

CHALLENGES IN LITERARY TRANSLATION: A CASE IN ENGLISH-VIETNAMESE TRANSLATION OF “THE GREAT GATSBY”

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Abstract: The present study aims to analyze challenges that the translator confronts in the English-Vietnamese translation of “The Great Gatsby”. The major method adopted in the study is comparative descriptive approach, which enables the researcher to describe the difficulties in the English-Vietnamese translation of “The Great Gatsby”. The findings unravel a number of constraints associated with linguistic and cultural differences between the source and the target language. Several recommendations to overcome the hindrances are also proposed.

Keywords: challenges, English-Vietnamese translation, literary translation

1. Introduction

The 21st century fosters nations around the world to come together in tremendous vigor to promote socio-economic development; thus, translators have been entrusted with the role of bridging the gap between people coming from various cultures. As a result, a surging number of novels have been translated into diverse languages. Among those, “The Great Gatsby”, a masterpiece by F. Scott Fitzgerald first published in 1925, has also been made available for the readership all over the world. With a unique writing style and profound insights into American values, Fitzgerald has been greatly regarded as one of the most influential representatives of American literature in the 1920s (Perkins, 2004).

Following its fame, the novel has been translated into Vietnamese. Among the translated versions, the translation of Trịnh Lữ (2009) has indeed attracted a myriad of contending reviews from translators (Đỗ, 2010). Therefore, the researcher aims to conduct the

minor study entitled “Challenges in literary translation: a case in English-Vietnamese translation of The Great Gatsby”.

2. Challenges in Literary Translation

According to Catford (2000), instances of untranslatability can arise from two major sources, including language and culture.

Linguistic translation problems emerge due to structural differences between the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL). Linguistically, each language has its own metaphysics that determines the spirit of a nation and its behavioral norms. Since words or images may vary considerably from one group to another, the translator needs to pay attention to the style, language, and vocabulary peculiar to the two languages in order to produce an adequate translation of the SL text.

Culture and language are closely interrelated. It is widely known that language is an integral aspect of culture. Nida and Taber (1982) also mentioned that words have meanings

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only in terms of the total cultural setting. Seeing eye to eye with other scholars, Newmark (1995) defined the culture as the way of life and manifestation that are peculiar to a community that uses a peculiar language as its means of expression. Culture includes and affects language; it is the ground from which language grows and develops.

According to Cui (2012), challenges for literary translators can be material culture, traditional culture, religious culture, and historical culture. First, different nations are in different places and will have distinct images for the same thing. For example, Vietnamese culture has “áo dài, bánh chưng, nhà sàn” and so forth. Western culture may have “pizza, sushi, continental breakfast”. It would be a huge challenge to deal with those culture-specific materials. Second, people live together in one country or region and will form their own traditions; these traditions will be passed from generation to generation. In other countries or regions, people may not have those traditions, thus making these traditions possibly untranslatable. For instances, in Quan ho Bac Ninh folk songs, there are some traditional customs such as “tục kết chạ, tục ngủ bọn” which merely exist in Vietnamese culture. Third, the history of a nation is the record of social development. Idioms and legends provide ready support in this respect. An idiom or fixed expression may have no absolute equivalent in the TL.

By and large, during the process of translating literary texts, there are linguistic and cultural challenges due to the cultural gaps between the SL and the TL. It is not adequate for the translators to know what words are used in the TL. It is even more vital for the translators to make the readership understand the sense as it is understood by the readership of the SL.

3. Methodology

Given the afore-mentioned research aims, this research encompassed the comparative descriptive design in order to compare and contrast the original with its translation.

The novel “The Great Gatsby” is selected in this study. The researcher collected

comprehensive data from nine chapters of both the source text – the whole novel “The Great Gatsby” (1993) by F. Scott Fitzgerald of Wordsworth Editions Publisher and the target text – “Đại gia Gatsby” (2009) by Trịnh Lữ of Nhã Nam Publisher.

