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**AN INVESTIGATION INTO TOPIC-COMMENT
SENTENCES IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE IN THE
PERSPECTIVE OF NEGATIVE TRANSFER**

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M.A.THESIS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale

The concept of sentence Topic-Comment (STC) is one of the most controversial linguistic issues. The reason for this seems quite clear: this concept seems too vague to be fruitfully applied to the analysis of language-specific constructions, let alone cross-linguistic investigations. In fact, having been a student and a teacher of English for years has brought to my attention a number of problems related to sentence topic-comment structures (STCSs). It has been observed that in some Vietnamese sentence types, the subject, in term of the obligatory Subject-Predicate structure (SPS) in English, is not obvious to the students. They find it difficult to locate the subject because Vietnamese sentences do not require a grammatical subject if it can be inferred from the context. Besides, what appears at the beginning of a sentence in Vietnamese is often the Topic, which can be the Subject, Object or Adjunct of the Predicate. For example, the following sentence is quite common in Vietnamese:

Cái nhà này mua bây giờ không lời

This house buy now unprofitable

TOPIC COMMENT

OBJECT OF PREDICATE
THE VERB

It is unprofitable to buy that house now.

This sentence may place a burden on Vietnamese students and translators. What appears at the beginning of the sentence - the subject position in English - is not the structural subject of the predicate. Rather, it is the object of the verb. Therefore, the students and translators must go beyond the word level to make sense of the “topic” and “comment” in the Topic-Comment sentences (TCSs), and correctly identify the grammatical relationship between the predicate of the sentence and the existing topic, which functions as the object of the verb, and then express it as an object in a SPS. Besides, as there is no subject in the example above, when translating into English, the students and translators have to predict from the context which is the exact subject to convert; otherwise, they have to put the sentences in the passive voice. Carrying out this thesis, I would like to point out the typical similarities and differences between TCSs in Vietnamese and English and common negative transfers of TCSs from Vietnamese to English at sentential level. The study also attempts to suggest some useful implications in order to help Vietnamese learners of English avoid negative transfer from Vietnamese Topic-Comment sentences and improve their translation skill as well as to make the process of teaching and learning language better.

1.2. The Significance of the Study

This investigation attempts to find out typical similarities and differences between TCSs in English and Vietnamese and common Vietnamese-English negative transfer of TCSs with the hope that it will help learners of Vietnamese and English avoid such negative transfers and use TCSs more effectively in translation as well as in communication. The findings of the study may be a useful tool for Vietnamese translators of English and be a necessary source for suggesting some good implications for teaching and learning TCSs better.

1.3. The Scope of the Study

The study is confined to the investigation of TCSs in the perspective of Vietnamese-English negative transfer. It does not attempt to prove any underlying grammatical structure of Vietnamese and English sentences revealed through students' negative transfers. Instead, the thesis focuses on the basic structures of TCSs in the two languages. Moreover, within the scope of a thesis, we cannot cover all the negative transfer but tend to rely on some as a research tool for examining whether the STCSs of Vietnamese is one of the possible hindrances causing difficulty for students in their translation tasks.

The subjects of our study were not professional translators, or all groups of Vietnamese learners of English but first-year English majors at Da Nang College of Foreign Languages who were being trained to be English teachers.

Those students must have certain knowledge of Vietnamese and English sentences, which helped us conduct the investigation more easily. What's more, being future teachers of English, the students had a more positive attitude to take part in the study.

1.4. Organization of the Study

Chapter 1: Introduction

The chapter deals with the necessity for the research to be proceeded. Also in this chapter, the purpose of the study, the questions to solve in the paper and the scope of the study are proposed. The last part is the preview of the organization of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Background

This chapter makes a review of the previous studies related to the problem and theoretical concepts that will give the foundation for the study of sentence Topic-Comment structures together with negative transfer.

Chapter 3: Method and Procedure

The chapter includes the research design, research method, description of population and subjects, data collection, instruments for analysis, data analysis, reliability and validity.

