



Improving Third Year English Students' Translation of Text Genres by Using The Method of Comparing the Position of Words in Phrases or Sentences in the Text Genres

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Abstract

This article presents an action research study undertaken at the Faculty of Education, Souphanouvong University during the 2020-2021 academic year. The aim was to determine whether teaching a method of comparing the position of words in the source language (English) and the target language (Lao) could improve third-year English students' translation of text genres, and whether they were able to learn new vocabulary using this procedure. The sample comprised the 19 students from class 3ENT who studied English as their major. Research instruments included a pre-test, post-test, and questionnaire. Both pre-test and post-test consisted of English to Lao and Lao to English translation, and the questionnaire included 12 closed and open-ended questions. For the experimental method of teaching-learning translation, specific instruction for comparing the position of words between English and Lao was provided for three hours, followed by further practice in translating text genres for two hours per week over 16 weeks. This was implemented in-class and online. Finally, the pre-test and post-test scores of the 19 students were compared to see the difference in students' translation ability. SPSS version 20 was used to calculate all the data. The results of this study showed the mean of the pre-test was 13.5263 with SD = 5.30585, and the mean of the post-test was 28.5263 with SD = 5.95696, while the t-test = -8.652 and p = 0.000. Before learning this technique for translation, 37% of students did not know how to translate English phrases or sentences into the Lao language by themselves, 47% of them knew a few ways, and 16% of students knew and understood how to use many techniques by themselves. After the experimental method was taught, 63% of students felt they knew how to translate English to Lao by themselves. In addition, 84% of students indicated they could learn new vocabulary from text genres, while 16% said they could learn a little new vocabulary from them.

Keywords: *method of comparing the position of words, phrase, sentence, text genres, English-Lao translation*

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1. Introduction

In the world of digital information, countries have increased their economic, social, and political integration and connectivity. Laos is a country that has also expanded its regional and international cooperation in Asia and the world, but the languages used are different between nations. So, people of various nations must learn and understand each other's cultures by language translation because translation can allow people to develop metalinguistic awareness, which can lead to a more complete conceptual framework for thinking about language and literacy (Jiménez et al., 2015).

Many countries use the English language as an official language in communication. In contrast, some countries use English as a second language. Still, almost all countries have put English into their school curriculum to teach students from primary school to university, to enable their people to get information from news worldwide and understand other nations' cultures through their language translation. The Souphanouvong University Faculty of Education (SU FoE) has also put the English language into their curriculum in every major subject since it was established. English major students must learn English as their major subject, and other majors such as chemistry and physics must learn English only as a required general subject. However, learning and teaching English in the Faculty of Education mostly follows the curriculum as fixed by the Department of Higher Education in the Lao Ministry of Education and Sports.

For many years SU FoE students studying to become high school English teachers have had a problem with translation of text genres. With respect to previous lecturers who were responsible for teaching the translation subject, some used the method of teaching grammar because they thought that if students were not good at grammar, they would never be good at translation. Other lecturers used the method of bringing new vocabulary from the news via the internet to teach students. They let students

work in groups to try translating text by using their telephone or dictionary, and then report in front of the class as part of class activity. In addition, the lecturers provided the text as homework for students to translate and then report in the next class.

The FOE English lecturers in further discussions indicated that many of the third- and fourth-year English students could not translate phrases, sentences, or text genres into Lao, even though these texts used easy words and simple sentence construction. While students might understand the meaning of each word in phrases or sentences, they still do not know how to translate it into their mother language. Sometimes, they understand the meaning of the source language (SL), but cannot convey the meaning in the target language (TL) correctly. Occasionally, they translate using their own opinion or thinking, which is not related to the original meaning in the SL.

Because of the problems mentioned above, the researcher was interested in doing an action research study to see if the means of teaching and learning translation could be improved. The reason is that these students will become teachers at schools, or they could work in the public or private sectors as translators in the future. So, translation problems could be challenging for them both in competition when applying for jobs and when they have found work.

Translation means to replace the concept of one language with another language; it is the process of rendering meaning from the SL to the TL by retaining almost the same meaning in the TL (Ordudari, 2007). Therefore, translators should ensure a result that sounds as natural as possible, and must develop the TL to make people understand. If the culture of the SL and TL are quite similar, most things said in the SL can be expressed in the TL, and the meaning of expressions in the TL can be preserved from the SL. So, the translation process, when transferring the meaning from SL to TL, must consider the naturalness and culture of the TL. It is also

important for the linguistic level of the translator to communicate at the reader's communicative level (Aulia, 2012; Newmark, 1988, as cited by Aulia 2012). Some studies have pointed out that a translator seeks to find the equivalent vocabularies, lexicon, grammatical structure, or analysis of the source text to determine the closest meaning, and then must reconstruct this same meaning using the natural forms of the TL (Aulia, 2012). Otherwise, the translator could give the reader the wrong information from the SL.

