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NGUYỄN HỮU HIẾU

AN INVESTIGATION INTO SEMANTIC AND
SYNTACTIC FEATURES IN THE VIETNAMESE-
ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE SHORT STORY
“VỪA NHẮM MẮT VỪA MỞ CỬA SỔ”

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M.A. THESIS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
(A SUMMARY)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the period when there are few literatures stories for children, this short story: “*Vừa Nhắm Mắt Vừa Mở Cửa Sổ*” by Nguyễn Ngọc Thuần has changed the mind of the readers. From the time of publishing till now, this story has won numerous prizes for the contributions it made. And the writer, who became famous overnight, brings us something to think of. With the spread consideration form famous critics, the story has been more familiar with the readers. Even more, it has also been translated into English named: “*Open the window, eyes closed*”.

1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The writer of this research decides to conduct a study on the strategies used in translating into English-the semantic and syntactic features in “*Open the Window, Eyes Closed*”, translated by Trương Tiếp Trương. “**AN INVESTIGATION INTO SEMANTIC AND SYNTACTIC FEATURES IN THE VIETNAMESE-ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE SHORT STORY “VỪA NHẮM MẮT VỪA MỞ CỬA SỔ”**” is carried out in the directions of semantics and syntax.

1.2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The writer of this study hopes this study will provide insights into the practice of translating Vietnamese prose work into English, especially the transferring of semantic and syntactic features in the story: “*Open the window, eyes closed.*”- translated by Trương Tiếp Trương. The study is expected to be helpful to Vietnamese learners of English when they translate some literature work into English.

1.3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The writer of this study decides to investigate into the transferring strategies related to semantic and syntactic features used in the English translational version (*Open the Window, Eyes Closed*) in compared with the Vietnamese version (*Vừa Nhắm Mắt Vừa Mở Cửa Sổ*) under the consideration of how many strategies are used and figure out the most common strategies used in the English translation version.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Following are some research questions that used in this thesis:

(1) What translation strategies related to semantics were used in the Vietnamese-English translational version in “*Open the Window, Eyes Closed*” by Trương Tiếp Trương?

(2) What translation strategies related to syntax were used in the Vietnamese-English translational version in “*Open the Window, Eyes Closed*” by Trương Tiếp Trương?

1.5. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

1.5.1. Translation

1.5.2. Source language

1.5.3. Target language

1.5.4. Communicative approach

1.6. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study will include five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Chapter 4 – Findings and Discussion

Chapter 5 – Conclusions

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1.1. Definitions of Translation

In the field of linguistics, translation is a branch of applied linguistics, for in the process of translation the translator consistently makes any attempt to compare and contrast different aspects of two languages to find the equivalents. Translation is considered as a process through which the translator decodes one language (source language) and encodes his understanding of the language (target language) form. Translation also denotes both the process of transferring a text from one language into another and the product resulting from this process.

So far, other Vietnamese researchers have paid attention to translation and given out a lot of meaningful definitions. *Vũ Văn Đai* [5, p.25] claims that there is an unequivalence in culture of translators and original texts, so in order to become good translators, it is very necessary to enrich the cultural and national knowledge of the TL.

2.1.2. What is equivalence?

Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) [28] view equivalence-oriented translation as a procedure which replicates the same situation as in the original, whilst using completely different wording.

2.1.3. Types of equivalence

According to Nida and Taber, there are two types of equivalence are formal and dynamic equivalence.

Catford's (1965) [5] approach to translation equivalence clearly differs from that adopted by Nida since Catford had a preference for

a more linguistic-based approach to translation and this approach is based on the linguistic work of Firth and Halliday. His main contribution in the field of translation theory is the introduction of the concepts of types and shifts of translation. Catford proposed very broad types of translation in terms of three criteria:

- The extent of translation (*full translation* vs. *partial translation*);
- The grammatical rank at which the translation equivalence is established (*rank-bound translation* vs. *unbounded translation*);
- The levels of language involved in translation (*total translation* vs. *restricted translation*).

Thus, a *formal correspondence* could be said to exist between English and French if relations between ranks have approximately the same configuration in both languages, as Catford claims they do.

