

An Analysis of Negative Verbs' Equivalents in a Vietnamese Translation of 'The Call of the Wild'

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ABSTRACT

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Negative verbs in English are regularly translated into Vietnamese as *không* (Doan, 2010). However, in different types of texts and specific contexts, especially in literary ones, the equivalents of negative verbs are quite diverse and distinctive. This study aims to analyze the Vietnamese equivalent diversity of negative verbs detached from the classic literary work – 'The Call of the Wild' by Jack London (1903) (ST) and the translation 'Tiếng gọi của Hoang dã' by Lam Hoai and Vo Quang (2019) (TT). Based on qualitative and text analysis method, after conducting a process of splitting, filtering, and inspecting source and target texts, 164 negative verbs were detached from the ST and their matching equivalents in the TT; *không* and its variants were identified as the dominant equivalent pattern (72.6%). Particularly, some specific equivalents, which were the results of passive-active restructuring (1.8%), negative-positive replacement (6.7%), and other structural, lexical transformations (12.8%), have been investigated for conceivably affecting features of equivalent selections by translators. The obtained results would be a modest part contributing to the vast work of building an English-Vietnamese corpus. The matter plausibly concerns translation issues, yet the outcomes of this study could be applied to translation training and teaching reading comprehension.

Introduction

Since Translation Studies and Translation Theory appeared in the 1980s, scholars have been cultivating their studies of translation issues which had "*challenged the long-standing notion of the translation as inferior to the original*" (Bassnett & Trivedi, 2012). Translators and scholars are on the way to pursue better and more complete methods as well as criteria systems for translation. Studies in different levels of language units, top-down and bottom-up approaches, macro to micro issues have been elaborated during the last 40 years. (Baker, 2018)

Along with the growth of globalization, translation has been printing its signature in all kinds of forms: books (fiction and non-fiction), textbooks, brochures, advertisements, documents, manuals, subtitles (films and TV shows), etc., and it has not shown any sign of decline. Even though the demand for translation is high, it is not easy to be satisfied. Readers, nowadays, are fastidious people who expect the translation to suit their taste and transfer all propositional contents from the original. Most of the time, translators' clients are not readers but publishers or translation agents. In a severe case, translators may have to face a tight deadline and high-quality requirements, which are hard to achieve.

To meet those requirements, translators need appropriate methods and tactics. In the linguistic aspect, the top-down approach addressing factors such as context or cultural setting is rather favored (Grace, 1998; Komissarov, 1991; Pham, 2021; Prince, 1996; Torop, 2002), but it does not mean that intensive studies into word level, syntax and grammar are less. This bottom-up approach can be a basis and guide for translators in the decision-making process during performing their work (Baker, 2018).

Many studies concerning differences between English and Vietnamese syntax have been released. Prominent issues in these papers are passive voice, collective nouns, pronouns, and tenses (Le, 2011; Ngo, 2006; Ngo, 2008; Tran & Bui, 2021; Vo, 2010). Then, it could be found that negation is one of the unattended matters which should be intensively studied and investigated.

This research is a comparative and exploratory study that aims to identify patterns of English negative verbs and their Vietnamese equivalents. Grounded on the contrastive analysis hypothesis (CAH), which assumes that “a finite structure of a given language that can be documented and compared with another language” (Dost & Bohloulzadeh, 2017), a contrastive comparison at the syntactic level would be conducted on the selected source and target texts. Within the scope and limitation of the study, this research is proceeded only in a literary translation by analyzing the original classic American novel ‘The Call of the Wild’ by Jack London (1903) and its translated text ‘Tiếng gọi của Hoang dã’ by Lam Hoai & Vo Quang (2019).

Literature review

Contrastive analysis hypothesis (CAH)

The definition of the contrastive analysis hypothesis was elaborated by Lado (1957). From his point of view, language learners have a tendency to transfer some features of their native language, which commonly are forms, meaning, and the distribution of forms and meaning, into the foreign language they are learning. Therefore, in the case of negative transfer where the native and foreign languages are different, it would lead to structural errors in the process of learning the foreign language (Dost & Bohloulzadeh, 2017). In translation, contrastive analysis hypothesis would be applied to identify the techniques of translators in handling

differences between source and target language.