Numerous scholars have worked on translation and created some translation theories and methods of teaching translation. These include word-to-word translation, literal translation, faithful translation, semantic translation, adaptation translation, free translation, idiomatic translation and communicative translation (Soang, 2016). However, no specific research could be found that revealed how to translate English phrases and sentences of text genres to Lao. Therefore, the researcher decided to focus on teaching translation by using a method of comparing the position of words between source and target language (English to Lao). This method is quite similar to a method of translation used by Nitirungrueang and Crabtree (2016) with Thai EFL students, which is based on separating complex sentences into short sentences or phrases by using conjunctions and prepositions to structure transformation and practice with word-for-word translation. They found that students, especially the freshmen or beginners, were not efficient in translating long, complex sentences, but that if they divided long, complex sentences into many simple sentences, it was best for them understanding and quite suitable for their translation efficiency (Nitirungrueang & Crabtree, 2016).

The researcher wanted to find out whether adapting this method of teaching translation could help FoE English students enhance their text genre translation, because students would learn translation by comparing English grammar to Lao language grammar. This could be

accomplished by comparing the position of words in English phrases or sentences to the position of words in Lao phrases or sentences and comparing the equivalence of vocabulary in both languages. This idea was also supported by other researchers. Schweers (1999) indicated that students could learn translation from highlighting likenesses and differences between the source language and target language forms. Mehta (2010) suggested that students could learn grammar, syntax, and lexis in both source and target language. Two strategies in translation that he suggested-structural strategies and semantic strategies-are related to the teaching method of comparing the position of words in phrases or sentences that the researcher used in this study.

Therefore, the objectives of this action research study were 1) to explore whether the method of comparing the position of words in the source and target languages could enhance students' text genre translation, and 2) to find out whether using this method of translation could also help students learn more vocabulary.

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Sample group

There were 19 third-year students studying English as their major (3ENT) at the Faculty of Education, Souphanouvong University, in the second semester of the academic year 2020-21. They were selected in total to be the sample group. All were enrolled in the subject English Translation. The subject ran for two hours a week for 16 weeks, and it was held both in person and online. It was during this time that the students were taught how to translate between English and Lao by the method of comparing the position of words in grammatical structures in both English and Lao languages.

2.2 Instruments

This study used a pre-test and post-test of the students' translating skills, as well as a questionnaire, as instruments. Both pre-test and post-test consisted of English to Lao and Lao to English translation, and the total points possible was 40 for each test. The questionnaire included

12 closed and open-ended questions. There was specific instruction in the translation method for three hours, followed by three months in teaching and learning/practicing translation and interpretation, predominantly English to Lao. In addition, observation was used to monitor the students' translation performance during the study.

2.3 Procedure

During the first week of classroom lessons, the lecturer provided a pre-test for students to translate both English to Lao and Lao to English. For the second week of the class lessons, the lecturer and students discussed how to translate English to Lao and how to translate Lao to English. During this time, the lecturer presented information about how to translate by using a method of comparing the position of words in the grammatical structures of both languages (see 2.3.2 below), explaining and giving examples from translating a variety of text genres. This instruction took approximately 3 hours in total. From then on, students practiced text genre translation activities in class. At the end of class, the lecturer provided homework for students to do in their own time and to present in the next class.

During teaching, learning and translation, the lecturer observed the students doing their translation. He provided them with short texts, let them do oral translating or write their translation on paper and read it to class, without using their smart phone or other translation apps to translate. Finally, students were given the post-test and questionnaire, in order to compare the pre-test and post-test scores for their translation to determine the level of the students' improvement and to ask them for their opinions and suggestions with respect to the method of comparing the position of words and whether it helped them to translate phrases and sentences in text genres.

2.3.1 The types of text genres

The lecturer used many types of text genres from the internet, including national and international political, economic, sport, social

and cultural news. These types of text genres were printed out and given to students. The lecturer and students started to translate from the beginning to the end of the text by translating phrases and sentences from the text step by step and comparing the word order position between English and Lao grammatical forms.