“The Great Gatsby” is selected as a case of this study because it is regarded as one of the greatest American masterpiece written by F. Scott Fitzgerald (Perkins, 2004). The novel was published in 1925; however, it was not until thirty years after its first publication that the novel finally found its remarkable position in American literature. This fact appears intriguing to many researchers; thus encouraging them to explore the reasons underlying the late-coming and everlasting popularity of this novel. “The Great Gatsby” has appeared in various reviews, articles, and studies. In the book *The Fictional Technique of Scott Fitzgerald* by Miller (1949), the author considered it “one of the finest pieces of American literature”.

Following its fame, “The Great Gatsby” has been translated into numerous languages in the world, including Vietnamese. The translation “Đại gia Gatsby” by Trịnh Lữ was selected as the case of this study because it was the updated version among three translated versions published by Nhã Nam Publisher in 2009. More significantly, the translation “Đại gia Gatsby” has received a huge number of mixed reviews and contending commentaries from the readership; hence, it would be meaningful in order to examine the “The Great Gatsby” and its translation “Đại gia Gatsby”.

4. Challenges in English-Vietnamese Translation of “the Great Gatsby”

4.1. Challenges in Translating Proper Names

In “Đại gia Gatsby”, the translator adopts non-translation in dealing with proper names. Nonetheless, it is inarguable that “The Great Gatsby” is prominent for its use of distinctive language (Liu, 2010). The author meticulously selected names to convey a message and lace with symbolism to give the characters more meaning.

For instance, *Gatsby*'s name is a typical example of Fitzgerald's amazing choice of words. The real name of Gatsby is James Gatz.

“Gatz” is a name of German origin. He changes it to Jay Gatsby after he meets Dan Cody on his yacht and leaves with him to travel the world at the age of 17. The name Gatsby is a play on words. “Gat” is a slang term for gun that is ironic since Gatsby was shot with a gun at the end of the novel.

Another example is the name “Buchanan”. The name *Buchanan* is a name for someone wealthy, pretentious, snobby, and sophistication auras are emitted from this name (Luft & Dilworth, 2010). This name connects to the American Dream because it represents someone wealthy, which is a part of the dream for most.

Regarding *Daisy Buchanan*, Daisy’s first name is a flower. The name fits with Daisy’s beauty and superficial purity. On the surface, Daisy, the protagonist of the novel, seems to be very naïve and pure from Gatsby’s perspective, but in fact she is totally empty.

Tom Buchanan also fits the role of someone called Buchanan. He is a former university athlete from an established family. His first name also perfectly fits his character. It describes his lack of personality. The name Tom is common and uninteresting just like Tom himself.

Nick is a neutral name. It can be a name of someone who is immensely wealthy or someone coming from extreme poverty. Fitzgerald wished to convey the unbiased and neutral nature of Nick. He is the narrator in the middle of the whole story and stands with both words without being able to decide where he belongs. In the beginning of the novel, he even admits that he is “inclined to reserve all judgements” (p. 5).

On the whole, the meaningful names in “The Great Gatsby” align with the findings of the previous studies (Manini, 2014; Phạm & Phạm, 2018) in which proper names in a literary text carry contextual meanings and provoke cultural connotations.

Despite carrying contextual meanings, the names remain non-translated. The adoption of non-translation strategy can be attributed to two main reasons. Firstly, proper names are deemed untranslatable due to linguistic and cultural differences between two languages and

cultures. As justified by Catford (1965), Faseng (2002) and Cui (2012), translators confront linguistic and cultural hindrances during the translation process. Cultural untranslatability means that a situational feature, which is functionally relevant for the SL text, is wholly absent from the TL culture. Secondly, the non-translation of proper names serves to preserve the American cultural exoticism of the SL. In line with the age of globalization, translation serves as an instrumental medium of cultural communication among different cultures. Accordingly, SL-oriented translation of the literary proper names would guide the Vietnamese readers through American culture. For that reason, non-translation of proper names motivates the Vietnamese readers to pronounce alien names and explore exotic English-speaking cultures and their naming practices.

