Contrastive Analysis of Persuasive Text Translation: An exploratory Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Students in Thailand EFL Context

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to study the translation ability in rend the persuasive letters from Thai to English by Vietnamese and Chinese students learning English as a foreign language in Thailand contexts in order to analyze the differences in interpreting the source language in English and grammatical errors and discursive texts. 60 participants who have passed the course of Thai usage, 30 Vietnamese and 30 Chinese students, were selected to translate the persuasive text from Thai to English under the topic of *"Let's have exercises with family"*, designed by the researchers and proved by the experts. The results showed that six common errors produced by Vietnamese and Chinese students were found in their Thai to English translation. Those errors were listed in descending order as follows: Categories of errors of wrong selection of words from source language for target language (VTN=29.34%: CHN=24.48%); noun (singular and plural) (VTN=22.82%: CHN=26.53%), subject-verb agreement (VTN=18.47%: CHN=12.24%), prepositions (VTN=17.39%: CHN=22.44%), determiners (VTN=6.52%: CHN=8.16%), and pronouns (VTN=5.43%: CHN=6.12) respectively. In addition, the results in the use of hedges and boosters found in VTN and CHN translation from Thai to English showed a very similar outcome. That was, the boosters were likely to be more dominant in both corpora. The results indicated that the students were more careful in translating the persuasive texts. Additionally, variations in the use of boosters existed in the translation of both VTN and CHN students. In the same fashion as in the hedges, it was clear that the boosters were more highly used in the two corpora especially the modal verb "should" (VTN= 16.22 per/1000 words: CHN=23.58 per/1000 words). However, the use of boosters is used higher in translation of the persuasive text from Thai to English of CHN students.

Keywords: Persuasive Text; Translation; Epistemic Modality**.**

Introduction

Language is an interesting phenomenon that humans use to communicate and express thoughts, ideas, or knowledge. Babatunde (2002) describes language as a tool for communicating and expressing culture. In addition, Osisanwo (2003) also explains that language is a tool for human communication. No matter which society, human beings have a language for transmitting knowledge for interaction and transfer knowledge.

In this globalization, English has been recognized and accepted as an international language for international communication. Therefore, the use of English in communication varies according to the regions in terms of cultural differences, concepts and perspectives in communication. The persuasive writing is a part of communication in both cross cultural communication and intercultural communication. The persuasive writing in business is a never-ending media that links a message to each other (Thanadhamma, 1994). Good writing is compared with the social inheritance of human beings that has been formed to be acceptable to society and tradition (Khundej-Amorn, 2005). In addition to writing on a piece of paper, there are other methods, such as electronic mail, fax, and memorandum. The purpose of a good business writing is to choose the appropriate texts, topics, or involve readers. Most importantly, the writers should consider the function of with written texts. Furthermore, it should provide clear information and details. Short and clear And tell the reason for writing the message. And should provide important facts, what the readers expect to read (Vissutakul, 2007).

To achieve the goal of communication, Maihom (2006) explained that a good writing should consist of 1) courtesy to get impression, 2) clarity to communicate the purposes of the written texts, 3) precise, 4) concise, 5) natural and sincere, 6) correct spelling, 7) correct grammar and proper punctuation, and 8) well-displayed. In persuasive writing, it is an attempt to convince the reader to agree with the author's point of views. The writers should be reasonable and able to prove the truth by providing some reasons or argument. The translation goes in the same fashion as in persuasive writing that the translators should discover the meaning of the source language (SL) equivalent to the target language (TL).

For this reason, business writing is always up-to-date, and good business writing reflects the knowledge, experience and culture of the author. Therefore, it may be noted that, in the context of business, there is an effective teaching and communication in both cross-cultural and intercultural communication. According to the general principles of language learning, especially English as a Second Language learners or English learners as foreign languages (ESL/EFL), it is essential that learners have to be trained in English to enhance communication, especially; the transmission of information from mother tongue to second language must be accurate. Therefore, the translation from the second language into the second language importantly plays an important role in communication.

The purpose of this study based on the theories of linguistics, applied linguistics, semantics, English for specific purposes and translation and applications, was to study the translation ability in rend the persuasive letters from Thai to English by Vietnamese and Chinese students learning English as a foreign language in Thailand contexts in order to analyze the differences in interpreting the source language in English and grammatical errors and discursive texts.

Literature review

According to Longman dictionary of contemporary English (2001), translation is commonly defined as the act of translating something or something that has been translated or the process of changing something into a different form. It is concerned with a process of transferring meaning of a language (source language (SL)) into another language (target language (TL)).