Chapter 4: Discussion of Findings

In this chapter, we describe the results of the investigation into TCSs in Vietnamese and English and common Vietnamese-English negative transfer of TCSs and

the discussions are also given. It comprises the three aspects as follows:

- Typical similarities and differences between TCSs in Vietnamese and English.
- Common Vietnamese-English negative transfers of TCSs.
- Possible causes of the negative transfers.

Chapter 5: Conclusions - Pedagogical Implications - Limitations - Further Research

This chapter mentions conclusions related to the study and the pedagogical implications for the English language learning and teaching. Some limitations and suggestions for further research are discussed as well.

1.5. Research Questions

1. What are typical similarities and differences between TCSs in Vietnamese and English?
2. What are common negative transfers of TCSs from Vietnamese to English?
3. What are possible causes of the negative transfer?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Review of Previous Studies

Recently, many scholars have been showing their great interest in studying issues related to Topic-Comment. In their seminal article, “Subject and Topic: a New Typology of Language”, Li and Thompson (1976) set up many criteria to distinguish the notion of subject and topic.

In his study, Cao Xuân Hạo explicitly stated that Topic-Comment is the basic structure. According to him, the way

the Vietnamese express themselves is that “*when uttering a sentence, the speaker produces a topic and says something about that topic or within the range of that topic*” [35, p.79].

In “Phân tích cấu trúc câu đơn tiếng Việt theo cấu trúc Đề-Thuyết” by Đào Thanh Lan (2002), the author gave a clear analysis of Vietnamese simple sentence on the basis of Topic-Comment structures.

In 1989, Odlin published “Language transfer: Cross-linguistic influence in language learning” and his book has laid a foundation for recent language transfer researches and studies. Different types and extents of cross-linguistic influence as well as errors were discussed.

Related to negative transfer, language errors is also an important field, which has been proved by a large number of books, articles and dictionaries about errors. “Longman Dictionary of Common Errors” by Turton and Heaton (2003) provides readers with a practical guide to common errors and their correction.

In the recent years, Vietnamese scholars have showed their concern and interest in the problem of language transfer and errors. In 2010, “An Investigation into Transferring of Lexical Meaning in Translated Works of Modern Literature from English into Vietnamese” was done by Lê Ngọc Trân Châu.

“Từ điển các lỗi thường gặp trong Tiếng Anh” by Việt Anh (2002) and “Những lỗi thường gặp trong Tiếng Anh” by Lê Xuân Phương (2006) are two of many books published and widely-used by Vietnamese people. This has proved the

fact that the problem of errors and negative transfer in language usage is still of great concern.

2.2. Theoretical Background

2.3.1. Theory of Sentence Topic-Comment

2.3.1.1. *Definition of Sentence Topic*

The study of topic is not a new one. Topic, as an object of grammatical investigation, was first raised by Hockett (1958). He proposed a theory in which a sentence can be divided in two parts, a topic and a comment, as in, for example, the sentence:

(1) **The boy** ate the hamburger.

The bold-faced subject is the topic about which some new information is mentioned. The predicate *ate the hamburger* is the comment. The topic normally corresponds with the subject, and the comment normally corresponds with the verb and its complements, the predicate. The topic is what the sentence is about, and the comment is what is said about the topic. Topic is basically seen as a grammatical entity (Brown & Yule, 1983:70-71).

Sentence topic has been identified by some writers with *old or given or assumed information* (Haviland & Clark, 1974; Chafe, 1974).

2.3.1.2. *Sentence Topic and Subject*

The major distinction between topic and subject is that, the subject has a grammatical relation with the predicate, while this is not required for the topic. The topic is related to the comment semantically, and may or may not be grammatically related. The semantic dependency of the topic-

comment relation means that it is insufficient to infer a TCS's meaning solely by its syntactic structure.

Topic is most often the subject in the unmarked pragmatic sentence articulation of *topic-comment*. This is a universal feature of language. Lambrecht takes topic as a marked construction when there is a deviation from the canonical constituent order.

2.3.1.3. Definition of Sentence Comment

(2) As for my siblings, my sister lives in Lithuania, and my brother lives in Armenia.

