

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

A STUDY ON TRANSLATING THE UNTRANSLATABLE CULTURE - SPECIFIC REFERENCES IN VIETNAMESE - ENGLISH LITERARY TRANSLATION OF THACH LAM'S "THE LITTLE TEA SELLER"

NGUYEN THI HONG HA* - LE THI ANH THU**

ABSTRACT: In the translating process, untranslatable culture-specific references in the source language seem to be the most challenging due to the lack of their equivalence in the target language. This research aims to investigate how translators deal with this phenomenon, including people and jobs, foods/drinks and objects in their Vietnamese - English literary translation of literary works 'The little tea seller' by Thach Lam, and the equivalence in term of semantics. The qualitative method is mainly applied to the research for a deep analysis to identify the translation technique and equivalence extent. The findings of the research reveal that the untranslatable culture-specific references are mostly translated with descriptive techniques, sometimes by a synonymy, a replacement or transference. These techniques, in spite of great efforts from translators, still leave a partial loss in meaning, especially in connotative meaning. Thus, footnotes with detailed explanations on culture are really essential for target readers to understand and perceive the culture-specific references of the source language. The research findings are expected to contribute to teaching learning translation courses, enabling learners to handle with the untranslatable culture-specific references in Vietnamese source texts.

KEY WORDS: equivalence; translation; technique; untranslatable; culture-specific references; literary works.

RECEIVED: September, 11st, 2024.

EDITED: November, 24th, 2024

1. Introduction

Translation studies has been dated since the 1970s when Holme's map was published, in which there are two major branches including 'Pure' and 'Applied'. The 'Pure' branch consists of 'theoretical' and 'descriptive', where product-oriented, process-oriented and function-oriented research are included. Studying translation techniques is regarded as process-oriented research, understanding the way, the strategies applied by translators in order to transfer the author's message in the source language (SL) into target language (TL). Since the 1980s, translation studies as a transdisciplinary field has been experiencing a 'cultural turn', in which translating the untranslatable culture references is considered to be a tough task for translators (Robinson, 2002). The lack of equivalence in the target language causes big challenges when transferring the author's message from the source text (ST). Source texts in Vietnamese language, especially literary texts regularly contain many cultural factors of Vietnamese nation - the orient culture, which are probably unavailable in the western cultures, and in the English - speaking cultures. The well-known works 'Hàng nước cô Dân' by Thach Lam is among the best Vietnamese literary works before the period of 1945. Translating the works into English seems to be challenging for translators because it draws a portrait of a little girl, who sold tea in Hanoi - the cultural and political center of Vietnam, full of special cultural traits of the ancient central city. The target text (TT) 'The little tea seller' is translated into English by a group of translators: Cowan, Swetland, Đặng Thế Bình, Farrington, Hodgkin, Hữu Ngọc in 'Vietnamese Literature' in 1982. The English translation is selected as the typical Vietnamese - English translation model to appear in the works 'Dịch thuật: Những tri thức cần thiết' by Nguyen Thuong Hung in 2014. This research investigates the translation methods resorted for transferring

*Dr.; Hanoi Open University (HOU); Email: nhha@hou.edu.vn

**University of Economics - Technology for Industries (UNETI); Email: lathu@uneti.edu.vn

untranslatable culture-specific references in Vietnamese into English and evaluates the translation equivalence compared to the original.

2. Literature review

2.1. Concept of culture-specific references

Culture is regarded as an umbrella covering a wide range of components from habits, traditions, customs, feelings, beliefs, to legends, myths, religion, geography, and so forth that a society shares and accepts in their community (Katan, 2014; Jakobson, 2014). In his iceberg model of culture with two main layers, Nguyen Quang (2008) refers to the elements like 'food', 'language', and 'appearance', which are emerged and visible on the surface layer, but the other elements including 'communication style', 'perceptions', 'beliefs', 'values', and 'attitudes' are on the underlying layer, deeply hidden in the sea bed. According to Nord (1997:137), a culture-specific reference is "*a social phenomenon of a culture A that is regarded as relevant by the members of this culture and, when compared with a corresponding social phenomenon in a culture B, is found to be specific in culture B*". Gambier (2007) also mentions the concept 'culture-specific references' as a term related to the unique cultural traits of a nation that are not existing in another culture. Several scholars (Klimberg, 1986; Newmark, 1988; Aixela, 1996) make a list of categories belonging to culture-specific references, consisting of 'fauna and flora', 'foods and drinks', 'clothes', 'architecture', 'measurement units', 'objects', 'linguistics' (proper names, puns, idioms, etc.), 'music', 'arts', 'gestures', 'customs', 'rituals', 'religions', 'mythology and popular beliefs', and 'politics'.

