

# **A STUDY OF TRANSLATION OF ENGLISH-VIETNAMESE SUBTITLES IN SELECTED ENGLISH FILMS FROM THE WEBSITE KST.NET.VN**

**Nguyen Thi Thu Ha, M.A.**

**LSD Division**

## **I. RATIONALE**

As more and more people see films not only to relax but also to learn foreign languages and cultures, the translation of subtitles becomes a common concern for many researchers. Kst.net.vn (or KST) is currently a leading site in films translation with latest movies, attracting thousands of viewers. Subtitles translated by KST have been sold to HTV3 and other TV channels as well as uploaded to share on many online film pages on the internet so KST can be said to exert a strong influence on the audience and it has played a significant role in communicating foreign languages and cultures to Vietnamese audience. The paper is conducted with the aim of offering an overview of subtitle translation as well as a useful reference for English majors at Faculty of English who start study translation theories in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year. Subtitled films are quite familiar with them so the research is expected to arouse their interest in translation of subtitles in particular and translation studies in general.

## **II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This paper is aimed at answering two questions:

- What are the procedures and strategies used in translating subtitles in ten selected films?
- What are the visible errors and how can they be corrected?

## **III. DATA COLLECTION METHOD AND PROCEDURES**

The method employed in this research is qualitative method. The data collected are analyzed based on the theoretical framework adapted from Newmark's and Baker's theories about translation procedures and translation strategies.

The selected films were taken from E-zone subtitle box of [kst.net.vn](http://kst.net.vn), including:

1. Harry Potter and the Deadly Hallows II

2. Captain America: The First Avenger
3. Cars 2
4. Hugo
5. In Time
6. Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol
7. One Day
8. Puss in Boots and Three Diablos
9. The Smurfs
10. The Three Musketeers

After collecting and transcribing the subtitles, the English and Vietnamese versions of each movie are compared with the aim of figuring out the procedures and strategies that translators employed to render the films. During this process, errors would also be noted down for the last part of the research findings. Subsequently, the results are systematically categorized into appropriate procedures and strategies based on the theoretical framework discussed in the second part of the study. The errors recorded are listed and suggestions for error correction are given afterwards.

#### **IV. FINDINGS**

##### IV.1. PROCEDURES USED IN TRANSLATING SUBTITLES OF TEN SELECTED FILMS

###### ***IV.1.1 Literal translation***

As the language in films are spoken language used in daily life so literal translation seem to be prevailing.

###### **For example:**

Only one thing was certain = Chỉ có một điều chắc chắn

You want to hire me? = Người muốn thuê thần sao? (*Puss in Boots and Three Diablos*)

###### ***IV.1.2. Transference***

Utopia Parkway/ New Haven / Paramus/ Brooklyn/ Hydra (*Captain America*)

Especially, there are spells in “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows II” and “The Smurfs” which are hardly translatable. KST translators also transfer them in their translation:

Alakazootiful! = Alakazootiful! *(The Smurfs)*

Or: Aresto Momentum = Aresto Momentum

Avada Kedavra! = Avada Kedavra! *(Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows II)*

#### ***IV.1.3. Naturalization***

- When you brought a 90-**pound** asthmatic onto my army base = Khi ông mang cái thứ hen suyễn nặng 90 **pao** đó vào lực lượng của tôi *(Captain America)*
- This is marvelous. I feel just like **Jean Valjean** =Mình cảm giác mình như là **Giăng Van Giăng** ấy. *(Hugo)*

#### ***IV.1.4. Cultural equivalent***

- Fifties. About six-foot, 180 pounds = Khoảng 50. Cao khoảng 1m82, nặng 80kg
- Why? It's a 25-foot drop = Sao ấy hả? Nó cao gần 8 mét đấy

*(Mission Impossible)*

#### ***IV.1.5. Functional equivalent***

This procedure means using “a culture-free word” or “a new specific term” to make the original word more neutral. (Newmark, 1995)

#### **Example:**

He timed himself out = Ông ấy tự sát **(In Time)**

“In Time” is a sci-fi movie about a world where people stop aging when they are twenty-five and their “life clocks” start to count down. They work and earn time to live and to pay all living expenses. If they run out of time, they will die. The example is spoken by the main character of the film (Will). He talks about a man who deliberately gave all his time to Will and died. That is to say, “time himself out” is rendered functionally to “tự sát” and it is more precise than its original idiomatic meaning.

#### ***IV.1.6. Descriptive equivalent***

- You want to go overseas. Kill **some Nazis** = Cậu muốn đi ra nước ngoài. Giết vài tên giặc Nazi.