House (1977) [9] is in favour of semantic and pragmatic equivalence and argues that ST and TT should match one another in function. House suggests that it is possible to characterize the function of a text by determining the *situational dimensions* of the ST.

Mona Baker explores the notion of equivalence at different levels:

- Equivalence that can appear at word level and above word level, when translating from one language into another.
- Grammatical equivalence, when referring to the diversity of grammatical categories across languages.

- Textual equivalence, when referring to the equivalence between a SL text and a TL text in terms of information and cohesion.

- Pragmatic equivalence, when referring to implicatures and strategies of avoidance during the translation process.

Popovic (1970) [22], in his definition of translation equivalence, distinguishes four types:

- *Linguistic equivalence:*
- *Paradigmatic equivalence*
- *Stylistic (translational) equivalence*
- *Textual (syntagmatic) equivalence*

And Munday (2001) describes five different types of equivalence. They are: Denotative equivalence- equivalence of the extra linguistic content of a text; connotative equivalence- related to the lexical choices; Text- normative equivalence- related to text types- different texts with different treating ways; Pragmatic equivalence or communicative equivalence- attention to the receiver of the text or message. And the last is formal equivalence- related to the form and aesthetic of the text, included word and individual stylistic features of the source text (p. 47).

2.1.4. What is literary translation?

A literary translation is the translation of literature such as novels, poems, plays and poems. The translation of literary works is considered by many one of the highest forms of translation as it involves so much more than simply translating text. A literary translator must be capable of also translating feelings, cultural nuances, humour and other subtle elements of a piece of work.

2.1.5. Vietnamese – English translation

Much of the work published for internal circulation in universities emphasizes the former aspect, which is the theoretical basis of translation. Prominent publications of this type (in Vietnam) include *Interpreting and Translation Course Book* (Bùi Tiến Bảo & Đặng Xuân Thu, 1999) [3], *Theory of Translation* (Huỳnh Trung Tín & Nguyễn Ngọc Tuyền, n.d.) [10] and some scattered academic essays found on the Internet.

2.2. TRANSLATION PROCEDURES AND METHODS

2.2.1. Translation procedures

Nida has divided his translation procedures into two categories: (1) Technical and (2) Organizational. The technical procedures concern the processes followed the translator in converting an SL text into a TL text. Technical procedures consist essentially of three phases: (i) analysis of the respective SL and TL; (ii) careful study of the SL text, and (iii) determination of the appropriate equivalents (1964:241).

The following are the different translation procedures that Newmark, one of the most popular translation scholars, (1988) [18] proposed:

- **Transference:** it is the process of transferring an SL word to a TL text. It includes transliteration and is the same as what Harvey (2005) [8, p5] named “transcription”.

- **Naturalization:** it adapts the SL word first to the normal pronunciation, then to the normal morphology of the TL.

- **Cultural equivalent:** it means replacing a cultural word in the SL with TL one. However, “they are not accurate.”

- **Functional equivalent:** it requires the use of a cultural-neutral word.
- **Descriptive equivalent:** in this procedure, the meaning of the cultural-based translation (CBT) is explained in several words.
- **Componential analysis:** it means “comparing an SL word with a TL word which has a similar meaning but is not an obvious one-to-one equivalent, by demonstrating first their common and then their differing sense components.”
- **Synonym:** it is a “near TL equivalent”. Here economy trumps accuracy.
- **Through-translation:** it is the literal translation of common collocations, names of organizations and components of compounds. It can be called: *claque* or loan translation.
- **Shifts or transpositions:** Transposition, or shift as Catford calls it, reflects the grammatical change that occurs in translation from SL to TL. According to Newmark, it involves a change in the grammar form SL to TL, for instance, (i) change from singular to plural, (ii) the change required when a specific SL structure does not exist in the TL, (iii) change of an SL verb to a TL word, (iv) change of an SL noun group to a TL noun and so forth.
- **Modulation:** With Newmark, it occurs when the translator reproduces the message of the original text in the SL text in conformity with the current norms of the TL, since the SL and the TL may appear dissimilar in terms of perspective.
- **Recognized translation:** it occurs when the translator “normally uses the official or the generally accepted translation of any institutional term.”