Here, *As for my siblings* constitutes the general topic, and *my sister* and *my brother* constitute subtopics. The comment to *as for my siblings* is the rest of the sentence, which itself consists of two topic/comment structures.

The *Comment* is the added information; “new” here includes what is important, as well as what is unfamiliar or not readily accessible to the hearer; it is often called “focus”. “Information” includes qualities, as well as participant entities.

2.3.1.4 Topic/comment Structure and Predication

Nehaniv (2000, 2005) suggested that predication emerged from the simple symmetric association of two ideas via a stage in which one idea has a topic role, and the other one is a comment.

Typically, we must make use of a grammatically marked nominalized form of a predicate if we want to make it subject. Languages might differ quite drastically in how well developed a predication relation they have. There are topic-

prominent languages that do not have a well-established subject relation (Li & Thompson 1976), and there are languages in which the distinction between nouns and verbs, the typical categories suited for topics and comments, is less clear, if present at all (Sasse 1991).

Granted that this scenario still does not tell us where truth values came from. However, at least it provides a road map for the asymmetry that is essential for truth values. If the combination of two ideas α , β leads to a truth value, and if one idea is simple, then the other one must be conceived of as containing one element that does the combining and mapping to a truth value. As indicated above, the topic/comment structures can be seen as the source of predication.

2.3.1.5. Types of Topic-Comment Structures in English

There are four types of topic-comment structures to be discussed in this part. The first type is a topic with a resumptive pronoun in the comment clause. The topic is the antecedent of a resumptive pronoun in the comment clause. The topic and the resumptive pronoun have a coreferential referent.

The second type of topic-comment structure is a topicalized clause. For this type of construction, the topic can be viewed as having been extracted from its original postverbal object position, leaving a gap in its original extraction site. This gap is coreferential with the topic. The comment clause may appear incomplete, but because it forms

part of the topic-comment structure with the topic, it is nevertheless grammatical.

The third type of topic-comment structure is double nominatives construction. A double-nominative construction in Chinese is where two adjacent NPs precede the predicate.

The fourth type of comment structure is an adverbial phrase. Adverbial phrases are less common as topics, but they nevertheless serve as the semantic frame and provide background information for the comment clause.

2.3.1.6. Topic Constructions in Vietnamese

Rosen (1998) has provided a categorization of different types of topics in Vietnamese sentences. According to Rosen's categorization, Vietnamese has the following 5 kinds of topics:

a) Apparent Long-Distance Dependencies

These sentences have a gap in the comment which is understood as being filled by the topic. This structure is similar to the "*topicalization*" phenomenon in English where a noun phrase is moved to the initial position of the sentence. It leaves only an empty position in the rest of the sentence.

(3) **Tôi** thì e không ngủ được.

I topic marker not sleep manage

As for me, (I) couldn't sleep. (Emeneau, 1951:54)

b) Noun Phrase Topics with Coreferential Noun Phrase in Comment Clause

This type of topic corresponds to a coreferential noun phrase or pronoun, which can be an overt subject or an overt object

in the comment. Examples (4) is a case where the topic corresponds to an overt subject .

4) **Tôi**, thì tôi chỉ muốn về Việt Nam.
 I topic marker I only wish return
 Vietnam

As for me, I only want to go back to Vietnam.

c) **Noun Phrase with Semantically Related Noun Phrase in Comment Clause**

This construction type is considered by Rosen as very common in Vietnamese. This construction is similar to what is called by Li and Thompson as *double subject* construction. In these constructions, the subject-predicate is embedded in another subject-predicate construction (in Chao's point of view), or the subject-predicate construction is embedded in topic-comment sentences.

5) Cái cửa này e thì thường đóng.
 Classifier door this topic marker usually closed
 As for this door, it is usually closed.

d) **Noun Phrase Topics with No Related Noun Phrase in Comment Clause**

In this kind of topic construction, the Noun Phrase topic may not be related to any constituent either empty or overt in the comment. Here are some examples of this kind of topic:

6) Thú cưng, tôi thích con mèo.
 Animal I like classifier cat

As far as animals are concerned, I like cats.

e) **Verb Phrase and Clausal Topic**

Not only can a Noun Phrase function as a Topic in Vietnamese, but also a verb phrase as well. Sometimes the topic consists of only a one-word verb and it is repeated in the comment clause, as we shall see in examples (23) and (24), or the topic consists of a verb phrase, only one word of which is repeated in the comment clause, as in example (25).

