 3 single terms, 4 compound terms, and 3 abbreviations. The third part collects the students’ responses about the translation difficulties while translating those terms. It is a 5-point Likert



scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The final part collects the students' responses about the translation strategies they used for translating those terms. These strategies were based on a previous study by [6], including “transposition translation, translation using related words, translation using unrelated words, translation using loan words, and translation using addition”. Moreover, there is another similar 5-point Likert scale asking specific ways of translation. They are (1) “I only focus on the English grammar structures of terms and use them in translation”, (2) “I just focus on the lexical attributes of the terms and translate word by word”, (3) “I focus on both the grammatical structure and the lexical attribute of the terms to translate”, (4) “I read a lot to help me understand the terminology better before translating”, and (5) “I used a bilingual dictionary to find out the meaning of words and wrote it down immediately”. The semi-structured interview was used as it enabled the interviewer to give hints or ask further questions while interviewing. The interview comprised 3 primary questions, namely (1) “Do you think that translating logistic terms between English and Vietnamese is

challenging? Why or why not?”, (2) “What are your translation strategies?”, and (3) “Would you like to suggest anything for our Faculty of Foreign Languages to help the students translate the terms better?”.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

After all instruments were carefully proofread, the researcher shared the online questionnaire, based on Google Forms, to the senior students via their Facebook group. Voluntary questionnaire respondents completed the survey within one week. Two weeks later, the researcher interviewed five voluntary students thanks to MS Teams. Key notes of the interview responses were used instead of voice recordings due to personal privacy.

Primarily, to answer the two research questions, Excel spreadsheet was used to extract key statistics expressed as percentage. The interview responses were used to explain the difficulties in translating logistics terms and commonly applied translation strategies as well as add further insights into the results.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Research Question One

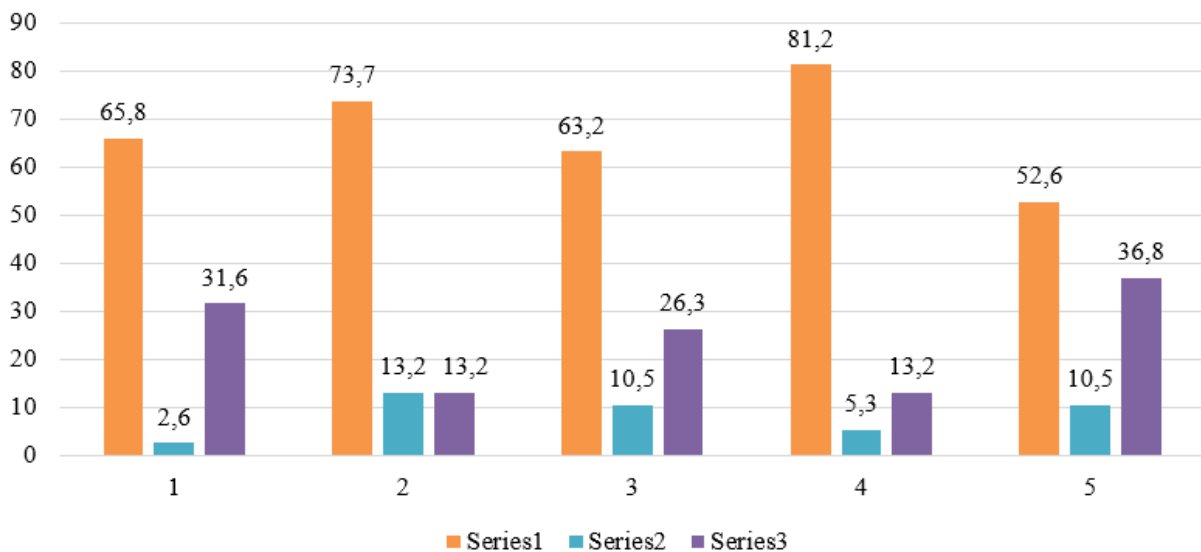


Figure 1 Respondents' translation problems (%)

As can be seen in Figure 1, up to 65.8 % of students agree that they have problem with grammatical structure of the terminology. The second problem prevented the respondents from having good translation is the lexical attributes of the terms, which accounts for 73.7 % of them. Regarding the third issue, 24 out of 38 respondents (63.2 %) demonstrated that

they cannot understand the meaning of the terms, so they feel hard when they translate logistics terms. When it comes to the fourth problem, the researcher presents the problem in having very little expertise in the related field. Up to 81.2 % of respondents agreed to this problem, 5.3 % of them were undecided and only 13.2 % of them disagreed. For the fifth difficulty, more

than half of 38 respondents (52.6 %) reported that they cannot find the equivalent of Vietnamese in producing a satisfactory logistics terms translation, 10.5 % of them undecided and 36.8 % of them disagreed with the problem.

