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Exploring translator's strategies and competence in English translation of *Đường Xưa Mây Trắng* by Thich Nhat Hanh

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Abstract

This study reports an investigation into translation strategies employed in Mobi Ho's English translation of selected Buddhist texts from *Đường Xưa Mây Trắng* by Thich Nhat Hanh (1992). The study also discusses the underlying translation competence through the choice of those translation strategies. Using content analysis, the study quantifies and analyses the presence and significance of translation strategies in the selected texts and the relations of such strategies to the translator's competence in the light of translation competence models and translation strategy categorization in the contemporary translation theories. The findings showed that most translation strategies and their related techniques previously discussed in literature as prevalent in translating Buddhist texts were found in the corpus. It was implied that translating Buddhist texts from Vietnamese into English was complicated as it requires the translator's advanced levels of language competence, especially the profound knowledge of Sino-Vietnamese and Sanskrit, apart from contemporary Vietnamese. Besides, extra-linguistic competence and strategic competence were also significant in decision-making about the translation strategies and techniques to be used. The study emphasized the influences of the translation competence on the choice of translation strategies. This study's results suggest the necessity of incorporating both translation competence and strategies into the training of professional translators.

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Introduction

The critical role of translating Buddhist texts into modern languages to save "a vast swathe of Buddhist civilization from extinction" (Khyentse Foundation, 2009, p. 6) was highlighted at the Translation Conference 'Translating the Words of the Buddha' in India. The well-known Bhutanese Lama Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche also appealed for the need of accelerating the spread of the Buddha's teachings in the context of growing global interest in Buddhism. In further support of the necessity of translating Buddhism, Martínez-Melis (2010) suggested that the translation of Buddhist terminology should be taken into consideration when the demands for Buddhism practice as a living tradition in the West have increased.

In Vietnam, Buddhist followers account for over 14 million (Duy Linh, 2023), not to mention the number of non-Vietnamese and overseas Vietnamese followers that has also increased, urging a need of translating Vietnamese Buddhist texts into foreign languages to spread the Buddha's teachings and spirits. The problem arising is that not all translators are Buddhists, and they will have certain challenges in understanding the majority of Buddhist terms and expressions even in Vietnamese, let alone translating them into another language. This is due to a frequent combination of Vietnamese, Sino-Vietnamese, and Sanskrit found in the Buddhist texts. The complication of terms in the texts, no doubt, requires translators' good specialized translation competence. However, notwithstanding the high demand of English translations of Buddhist texts, issues related to translating Buddhist-specific words into English has not captured much attention in academic studies, especially in the language pair of English and Vietnamese. Moreover, previous research often treated translation strategies and translator's competence as separate aspects, and so little has been discussed regarding the relations between the translator's competence and the choice of translation strategies they make in their work. This study, therefore, attempts to bridge this gap by surveying a particular translated work to gain insights into the mutual influences between the translator's competence and choice of translation strategies. The selected Buddhist texts were from an influential published work *Đường Xưa Mây Trắng* by Thich Nhat Hanh and its English version 'Old Path White Cloud' translated by Mobi Ho. The study is guided by concepts of translation competence and translation strategies in the contemporary translation theories. It seeks answers to the following questions:

(1) What are the prevalent translation strategies employed in translating Buddhist terms in *Đường Xưa Mây Trắng*?

(2) How do these choices of translation strategies underlie the translator's competence?

Literature Review

Translation Competence

Translation competence has been discussed in several models and frameworks. In the early days of translation competence model development, language competence played a very important role. Campbell (1991) investigated the translation from second language (L2) into the first language (L1) and developed a translation competence model in which language competence was identified as L2 textual competence, the first among three kinds of competence that a translator needs to acquire to perform the translation process. Neubert (2000) separated textual competence as a different ability. Language competence (or 'linguistic competence' in Neubert's term) involves the understanding of the grammatical and lexical features of the source and the target languages as well as the ability to distinguish the conventions in both languages.