2.3.2 Procedure for the method of comparing the position of words

As scholars strongly indicated, literal translation is the most common strategy for translation (Milikic, 2010). But how could this method be adapted to help students translate better? What part of a phrase or sentence in the SL should translators translate first, and what part next, into the TL? It is difficult to fix the method of translation from English to other languages, because problems of lexical and grammatical structural equivalence of English and other languages mean that faithful word-for-word translation will not necessarily transmit the original sense (Hejwowski, 2004, and Benjamin, 1992, as cited by Aulia, 2012).

The researcher developed some simple procedures that could help students decide step by step in which order to translate the words. They could translate English text genres into Lao by comparing the general position of words, and in particular, by showing the different position of words between the two languages so that students could recognize the differences in word order between these languages. As recommended by Mohamed et al. (2019), teachers should give explanations about translation difficulties and problem details to make students aware of word order and the differences of grammatical structures between the source and target languages, and in particular, "the teacher should illustrate through giving examples of word order, in both languages". Normally, long or short texts consist of phrases and sentences comprising different parts of speech, such as prepositions, gerunds, infinitives, verbs, adverbs, and so on. So, English-Lao text genre translation should consider different types of phrases or sentences,

as shown in the examples below:

1). In simple sentences, both English and Lao are usually in the same order. For the Lao version, the translator would normally start to translate words or phrases that come before the

SL = She eats mango.

① ② ③

TL= ລາວ ກິນ ໝາກມ່ວງ

① ② ③

The positions of words in both languages are not changed.

2). If the phrase consists of a list of nouns, including abstract things, then the positions of words between both languages are also the same. For example:

SL = peace independence democracy unity and prosperity

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥

TL= ສັນຕິພາບ ເອກະລາດ ປະຊາທິປະໄຕ ເອກະພາບ ແລະ ວັດຖະນະຖາວອນ

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥

The position of words in SL and TL are not changed.

3). If a phrase has only adjectives and a noun, and no possessives ('s), then usually it can be translated as a word-for-word back translation into Lao TL. For example:

SL = ASEAN Development Bank; TL = ທະນາຄານພັດທະນາ ອາຊີ)

① ② ③ ③ ② ①

The position of words in this phrase in SL and TL are opposite.

4). If the phrase includes an infinitive, the words and phrases that come before the infinitive are translated first, then the infinitive, and finally the words that come after the infinitive. For example:

SL = License to conduct mining exploration

① ② ③ ④

TL= ໃບອະນຸຍາດ ໃຫ້ດໍາເນີນການ ສໍາຫຼວດ ບໍ່ແຮ່

① ② ④ ③

5). If the English phrase consists of nouns, adjectives and prepositions (including gerunds as either nouns or adjectives), the noun before the preposition should be translated first, then the preposition (if necessary), then the phrase after the preposition. Usually the article (the) and sometimes the prepositions are not necessary to translate to the Lao version.

For example:

SL= Chairman of the Planning, Finance and Audit Committee

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧

verb or act as the subject, then translate the verb, and finally translate the words or phrases that are after the verb or act as object. For example:

TL = ປະທານ ກຳມາທິການ ແຜນການ, ການເງິນ, ແລະ ກວດກາ

① ⑧ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦

The article (the) is not required, and although you can put the preposition (of) in Lao, it is not required either.

6). Some forms of tense in English can be complicated in terms of word order. However, tense in Lao is not complicated, it is merely a literal orientation. Translators begin to translate the subject, verb, and finally the object of the sentence. Sometimes the wording in English

means that the translator cannot translate word-for-word into the Lao language, but use an equivalent meaning. Also, sometimes words are not written in the SL, but translators add it in TL to make readers understand better. For example:

SL= I have been living in Luang Prabang for many years.

①② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨

TL= ຂ້ອຍ ດຳລົງຊີວິດ ໃນ ຫຼວງພະບາງ ມາໄດ້ ຫຼາຍ ປີ ແລ້ວ

① ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ad

The words ‘have been’ are not necessary in Lao, and ແລ້ວ is not in SL but was added in Lao.

7). Sentences in English SL with an adverb at the beginning or the end of sentences, when translated into the Lao TL, can be the same adverb positions as the English SL.

For example:

SL= Today I walked to school slowly. TL= ມື້ນີ້ຂ້ອຍຍ່າງໄປໂຮງຮຽນຊ້າໆ

① ad ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ad ⑧ ⑨

SL= Sometimes I go to school by bus. TL = ບາງຄັ້ງຂ້ອຍກໍ່ໄປໂຮງຮຽນໂດຍລົດເມ

① ad ② ③ ④ ⑤ ad ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨

In these cases, adverb positions in both languages are the same.