The fact proves that after the translation tasks, students did not achieve good results, which is reported in the following table.

Table 1 The percentage of translation logistics terms result

Logistics terms	Correct (%)	Incorrect (%)
a. International maritime dangerous goods code	34.2	65.8
b. Carry over	2.6	97.4
c. Overheads	13.2	86.8
d. WIPON	18.4	81.6
e. Master lease	2.6	97.4
f. FCA	13.2	86.8
g. Lay days	10.5	89.5
h. Manifest	10.5	89.5
i. FOB	31.6	68.4
j. Pen container	15.8	84.2

In addition, the number of students using the source, searching documents and dictionaries is high, but translation problems still arise. According to the results of the survey, out of 38 participants, 30 respondents use dictionaries for translating logistics terms, accounting for 78.9 %. Also, 19 participants (50 % of the total) used other references to translate logistics terms better. The materials that students often use for reference are various, such as Oxford Learners Dictionaries, Google Translate, Logistics business book, Specialized logistics documents, and Wikipedia. It becomes apparent that EFL learners have run into translation difficulties due to using ineffective sources.

Beside the main problems above, the students, through interviews, perceived that the lack of specialized knowledge is one of the most difficult factors for translating logistics terms.

“The deprivation of background knowledge makes me unable to understand or be familiar with the context of logistics, and it causes me difficult to guess the meaning or generate idea of source language”. (student: NBV)

They also stated that logistics terms are very difficult and the vocabulary of this field is diverse, so if the

terms are not used and applied regularly, users will not remember and have difficulties in translation tasks.

According to the finding revealed in Table 1, the percentage of wrong translation of logistics terms is very high, all of which account for over 50 % of the total. Moreover, also from the questionnaire, 89.5 % of participants have English level from 6 to over 10 years, but 92.1 % of them have never gained experiences in logistics. This proves that most students have different problems when translating specialized terms in general and logistics terms in particular.

Similar to previous studies, the present study insisted that students find it difficult to choose appropriate vocabulary and getting stuck in grammar errors. This study also found that most students have problems with grammatical structure of the terms and lack of logistics vocabulary representing 65.8 % and 73.7 % as shown in Figure 1. Therefore, these problems can do serious harm to the quality of logistics translation.

Do [2] stated that lack of background knowledge in the specialized field leads to the inability to understand the meaning of the terminology, which makes it impossible for students to get good translations. This is also demonstrated in this paper through statistical percentages of 81.2 % and 63.2 % for these problems. The author admitted that the lack of general and specialized knowledge can cause a variety of troubles in translation.

Besides, the problem of linguistic knowledge also hinders the translation of students. Students tend to be influenced by their mother tongue, so they often translate word by word from the target language into the source language, and when they cannot find suitable Vietnamese words, they will produce bad and unprofessional translations. According to the statistics (Figure 1), up to 52.6 % of students cannot find equivalent words in Vietnamese.

However, beside these main problems, this study also investigated another problem that students often encounter when they do translation work, which is using ineffective sources. It cannot be denied that various sources also bring disadvantages if it cannot be used in a right way. According to the results of the survey, 79.8 % of students use dictionaries and 50 % of them use other references to help them translate logistics terms better. However, from the translation results in Table 1, we can see that they still cannot



translate the terms correctly. It can be asserted that the students use a variety of sources to support their translation, yet they do not know how to use effectively. Therefore, they cannot produce good translation products.

In summary, the problems of grammar structure, vocabulary, semantics, lack of background knowledge and ineffective use of sources make it difficult for students to create good logistics terms translation.

4.2 Research Question Two

There was a common preference for translation strategies employed by the students that they generally tend to use automatic translation and translation by paraphrasing using related words to translate logistics terms. The researcher has shown the results from the questionnaire as percentage, specifically as the following chart:

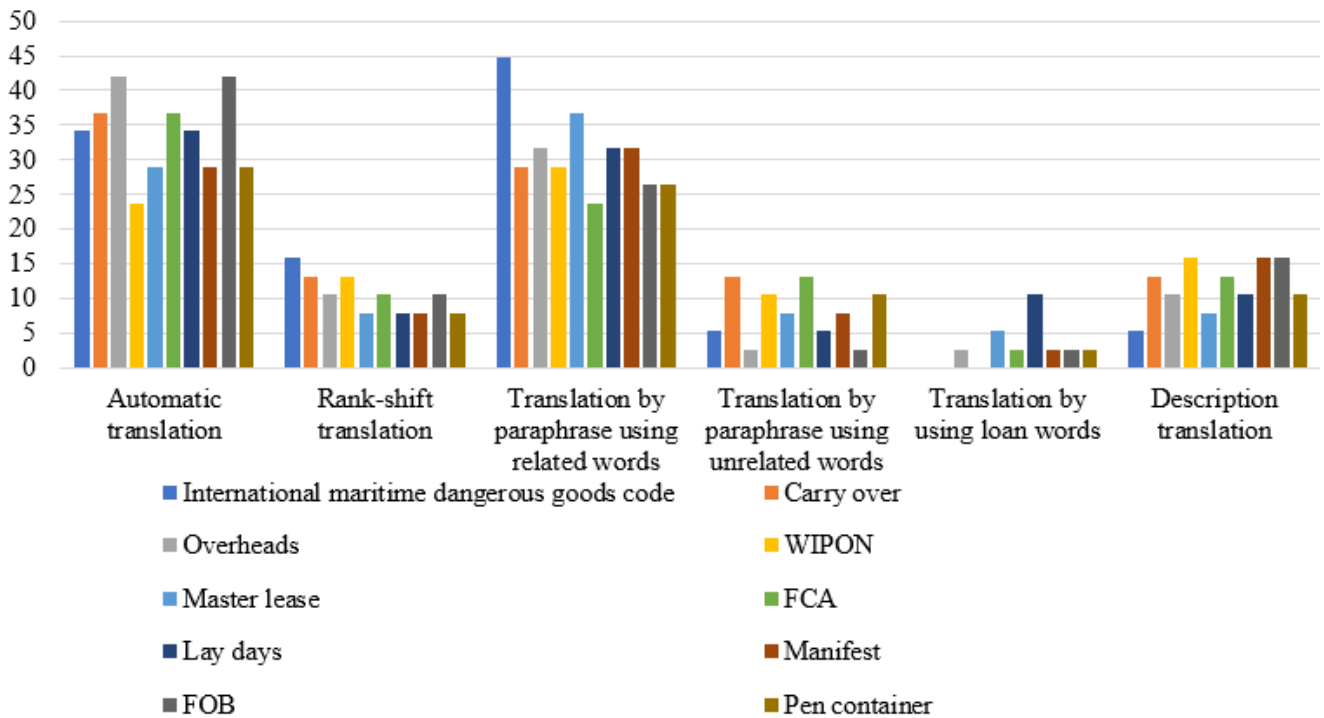


Figure 2 Respondents' translation strategies (%)

As shown in Figure 2, the respondents tend to use automatic translation and translation by paraphrase using related words to translate all logistics terms that the researcher put in the survey. The percentage of these translation strategies for each term all accounts for over 20%. While other translation techniques such as rank-shift translation, translation by paraphrase

using unrelated words, translation by using loan words and description translation have very low percentages, all accounts for under 20% or even 0% in translation by using loan words.

Moreover, specific activities that participants have done during the translation process are also shown in the following chart:

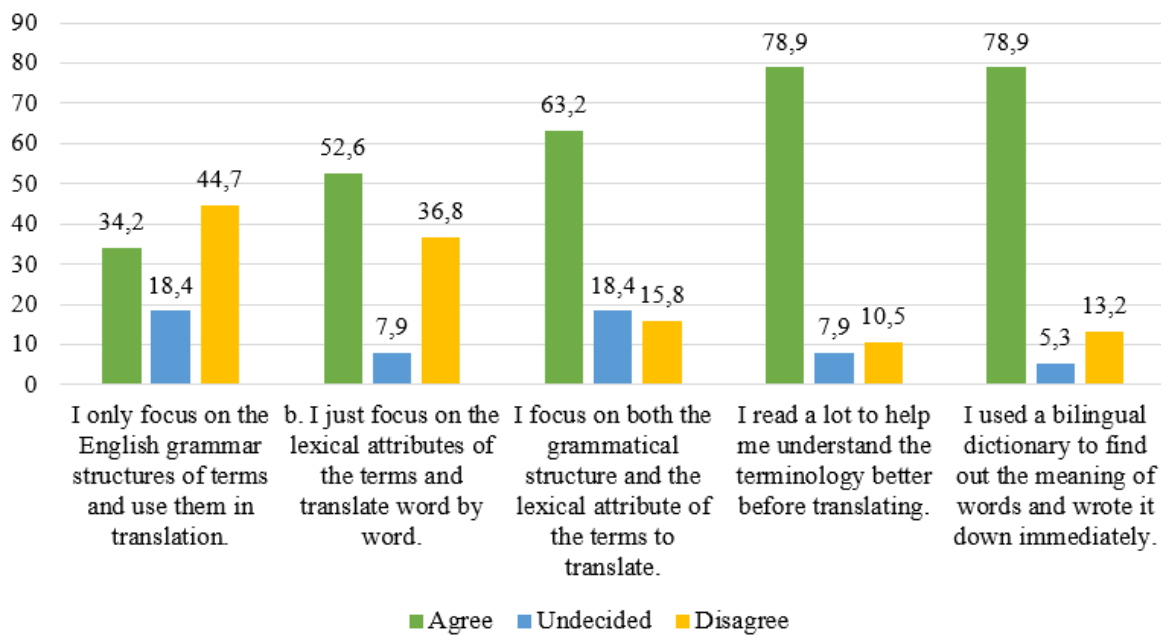


Figure 3 Respondents' activities during translation (%)

Figure 3 indicates the information about the activities that students often do during their translation works. We can see that up to 44.7 % of respondents disagree with the first activity in which they only focus on English grammar structures of terms and use them in translation, while only 34.2 % of them agree with that point. The second activity that respondents often do when they do translation is focusing on the lexical attributes of the terms and translating word by word, which accounts for 52.6 % of them agree with this point. For the third activity, more than half of the 38 respondents (63.2 %) reported that they focus on both the grammatical structure and the lexical attribute of the terms to translate, 18.4 % of them undecided and 15.8 % of them disagreed with the activity. Regarding the fourth activity, up to 78.9 % of respondents agreed that they read a lot to help them understand the terms better before translating, 7.9 % of them were undecided and only 10.5 % of them disagreed. When it comes to the last activity, 30 out of 38 respondents (78.9 %) demonstrated that they used a bilingual dictionary to

find out the meaning of words and wrote it down immediately.

In addition to the above translation strategies, through the interview, students also provided some other strategies. For instance, when they received the translation, instead of immediate translation, they read the whole text to find the main idea, then rely on gist and start translating. They also underline new words or terms, then use a dictionary to translate or ask people who are knowledgeable about logistics. However, some students still said that they could not identify specific translation strategies during their translation process.

"I felt confused when I translated some logistics terms as I could not identify any suitable translation techniques, most of which I translated according to my feelings and translated word by word." (student NAP) With these translation strategies, 55.3 % of students believe that their translation strategies have helped them translate well. However, their translation results are not good in reality. The results are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Proportions of students using correct and incorrect strategies to translate logistics terminology (%) (survey responses)

Terms	Translation strategies	Correct (%)	Incorrect (%)
a. International maritime dangerous goods code	Automatic translation	34.2	65.8
b. Carry over	Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words.	13.2	86.8

c. Overheads	Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words.	2.6	97.4
d. WIPON	Rank-shift translation	13.2	86.8
e. Master lease	Description translation	7.9	92.1
f. FCA	Rank-shift translation	10.5	89.5
g. Lay days	Translation by paraphrase using related words.	31.6	68.4
h. Manifest	Description translation	15.8	84.2
i. FOB	Rank-shift translation	10.5	89.5
j. Pen container	Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words & Translation by using loan words	13.2	86.8

From the table above, we can see that the translation results of students are not good. The percentage of incorrect translation of each term is very high, the lowest of which is from 65.8 % and the highest of which is 97.4 %.

The translation strategies for each term are related to its structure. Automatic translation is applied when the primary concern is just the meaning because there should be no change in grammatical structures between languages. Similarly, rank-shift translation is for the terms with revision in grammatical structures in the translation. Hence, as the terms such as “WIPON”, “FCA”, and “FOB” (acronyms) need more attention of the translators because the context should be clear in mind. The term like “International maritime dangerous goods code” seems to save more time for translation because there should be no significant problem to translation the whole group of words. Many terms such as “carry over”, “overheads”, and “lay days” require paraphrasing techniques because these terms cannot be easily understood by the meaning of their individual components. Also, translators need to consider the context very carefully to grasp the correct meaning. Similarly, terms such as “manifest” or “master lease” need more description in the target language due to the lack of full Vietnamese individual words to express the meaning. Translators are expected to supply further information to such words to help readers comprehend fully in their mother tongue. Finally, it is sometimes difficult to use only one translation technique for a word since a word like “pen container” needs more than that. The word “container” whose sound is borrowed in Vietnamese is translated into “công-ten-nơ” while the other “pen” needs paraphrasing techniques. Overall, the task of translation in logistics as a field of business

is challenging and does require much knowledge and seemingly tons of skills from the translators.