From a different angle, one might argue that as these literary names carry contextual meanings, they should have been translated into Vietnamese. Therefore, to compromise on the linguistic and cultural barriers, the following translation techniques have been proposed. Early in the literature, Newmark (1995) recommends the use of “footnotes” to tackle the rendition of proper names. Though divergent in wording, Faseng (2002), Jinfang (2004), and Cui (2012) reach the consensus about adopting translator’s notes, non-translation plus additional explanation. More recently, Manini (2014) agrees that selecting an interpretation is an essential element in translation, which nevertheless entails risks for translators. Therefore, “if explanatory footnotes serve the translators’ purpose, they can be inserted with relative ease into a work of narrative fiction to inform the reader about what had to be left out” (Manini, 2014, p. 173). Additionally, Manini (2014) suggests that “the use of explanatory notes or other forms of meta-textual comment such as the translator’s preface can perfectly well be envisaged to compensate for the semantic loss that occurs when loaded names are not translated” (p. 173).

4.2. Challenges in Translating Alliteration

One of the reasons why “The Great Gatsby” is considered a masterpiece is its excellent use of language (Arthur, 1963;

Kathleen, 1988; Ronald, 2003). Along with Ernest Hemingway and William Faulker, Scott Fitzgerald is regarded as one of the three great American prose writers with its most distinctive style (Ronald, 2003). In this novel, Fitzgerald strived to develop a unique language creating an emotional response not only through its content but also its sound and rhythm to appeal all the senses. The language in the novel is characterized by the use of figurative language, namely alliteration.

Nonetheless, due to the linguistic differences between Vietnamese and English, it

Table 1

English-Vietnamese Translation of Alliteration in "The Great Gatsby"

bond business (p. 7)	buôn trái phiếu
we walk (p. 7)	chúng tôi đi qua
high hallway (p. 7)	dãy hành lang cao
breeze blew (p. 7)	một cơn gió ủa qua
blown back (p. 7)	thổi dạt
people played polo (p. 10)	người chơi polo
a low white washed railroad fence (p. 28)	một dãy hàng rào hoả xa thấp quét vôi trắng
Evidently some wild wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens (p. 20)	Hiển nhiên là một gã bác sĩ mắt điên khùng đã dựng chúng ở đó hồng làm béo bở cho nghề nghiệp của gã ở quận Queens.
she smiled slowly (p. 30)	bà chậm rãi mỉm cười
cream-colored chiffon (p. 30)	hàng chiffon màu kem
At least once a fortnight a corps of caterers came down with several hundred feet of canvas and enough colored lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden. On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors-d'oeuvre , spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold. (p. 32)	Ít nhất nửa tháng một lần, một tập người phục vụ lại đến với hàng trăm mét vải bố và đủ số đèn màu để biến khu vườn mênh mông của Gatsby thành một cái cây Giáng sinh. Trên những bàn thức ăn tự chọn lấp lánh các món khai vị đẹp mắt, nhiều món thịt muối bỏ lò được bày chen chúc với những đĩa rau trộn trang trí sắc sỡ và các loại bánh thịt lợn thịt gà nướng như được phép thành vàng ròng sẫm màu.
A dead man passed us in a hearse heaped with blooms. (p. 52)	Một người chết đi ngược chiều với chúng tôi trong chiếc xe linh cữu chất đầy hoa.
" sun-strained eyes " (p. 63)	đôi mắt xám nheo nheo vì nắng
While we admired he brought more and the soft rich heap mounted higher shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral	Chúng tôi còn đang thán phục thì ông đã lại mang thêm ra và cái đống mềm mại phong phú ấy cứ cao lên mãi – sơ mi kẻ sọc, in hoa

is a huge challenge for the translator to convey that unique feature. For instance, in the title "Great Gatsby", the sound "g" in two words is repeated to generate a sound effect on the readership, but its translation "Đại gia Gatsby" cannot express the alliteration. Similarly, in "she smiled slowly", the sound "s" is repeated to create rhythm, but it is impossible to convey the rhythmic style of the original in the translation "bà chậm rãi mỉm cười". More examples are illustrated in the following table.