8). Adverbs in the middle of a sentence in English SL, when translated into the Lao TL, sometimes have to change to the end of the sentence. For example:

SL = I always go to school by bicycle. TL = ຂ້ອຍໄປໂຮງຮຽນດ້ວຍລົດຖີບເລື້ອຍໆ

① ad ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ad ⑦ ⑧ ⑨

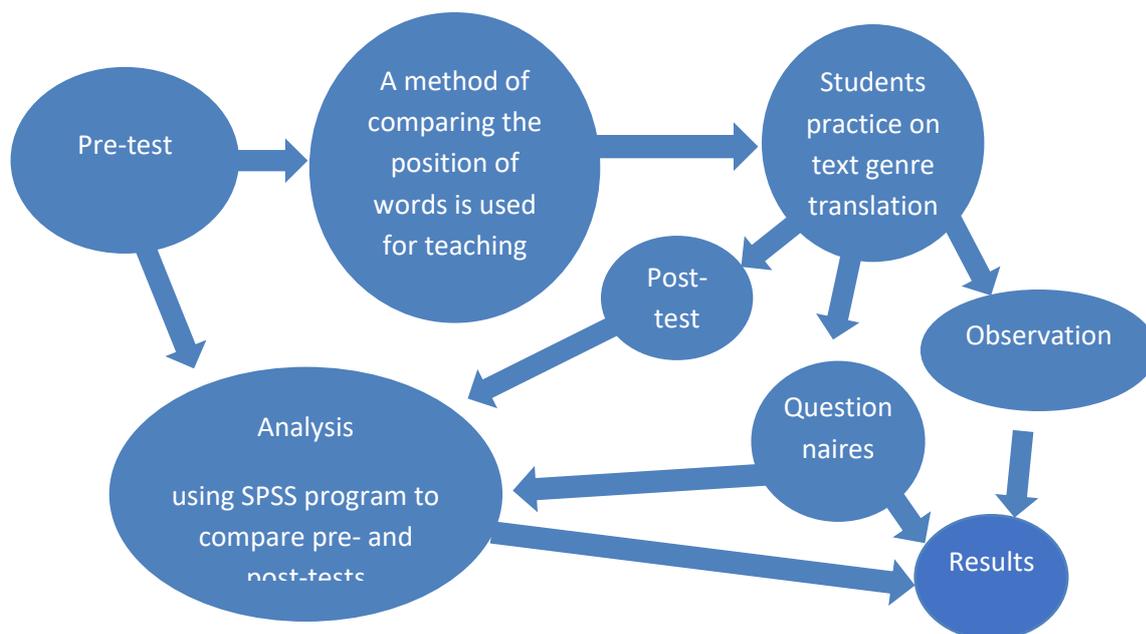
In this case, the position of the adverb in the SL is after the subject and before the main verb, but it is at the end of the sentence in TL.

However, for some adverbs in the English SL (quite, never, ever, rather, etc.), when translated into the Lao TL, the position of the adverbs in both language are not changed. Example:

SL= She never wants to go to the park with me. TL= ລາວບໍ່ເຄີຍຢາກຈະໄປສວນສາທາລະນະກັບຂ້ອຍ.

① ad ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ad ⑦ ⑧ ⑨

2.3.3 The chart of study implementation



2.4 Data analysis

The study used the SPSS program version 20 to calculate the data for the pre- and post-tests as percentages, frequencies, mean, and SD to determine the students' level of translation improvement. The SPSS program was also used to calculate the percentages for the questionnaire.

3. Results

This study aimed to determine first, whether the learning-teaching method of comparing the position of words in phrases or sentences of text genres would help students learn translation better; and second, whether the process of translation could help students learn more vocabulary. The scores for the pre-test and post-test (both 40 points each in total) and the answers to the questionnaire were used to calculate the results. Table 1 below shows students' pre-test and post-test scores.

From Table 1, we can see that the mean of the pre-test was 13.5263 with SD = 5.30585 whereas the mean of the post-test was 28.5263 with SD = 5.95696. The t-test = -8.652 and p = 0.000. As the value of p was between 0.00-0.05, the difference between the pre-test and post-test was significant, meaning the scores of the post-tests were significantly higher than the pre-tests.