Recently, translation competence has been researched and developed into models for the sake of training and professional evaluation. In the translation competence model proposed by a Spanish research group PACTE (2003), language is a category included in the *bilingual competence* that encompasses the pre-requisite knowledge of language of the two working languages, including the command of grammar and vocabulary, the understanding of pragmatic and socio-linguistic features, and the adherence to the textuality conventions. In addition to language competence, PACTE (2003) also introduced the *extra-linguistic competence* (the knowledge about a particular field and about the world in general), the *knowledge about translation competence* (translating strategies and techniques and professional issues), the *instrumental competence* (knowledge related to the use of sources, technology, etc. to assist the translation) and *strategic sub-competence* (procedural knowledge to handle the translation process).

Another influential translation model has been developed within a project of the European Union, namely, the European Master's in Translation (EMT) framework of translation competence. This competence model sets standards for training professional translators. In this model, language competence is seen as the most prominent criterion and requires a translator to have an advanced level of language competence in at least two working languages. The latest 2022 version includes 36 criteria, covering the five areas of competence necessary for the translators' performance in their career. Among these five areas, language is included the area of language and culture competence, which is argued by EMT expert group as "the driving force behind all the other competence" (EMT, 2022, p.

6). That said, the EMT competence framework is service-oriented because it not only involves translator trainees in a comprehensive set of criteria for the translation process but also equips them with "the ability to perform and provide a translation service in line with the highest professional and ethical standards" (EMT, 2022, p. 4).

The concept of translation competence in general and the term 'language competence' as it is used in this study refers to the system of knowledge and skills necessary for a thorough comprehension and intelligible production of working languages in translation. The notion is based on a combination of systems of competence described in the models of EMT (2022) and PACTE (2003). Due to the complexity of the languages in Buddhist texts that will be subsequently discussed, the language competence in the present study is not necessarily limited to two languages as stated in translation competence models. Yet, it should be "working languages", which will be more than two languages essential for the current purpose of the translation product. Nevertheless, the concept of 'competence' in this study also focuses on both the structural and functional aspects of languages in use, as described in PACTE model, including skills to manage the translation procedure and select the appropriate translating techniques. The translator's competence is manifested through the approaches or strategies of translation; and the choice of translation strategies is evidence of a translator's professional competence.

Strategies in Translation of Buddhist Texts

There have been apparent discrepancies between the points of view of scholars on terms in translation studies, especially among *translation procedures, translation techniques* and *translation strategies*, both terminologically and conceptually (Molina & Albir, 2002). Sun (2013, p. 5408) explained that "the term 'strategy' in 'translation strategies' is often used synonymously with such terms as 'procedure,' 'technique,' 'method,' 'tactic,' 'approach,' and so forth. Their meanings overlap, and translation researchers define them in various ways." However, Molina and Albir (2002) made a clear distinction between the two concepts 'techniques' and 'strategies.' Accordingly, a translation strategy must be the answer to the question of how the translator solved the problems that have emerged during the translation process, whereas a translation technique revealed how the result of the translation functioned in relation to the corresponding unit in the original text. In the light of this definition, a translation strategy is an umbrella term that encompasses many translation techniques. Both terms will be used in the present study to consider individual instances of translation.

In translating Buddhist texts between Vietnamese and English, there are several essential strategies to handle the translation process due to the non-equivalence between the two languages.

The classical approach to translating Buddhist texts has been influenced by Hsuan Tsang's five categories of non-translation (Zhao, 2021). Non-translation does not mean there is no translation at all (i.e., omission), but the use of transliteration for 'untranslatable' items due to a semantic mismatch between the two languages. The five categories of untranslatable terms are handled by (1) retaining Sanskrit pronunciation due to mysterious nuances, (2) maintaining the original words to avoid ambiguity due to multiple meanings, (3) omitting the word due to no target language (TL) vocabulary equivalents, (4) maintaining the existing transliteration, and (5) maintaining the word for ideographic accuracy (Zhao, 2021). These five untranslatable categories serve as a guide for transliteration as an essential and feasible method in Buddhist translation.