2.2. Untranslatability

Bassnett (2002:37) concludes that "*equivalence in translation, then, should not be approached as a search for sameness, since sameness cannot even exist between two target language version of the same text*". Translators often encounter difficulties when facing with concepts or terms in the source language that are not available in the target language. At that time, the issue of *untranslatability* occurs and Catford (1965) divides into *linguistic untranslatability* and *cultural untranslatability*. On the former level, untranslatability appears when the target language does not have lexical or syntactical replacement for the item in the source language. On the latter level, cultural untranslatability happens because of the absence in the target language culture of a relevant situational feature for the source language text. Darbelnet and Vinay (1995) also analyze linguistic different points between the two languages, driving translation impossible. Thus, it is obviously that the challenging mission of the translator is to find the best solution to deal with untranslatability in the source text, making it possible in the translated text. Such solutions, as Bassnett (2002, p.44) suggests, '*may vary enormously*' and '*itself a creative act*'.

Several previous studies have addressed culture-specific references in translation so far. For instance, the study "*English-Vietnamese translation assessment of culture-specific references in a literary text: A functional-pragmatic perspective*" by Trieu Thu Hang (2019). Through the study on proper names, personal reference forms, and regional dialects as the culture-specific references, she remarks the TT '*partially loses the connotations*' hidden in the meaningful names, person reference forms are '*covertly translated*', and regional dialects reach just '*partially functional equivalence*'. According to Catford (1965: 21), the term of 'full translation' is understood that very part of the source text is replaced by the target text material, while in a 'partial translation', some part or parts of the source text are left untranslated; they are simply transferred to and incorporated in the target text. Meanwhile, non-equivalence is identified when no target language expression is equivalent to a single source language expression. Another study titled "*Culture-specific items in the source and target literary texts: Classification of translation strategies*" by a group of Ukrainian researchers Borysenko, Slavova, Kodubovska, and Matushevskya (2024). They, after conducting research on translation strategies of two novels '*Me Before You*', and '*After You*', come to the findings that translation strategies of transference (direct borrowing, transcoding, transcoded substitution) and

calque are seen as elements of foreignizing ones, while generalization, descriptive periphrasis, cultural equivalent alone or accompanied by a footnote are viewed as domesticating ones.

3. Methodology

The research focuses on examining the translation techniques used for untranslatable culture-specific references, including names of objects, jobs, and people and assess the equivalence of denotative and connotative meaning. Therefore, research questions are formulated below:

1. *What translation techniques are applied to transfer the untranslatable culture-specific references embedded in the works ‘The little tea seller’?*

2. *How are translations of the untranslatable culture-specific references equivalent to those in the original text?*

The ST in Vietnamese is the short story “Hàng nước cô Dân” by the well-known writer Thạch Lam, published in 1934 and selected in the volume “Hà Nội băm sáu phố phường” and the TT “The little tea seller” in English was performed by a group of translators Cowan, M., Swetland, C., Đặng Thế Bình, Farrington, P., Hodgkin, E., & Hữu Ngọc, published by Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hanoi in 1982. Both of the ST and TT are selected to be in ‘Dịch thuật: Những tri thức cần thiết’ by Nguyễn Thượng Hùng in 2014. The term ‘translation techniques’ used in this study coincides with the terms ‘translation procedures’ suggested by Newmark (1988) when he refers to the way translators apply to formulate equivalence. They include 14 techniques: transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, componential analysis, synonymy, through-translation, shifts or transportations, modulation, recognized translation, compensation, paraphrase, and couplets. In term of equivalence, this study applies the categories of denotative and connotative equivalence by Koller (1979) on the culture-specific references of people and jobs, objects and foods/drinks. Qualitative method including descriptive, comparative, and interpretative analyses are resorted to evaluate the equivalence in three extents: full, partial, or non-equivalence (Catford, 1965, p.21).