Tytler (as cited in Thairattananon, 2003) defines translation as a process of which the original meaning is completely transferred and expressed into another language. He proposed

that a translator should: 1) give a complete transcript of the ideas and sentiments in the original passage 2) maintain the character of the style and 3) have the ease and flow of the original text.

Similarly, Nida (as cited in Seesai, 2005) puts that translation consists of producing the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, both in the meaning of the text and language style. Additionally, translation process is divided into three steps: 1) analyzing and decoding the original meaning of source language by considering grammatical structures and semantic meaning of the target language; 2) transferring the message through an appropriate translation, literal translation, semantic translation, or free translation; and 3) restructuring by adjusting the grammatical structure of the target language by keeping the original meaning of the source language (as cited in Thairattananon, 2003).

Discourse and Epistemic Modality

Discursive Practice is a collaborative process between interpretation and practice, and the perception or consumption of meaning, in the context in which the communication occurs.
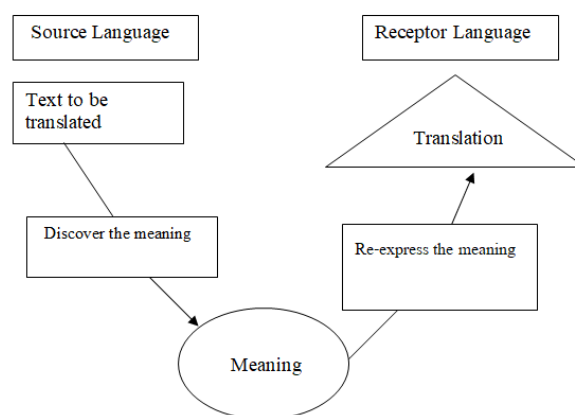
Display 1: Larson's translation process

An analysis of the discourse must reflect the knowledge, opinions, ideas that are reproduced. The conceptual knowledge that has been refurbished in the context of the various discourses has come together in a context of different elements (Hyland, 2003). That is, the discourse practice reflects the ideas, opinions, and stance or the writers via the use of the epistemic modality.

Epistemic modality is considered to be central to the process of weighing fact and evaluation, represents a continuum of commitment ranging from uncertain possibility to confident assurance (Kreidler, 1998; Milton & Hyland, 1999; Letica, 2009), and it is categorized as metadiscourse devices, which contains an evaluative function and convey the writer's attitude towards the knowledge conveyed, while engaging in a dialogue with the intended readers (Hyland, 2004). Additionally, the term "epistemic modality marker" is referred to linguistic elements, whose main function is the qualification of the writer's commitment (boosters) or lack of commitment (hedges) to the truth of the proposition (Vázquez & Giner, 2008). The epistemic modality utilized to indicate how the writers

establish relationship with the readers in the translation based on the interactional functions in the model of met discourse in academic discourse proposed by Hyland (2005, p. 53) which allow the writers to involve the readers in the persuasive texts.

1.   Hedge: words "that indicate the writer's decision to withhold complete commitment to a proposition employed as an index to recognize the alternative voices, viewpoints, and possibilities".

2.   Booster: words "that writers use to express certainty and express in what they say and to mark involvement with the topic and solidarity with their audience" (Hyland, 2005).

Methodology

The participants were 30 Vietnamese students and 30 Chinese studying English as a foreign language in Thailand contexts. Those participants, studying in the department of Business English, English for international communication, and English for cross cultural communication, have reasonable Thai language skills because they have passed the course of Thai usage 1 and 2. The participants were required to translate the persuasive letter on "*Let's have exercises with family*", approximately 250 words proved by the three experts from Thai to English, designed by the researchers   to be used for Thai to English translation within a specific time, three hours. The contents of the texts consisted of the vocabularies necessary for persuasive writing.

This contrastive analysis of the persuasive text translation was classified into two categories as follows; 1) grammatical errors found in Thai to English translation produced by Vietnamese and Chinese students, and 2) the variations in the use of the epistemic modality used to translating persuasive texts based on the interactional functions in the model of met discourse in academic discourse proposed by Hyland (2005, p. 53) which allow the writers to involve the readers in the texts including (as shown in table 1);

1. Hedge: words "that indicate the writer's decision to withhold complete commitment to a proposition employed as an index to recognize the alternative voices, viewpoints, and possibilities" (Hyland, 2005, p. 52, 178).

2. Booster: words "that writers use to express certainty and express in what they say and to mark involvement with the topic and solidarity with their audience" (Hyland, 2005).