Modern translation theorists have considered Buddhist terms as part of culture-specific terms or concepts (Aixela, 1996; Baker, 1992; Newmark, 1988; Schäffner &Wiesemann, 2001). Research into translating Buddhist texts in various languages also pointed out similarities in translation strategies to maintain the historical and religious nuances of the source texts. If the concept is subject-specific in the TL, it is common to use 'transference' in translating Buddhist texts (Munday, 2008; Pym, 2007). Transference is a strategy that encompasses techniques such as borrowing, adaptation and transliteration, which is a kind of sound adaptation, trying to adjust the source language (SL) sounds as closely as possible to the TL for easy pronunciation (Newmark, 1988). For example, the Sanskrit term *Sotāpatti*, which literally means entering the stream – the first of the four enlightenment stages (Thich Chon Thien, 2010), is translated into Vietnamese as *Sơ quả* by imitating the original sound. Compared with the classical approach, this strategy is corresponding to the three categories: (1) retaining Sanskrit pronunciation, (2) maintaining the original words, and (4) maintaining the existing transliteration.

Martínez-Melis (2010, pp. 141–142) suggested 'creation' (creating a new term) as a translation strategy for a concept that is non-existent in the TL, exemplifying the translation of Sanskrit terms of suffering into two Spanish phrases meaning 'suffering from pain' and 'suffering of suffering'. This strategy is often realised in the use of a superordinate (a word with general meaning) or a subordinate (a word with specific meaning).

In case there is a similar concept in the TL, it is plausible to use the strategy of 'equivalence'. Equivalence, which covers the content while maintaining the meaning and context in the

SL, is realised in a descriptive equivalent, a contextual equivalent (a slight adaptation to a TL term that does not entirely cover the meaning in the SL) (Martínez-Melis, 2010), and a formal equivalent, which includes literal translation (a word-for-word translation) and through translation (a literal translation of collocations).

Characteristics of Vietnamese Buddhist Texts and Challenges in English Translation

The import of Buddhism to Vietnam was due to cultural and commercial exchanges as well as the thousand years' Chinese invasion. This brought into the country many scriptures and important documents written in Chinese. As a result, Chinese vocabulary has played an important part of Buddhism contents (Thich Minh Canh, 2003). These Chinese-origin words, however, have been pronounced in Vietnamese ways, creating a set of vocabulary in Vietnamese called Sino-Vietnamese. Prior to the emergence of *chữ quốc ngữ* (the national scripts written in the Roman characters), the Sino-Vietnamese, which was Chinese words pronounced in Vietnamese ways, was the official language in Vietnam. In modern Vietnamese, the Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary performs stylistic functions that express formality, elegance, abstractness, and ancientness. These words are present in religious, political, diplomatic and academic texts, to name but a few. In Vietnamese Buddhist texts, the Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary are often the nouns referring to religious establishments (e.g., *thiền viện* ['monastery']), schools of Buddhism (e.g., *Bắc tông* ['Mahayana'] and *Nam tông* ['Theravada']), Buddhist rituals (e.g., *Phật Đản* ['Buddha's Birthday']) or titles (e.g., *thiền sư* ['Zen master']) (Thich Minh Canh, 2003). In addition, Buddhist concepts, Buddha's life and teachings, and secret codes in the scripture were presented in Sino-Vietnamese for the sake of formality, or due to untranslatability.

Most of the Buddhist texts in European languages are known to be translated from Tibetan or Chinese. Yet, there has been a rise in the translations of Vietnamese Buddhist texts into other languages, the majority of which are in English, for many reasons, including the increasing oversea Vietnamese population whose oversea-born generations speak better L2 than the mother tongue, and the growing number of expatriates in Vietnam. Nguyen (2019) argued that Vietnamese translators of Buddhist texts have had both advantages and disadvantages. Vietnamese translators have little difficulty understanding Buddhism because it is a popular religion in Vietnam with widely-shared common Buddhist knowledge. However, the problem with Vietnamese translators when they translate Buddhist texts into English is the cultural differences between the SL and the TL (Nguyen, 2019).