4. Findings and discussion

There are 29 cases of untranslatable culture-specific references in the ST, in which 10 cases refer to people and jobs, coded from 1.1 to 1.10 and 19 cases mention foods/drinks, and objects coded from 2.1 to 2.19.

4.1. Culture-specific references of people and jobs

As can be seen from Table 1, just from the title code 1.1, there is a proper name of the shop owner ‘cô Dân’ in the ST, but in the TT the translators use componential technique ‘The little tea seller’ to substitute, obviously not one-to-one equivalent, leaving a lack of the owner’s name. Moreover, ‘cô Dân’ in Vietnamese also implies that the girl was born in the year under the star sign of a Tiger (the powerful animal symbolizes the year based on the orient culture). According to Vietnamese culture, those who are born in the ‘Tiger year’ (Dân) usually have a very strong and decisive personality. That is why when mentioning a girl who was born in the ‘Tiger year’, there is a stereotype that she will be hard to find a suitable partner because of so strong character. Actually, these associations do really exist in the source language, but impossibly expressed in the English translation. In code 1.2, 1.5 and 1.6, the name of girl is repeated in the ST, translation techniques applied for them are different from the title: transference and modulation techniques, respectively. While transference techniques keep the word form, but losing the connotative meaning (code 1.2; code 1.5), modulation technique, by contrast, reserves the denotative meaning, but losing the word form (code 1.6).

Table 1. Comparison on culture-specific references of people and jobs

Code	Vietnamese ST	English TT	Technique / Equivalence
Title 1.1	“Hàng nước cô Dân”	“The little tea seller”	Componential/ non-equivalence
1.2	Cô Dân là một thiếu nữ hãy còn	Dan is very young – her name of	Transference /

	trẻ, cứ nghe tên cô thì đủ biết.	course gives away her age	partial
1.3	Cái lối đặt tên của <i>cổ nhân</i> ta nghĩ cũng thẳng thắn và thực thà: mang cái tuổi trong tên mình, không cần giấu giếm.	This tradition honored by our <i>ancestors</i> of naming children according to the year in which they were born dates them irrevocably, every one bearing their name and age in one syllable, quite simply.	Synonymy / full
1.4	Một mình cô trông nom cái cửa hàng nước ở trước chợ Đồng Xuân, bên cạnh <i>bà cô</i> bán hàng xôi, và cũng như bà, cô bán hàng từ chín mười giờ tối, suốt đêm cho tới sáng.	She manages her little business quite alone in front of Dong Xuan market. Two paces away from her tiny stall, <i>one of her aunts</i> sells sticky rice cakes, and side by side they ply their trade from dusk to dawn, starting from nine or ten in the evening.	Descriptive/ non-equivalence
1.5	Nhưng hàng <i>cô Dân</i> có một chút đặc biệt hơn:	<i>Dan's</i> little shop is different only in one respect.	Transference / partial
1.6	Nên hàng <i>cô Dân</i> đông khách lắm, có khi cô trở tay không kịp.	So, there is no need to ask how <i>the place</i> comes to be so popular. To such an extent sometimes that the little proprietress does not quite know whom to serve first.	Modulation/ partial
1.7	Những <i>bác phu xe</i> đặt nón lên túi lấy một điều thuốc Lào...	<i>Pedicab drivers</i> lay their conical hats on the ground, searching their pocket for a roll of tobacco.	Functional/ partial
1.8	...vài <i>thầy đội xếp</i> uống chè từng ngụm nhỏ trên xe đạp gác ở hè, ...	<i>A policeman or two</i> propped astride their bicycles parked against the curb drink in appreciative sips.	Synonymy/ full
1.9	Thình thoảng, một <i>bác phu già</i> , rụt rè thâm khê bên tai cô hàng nước, hoặc trả tạm một vài xu ở món nợ còn lại, hoặc năn nỉ xin chịu nữa.	Sometimes a <i>pedicab driver</i> rather timidly will whisper a few words in her ear, leaving her with a dub coin or a request for credit.	Functional/ partial
1.10	... cái phong vị bình dân mà mộc mạc của các cô hàng nước cùng với các <i>cô hàng xén</i> kiu kịt đi chợ Đông, chợ Đoài...	the succession of simple, popular pleasures that give the streets of Hanoi their magic. The tea sellers and <i>the little street merchants of haberdashery</i> have long been the purest native flowers...	Descriptive/ partial