7) Ăn, thì ông Ba ăn khỏe lắm.
 Eat topic marker Mr. Ba eat healthy very
 As far as eating is concerned, Mr Ba has an enormous appetite.

2.3.1.7. Empty Pronouns in Vietnamese

If the empty pronouns are presented out of context, the native speakers usually do not understand or accept it and they will explore more information by asking for the missing argument. If the context gives clues to the missing argument, the sentence will be understood and accepted by the Vietnamese native.

8) Tôi đọc e rồi.

I read already

2.3.2. Characteristics of Topic-Prominent Languages

One grammatical characteristic that is also observed as related to topic-prominence and subject-prominence is the passive construction. Since passive involves non-agentive subjects, it follows that passive construction is seen more in subject-prominent than topic-prominent languages.

Another characteristic considered typical for topic-prominent languages is the presence of the double subject construction. Li and Thompson say that this construction is

very popular in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Lisu and Lahu (1976) and they give some examples as follows:

9) That tree, (its) leaves are very big.

2.3.3. Topic-Comment Problems of Language Learners as Translators

Fawcett mentions the influence of unmarked and marked theme on the task of translation. The problem lies in the fact that “*what is considered as marked theme and unmarked theme varies between languages*” (1997:88), and “*not all languages organise theme-rheme in the same way and indeed may not even have a theme-rheme structure*” (1997:89). According to Fawcett, many unskilled translators may produce clumsy translations by unthinkingly reproducing source-language thematic structures.

2.3.4. Theories of Negative Transfer

2.3.4.1. Definition of Language Transfer

Transfer is not a new concept, but goes back to the extensive studies in second language acquisition (SLA) beginning in the middle of the twentieth century. At that time the phenomenon was often referred to as “*interference*”, which reflected the focus on language errors and the negative aspects of language transfer. Soon, transfer was an accepted phenomenon and was considered as the most important, if not the only, noticeable reason for errors and difficulties among language learners.

Transfer can also mean “*the carry-over or generalization of learned responses from one type of situation to another*”, especially “*the application in one field of study*

or effort of knowledge, skill, power, or ability acquired in another” (Webster’s Third New World International Dictionary, 1986).

2.3.4.2. Definition of Negative Transfer

NL-based linguistic transfers are divided into two broad types, *positive* and *negative*. Those NL-based uses that do not lead to linguistic errors are labeled as *positive transfer*, whereas those that lead to errors are labeled as *negative transfer*.

Positive transfer occurs when those similarities in the mother tongue and the target language can facilitate the learning. Negative transfer; however, refers to the negative influence that the knowledge of the first language has in the learning of the target language due to the differences existing between both languages.

2.3.4.3. Types of Negative Transfer

According to Odlin, there are two types of negative transfer:

Substratum transfer: refers to the influence of a source language on the acquisition of a target language.

Borrowing transfer: refers to the influence a second language has on a previously acquired language.

T. Odlin (1989) indicates four different consequences due to this negative transfer:

- *Underproduction*
- *Overproduction*
- *Production Errors*
- *Misinterpretation*

Underproduction appears when the learner notices that particular structures in the target language are very different from those in his/her first language, and therefore, he/she will avoid using such structures. Due to the fact that some common structures are avoided because of such *underproduction*, other structures that are not so frequent in the target language are used more regularly by the learner because he/she feels more confident using them and therefore, *overproduction* will arise.

Within the *production errors*, two different types can be distinguished: *substitutions* and *calques*. *Substitutions* refer to the use of native language forms in the target language, while *calques* are errors that reflect a very closely related native language structure. Finally, as regards *misinterpretation*, some structures in the mother tongue can influence the interpretation of target language messages and this may lead learners to infer something different from the message the speaker wanted to convey.