- **Compensation:** it occurs when loss of meaning in one part of a sentence is compensated in another part.
- **Paraphrase:** in the procedure, the meaning of the CBT is explained. Here the explanation is much more detailed than that of descriptive equivalent.
- **Couplets:** it occurs when the translator combines two different procedures.

Another popular translation scholar whose work on translation practice is widely adopted is Mona Baker (1992) [16], pointed out 8 strategies for dealing with non-equivalence at word level.

- ❖ *Translation by a more general word (super-ordinate)*
- ❖ *Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word*
- ❖ *Translation by cultural substitution*
- ❖ *Translation by using a loan word or loan word plus explanation*
- ❖ *Translation by paraphrase using a related word*
- ❖ *Translation by paraphrase using unrelated word*
- ❖ *Translation by omission*
- ❖ *Translate by illustration*

At the syntactic level, Catford (1965) [5], proposed 4 types of shift:

- (a) Structural shifts
- (b) Class shifts
- (c) Unit shifts or rank shifts
- (d) Intra-system shifts

2.2.2. Translation methods

Newmark (1988b) [18, p81] mentions the difference between translation methods and translation procedures. He writes that,

“While translation methods relate to whole text, translation procedures are used for sentences and the smaller units of language.” He refers to the following methods of translation:

- *Word-for-word translation*
- *Literal translation*
- *Faithful translation*
- *Semantic translation*
- *Adaptation*
- *Free translation*
- *Idiomatic translation*
- *Communicative translation*

2.2.3. Translation of literature

Literary translation is the branch of translation that deals with novels, poems, plays, stories, song lyrics etc. It has sometimes been said that “the translation of literary works is considered by many [to be] one of the highest forms of translation as it involves so much more than simply translating text.”

2.3. NGUYEN NGOC THUAN’S BIOGRAPHY

Nguyen Ngoc Thuan was born in 1972 in La Gi, Binh Thuan Province. He graduated from The College of Art. He works for Tuoi Tre Newspaper as a writer and a painter. He has won numerous prizes in Vietnam and Sweden’s 2008 Pen Pan Reward.

2.3.1. Nguyen Ngoc Thuan’s Literature

Following are some of his notable works:

1. *Open the window, eyes closed (Vừa nhắm mắt vừa mở cửa sổ)*.
2. *Herding the angels up the hill (Trên đồi cao chăn bầy thiên sứ)*.

3. *Father, son and airplane (Cha và con và...tàu bay)*.

4. *Fiddle-faddle* – about the abuser and her husband (short novel).

5. *The spider web (Giăng giăng tơ nhện)*.

6. *A night of dream (Một thiên nằm mộng)*.

7. *The magic spider (Nhện ảo)*.

2.3.2. Writings about Nguyen Ngoc Thuan and his literature

2.4. TRUONG TIEP TRUONG’S BIOGRAPHY

2.5. TRANSLATION OF NGUYEN NGOC THUAN’S STORY

The story: “*Vừa nhắm mắt vừa mở cửa sổ*” was translated into English by Truong Tiep Truong. This act of translation is completed under the support of Tre Publishing House as a trial project of bringing Vietnamese literature to the readers of the world.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

3.1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1.1. Aim of the Study

This study aims to find out how semantic and syntactic features are transferred from Vietnamese into English as manifested in published translated works of “*Open the Window, Eyes Closed*” by Trương Tiếp Trương.

3.1.2. Objectives of the Study

This thesis is conducted with the following objectives:

(1) Identify the semantic features used in the English translational version of the story: “*Open the window, eyes closed*” by Trương Tiếp Trương.

(2) Identify the syntactic features used in the English translational version of the story: “*Open the window, eyes closed*” by Trương Tiếp Trương.

(3) Find out the possible differences and similarities in terms of the semantic and syntactic features between the English translational version with the Vietnamese one.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.3. REREARCH METHODS

This study is carried out with the use of qualitative approach that is the combination between descriptive and contrastive methods to describe and analyze the transferring of semantic and syntactic features from Vietnamese into English of the chosen storybook.