The Sino-Vietnamese word '*cổ nhân*' (code 1.2) transferred into '*ancestors*' can be considered as a full equivalence with synonymy technique though the formal style of the ST is difficult to gain in the TT. The pronoun '*bà cô*' in code 1.4 of the ST describes a middle-aged woman seller in terms of denotative meaning. On connotative meaning, sometimes this expression in the source language also refers to middle-aged women, still single with a difficult and serious personality, especially the women come from someone's husband family. Meanwhile, in the TT, the expression '*one of her*

aunts’ hardly conveys either denotative or connotative meaning, if not saying a mismatch leading to non-equivalence for the code 1.4.

For the nouns of jobs appearing in the ST, *‘bác phu xe’* (code 1.7), *‘thầy đội xếp’* (code 1.8), *‘bác phu già’* (code 1.9), *‘cô hàng xén’* (code 1.10), all of them were the jobs in Vietnam under the time of French colony before 1945, which are not available in the modern society. In the Vietnamese dictionary online (<https://vtudien.com/viet-viet/dictionary>), *‘bác phu xe’* means a person who pulls a vehicle by hands to carry passengers (*‘người kéo xe tay’*). The translation *‘pedicab driver’* uses functional technique, in which *‘pedicab’* is ‘a bicycle with three wheels, with a covered seat at the back for passengers, used as a form of taxi’ (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/vi/dictionary/english>). It can be said that the denotative meaning is partially lost, because the vehicle in the ST was just simple with two wheels controlled by human power. Another job is *‘thầy đội xếp’* referring to a policeman under the time of French colony. The translation *‘A policeman or two’* (code 1.8) applies synonymy technique, which can be seen a full equivalence in the TT, though in the ST the word *‘thầy’* (like other words *‘cô’*, *‘bác’*, *‘bà’*) shows the author’s and public’s respect to the job, that is invisible in the TT. *‘Cô hàng xén’* (code 1.10) means a seller who sells many small things, groceries on pavement, in a market (*hàng tạp hoá nhỏ, bán ở vỉa hè, ở chợ*) in the ST is described as *‘the little street merchants of haberdashery’* in the TT, applying descriptive technique. However, the word *‘haberdashery’* in the English dictionary, quite limited in denotative meaning, means ‘cloth, pins, thread, etc. used for sewing, or a shop or a department of a large store that sells these’ (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/vi/dictionary/english>). Thus, the ST of this case is partially lost in terms of denotative meaning. Furthermore, in Vietnamese culture, the image of *‘Cô hàng xén’* always recalls the source readers about young girls, both charming *‘with their smiles like the sunshine of autumn’* (*những cô hàng xén răng đen. Cười như mùa thu tỏa nắng* – by Hoàng Cầm) and hard-working, dynamic with doing a good business in markets. This nuance of connotative meaning of the ST is far-reaching in the translation.

4.2. Culture-specific references of foods/drinks and objects

Among the 19 culture-specific references in this group, there are 9 cases describing Vietnamese foods/drinks in the old time (See Table 2), and 10 cases mentioning objects (See Table 3).