(**Captain America**)

#### ***IV.1.7. Through-translation***

- I represent **the Strategic Scientific Reserve** = Tôi đại diện cho **Lực lượng Khoa Học Chiến Lược**. (***Captain America***)

#### ***IV.1.8. Shift or Transposition***

- Quê của mẹ = Where Mother was from (***Hugo***)
- I think that you are a **man of great vision** = Tôi nghĩ ông là **người có tầm nhìn vĩ đại**

#### ***IV.1.9. Modulation***

(a) Passive ⇔ active:

- Just doing **what needed to be done** = Chỉ là làm **những việc cần làm** thôi (***Captain America***)

(b) Positive ⇔ Double- Negative

- It's been just destroyed many moments ago by **none other than Voldemort** himself = Nó vừa bị phá huỷ mới đây bởi **chính Chúa tể Voldemort**.

(***Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows II***)

#### ***IV.1.10. Couplets***

- It is rumored there are three = Người ta đồn rằng có ba Bảo Bối Tử Thần. (modulation+ expansion)

#### ***IV.1.11. Notes, additions and glosses***

- Yggdrasil: Cây càn khôn (nối liền trời, đất, và địa ngục) (***Captain America***)

### **IV.2. STRATEGIES USED BY THE TRANSLATORS OF KST.NET.VN**

#### **IV.2.1. At word level**

- (a) **Translation by a more general word** (superordinate)

- He also told me you'd likely be **hacked off** = Anh ấy cũng bảo ta cậu sẽ **cu xử như vậy**

**(b) Translation by a more neutral /less expressive word**

- **The son of a bitch** did it = **Tên ngốc đó** thành công rồi  
(*Captain America*)

**(c) Translation by cultural substitution**

- I'm the king of **car crash television**. Mình là vua của thể loại **truyền hình câu khách nhắm nhí**
- I'm too old for **hen nights** = Em quá già cho **tiệc độc thân** rồi (*One Day*)

**(d) Translation by paraphrase using a related word**

It's **voice-activated** = Nó được **kích hoạt bằng giọng nói** (*Cars 2*)

**(e) Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words**

- If not, then **my head'll be on a pike** next to the last guy = Còn không, anh sẽ **bị sa thải** giống người trước đó (*The smurfs*)

**(f) Translation by omission**

- Collecting **scrap** metal = Thu thập những mảnh kim loại.
- Although the price of loss, **as you'll come to discover**, is a bit higher = Mặc dù cái giá của sự thua cuộc có hơi cao một chút. (*The Three Musketeers*)

**IV.2.2 Above word level**

**IV.2.2.1 Collocations**

- I just got a **quick look** = Tôi chỉ **được nhìn lướt** [a] (*Captain America*)
- **Flesh wound** = **Chỉ bị thương phần mềm** [b]

**IV.2.2.2. Idioms**

**- Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form**

- Easy in, easy out = **đầu xuôi, đuôi lọt** (*Mission impossible*)

**- Translation by paraphrase**

- I don't mean to bring up the elephant in the room = Tôi không định hỏi khó anh đâu [a]  
(*Mission Impossible*)

#### IV.3. VISIBLE ERRORS OF TRANSLATION IN COLLECTED SUBTITLES

English version	Vietnamese translation
Will: Does everyone in the ghetto steal? Sylvia: That's rich, coming from you. <i>(In Time)</i>	Will: Người ở khu này toàn ăn cắp à? Sylvia: Sự giàu có của cô đấy.

To cite Idiomagic, a website about idiom meanings, “that’s rich”, apart from meaning “it’s amazing”, is a sarcastic expression which is a remark used to remind someone that they were being critical of someone for something they themselves were guilty of. Will’s comment, hence, is suggested to be rendered as: “Cô mà cũng nói ra được câu đó cơ đấy!”

Other errors found are:

- Go easy on the cologne tomorrow = Mai dùng nước hoa đi nhé (*The Smurfs*) → Từ mai dùng ít nước hoa đi nhé
- Lines like yours might actually work there. This is Paris = Những người như người có thể làm việc ở đây. Đây là Paris → Những lời đó sẽ có tác dụng ở quê anh đấy. Nhưng nên nhớ đây là Paris.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The paper has briefly looked at the subtitles of ten most popular English films on the website [kst.net.vn](http://kst.net.vn) in the light of Newmark’s theory about translation procedures and Baker’s theory about translation strategies. The most common procedures used in translating these films seem to be literal translation and modulation while translation by omission and collocation translation are the most prevalent strategies. Though the translators have tried hard in doing their job, problems of non-equivalence can still be observed in the presence of errors resulting from either the translators’ misunderstanding of the context or their lack of linguistic competence. As stated in the beginning of the paper, this work is

expected to serve as a useful reference for the students at Faculty of English and to enrich the existing literature on subtitle translation. It is clear that the study has not been so exhaustive as what the title may suggest and the field of film translation is still open for more research.