Questionnaires were also returned by all 19 students. Before students learned translation by the method of comparing the position of words in phrases or sentences, 47% of students did not know how to translate, or what words should be translated first or last. They were confused about their meaning. Furthermore, 37% of them knew only a few methods of translation, and only 16% of students knew and understood how to translate in many ways. The data showed that 53% of students always faced problems about where to begin with translation. Even when they knew the meaning of all the words in the phrases or sentences, they still did not know how to translate to get the correct original meaning. While 26% of them sometimes had a problem with this situation, the remaining 21% had no problem.

With respect to learning by the method of comparing the position of words in phrases or sentences, 63% of students thought that it helped them translate English to Lao, while 37% thought it helped them a little. Furthermore, 58% of students agreed that if they understood the meaning of all the words in phrases or sentences, they could translate the correct meaning by themselves without using Google translate or other apps to help in

translation. However, 21% still had to use a translation app from the internet to help in translation, while the other 21% replied that they were not sure about this. A large proportion, 79% of students, agreed that this teaching and learning method for translation was excellent to use in the classroom, while 21% agreed that the method was good.

With respect to the second aim of this study, 84% of students thought they could learn new vocabulary from translating text genres, while 16% said they learned a little new vocabulary from translating the text genres. None indicated that they had not learned vocabulary using it.

Based on the observation of students practicing text genre translation for three months, the researcher found that the students were able to do much more by themselves than they had been able to do previously, they could convey the original meaning from English to Lao, and their TL translation was clearer and easier to understand. However, they could not avoid checking the meaning of difficult and unknown vocabulary using a dictionary.

Therefore, based on the pre- and post-tests and questionnaire, it appears from this action research study that the method of comparing the position of words in teaching-learning English to Lao translation could help to improve students' text genre translation and vocabulary.

4. Discussion

This study is similar to Clavijo & Marin (2013) as an exploratory study about identifying translation teaching strategies that used different textual genres for translation exercises and activities in the classroom to develop students' translation and make them feel accurate as translators. They found that the textual genres used in class could make students find out about the varieties of translation methods.

In particular, a method of comparing the position of words in phrases and sentences was used to improve the third-year English students' text genre translation. The process of students learning through this method is similar to

Nitirungrueang and Crabtree (2016). They reported that most students decided to use the method of separating long complex sentences into several simple sentences or phrases in translating Thai versions of news article with word-for-word translation into English versions because they could not translate long sentences from one language to another language proficiently. The data from this study showed similar results, that after learning the translation method of breaking sentences into shorter phrases and applying a comparison or word order, 63% of students said it helped them a lot, 37% that it helped them a little, and none that it didn't help them.

However, different types of text genres consisted of different kinds of vocabulary, or academic words in fields such as politics or medicine, and sometimes it was necessary for students to check the meaning of those words in the dictionary. This problem can be typical for students who start learning English as a foreign language, as the main difficulty in translation is knowledge of the two languages and the meaning of words (Schwarz et al., 2016). Nonetheless, in this study, 84% of students were able to learn more new types of vocabulary from text genre translation. This was similar to Musawi (2014), who found that students mostly used translation strategy to learn English vocabulary. Mehta (2010) also agreed that learning translation was a useful tool to learn lexis in both source and target languages, and then translation would be automatized through knowledge of corresponding surface structures of the two languages. Koletnik (2012) also noted that translation had a central role in vocabulary acquisition for EFL learner. This was also found in the present study, in that 58% of students, after learning the translation procedures, could translate English text genres to Lao by themselves without using translation through a smart phone app, if the words in those text genres did not include words that they did not know the meaning of.

5. Conclusion

Regarding the study results, it was found that teaching-learning translation by using the method of comparing the position of words of phrases or sentences in text genres can be effective. This method could help students know how to translate English to Lao, and could also help them recognize the grammar rules of both languages, which could result in greater consistency with the theory of learning translation. In addition, the students can use this method to build their vocabularies. With respect to the aims of this action research, it appears that the word order position comparison technique can be a useful tool for teaching English translation and building students' English vocabulary at Souphanouvong University.

6. Conflict of Interest

On behalf of the researcher, I initiate that the information contained in this research is my own action research, which hasn't been copied from anywhere else. There is no inconsistency of interest to either party, and it is not conducive to either party. In the event of any breach, I am personally responsible.

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Table 1: A comparison of differences in students' pre-test and post-test scores

Test	N	Mean	SD	t-test	p
Pre-test	19	13.5263	5.30585	-8.652*	.000
Post-test	19	28.5263	5.95696		