Table 2. Comparison on culture-specific references of foods/drinks

Code	Vietnamese ST	English TT	Technique/ equivalence
2.1	...bên cạnh bà cô bán hàng xôi, và cũng như bà, cô bán hàng từ chín mười giờ tối, suốt đêm cho tới sáng.	Two paces away from her tiny stall, one of her aunts sells <i>sticky rice cakes</i> , and side by side they ply their trade from dusk to dawn, starting from nine or ten in the evening.	Descriptive/ full
2.2	Cửa hàng của cô cũng không có gì: một vài miếng trầu	Her stock in trade is not very big. A handful of <i>betel-chews</i>	Synonymy/ partial
2.3	một vài <i>phong thuốc Lào</i> , một bao thuốc lá bán lẻ,	some <i>packets of tobacco for water pipes</i> , some cigarettes,	Descriptive/ Partial
2.4	Nhưng hàng cô Dần có một chút đặc biệt hơn: cô không bán nước vối	Dan’s little shop is different only in one respect. She does not go in for <i>the tea called “Voi”, a brew of leaves of wild plants picked in the forests and which tastes very bitter</i> ,	Descriptive + transference/ partial
2.5	hay nước chè tươi	nor for <i>green tea</i> , though both these are very popular.	Synonymy/ partial

2.6 2.7	Cô bán nước chè, tôi cũng không biết <i>chè mạn</i> hay <i>hột</i> , chỉ biết là một thứ chè cũng dễ uống.	She sells only tea, real tea. I don't know whether it is <i>dried tea in leaves</i> or in <i>tips</i> , all I know is that it is a very good drink	Descriptive/full Descriptive/ full
2.8	lần túi lấy một <i>điếu thuốc Lào</i>	searching their pocket for a <i>roll of tobacco</i>	Synonymy/ partial
2.9	Cô bé em cô, hẳn vậy, sẽ ngồi bán hàng thay chị, lại que diêm, <i>điếu thuốc</i> , <i>miếng trầu</i>	She will be there in her place, selling matches, cigarretes, <i>betel</i> and tea	synonymy/partial

First of all, in terms of foods, only two kinds of food are referred to in the ST, they are 'xôi' (code 2.1) and 'miếng trầu' (code 2.2 & 2.9). In the former case, the translation 'sticky rice cakes' uses descriptive technique, seemingly achieving full equivalence. However, the food 'xôi' in Vietnam is usually wrapped in banana leaves or lotus leaves, very typically Vietnamese food for breakfast. So, the word 'cakes' in TT seems probably unsuitable for the food. The latter case 'miếng trầu' was transferred into 'betel-chews' in code 2.2 and 'betel' in code 2.9, just partially reflecting the denotative meaning as 'miếng trầu' is a finished product made by hand from betel leaves with a little quicklime. What is more, 'miếng trầu' in Vietnamese culture is the first thing ancient people offered each other to start a conversation. Also, 'miếng trầu' as a cultural special trait of Vietnam has been appeared in folk songs and poetry, in prose with the legend 'Trầu Cau' (Betel and Areca nuts) of the nation. Thus, for the source readers, 'miếng trầu' is more than something to eat, and more than something for sale that the translation hardly gains the connotative meaning.

Regarding drinks, in the ST there are 'phong thuốc Lào' (code 2.3), 'điếu thuốc Lào' (code 2.8), 'nước vối' (code 2.4), 'nước chè tươi' (code 2.5), 'chè mạn hay hột', (code 2.6, 2.7). The translators mainly apply descriptive and synonymy techniques to explain and convey the meaning, but the equivalence is partially lost. 'Thuốc Lào' is a kind of thing to smoke like tobacco, but different from tobacco. It is not as popular as tobacco, with heavier addiction, usually for low-income users. So, 'packets of tobacco for water pipes' (code 2.3) and 'roll of tobacco' (code 2.8) in the TT are not actually accurate in denotation. Similarly, 'Nước vối' (code 2.4) is translated into 'the tea called "Voi", a brew of leaves of wild plants picked in the forests and which tastes very bitter', not a really precise explanation as it is not a wild plant in the forest, or it does not taste very bitter. In fact, 'Nước vối' has a very nice color and smell with a good taste preferred by most of urban residents. Another drink 'chè mạn hay hột' (code 2.6, 2.7) replaced with 'dried tea in leaves or in tips' in the TT can be regarded as a full equivalence as it conveys the content accurately.