2.3.5. Theories of Interference

The most commonly used terms referring to the influence of L1 on second language acquisition (SLA) are *interference*, *transfer*, *mother tongue influence* and *cross-linguistic influence*. The term *interference* was one of the first terms describing L1 influence (Weinreich 1953; Lado 1957). *Interference* equals negative transfer, i.e., learning difficulties and errors caused by L1–L2 differences, and excludes

positive transfer, i.e., the facilitating effect of L1–L2 similarities (Odlin 1989: 26).

The term *interference* also implies that L1 inhibits L2 acquisition and that learner errors are an indication of unsuccessful learning, which represents an outdated and simply incorrect view of L1 influence and L2 learning in general. Therefore, this term is rarely used in current SLA literature.

2.3.5.1. Cross-Linguistic Influence

According to Meisel (2001), CLI will tend to affect the weaker language more extensively. Transfer of structural patterns from one language to the other in the case of balanced bilingualism tends to be temporary. Persistent error patterns in the non-dominant, developmentally “incomplete” language have CLI as only one of a complex array of interacting underlying causal factors.

Kellerman & Sharwood-Smith (1986) studied the exactitude of the term and tried to draw a distinction between transfer and influence. To them, transfer is not the same thing as CLI. Whereas transfer refers to those linguistic behaviors incorporated from L1 into IL without capturing other interlingual effects, cross-linguistic influence, on the other hand, refers to those L1 effects such as avoidance, L1 constraints on L2 learning and performance, and different directionality of interlingual effects.

2.3.5.2. Types and Extent of CLI

To start this part, we would like to make a clear distinguish between 2 types of influence: *Interlanguage*

Influence and Intralanguage Influence. The former is referred to as intralanguage influence, since the influence takes place within the same language itself; whereas the latter is called interlanguage influence, since it refers to the influence that one language has on another one.

2.3.5.3. Language Transfer and Interference

Ellis (1997: 51) refers to *interference* as *transfer*, which he says is “*the influence that the learner’s L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2*”. He argues that transfer is governed by learners’ perceptions about what is transferable and by their stage of development in L2 learning. In learning a target language, learners construct their own interim rules (Selinker, 1971, Seligar, 1988 and Ellis, 1997) with the use of their L1 knowledge, but only when they believe that it will help them in the learning task or when they have become sufficiently proficient in the L2 for transfer to be possible.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD AND PROCEDURE

3.1. Aims and Objectives

3.1.1. Aims

This study aims to increase knowledge of these structures in Vietnamese as well as English teaching and learning. More importantly, the thesis attempts to find out common Vietnamese-English negative transfers of the structures with the effort to help Vietnamese students gain proficiency in Vietnamese-English translation.

3.1.2. Objectives

The study is expected to:

- Point out typical similarities and differences between TCSs in English and Vietnamese.
- Present common negative transfer of TCSs from Vietnamese to English.
- Identify possible causes of the negative transfer.
- Discuss some pedagogical implications for teaching translation into English to students in Viet Nam.

3.2. Research design

To do this research, description, comparison, and qualitative analysis are adopted.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The data in this study is of two types: Vietnamese-English translations of an authentic text and responses to questionnaire data. This source of data is used to find out common negative transfer of TCSs from Vietnamese to English and possible causes to the negative transfer.

The data analysis consists of 2 steps: analysis of the performance data and analysis of the questionnaires. In the first step, the learners' translation corpus was collected from the performance data of the students and analyzed. Negative transfers were classified in terms of their possible sources. To confirm these results, the second step analyzed the information obtained from the questionnaires to find out the possible causes of errors from the students' perspective. About two weeks after the translation elicitation task (to provide enough time for the author to analyze the errors), 50 students were given back their original test papers with all of

their errors circled and numbered. The questionnaire was in English. The students were asked to indicate the factors that caused them to make errors by checking the appropriate box on a provided list. The questionnaire comprises 7 close-ended options and 1 open-ended option for the students to choose from.