Buddhist-specific items are considered cultural terms, and therefore, translating them requires profound linguistic and cultural knowledge of the working languages, that is, both language competence and extra-linguistic competence. Translators usually have to work with more than one source language in translating Buddhist texts because Buddhist texts have many words from Indic languages and Chinese (Berzin, n.d.). This is a real challenge for translators. Mahmoud (2015) argued that the biggest obstacles in dealing with religious documents originated from conceptional discrepancies and a wide range of terminology. Buddhism as practised in Vietnam is shaped by both Mahayana and Theravada traditions, influenced by local culture and history. Concepts, practices, and terminology that are familiar to Vietnamese speakers may not have direct equivalents in English or Western religious traditions. Even if there are equivalents, vocabulary related to spiritual meaning in Vietnamese may not carry the same nuances in English, making it challenging to translate terms in a way that preserves both their literal and symbolic meanings. Therefore, it seems that the work of translating religious text is one of the most challenging kinds of translation, requiring an extremely high degree of precision, carefulness, and cautiousness. These problems can also face Vietnamese translators when they deal with Buddhist terms. There have been dozens of inconsistencies between the original Vietnamese Buddhist words and their English equivalents (Thich Tam Chanh, 2009).

Overall, translating Buddhist texts from Vietnamese into English involves balancing linguistic accuracy with cultural and religious senses. A successful translation requires the translator to have not only an insightful understanding of Buddhism and the context in which the text was written, but also sound knowledge of Buddhist terminology. On the premise that Vietnamese translators of Buddhist texts must not only be competent in Vietnamese and English, but also have semantic insights into Sino-Vietnamese and Sanskrit, this study looks into the authentic texts from a particular Buddhist material, Thich Nhat Hanh's *Đường xưa mây trắng*, translated into English as 'Old path, white clouds' by Mobi Ho to explore the importance of translator's translation competence and its manifestation through the choice of translating strategies.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopted the interpretive qualitative research design, combined with quantitative enumeration of translating strategies to assist the qualitative analysis of the translator's competence through the use of translating strategies.

The Corpus

Đường xưa mây trắng ('Old Path, White Clouds') is a collection of 81 stories about the life and teachings of Buddha, drawn from Pali, Sanskrit, and Chinese sources and retold by Thich Nhat Hanh (1992) and translated by Mobi Ho, who is a specialist translator in Buddhist works. This translation has contributed to making the book accessible to thousands of Western readers. The book has been rated 4.4 stars out of five on Good Reads.

Within the scope of the present study, sixteen stories were selected as evidence for the translator's strategies and competences. These chapters illustrate the most important events in Buddha's life, according to the introduction of the book and reader's evaluation. The contents of these chapters were about Buddha's birthday and childhood (chapter 6), his renunciation day (chapter 12), the events happening before he became a Buddha (chapter 3 and chapter 5), the moment when *Gautama* achieved absolute enlightenment and became a Buddha (chapter 17 and chapter 18), and the moment when he entered *Nirvana* (chapter 80), as summarized in Table 1