Categories	Function	Recourses
Interactional	**Involve the readers in argument**	
Hedges	Withhold writers' full commitment to propositions	might/ perhaps/ possible/ about
Boosters	Emphasize force or writer's certainty to propositions	in fact/ definitely/ It is clear that

Table 1: Model of met discourse in academic discourse – interactional (Hyland, 2005)

Results

Table 2: Grammatical errors in Thai –English Translation of Vietnamese and Chinese Students

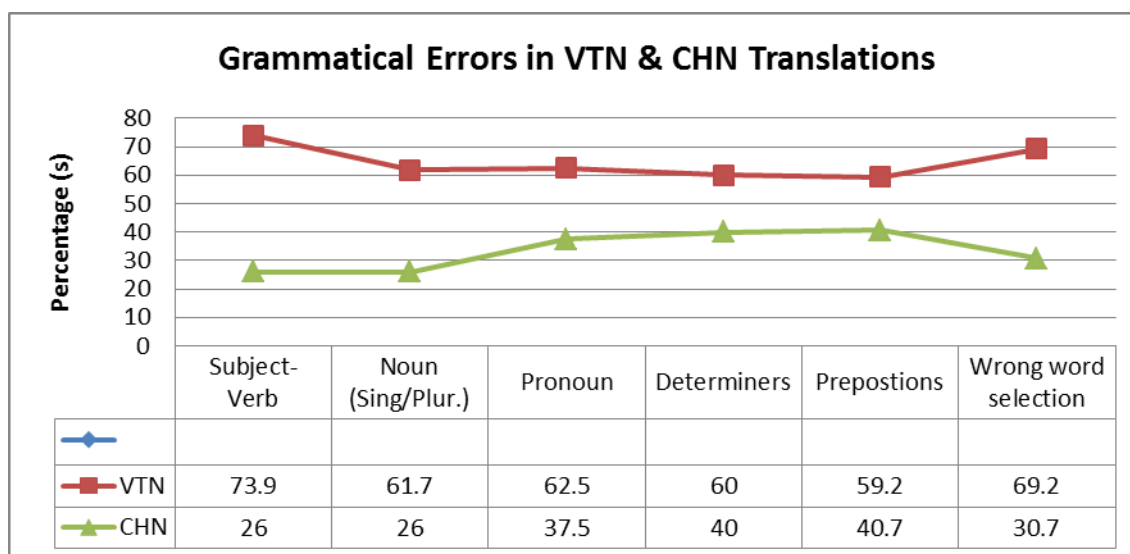| Source of Errors		VTN (N=92)		CHN (N= 49)	
		Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)
1	Subject-verb - Omission of _s (in Present tense ,third person, singular) -Omission of main verb	17	18.47	6	12.24
2	Noun (singular and plural)	21	22.82	13	26.53
3	Pronouns	5	5.43	3	6.12
4	Determiners (Articles)	6	6.52	4	8.16
5	Prepositions	16	17.39	11	22.44
6	Wrong selection of words in the SL for the TL	27	29.34	12	24.48

As shown in table 2, the results of grammatical errors in Thai to English translation of Vietnamese and Chinese students revealed six sources of errors in Thai to English translation. Regardless misspelling, both Vietnamese and Chinese students have made errors in subject-verb agreement out of 141 errors found in the corpora; omission of (_s) in present tense, third person, singular, and omission of the main verbs; nouns (singular and plural); pronouns; determiners; prepositions; and wrong selection of words from SL to TL. When considering as a whole picture, Vietnamese students have more statistical errors in translations than Chinese students in the six categories especially in wrong word selections (29.34%), nouns-singular and plural- (22.82%), subject verb agreements (18.47%), prepositions (17.39%), determiners (6.52%), and pronouns (5.53%) respectively.

In contrast to Vietnamese translation from Thai to English, Chinese students have made smaller numbers of errors. Those were; the category of noun (singular and plural) (26.53%)-not wrong word selection as found in Vietnamese students' translation; wrong

selection of word from SL to TL (24.48%), prepositions (22.44%), subject-verb agreement (12.24%), determiners (8.16%), and pronoun (6.12%) respectively.

Considered as a whole, Chinese students have made less translation errors than Vietnamese students. The errors have found in translation from Thai to English 34.7 % from Chinese students, whereas the results of Thai to English of Vietnamese students showed 65.7% as summarized in figure 1.