and apple-green and lavender and faint orange, and monograms of Indian blue. Suddenly, with a strained sound, Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily. (p. 71)	và carô đủ màu san hô, xanh táo, tím hồng, da cam nhạt, cái nào cũng thêu chữ lồng màu lam Ấn Độ. Đột nhiên, thốt lên một tiếng nghẹn ngào, Daisy gục đầu vào đồng áo ấy và bắt đầu khóc như mưa như gió.
I heard a car stop and the sound of someone splashing after us over the soggy ground. (p.131)	Tôi nghe có tiếng ô tô đỗ lại rồi đến tiếng chân bì bõm trên mặt đất sũng nước chạy theo chúng tôi.
And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock . (p. 136)	Và khi ngồi đó trầm tư về cái thế giới xưa xa lạ, tôi nghĩ đến niềm xúc động đầy kinh ngạc của Gatsby khi lần đầu ông thấy đốm sáng xanh ở cuối bãi thuyền nhà Daisy .
So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past . (p. 136)	Chúng ta cứ thế dần bước, những con thuyền rẽ sóng ngược dòng, không ngừng trôi về quá khứ.

According to Liu (2010), the structure of language commonly shows the characteristics of the language, these characteristics can only be found in relative language, the similar transfer is difficult to find in non-relative language, for it needs to change the code completely. It is generally agreed that each language has its own special phonemic system (Lâm, 2013), which cannot be replaced by another language. No translation language can reproduce the same sequence of sounds as the language of the original, simply because the two languages are not totally the same from the standpoint sound. In the case of “The Great Gatsby” and its translation, there are linguistic differences between English and Vietnamese; therefore, it is understandable that the translator of “The Great Gatsby” may sacrifice the sound and rhythm effect in order to achieve meaning.

Table 2

English-Vietnamese Translation of Complex Structures in “The Great Gatsby”

ST	TT
I bought a dozen volumes on banking and credit and investment securities, and they stood on my shelf in red and gold like new money from the mint, promising to unfold the shining secrets that only Midas and Morgan and Maecenas knew.	Tôi mua hàng chục tập sách về ngân hàng, tín dụng và chứng khoán đầu tư. Chúng đứng xếp hàng trên giá, bìa đỏ chữ mạ vàng, tinh khôi như tiền mới đúc ra lò, hứa hẹn sẽ khai mở những bí mật sang ngời mà chỉ các thần tài cỡ Midas, Morgan và Maecenas mới biết được.
I looked back at my cousin, who began to ask me questions in her low, thrilling voice.	Tôi quay lại với cô em họ. Nó bắt đầu hỏi han với cái giọng trầm lời cuốn đầy cảm xúc.

4.3. Challenges in Translating Complex Structures

Fitzgerald’s syntactic structures are vividly illustrated through his use of clause complexes. This style is pertinent in describing emotional changes and highlighting the inner complex feelings of the narrator towards the Jazz Age in the 1920s. Moreover, the narrator of the novel Nick presents himself as a learned man with Yale University education, which can be seen from his use of language, particularly the use of both coordination and subordination.

However, in the translation of “The Great Gatsby”, clause complexes were simplified into short and simple ones. Several instances are provided in Table 2.

Slenderly, languidly, their hands set lightly on their hips, the two young women preceded us out onto a rosy-colored porch, open toward the sunset, where four candles flickered on the table in the diminished wind.

Mảnh mai, uể oải, tay đặt nhẹ trên hông, hai người đàn bà dẫn chúng tôi ra ngoài hiên nhà toàn màu hồng hướng về phía hoàng hôn. Bốn ngọn nến đang cháy chập chờn trên bàn trong gió lúc ấy đã dịu hẳn.

As mentioned above, each language has its own structures (Lâm, 2013). In order to deal with syntactic differences, Newmark (1995) proposed a translation procedure named shift or transposition. In his opinion, shift or transposition means a change in the grammar from the SL to the TL. The change in grammar can be from singular to plural; from gerund to verb-noun; from subordinate clause to infinitive; from verb to noun/ adverb; from complex sentence to simple sentence and so on. This procedure is applicable because when an SL grammatical structure does not exist in the TL or where literal translation is grammatically possible but may not accord with natural usage in the TL to give natural expressions in the TL. Therefore, it is understandable that Trịnh Lữ adopted shift or transposition in separating clause complexes into simple ones in order to achieve naturalness Vietnamese.