Table 1 A summary of selected chapters in *Đường xưa mây trắng*

Chapters	Titles	Chapter's main ideas
3	*Mớ cỏ Kusa* ('An armful of kusa grass')	The chapter recounts the meeting between *Svasti*, a buffalo-boy, and the Buddha-to-be whose name is *Gautama*. *Svasti* gives *Gautama* a bunch of *Kusa* grass so that the Buddha-to-be can use that grass as a cushion when he meditates.
5	*Bát sữa cứu mạng* ('A bowl of milk')	This chapter tells a story about a woman whose name is *Sujata.* She brings to *Gautama* a bowl of milk, saving his life when he is about to starve to death.
6	*Bóng mát cây hồng táo* ('Beneath a rose-apple tree')	The chapter describes the birth of Prince *Siddhartha*.
12	*Con Ngựa Kanthaka* ('Kanthaka')	This chapter outlines the scene when Buddha decides to leave his family to live a monastic life.
17	*Chiếc lá Pippala* ('Pippala leaf')	In this chapter, beneath the *pippala* tree, the Buddha discovers the nature of selflessness, impermanence, and interdependence of all things in the universe.
18	*Sao mai đã mọc* ('The morning star has risen')	In this chapter, *Gautama* attains the absolute enlightenment and becomes the Buddha.
22	*Chuyển Pháp Luân Kinh* ('Turning the Wheel of Dharma')	This chapter is about the first teachings of the Buddha after his enlightenment.
36	*Bông sen duyên kiếp* ('Lotus vow')	In this chapter, the Buddha tells the story of one of his past lives where he met his ex-wife.
44	*Tứ đại tan rã rồi tứ đại lại kết hợp* ('The elements will recombine')	In this chapter, the Buddha gives lectures on the transitory nature of the body.
45	*Cánh cửa phương tiện* ('Opening the door')	This chapter focuses on the eight rules that nuns must follow.
50	*Một vóc cám rang* ('A handful of bran')	This chapter describes a special situation in which the Buddha has to eat bran during three months due to the drought.
56	*Trùng sinh ân nặng* ('Full awareness of breathing')	This chapter highlights the Buddha's teachings on the Full Awareness of Breathing.
67	*Nước biển chỉ có vị mặn* ('Ocean poet')	In this chapter, the Buddha delivers the lesson about the characteristics of the sea.
70	*Bụt từ đâu tới và sẽ đi về đâu?* ('Where will the Buddha go?')	This chapter centers on the nature of all Dharmas.
80	*Hãy tinh tiến lên để đạt giải thoát* ('Be diligent!')	This chapter portrays the moment when the Buddha passed away.
81	*Đường xưa mây trắng* ('Old paths white clouds')	This chapter recounts certain important events in Buddhism, occurring after the Buddha's demise.

Procedure of Data Collection and Processing

Data collection underwent these stages: First, the original book *Đường xưa mây trắng* ('Old Path, White Clouds') and its English version were examined to select the chapters as presented and explained above. Next, data were aligned. As manual alignment can be effective with small-sized corpora (Vertan & Gavrila, 2011), the corpus texts in the data set were aligned manually with the help of *Smartcat*. Both the source and translated texts were then entered into *Smartcat*, where they were broken into segments. The English segments were manually aligned to match with their Vietnamese equivalents. This step also involved identifying instances of Buddhist terms. The segments containing Buddhist terms and their equivalents to be considered were then extracted to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet organized in parallel for strategy labelling and further analysis.

To minimize the subjectivity, all authors in this study were involved in the data coding process and performed independently. Once the strategy identification was completed, they discussed and resolved the discrepancies by reviewing similar instances in previous studies until a final decision was agreed upon.

Data Analysis

Selected Buddhist terms were identified and grouped in terms of translating strategies and techniques. Percentage calculation was applied to find out the common strategies in translating Buddhist terms. Instances were presented in the source term (ST) and target term (TT) in parallel and numbered for convenient reference. For example,

ST: *sa môn*

TT: hermit

Reasons for the employment of particular strategies and techniques were discussed with reference to the translator's competence models with more a focus on language competence. As mentioned, as the translator was a specialist in translating Buddhist works, the present study takes a premise of argument that the translator must be familiar with and competent in all Buddhist terms.

Results

The Distribution of Translation Strategies

A total of 248 instances of Buddhist terms were found across the 16 selected chapters of *Đường xưa mây trắng* ('Old Path White Cloud'). Strategy groups from both classical and modern approaches mentioned earlier were all found with eight particular techniques applied to the translation of Buddhist terms (Table 2).