Figure 1: Comparison of Grammatical Errors in VTN & CHN Translations

	Subject-Verb	Noun (Sing/Plur.)	Pronoun	Determiners	Prepostions	Wrong word selection
VTN	73.9	61.7	62.5	60	59.2	69.2
CHN	26	26	37.5	40	40.7	30.7

Table 3: Hedges and Boosters found in Thai to English Translation of Vietnamese and Chinese students: Data Analysis

Vietnamese (VTN) = 6965 words token: Chinese (CHN) = 6657 words token

	Type	VTN Resources	Freq.	Per/1000 word	CHN Resources	Freq.	Per/1000 word
Hedges	Modal verbs	*Can*	72	10.34	*Can*	61	9.16
		Could	54	7.75	*Would*	59	8.86
		May	32	4.59	*May*	34	5.11
		Would	27	3.88	*Could*	28	4.21
		Might	21	3.02	*Might*	11	1.65
	Verbs	*Suggest*	17	2.44	*Suggest*	28	4.21
		Seem	17	2.44	*Seem*	15	2.25
		Tend to	4	0.57	*Tend to*	9	1.35
	Total		**244**	35.03	**Total**	**245**	**36.80**
Boosters	Modal verbs	*Should*	113	16.22	*Should*	157	23.58
		Will	65	9.33	*will*	57	8.56
		Must	43	6.17	*must*	31	4.66
	Adjectives:	*certain*	24	3.45	*Certain*	31	4.66
	Adverbs		17		*Essential*	12	
		clearly		2.44	*(-ly)*		1.80

Solidarity features	*Essential (-ly)*	13	1.87	*Actually*	7	1.05
	always	19	2.73	*always*	13	1.95
	of course	6	0.86	*of course*	4	0.60
	It is clear	6	0.86	*It is well known*	3	0.45
	It is well known	2	0.29	*It is clear*	2	0.30
Total		**308**	**44.22**	**Total**	**317**	**47.62**

The table 3 showed frequencies and occurrences per 1,000 words of the hedges and the boosters found in Thai to English Translation of Vietnamese and Chinese students. The hedges and boosters varied in the categories of modal verbs, verb, adjective and adverbs, and solidarity features.

The variations in the use of the hedge revealed the similar occurrences in both corpora (VTN=35.03 per/1000words; CHN = 36.80 per/1000 words). However, the frequencies of occurrences were different. The hedge most frequently used was the hedge "can" in both corpora. In VTN corpus, the modal *can* (10.34) was commonly used followed by *could* (7.75), *may* (4.49), *would* (3.88), and *might* (3.02); whereas, CHN frequently used *can* (9.16) followed by *would* (8.86), *may* (5.11), *could* (4.21), and *might* (1.65).

In addition, there were found that both corpora used the similar occurrences in the verb for hedging; *suggest* (VTN = 2.44: CHN = 4.21), *seems* (VTN = 2.44: CHN = 2.25), and *tend to* (VTN = 0.57: CHN = 1.35).

Interestingly, both corpora also showed a very similar frequency in the occurrences of the boosters especially the use of *should* (VTN = 16.22 per/1000 words: CHN = 23.58 per/1000 words). The rank of the frequency of modal verb used for the boosters was found similar, but a number of frequencies and occurrences per 1000 word differently occurred. There were also adjectives: adverbs, and solidarity features found in Thai to English translation of both corpora as shown in table 3.

Considering the variations in the use of the epistemic modality in translation of the persuasive letter, it was clear that Vietnamese and Chinese students significantly preferred to use more boosters than hedges in persuasive letters as shown in table 4.

Table 4: Summary of occurrence of hedges and boosters in Thai to English translation of VTN and CHN students

Hedges and Boosters	Hedges	Boosters
VTN	35.03	44.22
CHN	36.6	47.62
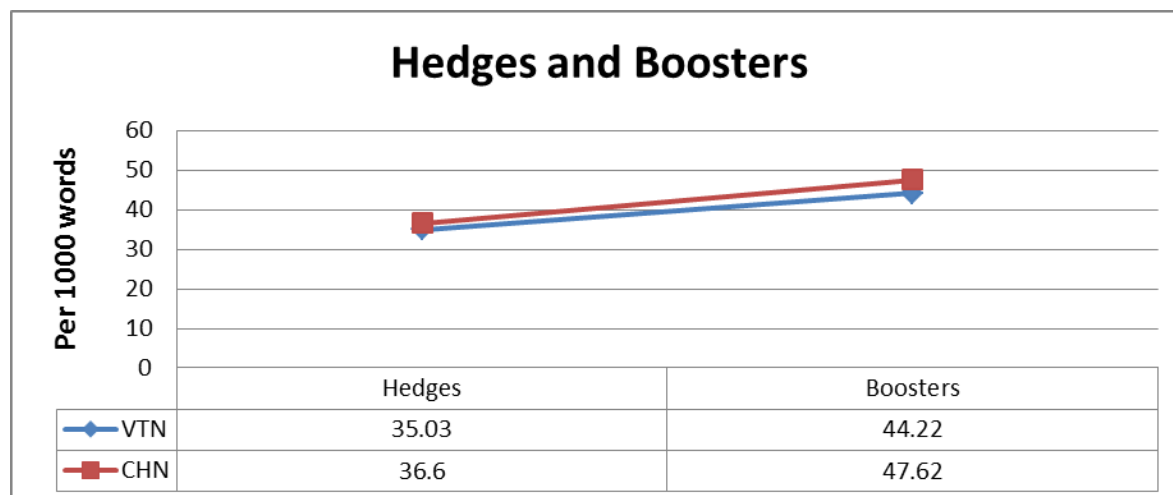
Conclusion and Discussion