4.4. Challenges in Translating Conjunction Words

Excessive conjunctions convey the intentional discrepancy of the writer between East Egg and West Egg. In the novel, the most popular conjunctives were additive “and”. Fitzgerald purposely employs conjunction “and” in order to vividly depict how different and “grotesque” West Egg is compared to the cultured, high society that exists in the East Egg (Liu, 2010). Fitzgerald desired to stress on the differences between East Egg and West Egg in his novel. The writer repeatedly used “and” to emphasize that there are many important differences between people living in the East Egg and those living in the West Egg.

Besides, Fitzgerald strived to develop a unique language creating an emotional response not only through content but also through its sound and rhythm (Ronald, 2003). This feature is characterized by the use of repetition, namely the repetition of additive “and”.

Several examples are illustrated in the following table.

Table 3

English-Vietnamese Translation of Conjunctions in “The Great Gatsby”

ST	TT
He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that.	Ông không nói gì thêm, nhưng cha con tôi vẫn luôn hiểu nhau theo một kiểu kiệm lời khác thường, nên tôi biết ý ông dặn là hơn thế nhiều.
And, after boasting this way of my tolerance, I come to the admission that it has a limit.	Nhưng sau khi đã huênh hoang như thế về tính bao dung của mình, tôi phải công nhận rằng nó cũng có giới hạn.
The practical thing was to find rooms in the city, but it was a warm season, and I had just left a country of wide lawns and friendly trees, so when a young man at the office suggested that we take a house together in a commuting town, it sounded like a great idea.	Thực tế ra thì phải tìm chỗ ngay ở trong thành phố, nhưng lúc ấy trời còn đang ấm áp, mà tôi thì vừa mới ở quê ra vẫn còn nhớ cảnh cây cỏ than quen rộng rãi, nên khi có một anh chàng ở văn phòng bảo muốn thuê chung với tôi một cái nhà ở chỗ nào ngoài thành phố mà vẫn tiện đi làm hàng ngày được thì tôi ưng ý ngay.
He found the house, a weather-beaten card-	Anh ta đã tìm được một chỗ - một căn nhà một

board bungalow at eighty a month, but at the last minute the firm ordered him to Washington, and I went out to the country alone.	tầng khung gỗ vách bìa cứng dầu dãi nắng mưa với giá 80 đô la một tháng, nhưng đến phút chót thì công ty lại bắt anh chàng phải chuyển đến Washington nên tôi dọn đến đó một mình.
And so it happened that on a warm windy evening I drove over to East Egg to see two old friends whom I scarcely knew at all.	Thế là, một chiều lộng gió ấm áp, tôi lái xe sang East Egg thăm hai người bạn cũ mà thật ra là chả biết gì về họ mấy.
At any rate, Miss Baker's lips fluttered, she nodded at me al- most imperceptibly, and then quickly tipped her head back again	Không hiểu tại sao, đôi môi cô Baker bỗng run run, cô gật đầu với tôi, gần như không thấy trước được, sau đó lại vội vàng ngửa đầu ra như cũ.
"Well, it's a fine book, and everybody ought to read it.	À, vì đó là một cuốn sách hay, mọi người ai cũng phải đọc.
I looked outdoors for a minute, and it's very romantic outdoors.	Em vừa ra ngoài xem một tí, ở đó rất lãng mạn anh ạ.
Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where.	Thế này nhé, nó mới chưa đầy một tuổi mà Tom thì có trời biết là đang ở đâu.
Sitting on Tom's lap Mrs. Wilson called up several people on the telephone; then there were no cigarettes, and I went out to buy some at the drugstore on the corner.	Vừa ngồi trên lòng Tom, bà Wilson vừa gọi phôn cho nhiều người; thế rồi không có thuốc lá, nên tôi phải xuống chỗ hiệu thuốc góc phố mua một ít.
"And Daisy ought to have something in her life," murmured Jordan to me.	Daisy cũng phải có được cái gì đó trong cuộc sống của mình anh ạ," Jordan thăm thì.
He was pale, and there were dark signs of sleep- lessness beneath his eyes.	Ông ta tái nhợt, mắt thâm quầng vì thiếu ngủ.
His eyes glanced mo-mentarily at me, and his lips parted with an abortive attempt at a laugh.	Ông liếc vội sang tôi, môi hé mở định cười nhưng lại thôi.