Table 3. Comparison on culture-specific references of objects

Code	Vietnamese ST	English TT	Technique/ equivalence
2.10	vài cái bát uống nước, như các bát uống nước ở tất cả các hàng An Nam, đặt úp xuống mặt <i>chõng</i> .	little bowls for the tea arranged carefully on <i>one minute bamboo counter</i> , just like every other little refreshment stalls in Vietnam.	Descriptive/ full
2.11	Ấm chè bọc một cái áo gai rất cẩn thận, dựng bên <i>một cái hỏa lò than</i> cũng hồng, mang một ấm nước bao giờ cũng reo sôi.	Her teapot is always really hot, winter and summer alike, kept imbedded in a pot-nest padded with hemp, placed beside a <i>charcoal brazier</i> where a pot of water is always on the boil.	Descriptive/ full
2.12	Ai uống nước đường thì đã có cốc thủy tinh; <i>một xu một</i>	For those who like their tea sugared it is <i>one sou</i> a cup.	Transference/ no equivalence

	cốc.		
2.13	Những bác phu xe đặt <i>nón</i>	Pedicab drivers lay their <i>conical hats</i> on the ground,	Descriptive/ full
2.14	Thỉnh thoảng, một bác phu già, rụt rè thâm khê bên tai cô hàng nước, hoặc trả tạm <i>một vài xu</i> ở món nợ còn lại, hoặc nằn nì xin chịu nữa.	Sometimes a pedicab driver rather timidly will whisper a few words in her ear, leaving her with <i>a dub coin</i> or a request for credit.	Shifts/ partial
2.15	Cô hàng nước An Nam là nhân vật biệt hiệu nhất của sự sinh hoạt An Nam – dù ở dưới <i>bóng đa</i> , bên ruộng lúa hay ở dưới mái hiên của thành phố	In Vietnam such tea-sellers are very typical. They are sometimes to be found among <i>the roots of the banyan trees</i> , sometimes on the raised paths between rice-fields or under little awnings in the busy streets.	Descriptive/ full
2.16	Ồ, nhưng mà chúng ta hãy trở lại cô hàng nước của <i>36 phố phường</i> .	But to return to our little tea-seller of <i>the thirty-six streets of Hanoi</i> .	Cultural/ full
2.17	Cô nhũn nhặn lắm: cô mặc một cái <i>áo tứ thân</i> nâu cũ, giản dị và đậm đang	She is a girl of simple modesty, wearing a plain brown <i>tunic sewn in four panels</i> .	Descriptive/ partial
2.18	Trong mấy ngày Tết, người ta mới thấy cô khoác cái áo mới hơn một chút, vấn <i>vành khăn</i> tròn trặn và chặt chẽ hơn.	Only at the Tet Festival will you see her in a rather less patched tunic and then she will do <i>her hair up in a special little turban</i> ,	Descriptive/ partial
2.19	Một hai năm nữa, lớn lên đi lấy chồng, ai là người thay cô trông nom ngôi hàng nước của “Hà nội là <i>động tiên sa</i> ?”	In some years she will marry. Then who will take her place at the little tea-counter in <i>the fair city</i> of Hanoi?	Synonymy/ partial

The culture-specific references of objects in the ST include dressing ‘áo tứ thân’ (code 2.17), ‘vành khăn’ (code 2.18), ‘nón’ (code 2.13), places ‘bóng đa’ (code 2.15), ‘36 phố phường’ (code 2.16), ‘động tiên sa’ (code 2.19), and other objects in everyday life ‘một vài xu’, ‘một xu’ (code 2.12, 2.14), ‘chồng’ (code 2.10), ‘hỏa lò than’ (code 2.11). In general, the translators resort descriptive technique to reach full equivalence in most cases.