Grammatical errors in Thai –English Translation of Vietnamese and Chinese Students

In this study, six common errors produced by Vietnamese and Chinese students were found in their Thai to English translation. Those errors were listed in descending order as follows: Categories of errors of wrong selection of words from source language for target language (VTN=29.34%: CHN=24.48%); noun (singular and plural) (VTN=22.82%: CHN=26.53%), subject-verb agreement (VTN=18.47%: CHN=12.24%), prepositions (VTN=17.39%: CHN=22.44%), determiners (VTN=6.52%: CHN=8.16%), and pronouns (VTN=5.43%: CHN=6.12) respectively.

Considered in comparison as a whole, Chinese students have made less grammatical errors in translations than Vietnamese students. The errors have found in translation from Thai to English 34.7 % from Chinese students, whereas the results of Thai to English of Vietnamese students showed 65.7% as summarized in table 4.

It should be noted that the differences of language structures make difficulties in translation for both Vietnamese and Chinese students in Thai to English translation; it is common that errors were found such as the omission of "_s in Present tense, third person, and singular noun for subject". This grammatical rule is well known among English learners, and normally is emphasized in English lessons. It is necessary to put _s in the present verbs of the third person, singular noun for subject. For example;

1. An older encounter *(s)* and pass *(es)* many problem *(s)*.

2. The society change *(s)* from another age, which affect *(s)* the mental health of the elderly.

The use of epistemic modality-hedges and boosters- in Thai to English translation of Vietnamese and Chinese students

As explained earlier, the epistemic modality (EM) is a very important device which contains an evaluative function and conveys the writer's attitude towards the knowledge conveyed (Hyland, 2004; Kreidler, 1998; Milton & Hyland, 1999; Letica, 2009). Additionally, the term "epistemic modality marker" is referred to linguistic elements, which functions in the expression of the writer's commitment (boosters) or lack of commitment (hedges) to the truth of the proposition (Vázquez & Giner, 2008). Each expression in the epistemic modality markers used to claim the quality of commitment reflects a writer's style of writing which varies according to linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

In this aspect, the epistemic modality utilized to indicate how the writers establish relationship with the readers in the translation based on the interactional functions in the model of met discourse in academic discourse proposed by Hyland (2005, p. 53) which allow the writers to involve the readers in the persuasive texts.

Surprisingly, the results in the use of hedges and boosters found in VTN and CHN translation from Thai to English showed similarities. That was, the boosters were likely to be more dominant in both corpora. The results indicated that the students were more careful in translating the persuasive texts. Additionally, variations in the use of boosters existed in the translation of both VTN and CHN students. In the same fashion as in the hedges, it was clear that the boosters were more highly used in the two corpora especially the modal verb "should" (VTN= 16.22 per/1000 words: CHN=23.58 per/1000 words). However, the use of boosters is used higher in translation from Thai to English of CHN students.

Take examples of Hedges and Booster in VTN and CHN students in their translation the persuasive letter from Thai to English as follows:

1. The society has changed and affected the elderly emotions; we should pay attention to them as well.

2. Our society always change(s), and it has effect for the older health; therefore, they should receive more attentions.

3. Exercise is good; it is essential that we must to persuade members in the family to take the older to have exercise together.

4. Exercise is considered (a) good activity; essentially, we should invite the family members to persuade the elder to exercise together.

In brief, there is a significant variation in hedges and booster of both corpora. Boosters are more dominant in the translation from Thai to English produced by VTN and CHN students since they are employed to make the persuasive letter more interesting.

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