Translation criteria

A prevalent norm in criteria for translation is expecting it to hide the fact that it is a translation (Nida & Taber, 1969). In other words, it should appear as an original work in a target language (TL), some kind of “invisible” translating language (Venuti, 2017). In *A Textbook of Translation* (1988), Newmark ranked naturalness as the fourth – the topmost level in the translating process. It is “a generalized level” and only concerned with reproduction. Besides, naturalness is also the “ease” of understanding (Beekman & Callow, 1974). It means the more readers can be at ease in comprehending the meaning of the text, the more natural the translation is. This “ease” idea was also indicated in Tytler’s (1907) paper as the “ease of original composition.”

Negative verbs in English

Beare (2019) defined negative verbs as combinations between *not* and auxiliaries, including copular verb, *be*, modal verbs, and other auxiliaries (*do, does, did, have, has, and had*). In *Essentials of English Grammar* (2013), it was pointed out that there were two negative structure tendencies: the use of “negative word or element” and the combination of *not* and auxiliaries – negative verbs, which seems more preferred in modern English usage (Jespersen, 2013).

Negation equivalents in Vietnamese

Generally, negation in English can be expressed in negative verb structures (be/auxiliaries/modal verbs + *not*) or in lexical forms (negative affixes, the particle *no/not*, and their variants such as *never, neither, nor*, etc.) (Jespersen, 1917). Correspondingly, in Vietnamese, the most common negative expression is the use of *không* and its synonyms or variants like *chẳng, chẳng, chưa*, etc. This equivalent is applied to both expressions of English negation (Doan, 2010). Besides *không*, it is expected that there are various ways to translate English negation into Vietnamese, which can be either in other Vietnamese negative forms or in non-negative forms. The phenomenon has appeared in other languages such as Danish, German, and Latin (Jespersen, 1917).

Vietnamese equivalents of English negation convey the same meaning but are different from each other in aims and functions (Tran, 2000). Therefore, depending on the structure of the translated sentence and translators' intention, one equivalent can be more preferred to the others. Contrastive studies into a negation of English and Vietnamese mostly emphasized equivalence in structure, syntax, and some semantic features, which lacked intensive consideration of equivalent selection in actual translating work (Zhenya, Luong, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2016; Doan, 2010) or offered alternative solutions. This issue could be aware by many translators and scholars, but it has been still unattended to some extent. This is the gap that the study would like to fill in and apply the obtained results to actual translating work.

Research Questions

The study aims at finding helpful suggestions and practical solutions for the matters of translating into Vietnamese various English expressions of negative verbs. To fulfill this aim,

the text analysis was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the common patterns of English negative verbs' equivalents in the translated text 'Tiếng gọi của Hoang dã'?
2. How are Vietnamese equivalents decided for English negative verb items in 'Tiếng gọi của Hoang dã'?

Methods

Design of the study

Text analysis is a favorable approach in translation research, especially in the contrastive analysis of original and translated texts to investigate not only the meaning and structures of SL and TL, but also the literary style of translators (Bernard & Ryan, 1998). For a highly artistic and creative performance as literature, only by systematically comparing texts would be able to figure out the underlying cognitive representation (Sherzer & Woodbury, 1987).

The research required an intensive analysis of the texts to be able to explain the trends of selection. Therefore, thorough consideration and evaluation were conducted into grammatical elements and semantic features. For this procedure and the characteristics of the study, the researcher decided to employ the qualitative method in the text analysis approach.

Materials

- 'The Call of the Wild' by Jack London (1903) (hereinafter referred to as ST)

This short adventure novel, first published in 1903, is a masterpiece of Jack London which marked his status as a writer after the Gold Rush in 1897 (Shepherd, 1998). It has also been so well-known in Viet Nam as typical American literature that a passage excerpted from the text appears in the textbook of 9th grade's Literature. Besides, concerning the scope and limitations of this study in terms of time and manpower, the length of this novel is reasonably suitable to be the material of the study.