However, there is a partial loss in several unique culture references to Vietnamese traditional dressing. For instance, ‘tunic sewn in four panels’ (‘áo tứ thân’). In dictionary, ‘tunic’ refers to ‘a piece of clothing that fits loosely over a person’s body, reaches to the waist or knees, and often has no sleeves’. Whereas, ‘áo tứ thân’ in Vietnam symbols a standard beauty of Kinh Bac’s girls, and of course with long sleeves. This kind of blouse much appears in Vietnamese poetry, especially in Nguyen Binh’s poem lines ‘nào đâu cái áo tứ thân, cái khăn mỏ quạ, cái quần nái đen’. Together with ‘áo tứ thân’, ‘vành khăn’ is another indispensable accessory with the hair of Vietnamese traditional girls. The translation ‘her hair up in a special little turban’ (‘vành khăn’) actually fails to touch a full equivalence. ‘Turban’, in dictionary, means ‘a head covering for a man, worn especially by Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus made from a long piece of cloth that is wrapped around the top of the head many times’. Meanwhile, ‘áo tứ thân’, and ‘vành khăn’ specifically represent the attractive beauty, and charm of Vietnamese northern girls, not mentioning any religion at all. Thus, this connotative meaning is impossible to be seen in the translation. Another case is the translation ‘the fair city’ (‘động tiên sa’), making the target readers more or less associate with the well-known

critical works ‘*The Vanity Fair*’ by William Makepeace Thackeray about the British society in 19th century. The Sino-Vietnamese ‘*tiên sa*’ means the appearance of fairy, implicating so many beautiful girls like fairy in the capital city – Hanoi. Also, this collocation refers to a great variety of merchandise recalls an anonymous poem ‘*Hà Nội như động tiên sa*’ with so exciting poem lines (‘*Hà Nội như động tiên sa/ Sáu giờ mới hết đèn xa, đèn gần/ Vui nhất là chợ Đồng Xuân/ Thứ gì cũng có xa gần bán mua*’...). All of these connotative meanings are hardly seen in the translation related to culture-specific references to dressing in the ST.

5. Conclusion

Culture-specific references in any language is always unique of the nation and always cause challenges for translators, so choosing the appropriate translation technique to transfer both denotative and connotative meaning and reach full equivalence is a hard job. This research reveals that descriptive techniques are preferably used for most cases besides synonymy, or transference, functional techniques. In terms of equivalence, only few cases gain full equivalence, while most of references on foods/drinks and dressing objects are partially lost, especially in connotative meaning. Thus, in order to avoid failing to gain full equivalence, foot-notes with detailed explanations, especially explanations on culture-specific aspect should be provided for the target readers so that they can understand the cultural uniqueness of the source language. Before translating the culture-specific references from Vietnamese into English, translators need to have an insight on Vietnamese culture, understanding the differences between the languages to find out as the closest equivalence as possible. The findings are also aimed to contribute to teaching learning translation courses, enabling learners to handle with the untranslatable culture references in Vietnamese source texts.

REFERENCES

Vietnamese

1. Lê Hùng Tiến (2018), *Phê bình đánh giá dịch thuật: Một số vấn đề về lý luận cơ bản và thực tiễn dịch thuật*. Nxb Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội.
2. Lê Hùng Tiến, Đỗ Minh Hoàng, Nguyễn Phương Trà (2006), *Lý thuyết và thực tiễn dịch thuật Anh- Việt: một số vấn đề về lý luận và phương pháp cơ bản*. Đề tài nghiên cứu cấp Quốc gia: ĐHNN-ĐHQG Hà Nội.
3. Nguyễn Quang (2008), “Văn hóa, giao thoa văn hóa và giảng dạy ngoại ngữ”. Tạp chí *Khoa học ĐHQGHN, Ngoại ngữ*, số 24(2008), tr.69-85.
4. Nguyễn Thị Hồng Hà (2024), “Yếu tố văn hóa ẩn trong dịch tên riêng từ tiếng Việt sang tiếng Anh”. Tạp chí *Ngôn ngữ & Đời sống*. Số 2 (350)-2024, tr.23-29.
5. Nguyễn Thượng Hùng (2005), *Dịch thuật: Từ lý thuyết đến thực hành*. Nxb Văn hóa Sài Gòn.
6. Nguyễn Thượng Hùng (2014), *Dịch thuật: Những tri thức cần thiết*. Nxb Tri thức.