3.4. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

3.5. DATA COLLECTION

The writer of this gets the data from the two story books: “*Vừa Nhắm Mắt Vừa Mở Cửa Sổ*” by Nguyễn Ngọc Thuận and “*Open the Window, Eyes Closed*” by Trương Tiếp Trương. The length of these is from 400 to approximately 500 samples.

3.6. DATA ANALYSIS

Data collected will be mainly analyzed on the basis of the following points:

- *Semantic features*: We examine semantic features which were used in Vietnamese-English translation; compare them between English and Vietnamese.

- *Syntactic structures*: We examine which sentence structures are frequently used in Vietnamese-English translation, compare.

3.7. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

In respect of validity, this research has to meet the following criteria: The first thing is that all data have to be collected from reliable sources: printed sources, official websites, magazines, newspapers... The second thing is that the data will be analyzed based on a reliable theoretical background. So the data are reliable and not out-of-date.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. TRANSLATION STRATEGIES INVOLVED IN TRANSLATING SEMANTIC FEATURES

4.1.1. Translation by using a more general word

This is one of the commonest strategies for dealing with many types of non-equivalence, particularly in the area of propositional meaning. This strategy works equally well in most, if not all languages, since the hierarchical structure of semantic fields is not language-specific. This strategy appears in the English version as the second-ranked strategies used by the translator. This strategy appears 84 times in the English translational version, accounting for 27.8% of the total strategies. In this strategy, the translator wants to get over the specificity of the TL in comparison with the SL.

(1) For example, the verb: “*cõng*” in the sentence: “*Có một lần chú cõng tôi ra cồn, chỉ vào một lùm cây, nói ngón tay chú nằm chỗ này.*” [line 25, p.23] becomes: “*carried*” in the sentence: “*One day he carried me to a sand hill and pointed to a bush - he said his finger lay there.* [line 11, p.26]. In this case, the translator replaces the verb: ‘*cõng*’ by just a general word: ‘*carry*’.

| Source text | Target text | Back translation |
|-------------|--------------|------------------------------|
| <i>cõng</i> | <i>carry</i> | <i>mang, vác, khuân, chở</i> |

In other examples, we can see the Vietnamese words or phrases are translated by a super-ordinate word.

(2) Take ‘*nhìn*’ in the sentence: “*Bạn có biết mở mắt nhìn bố mẹ không?*” [line 20, p.9] as the second example, it is translated into English as ‘*welcome*’ [line 20 ,p.11] which mean ‘*to greet the arrival of (a person, guests, etc.) with pleasure or kindly courtesy*’. In this

case, ‘*welcome*’ has a broader meaning than ‘*nhìn*’ which means ‘*to look at someone or something*’.

| Source text | Target text | Back translation |
|-------------|----------------|------------------|
| <i>nhìn</i> | <i>welcome</i> | <i>chào đón</i> |

4.1.2. Translation by paraphrase using a related word

This highest-ranked strategy is used in the mosaic of the total bigger picture. This strategy is said to be used when the concept expressed by the source item is lexicalized in the target language but in a different form and when the frequency with which a certain form is used in the source text is significantly higher than would be natural in the target language. In the English version, the translator tends to paraphrase Vietnamese words and collocations with a related one so as to keep the denotation as well as the connotation meaning. This strategy appears 112 times and consists of 37.1% of the strategies used.

(3) Take an example, ‘*không phải nhọc công*’ in the sentence: “*Bà mụ rảnh tay, không phải nhọc công.*” [line 17, p.9] and ‘*saved the midwife the trouble of doing*’ [line 16, p.11] to analyze the strategy. In this example, we can see that the phrase: ‘*không phải*’ is translated into: ‘*saved*’ and the phrase: ‘*nhọc công*’ is translated into: ‘*the trouble of doing*’. ‘*không phải*’ which means ‘*need not to*’ is translated into: ‘*save*’ that means : ‘*help someone avoid doing something*’, both the two English equivalences plus the meaning in its form.