Therefore, in reality, it is understandable that not all students can use appropriate techniques. This can be proved through the Table 2 that students do not achieve good results when translating which accounts from 65.8 % to 97.4 %. This can be explained by the following reasons. There is a mismatch between students' awareness of the translation method and the way they use translation method in practice. Through Figure 3 and the interview, many students still have very good awareness about translation techniques, yet when applying to actual translation exercises, they cannot use those translation strategies correctly. Thus, it is possible to see a general tendency in the student's translation process as sensibility. Students still translate following their habit as long as they themselves feel okay. They do not consider the actual context and adjust the language appropriately in their mother tongue. Moreover, students still do not have specific and suitable translation strategies and depend too much on the translation support tools. Furthermore, many students still cannot determine the appropriate translation strategy when translating, so they often feel confused and unable to produce good translation products.

Unlike other research papers, this paper not only addresses translation problems but also addresses the translation process which is inherently complicated. It requires translators of many different requirements, especially choosing the appropriate translation strategies. Because choosing the wrong translation methods greatly affects the translation results and also makes translators form bad translation habits which affect their learning and quality of work.

In short, most EFL learners are choosing the wrong translation strategy for themselves. While choosing the right translation strategy is extremely important for translation, it is necessary to have solutions to overcome this problem.

5 Conclusion

The study results revealed the students' common translation difficulties in translating logistics terms are (1) linguistic problems (grammatical and lexical attributes of the terms), (2) misunderstanding of the terms' meanings, (3) inadequate expertise in logistics, and (4) ineffective use of sources for translation.

Although they were aware of necessary translation strategies for each term, they tended to inappropriately use them. Five translation strategies, including transposition translation, translation by using related words, translation by using unrelated words, translation by using loan words, and translation by addition were acknowledged by the students. However, they were likely to produce incorrect translation, heavily reliant on Google Translate or word-for-word translation. They disregarded the context or the pragmatic use of the terms.

The study has some practical applications to translation teaching and learning at the school. Students need trainings on (1) how to use sources effectively for translation, (2) how to improve their expertise in the field related to the translation texts, and (3) how to select the best translation strategies for each circumstance.

However, this study has a few limitations. The data was collected from only 38 students at the school, so the results might not be generalized to other contexts. The terms were randomly selected, so the results might not have reflected all possible translation strategies applied in logistics field. Moreover, only one field was mentioned. Therefore, future research can include more student participants and select the terminologies with clear criteria to yield more meaningful findings. Future studies can also include translation difficulties and strategies applied into other fields for better comparison.

Acknowledgment

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Khó khăn của sinh viên năm cuối Đại học Văn Lang trong dịch thuật và chiến lược dịch thuật ngữ logistics

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Tóm tắt Dịch thuật cần thiết cho nhiều lĩnh vực trong đời sống, tuy nhiên việc tạo ra một tác phẩm dịch thuật hiệu quả rất khó khăn vì nhiều yếu tố (cả ngôn ngữ và phi ngôn ngữ). Việc dịch thuật ngữ chuyên ngành đòi hỏi người dịch không chỉ sử dụng ngôn ngữ lưu loát mà còn phải có kiến thức vững về lĩnh vực liên quan. Nghiên cứu nhằm điều tra những khó khăn trong việc dịch thuật và những chiến lược dịch thuật trong việc dịch thuật ngữ logistics. Đối tượng khảo sát gồm 38 sinh viên chuyên Anh tại trường Đại học Văn Lang. Dữ liệu định lượng (qua bảng khảo sát) và định tính (qua phỏng vấn) được sử dụng để củng cố kết quả nghiên cứu. Kết quả nghiên cứu đã làm sáng tỏ những vấn đề nổi bật trong dịch thuật, bao gồm sự chuyển di tiêu cực từ tiếng Việt, sự thiếu hụt kiến thức chuyên ngành về logistics, và sự thiếu hụt về kiến thức ngôn ngữ (từ vựng và ngữ pháp). Hầu hết sinh viên dịch từng từ một và tận dụng công cụ Google dịch để hoàn thành nhiệm vụ dịch thuật mà không xem xét nhiều về ý nghĩa thực tiễn của các thuật ngữ. Sau đó, những kiến nghị về giải pháp giải quyết vấn đề được đưa ra. Giảng viên được khuyến nghị hướng dẫn sinh viên chú ý đến việc tự cải thiện kiến thức chuyên ngành có liên quan bên cạnh kiến thức và kỹ năng ngôn ngữ để hoàn thành tốt việc dịch thuật ngữ.

Từ khóa dịch thuật, chiến lược dịch thuật, khó khăn trong dịch thuật, logistics