English

7. Aixela, J. F. (1996), *Culture-specific items in translation*. E Wigmans
8. Bassnett, S. (2002), *Translation Studies*. London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
9. Catford, J. (1965), *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: An Essay in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
10. Cowan, M., Swetland, C., Đặng Thế Bình, Farrington, P., Hodgkin, E., & Hữu Ngọc (1982), *The little tea seller in Hanoi of the thirty-six streets and guilds*. Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hà nội.
11. Darbelnet, J and Vinay, J. P. (1995), *Comparative Stylistics of French and English: A Methodology for Translation* (translated and edited by Sage, J. C. and Hamel, M. J.). Amsterdam and Philadelphia. John Benjamins.
12. Jakobson, J. (2014), *Introducing Language and Intercultural Communication*. London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

13. Kade, O. (1968), *Translation theory- Today and Tomorrow*. Leipzig.
14. Katan, D. (2014), *Translation Culture: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
15. Klimberg, G. (1986), *Children's Fiction in the Hands of the Translator*. Malmo: Liber/Gleerup.
16. Koller, W. (1979), *Equivalence in Translation Theory*, translated from the German by A. Chesterman (ed.).
17. Borysenko, N., Slavova, L., Kodubovska, O., Matushevskaya, N. (2024), *Forum for Linguistic Studies* 6(1): 1988. Academic. Culture-specific items in the source and target literary texts: Classification of translation strategies.
18. Newmark, P. (1988), *A Textbook of Translation*. Oxford. Prentice Hall.
19. Newmark, P. (1991), *About translation*. Toronto, Sydney: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
20. Nord, C. (1997), *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
21. Robinson, D. (2002), *Becoming a Translator: An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Translation*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
22. <https://vtudien.com/viet-viet/dictionary>
23. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/vi/dictionary/english>

**Nghiên cứu về dịch các yếu tố văn hóa đặc trưng bất khả dịch
trong bản dịch Việt - Anh tác phẩm văn học “Hàng nước cô Dân” của nhà văn Thạch Lam**

Tóm tắt: Trong quá trình dịch thuật, các quy chiếu đặc biệt về văn hóa bất khả dịch trong ngôn ngữ nguồn dường như là thách thức lớn nhất với dịch giả do chúng thiếu sự tương đương trong ngôn ngữ đích. Nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích tìm hiểu các thủ pháp mà dịch giả dùng để giải quyết hiện tượng này, bao gồm các quy chiếu về con người và công việc, đồ ăn/thức uống, và đồ vật trong bản dịch văn học Việt - Anh tác phẩm ‘Hàng nước cô Dân’ của nhà văn Thạch Lam và sự tương đương về mặt ngữ nghĩa của chúng. Phương pháp định tính chủ yếu được áp dụng để nghiên cứu phân tích sâu nhằm xác định thủ pháp dịch và tương đương dịch thuật. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy rằng các qui chiếu đặc biệt về văn hóa bất khả dịch hầu hết được chuyển tải bằng thủ pháp mô tả, đôi khi bằng từ đồng nghĩa, hoặc mô phỏng. Những thủ pháp này, mặc dù thể hiện nỗ lực rất lớn của người dịch, vẫn để lại sự thất thoát một phần về nghĩa, đặc biệt là nghĩa biểu cảm. Vì vậy, chú thích cuối trang với các giải thích chi tiết về văn hóa nguồn thực sự cần thiết để người đọc đích cảm nhận được hết cái hay cái đẹp của ngôn ngữ nguồn. Kết quả nghiên cứu được kỳ vọng sẽ góp phần hỗ trợ giảng dạy các khóa học dịch thuật, giúp người học có thể xử lý các quy chiếu văn hóa đặc trưng bất khả dịch trong văn bản nguồn bằng tiếng Việt.

Từ khóa: tương đương; dịch thuật; thủ pháp; bất khả dịch; quy chiếu đặc biệt về văn hóa; văn học.