- 'Tiếng gọi của Hoang dã' by Lam Hoai and Vo Quang (2019) (hereinafter referred to as TT)

The translation by Lam Hoai and Vo Quang (previously known as Nguyen Cong Ai and Vu Tuan Phuong) was first published in November 1983. It is considered as one of the earliest and official Vietnamese versions of 'The Call of the Wild'. The first publication appeared to have some unsought errors, as specified by translators. One of the most notable errors was the title of the translation which was 'Tiếng gọi nơi Hoang dã'. The translators confirmed that the title should be 'Tiếng gọi của Hoang dã' definitely because the former "nơi" would make London's intention of personification "the Wild" disappear (Lam & Vo, 2019).

The later book reprinted in 2019, which was committed to ensuring and maintaining the original's style and writings to the fullest, was again reviewed by the two translators. Vivid evidence for this commitment is that all names of persons and places are original in English and

French. This edition would be hard for young readers, but it is preferable for adult readers, especially English learners. That was the decisive reason for it to be chosen as the material of the research.

Data collection and analysis

Online text tools – Text-splitter and Text-filter (Online text tools - Text splitter, n.d.) were employed to detach all texts containing negative verbs in the ST and their equivalents in the TT, then group and count the occurrences via Microsoft Excel; SDL Trados would be used for fast-tracking Vietnamese equivalents. The human source was the main force of this study.

After grouping and counting, general trends in the usage of English negative verbs and Vietnamese equivalents were exposed. The next process was comparing and analyzing the trend of Vietnamese equivalent patterns in each type of English negative verb pattern to identify the translators' tendency of treating English negative verb items. By intensively inspecting selected items, features of negative equivalent selection would be concluded at the end of the research.

This paper is a comparative study conducting contrastive analysis of negative verbs' structure and Vietnamese equivalents' structure in a certain extent. It would be expected that the syntactic structure of ST and TT would not be equivalent because of the feature of literary translation. Translators might prioritize equivalence in meaning than structure. This is a particular aim of this study which would be considered dissimilar to previous contractive analysis studies in the structure of noun phrases (Vo, 2010) and negation (Doan, 2010) identifying pairs of equivalent structure. The discussion of the study would expose techniques applied by translators to obtain a natural translation.

Data coding

Table 1. English negative verb coding

ENGLISH NEGATIVE VERBS (ST)		
Group's name	Description	Code
Be + <i>not</i>	Combination of the copular verb <i>be</i> and <i>not</i> : <i>am not</i> , <i>is not</i> , <i>are not</i> , <i>was not</i> , etc.	E1
Modal + <i>not</i>	Combination of modal verbs and <i>not</i> : <i>could not</i> , <i>would not</i> , <i>should not</i> , etc.	E2
Aux + <i>not</i>	Combination of auxiliaries and <i>not</i> : <i>did not</i> , <i>do not</i> , <i>have not</i> , <i>had not</i> , etc.	E3

Table 2. Coding of Vietnamese equivalents of English negative verb items

VIETNAMESE EQUIVALENT (TT)		
Group's name	Description	Code
Single negative marker	The use of negative markers such as <i>không</i> , <i>chẳng</i> , <i>chẳng</i> , <i>chưa</i> , <i>đừng</i> , <i>chả</i> , <i>chớ</i> and <i>khỏi</i> .	V1
Negative marker + <i>hề</i>	Cases where <i>hề</i> is added after negative markers for emphasis: <i>không hề</i> , <i>chẳng hề</i> , and <i>chưa hề</i> , etc.	V2
Rejective negation	Negative marker + <i>phải</i> : <i>không phải</i> , <i>chẳng phải</i> , and <i>chưa phải</i> , etc.	V3
Negative predicate	Negative predicates stand at the beginning of a sentence:	V4

	<i>không phải (là), chẳng/chả phải (là), đâu có phải (là), có phải (là) ... đâu, and nào có phải là ... đâu</i>	
Negative indefinite pronouns	Words for general negative proposition: <i>không (có) ai, không (có) gì, không bao giờ, and không nơi nào.</i>	V5
Sino-Vietnamese negative maker	The use of Sino-Vietnamese negative markers such as <i>bất, phi, vô.</i>	V6
Non-negative equivalent	An equivalent of an English negative item which is a non-negative item.	V0

The two tables were adopted from *Essentials of English Grammar* (Jespersen, 2013), *Tiếng Việt - Sơ thảo Ngữ pháp chức năng* (Cao, 1991), and *Tiếng Việt và Thực hành tiếng Việt* (Nguyen, 1995).