3.4. Research Procedure

To do the study, following steps are set: defining theoretical basis on which this research is done; collecting and analyzing data from Vietnamese and English materials; describing them to find out the similarities and differences between TCSs in the two languages; composing the authentic translation task and questionnaire; analyzing the findings and drawing conclusions.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. TYPICAL SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TOPIC-COMMENT SENTENCES IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE

4.1.1. Typical Similarities between Topic-Comment Sentences in English and Vietnamese

Although types of sentence Topic-Comment structures classified in Vietnamese outnumber in English, they share many similarities, one of which is quite clear: topic appears in the initial position and comment stands in the remaining part of a sentence in both languages.

The second common similarity lies in the relationship between the topic and the resumptive pronoun which have a coreferential referent. In other word, the NP in the topic appears again in the comment.

Another common feature is manifested in the semantic relationship between the two initial NPs in the TCS. Among this relationship; as Kroeger (2004) stated, the two most common are domain-subset or possess. In the following examples, the NP functioning as the objects of the comment clause is considered to be a subset of the domain of the topic NP:

Vietnamese	English
Hộc tử ấy thì tôi đã làm mất chìa.	As far as animals are concerned, I like cats.

In both Vietnamese and English sentences, the objects *chìa* and *cats* have the possessive relationship with the NP in the topic.

However, sometimes the NP topic may not be related to any constituent in the comment. Even though this type of topic exists in both Vietnamese and English, most of Vietnamese translators find it difficult to transfer such kind of topic into English.

In terms of syntactic relationship, beside the clear similarities mentioned, we can see that, not all sentence topics are NPs, and in both languages, topic can be a full clause.

4.1.2. Typical Differences between Topic-Comment Sentences in English and Vietnamese

Firstly, when the NP in the topic and the subject in the comment are co-referential, the subject can be omitted in Vietnamese. However, it is impossible to omit the subject in English, let us have a look at the following examples:

Vietnamese	English
Tôi thì e không ngủ được.	As for me, I only want to sleep in Vietnam.

As can be seen, there is a gap which presents the subject omitted in the comment in the Vietnamese sentence and this phenomenon is quite common in both written and spoken form. Nevertheless, in the English language, the subject must be repeated to fix the grammatical rule and only in spoken form that the exception is allowed.

Also in this case, it is noted that the NP in the topic and in the comment is unchanged in Vietnamese sentence while according to grammatical norm, there is a difference in term of part of speech of the two NPs in the English sentence. The

topic marker “as for” must be followed by an object and this object is turned into a subject pronoun in the comment. In Vietnamese, the topic marker does not change the form of the NPs but the English topic marker may do.

We can see the influence of topic marker in English by considering the two sentences:

Vietnamese	English
Ăn, thì ông Ba ăn khỏe lắm.	As far as talking is concerned, Mrs. Ba talks a lot.

Very clearly, the verb phrase functions as the topic in the Vietnamese sentence and as we have discussed, the form of the VPs is unchanged in the topic and the comment. However, due to the presence of topic marker, the VP in the English sentence is changed into a gerund in the topic and this creates a difference in form of the VP. This is a point that should be taken into consideration because most of Vietnamese learners of English are deeply influenced by the mother tongue.

4.2. COMMON NEGATIVE TRANSFERS OF SENTENCE TOPIC-COMMENT STRUCTURES FROM VIETNAMESE TO ENGLISH

Table 4.1. List and Frequency of Negative Transfer of Sentence Topic-Comment Structure Across 14 Sentences

Negative transfer type	Frequency	Percentage
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Omission of Topic	57	19.8%
Identification of Topic and Subject	62	21.6%
Inaccurate Choice between Topic and Object in Comment	41	14.4%
Too Free Translation of Topic When Topic coincides with the Main Verb in the Comment	63	22%
Too Literal Translation of Unmarked Topic in Existential Sentences	25	8.7%
Changing of Topic for a Prepositional Phrase in Comment	39	13.5%
	287	100 %

4.2.1. Omission of Topic

The negative transfer can be explained by the fact that in the two sentences, the topic and the subject coincide but the subject is hidden in the sentence and this gap is called empty pronoun by Rosen. What's more, the formation of topic is quite unfamiliar to Vietnamese students, which causes lots of difficulties for them in Vietnamese-English transfer. In the two cases of topic omission, it is also noticed that the influence of empty pronoun structure in Vietnamese and the practice of word-by-word translation contribute to such negative transfer.