It can be seen from the translation that "and" was translated as "nên", "nhưng", "mà" and so forth. According to Oxford dictionary (2015), the conjunction "and" has a total of eight layers of meaning as follows:

- Be used to connect words or parts of sentences and have the same meaning as "also, in addition to"

- Have the same meaning as "added to"

- Have the same meaning as "then, following this"

- Have the same meaning as "go, come, stay, try" and be used before a verb instead of "to" to show purpose such as "go and get me a pen please".

- Be used to introduce a comment or a question such as "We talked for hours. And what did you decide?"

- Have the same meaning as "as a result" such as "Miss another class and you will fail".

- Be used between repeated words to show that something is repeated or continuing such as "He tried and tried but without success".

- Be used between repeated words to show that there are important differences between things or people of the same kind such as "I like city life but there are cities and cities".

Therefore, it is rational that "and" can be translated into different ways such as "nên", "nhưng", "mà" and so on. For example, additive "and" in the sentence "He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, **and** I understood that he meant a great deal more than that." was translated as "**nên**" "Ông không nói gì thêm, nhưng cha con tôi vẫn luôn hiểu nhau theo

một kiểu kiệm lời khác thường, **nên** tôi biết ý ông dặn là hơn thế nhiều.” Similarly, “and” was translated as “nhưng” and “mà” in other aforementioned examples.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The present minor study delineates challenges in an English-Vietnamese translation of “The Great Gatsby”. Through qualitative descriptive approach, the difficulties in the English-Vietnamese translation of the Great Gatsby are unraveled. The findings reveal a number of constraints associated with linguistic and cultural distinctions between the SL and the TL.

The findings of the study also yield several implications. Firstly, the findings of the study serve as a beneficial reference for literary translators. It is essential for literary translators to master the writing style of the SL author so that a proper selection of lexical, syntactic and textual means can be done. This will assist literary translators in creating the same effect of the translation on the TL readers and the SL readers.

Secondly, it can be inferred from the study that the SL-oriented kind of translation should be considered for the translation of literary works, especially well-known timeless masterpieces. In an SL-oriented translation, the original is tied in a specific manner to the SL community and its culture, and is often specifically directed at source culture addressees. In literary translation, it is significant to convey distinctive features and styles of the SL author; therefore, SL-oriented translation should be considered for the translation of literary texts.

Although this study has yielded several insights into challenges in English-Vietnamese translation, during the research implementation, it might not avoid the following limitation. The reasons underlying the translation strategies adopted by the translator are matters for future research. The choices of translation strategies undertaken by the translator deserve research attention. It is recommended for further research that interviews with the translator would be conducted in order to dig deeper into the underlying reasons affecting the choices of translation strategies.

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THÁCH THỨC TRONG DỊCH VĂN HỌC: NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP DỊCH ANH – VIỆT TRONG TÁC PHẨM “ĐẠI GIA GATSBY”

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Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này phân tích các thách thức mà người dịch đối mặt trong quá trình dịch Anh-Việt tác phẩm Đại gia Gatsby. Phương pháp nghiên cứu chính được áp dụng là phương pháp mô tả so sánh đối chiếu giữa bản dịch và bản gốc. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy người dịch đối mặt với những rào cản, thách thức liên quan đến sự khác biệt về ngôn ngữ, văn hoá giữa bản dịch và bản gốc. Dựa trên kết quả nghiên cứu, tác giả đề xuất một số chiến lược dịch xuyên văn hoá.

Từ khoá: thách thức, dịch Anh - Việt, dịch văn học