Findings

'The Call of the Wild' is a literary text consisting of seven chapters, 1,620 sentences, and 31,792 words. In this ST, 164 negative verbs appeared in 151 negative sentences. It was detached that there were 617 negative items of all six types of negative structures (as specified in *Essentials of English Grammar* by Jespersen (2013)) detached in ST, which made negative verb items occupied 26.6%.

Table 3. Occurrences of E groups

Group	Description	Number of occurrences	Percentage
E1	am/is/are	6	22.6%
	was/were	31	
E2	can/will/must	6	30.5%
	could/would/should	44	
E3	do	5	46.9%
	did/had	72	

As can be seen from Table 3, negative verbs cover three structures: Be + *not* (E1); Modal + *not* (E2) and Aux + *not* (E3). Because of the fiction figure of the ST, most of the sentences are in the past tense (89.6%); a few sentences of present and future tense appeared in dialogues and monologues (10.4%). It appears that E3 is the most dominant pattern, with 77 items occupying 46.9%. The second place is E2 (30.5%), and E1 is the least dominant one within three. Despite the inequality in the number of occurrences among groups, these differences are not actually significant.

Table 4. Vietnamese equivalent occurrences

	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V0
E1	15	0	10	3	4	1	4
E2	48	0	1	0	0	0	1
E3	56	6	5	0	1	1	8

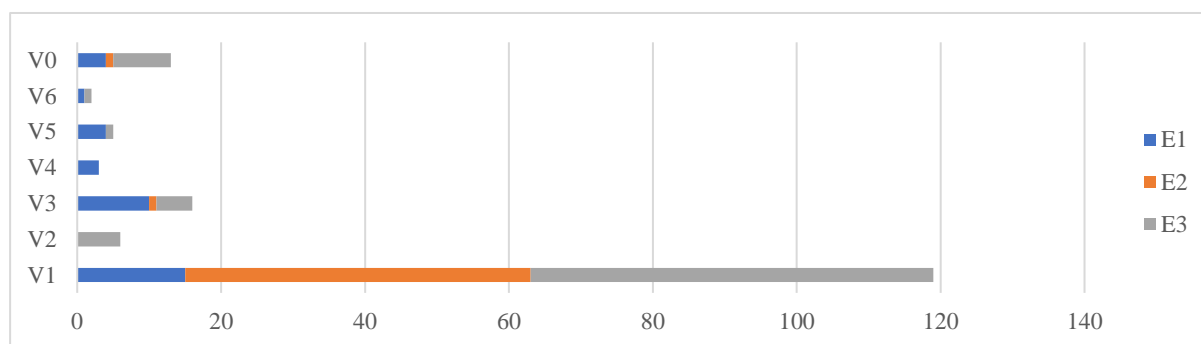


Figure 1. Vietnamese equivalent patterns

As figured from Table 4 and Figure 1, the absolutely dominant pattern of negative verbs' equivalents in this study is the use of negative markers (V1) such as *không*, *chẳng*, *chả*, *đừng*, and *chưa*. The result is identical to the assessment of Doan (2010) and Zhenya, Luong, Nguyen, and Nguyen (2016) in their papers. This pattern was also dominant in all three English negative verb patterns E1 (40.5%), E2 (96%), and E3 (72%). V2 only appears in E3, and V4 is only the equivalent pattern of E1. V6 is the least dominant pattern, occupying solely 1.2%.

Discussion

The use of negative markers (V1) such as *không*, *chẳng*, *chả*, *đừng*, and *chưa* was identified as the preferable equivalent for all English negative pattern. In many cases, the negative markers came along with *còn* (*chẳng còn*, *không còn*), *nào/chút nào* (*không...chút nào*, *không...nào*, *chả...nào*), *được* (*không...được*), *gì* (*không...gì*). The appearance of these additional words would make the translation more natural and sensible. They would also imply some propositions such as availability (*còn*), capability (*được*), and expression of emphasis (*nào/chút nào*).

(1a) "Buck saw money pass between them, and **was not** surprised"...