4.2.2. Identification of Topic and Subject

The fact is that, not many of the students have a clear distinguish between the topic and the subject and even when they realize what the topic is, they are not able to use a proper structure to transfer it into English.

4.2.3. Inaccurate Choice between Topic and Object in Comment

Most students commit the negative transfer of the topic and they simply separate the topic with the remaining of the sentence by a comma. Another reason that can partially explain the inaccurate choice between topic and object in the cases is the popular use of the topic in Vietnamese language and the unclear border between the topic and the subject.

4.2.4. Too Free Translation of Topic When Topic coincides with the Main Verb in the Comment

To our expectation, some students remember to change these verbs into noun form but that may be in a subconscious way: they don't know the purpose of that changing or they just try to imitate some sentences beginning with present participle form like: "Talking with Peter, I understand him more."

4.2.5. Too Literal Translation of Unmarked Topic in Existential Sentences

In Vietnamese, "Có" plays the role of the subject of an existential sentence and it is also the unmarked topic. We can see a similar notion "there" in English. However, not all English majors in Vietnam are fully aware of the proper use and function of the unmarked topic "there". As a result, one

fourth (equal to 25 cases) of the participants cannot transfer the topic from Vietnamese existential sentences into English.

4.2.6. Changing of a Noun Phrase Topic for a Prepositional Phrase in Comment

Up to now, it is quite clear that, Vietnamese students really have trouble with transferring the topic of a sentence while in Vietnamese these structures are so commonly-used. That is to say, it is high time that sentence topic-comment structures in English should be concerned and taught to students from the early ages.

4.3. POSSIBLE CAUSES OF NEGATIVE TRANSFERS

Very surprisingly, the answer that accounted for the highest percentage (24.1%) is choice 7: *“The structure has not been taught yet”*. To our expectation, the Vietnamese language has a deep influence on the negative transfer, which is proved by the second highest choice (17.8%) of the students. This can explain for the answer with the third highest choice (14.5%): *“It is different from Vietnamese syntactic structures”*. The fourth most popular answer (12.5%) was *“I cannot understand the source sentences”*.

11.3% of the answers explaining for the negative transfer revealed the fact that the students do not have the ability to apply their English knowledge to an actual task of translation.

The two remaining causes which are ranked the sixth and seventh highest were *“I don’t practice frequently”* and *“I forgot the rule”*. Only 12 out of 100 students raise their voice

in open-ended answers of students, accounting for 3.5% of all the answers,

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

CONCLUSION

5.3. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

5.3.1. Implications for Learners

Firstly, learners should be equipped with different types of TCSs in Vietnamese and in English. What's more, the topic markers should also be pointed out and taught so that students can recognize and apply to transferring process from this language to the other. Second, in order to get success in choosing a proper STCS, students should have the ability to analyze what structure is commonly used in the two languages and on what occasion. Finally, when they encounter a topic-comment structure in Vietnamese, the first thing they should do is to consider the equivalent structure in English. They should not try to transfer freely and literally basing on the objective inference. In the process of translation, learners should pay more attention to the teachers' correction and try to self-correct when it is possible. Through self-correction, students will find out the rules and naturally avoid the mistakes the next time.

5.3.2. Implications for Teachers

When teaching Vietnamese students how to translate Vietnamese TCSs into English, some specific contents should be emphasized to students, including the syntactic features of

TCSs of the two languages and how to translate different types of topic-comment structures of Vietnamese.

When the topic is a verb/verb phrase in Vietnamese, the teachers should emphasize the necessity to change the part of speech of the verb when transferring the topic into English. The students in the study forgot to do this because in Vietnamese, most of words are not derived when their part of speech is changed.

5.5. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

If the further research is conducted in this direction, the following aspects will be taken more consideration and investigation:

- How to improve Vietnamese students' skills in comprehending the source sentence in Vietnamese-English translation.
- The influences of cultural aspects on the use of STCSs.
- A contrastive analysis of Comment and Predicate between Vietnamese and English.