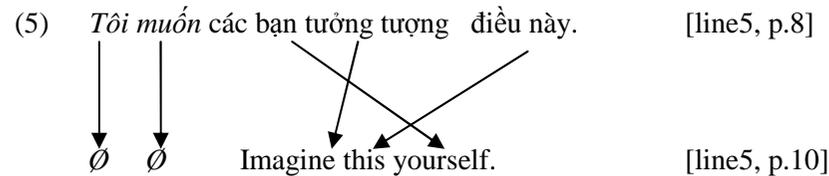
| Source text | Target text | Back translation |
|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| <i>không phải nhọc công</i> | <i>saved the midwife the trouble of doing</i> | <i>khiến bà mụ không phải làm</i> |

(4) In the next instance, let consider the equivalence of: ‘*chào đời*’ in the sentence: “*Tức cái ngày tôi chào đời.*”[line 10, p.10]which is translated: ‘*came into this world*’[line 11, p.12]. Let us not care about the tense here, just look at the paraphrasing. Of course, we know that: ‘*đời*’ and: ‘*world*’ have a same denotation meaning.

| Source text | Target text | Back translation |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>chào đời</i> | <i>came into this world</i> | <i>đến với cuộc đời này</i> |

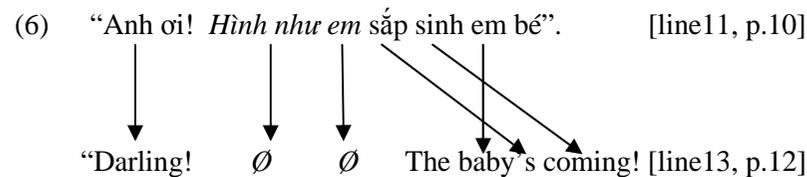
4.1.3. Translation by omission

Translation by omission is another preferred strategy used in the translation of the story. With 37 times of appearance and contributes 12.2% in the total league, omission is also a preferable strategy used by the translator.



In the example above, the Subject and the main verb (imperative verb) are omitted in order to meet the prefer structure of an imperative sentence in English. However, the meaning is preserved well.

In another example, full omission appears but in different position. Consider this example:



4.1.4. Translation by paraphrase using unrelated word

In this strategy, sometimes an amount of definition/explanation is provided in order to characterize the term translated. With 52 times of appearing and 17.2% of the total proportion of all strategies, translation by paraphrase using unrelated word has very unique features itself.

(7) Take the first example for making this clearer, we can see that the clause: ‘*hôn vào cái miệng đang khóc của tôi*’ in the sentence: “*Nói rồi ông hôn vào cái miệng đang khóc của tôi.*” [line 3, p.11] with this clause: ‘*stifled my crying with a kiss*’ [line 6, p.13]. The word: ‘*stifle*’ means: ‘*to stop someone from breathing*’ so the original meaning is not kept.

| Source text | Target text | Back translation |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| <i>ông hôn vào cái miệng đang khóc của tôi</i> | <i>stifled my crying with a kiss</i> | <i>làm tôi nghẹt thở với một nụ hôn</i> |

4.1.5. Translation by cultural substitution

This strategy involves replacing a culture-specific item or expression with a target-language item which does not have the same propositional meaning but is likely to have a similar impact on the target reader. Translation by cultural substitution appears 8 times and is the sixth-ranked strategy. This strategy has the portion of 2.7% of the total.

(8) As the first example, let consider the equivalence of: ‘*bộ ván*’ in the sentence: “*Tôi từ từ đi vào nhà, ngồi xuống bộ ván.*” [line 6, p.25] which is translated as: ‘*the couch*’[line 13, p.27]. In Vietnamese culture, ‘*bộ ván*’ is a piece of furniture made from wood

which is long and is placed on two legs (which are called: ‘*cặp ngựa*’) used to lie or sleep on. But in English, there is no thing like that, so the translator uses another thing to replace, that is: ‘*the couch*’. The couch is a long low comfortable seat that two or three people can sit on. And yet the material is totally different from the SL.

| Source text | Target text | Back translation |
|---------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>bộ ván</i> | <i>the couch</i> | <i>ghế trường kỷ, đi văng</i> |

4.1.6. Translation by using a more neutral/less expressive word

With the 9 times of appearances, this strategy is up to 3% of the all strategies.