(1b) "Buck nhìn thấy tiền trao qua đổi lại giữa hai người, và **không** ngạc nhiên *chút nào*"...¹

In this case, the additional word "chút nào" can be omitted, which makes no change in the negative meaning of the sentence, but it would miss the expression of emphasis, which showed how familiar Buck had been with seeing humans pay money for dogs.

The pattern "negative marker + *hề*" (V2) only appeared in a translation of the structure "Aux + *not*". In the same way of other additional words mentioned above, *hề* in some cases can be omitted, except in the example (2) below:

(2a) "Spitz gained his feet almost as though he **had not** been overthrown," ...

(2b) "Spitz lật mình đứng thẳng dậy được ngay như thể vừa rồi **không hề** bị hất ngã," ...

¹ All examples marked 'a' are source texts in English cited from 'The Call of the Wild' (1903); all examples marked 'b' are the target/translated texts in Vietnamese cited from 'Tiếng gọi của Hoang dã' (2019).

Hề is added after negative markers for emphasis (Nguyen, 1995). In example (2b), to highlight the contrastive status of before and after Spitz was overthrown, *hề* should be presented.

For rejective negation, or object negation (Doan, 2010), the Vietnamese pattern of "không phải" (*là*) (V3) is perfectly fit to negative structure "Be + not" in expressing rejection of the predicate of "Be + not" and highlighting affirmation of the contrastive predicate. In this sense, the rejection negation is quite different from the negation of relationship, which was identified that it also had the equivalent "không phải" in Vietnamese (Doan, 2010).

(3a) ... "it was everything that **was not** *death*, that *it was aglow and rampant*, expressing itself in movement, flying exultantly under the stars and over the face of dead matter that did not move."

(3b) ... "trong mọi thứ **không phải là cái chết**, mà là *sức sống đang toả ánh chói loà và bùng lên mạnh mẽ*, thể hiện thành chuyển động, hân hoan tung cánh bay dưới những vì sao và trên bề mặt của vật chất chết lặng không hề động đậy."

(4a) "But it **was not** *food* that Buck and the huskies needed, *but rest*."

(4b) "Nhưng điều cần thiết nhất lúc này đối với Buck và lũ chó Eskimo **đâu phải là thức ăn**, mà là *sự nghỉ ngơi*."

In examples (3a) and (4a), predicates of the negative verbs ("death" and "food") are rejected to confirm the right ones ("aglow and rampant" and "rest") specified right after them. In (4a), there is a dummy subject 'it' and a relative 'that' clause distancing the contrastive predicates "food" and "rest" which would make the contradiction less and confuse readers if the order in (4a) was observed. Therefore, translators decided to replace the dummy subject 'it' with the real subject indicated in the relative 'that' clause in (4b) to clarify the idea in the ST and emphasize the contradiction in the use of rejection negation.

Nevertheless, the excellence of translators is also exposed in the way they transformed a non-rejective negation into one.

(5a) "He **did not** mind the hunger so much, but the lack of water caused him severe suffering and fanned his wrath to fever-pitch."

(5b) "Đói ăn **không phải** là điều nó quan tâm nhiều lắm, nhưng khát nước đã làm cho nó cực kỳ khổ sở và thổi bùng sự phẫn nộ của nó lên đến mức như phát sốt."

In the translated text (5b), translators made "the hunger" (*đói ăn*) the subject and turned a normal negative sentence into a rejective negative sentence to emphasize the counterweight of "the hunger" and "the lack of water".

Negative predicate (V4) appeared to be only equivalent to 'it + be + not' structure.

(6a) "Besides, **it was not** the life of the herd, or of the young bulls, that was threatened."

(6b) "Hơn nữa **không phải** là tính mệnh của cả đàn hay tính mệnh của lũ nai đực trẻ bị đe dọa," ...

Even though V5 and V6 patterns (refer to Table 2 for the description) are not dominant in the TT, V6 is indeed the least dominant one. Some equivalents in these groups were found to be

unique and significant. They were appeared to be affected by structure transformation in the English – Vietnamese translation process.

(7a) ... “and he was glad each time when he **was not selected**.”

(7b) ... “mỗi lần **không ai đã động** gì đến nó cả thì nó lại mừng.”

Translators transformed a passive sentence into an active sentence and made a negative verb a sentence with the negative indefinite pronoun '*không ai*' (nobody).