(9) Take the equivalence of: ‘*không dám*’ in the sentence: “Từ đó, tôi *không dám* cười nữa.” [line 6, p.16] as an example. In the TL, that is translated: ‘*stopped*’ [line 6, p.18]. ‘*không dám*’ means that ‘*dare not*’ but it is transferred into: ‘*stopped*’.

| Source text | Target text | Back translation |
|------------------|----------------|------------------|
| <i>không dám</i> | <i>stopped</i> | <i>ngừng</i> |

4.2. FREQUENCY OF THE STRATEGIES INVOLVED IN TRANSLATING SEMANTICS FEATURES

After studying through the semantic features both in Vietnamese and their English translational versions, using translation strategies suggested by Newmark and Baker, we found that there are 7 strategies most used and their frequency is illustrated in the table below:

Table 4.1: The tokens and percentage of semantic strategies

| Strategy | Tokens | Percentage |
|--|--------|------------|
| Translate by paraphrase using related word | 112 | 37.1% |
| Translation by using a general word | 84 | 27.8% |
| Translation by paraphrase using unrelated word | 52 | 17.2% |
| Translation by omission | 37 | 12.2% |
| Translation by using a more neutral/less expressive word | 9 | 3% |
| Translation by cultural substitution | 8 | 2.7% |
| | 302 | 100% |

In the data, the strategy “*Translate by paraphrase using related word*” appears 112 times and takes the highest percentage with 37.1% while the two strategies “*Translation by using a general word*” and “*Translation by paraphrase using unrelated word*” stand on the second and third rank with 27.8% for 84 tokens and 17.2% for 52 tokens.

Staying at the fourth and fifth rank are the two strategies “*Translation by omission*” with 12.7% for 37 tokens and “*Translation by using a more neutral/less expressive word*” 3% for 9 tokens.

Standing at the sixth rank is the strategy “*Translation by cultural substitution*” with 2.7% for 8 tokens.

By examining the frequency of those 6 strategies, the strategy “*Translate by paraphrase using related word*” is most used with more than one third of the proportion.

(85) Intra- system shift appears in the following example due to the change of singular noun in the SL into the plural noun in the TL. ‘cái mông’ is translated into: ‘butts’

| <i>Vietnamese (singular)</i> | <i>English (Plural)</i> |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>cái mông</i> [line 10, p.9] | <i>butts</i> [line 10, p.11] |

4.4. FREQUENCY OF THE STRATEGIES INVOLVED IN TRANSLATING SYNTACTIC FEATURES

The frequency of the 4 strategies suggested by Catford in the translational version of the story which is examined above is as follows:

Table 4.2: Tokens and percentage of syntactic strategies

| <i>Strategy</i> | <i>Tokens</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|---------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Intra-system-shifts | 138 | 47.6% |
| Structural-shifts | 127 | 43.7% |
| Class-shifts | 20 | 7% |
| Unit-shifts | 5 | 1.7% |
| | 290 | 100% |

The table above indicates the frequency order of the 4 strategies suggested by Catford from the highest to the lowest.

In the data, the strategy “*Intra-system-shifts*” stays on the first rank by appearing 138 times with 47.6%. Next to this one, the strategy “*Structural-shifts*” possesses the second rank with 43.7% for 127 tokens. The third runner-up is the “*Class-shifts*” strategy for having 20 tokens with 7%. And the least used strategy is the “*Unit/Rank-shifts*” with only 5 times of appearance and accounts for just 1.7% of the total strategies.

4.5. SUMMARY

After studying both the story: “*Vừa Nhắm Mắt Vừa Mở Cửa Sổ*” and the translational version of the story, we get to the conclusion after findings features in semantics and syntax that the changes when transferring from Vietnamese into English are caused by the demands of the tone of the story which is for children and the understanding of lexical items between SL and TL. To make the words be understood in the TL, the meaning of source texts cannot be conveyed fully. In most of the cases, the translator tries to keep the deep meaning which the writer wanted to express by using the communicative approach in translating. Besides, the kind of language has also caused the differences in syntactic structure between source texts and target texts. However, there must be such changes to make the English translational versions familiar to the readers and as faithful as possible to the original meaning of source text. That seems quite hard for the translator but the translation version has itself reflected the careful work and practical skills of the translator in translating that story.