(8a) ... “things which had been as dead and which **had not moved** during the long months of frost.”

(8b) ... “những vật như đã chết và đã im lìm **bất động** trong suốt những tháng dài đông giá.”

This case could be considered as that a negative verb was translated into a positive verb with negative meaning: ‘had **not** moved’ = ‘**không** chuyển động’ = ‘bất động’.

Besides, there was a case where negative verb was neglected in the translation.

(9a) ... “though he speedily taught them their places and what not to do, **he could not teach them what to do**.”

(9b) ... “Mặc dù Buck nhanh chóng dạy được cho chúng ổn định vào vị trí từng con và những gì chúng không được làm.” /NULL/

The most significant finding of this study is the pattern V0 where a negative sentence is translated into a non-negative sentence which could be positive or interrogative.

(10a) “He **did not** know what to say.”

(10b) “Anh biết nói **thế nào bây giờ?**”

In the above example, a negative sentence was turned into a rhetorical question. This is regarded as an “indirect or roundabout means” to express negation (Jespersen, 1917). This type of question was not to be answered but to convey the similar negative meaning of the ST. A gain of the equivalent was making the TT more elegant as required for literature.

(11a) ... “there would be trouble if he **were not left alone**.”

(11b) ... “nếu **cứ động vào** gã thì rồi sẽ có chuyện phiền toái đây.”

There are three transformations in example (11). The first one is to replace the negative verb “were not left alone” by an acronym of “leave alone” which is “pick on” (*động vào*). Then, the passive voice was also transformed into the active voice. Finally, the ‘if’ clause was moved to the initial position, preceding the main clause. These transformations were performed to clearly clarify the idea in the ST and create a more comprehensible, as well as natural expression in the TT.

(12a) “Charles turned his back and drew the lashings down as well as he could, which **was not** in the least **well**.”

(12b) “Charles quay lưng và cố đem hết khả năng của mình ra để rút các dây buộc cho đồng đồ đạc hạ thấp xuống nhưng khả năng của y lại quá **tồi**.”

Similar to the first transformation of example (11), “was not...well” in (12a) was replaced by “bad” (*tồi*) in (12b).

Covering the total of 164 negative verb items in the ST was 164 Vietnamese equivalents appeared in seven patterns. Most of them were translated in a typical way of the presence of *không* and its variants, other negative markers in Vietnamese (72.6%). On the other hand, unique and highlighted solutions for negative verbs in the ST, such as passive-active transformation (1.8%), negative-positive replacement (6.7%), restructuring (12.8%), etc. provided by the two translators were rightly recommended.

Conclusion

The study had clarified the trends and specified unique selections of Vietnamese equivalents of negative verbs in the ST. The result showed that *không* and its variants were the most favorable equivalent for 164 items of detached negative verbs. Certainly, the appearance and distribution of items under other Vietnamese equivalent patterns have raised the attention for further analysis. It was identified that both syntactic and semantic features of negative verbs and differences in tendencies of English and Vietnamese language usage, such as passive and active voice (1.8%) or the use of dummy subjects (9.1%), influenced the selection of equivalents. It was confirmed that the translators tended to prioritize meaning and naturalness over corresponding in syntax and structure in assigning equivalents. In addition, comprehensibility was as well a great consideration of translators. These references from the translators were supposed to be appropriate and tasteful because this was a literary translation that required significant natural achievements to make the translated text read as literature.

Despite the limitation in genre and number of materials, these humble achievements would benefit students of the English language in general and major in translation and interpret in particular. The trends and tendencies of Vietnamese equivalents of negative verbs concluded in this study might not be generalized outcomes, yet they could be supportive suggestions when an issue concerning negative verbs in actual translating and interpreting work arises. The study mainly processed from the bottom-up approach, based on the syntactic elements, so this could be a reference for translation training and reading comprehension teaching.

Because of a rather specific scope of the study, some aspects have remained and are expected to be discovered. In the process of analyzing the texts, it has appeared that there would be distinctions among variants of *không* (*chẳng, chẳng, chưa, đừng, chả, chớ, and khỏi*); besides, other English negative forms specified by Jespersen (1917), and some indirect negative means in English and Vietnamese, such as questions, exclamations, and ironic expressions, etc. would be further examined in future studies.

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