Most noticeable is the use of the strategy group of equivalence, accounting for more than half of the instances found in the data set. Within this type of strategy, literal translation made up 30 percent, followed by descriptive equivalent (18%). Contextual equivalent and through translation equally contributed 4 percent each to the distribution of the translation strategies across the chapters in *Đường xưa mây trắng* ('Old Path, White Cloud').

Table 2 Distribution of translation strategies in *Đường xưa mây trắng*

Strategies	Techniques	No.	Percent
Transference	Borrowing	17	7
Equivalence	Descriptive equivalent	44	18
	Contextual equivalent	10	4
	Literal translation	74	30
	Through translation	10	4
Creation	Superordinate	27	11
	Subordinate	20	8
	Omission	46	18

The fact that literal translation was the most commonly used technique to translate Buddhist terms implies that the technique is helpful. By using literal translation, the actual meaning of the original text will be saved from getting deviated. This is supported by Newmark (1988) who stated that literal meaning helped to secure referential and pragmatic equivalence to the original. Descriptive equivalents came second on the list (18%). They benefit the Vietnamese-English translations in certain ways, such as clarifying uncommon notions, providing information about the special characteristics of the translated items, or emphasizing the importance of the described objects, etc.

In the creation strategy group, omission accounts for 19 percent of the total, making it another second most used translation technique (together with descriptive equivalent). The advantages of applying omission in translating Buddhist items vary from avoiding embarrassment for readers when encountering completely unfamiliar concepts to creating a more acceptable text in the target language. Omission may also arise

out of the cultural clashes that exist between the SL and the TL, when there is no equivalent found in the TL to describe the source item (Iacovoni, 2009). Superordinate and subordinate were common techniques. A superordinate enables the translator to offer a more acceptable text consisting of common vocabulary items instead of rare ones, while a subordinate, in several circumstances, is effective in terms of highlighting one specific nuance of a comprehensive definition. In the transference strategy group, only instances of borrowing were found. This technique was employed to translate mainly proper names and religious concepts that came from Sanskrit, but the borrowing process is somewhat more complicated. This will be subsequently discussed in detail.

Translator's Language Competence reflected through Strategy Manipulation

The strategy of equivalence

As mentioned earlier, the strategy of equivalence was realised through formal equivalents, descriptive equivalents and contextual equivalents. Regarding formal equivalents, both techniques of literal translation and through translation occurred in the data set. Although literal translation was the most used technique found across the 16 chapters of *Đường xưa mây trắng* ('Old Path White Cloud'), the process of translating is not as simple as rendering the literal meaning of the word. There is a hidden process of translating from Sino-Vietnamese into pure Vietnamese before a corresponding English expression is rendered. This shows an advanced level of language competence of the translator. The following extracts illustrate different situations.

[1] ST: *ra đi tìm Đạo*
TT: go and seek the Way

In [1], although the translated text relatively copies the form of the original expression, with *ra đi* meaning "leave" or "go" and *tìm* as "seek", the word *đạo* is Sino-Vietnamese synonymous with *đường*, meaning "the way". In a similar vein, *thiền hành* in [2] is a compound Sino-Vietnamese. *Thiền* indicates a state of quietness and concentration, *hành* means *đi bộ* ('walk'). The translator needs to have a good command of Sino-Vietnamese in Buddhism to interpret before rendering words:

[2] ST: *thiền hành*
TT: meditation walking

The order of words in the two phrases is word-for-word corresponding while it is often noticed that Vietnamese and English phrases have inversed orders. This is because Sino-Vietnamese phrases have the inverse order compared with pure Vietnamese ones, thus having the same order with English ones. However, in some cases, the order of words in the phrase is complicated, as in [3], because the Sino-Vietnamese expression has the word order of pure Vietnamese.

[3] ST: *quán chiếu tự tánh vô thường*
TT: penetrate the impermanent nature

In Vietnamese, *quán chiếu* is a Buddhist terms that means to think carefully about something and conceive it from one's own experience. The English word "penetrate" that means to manage to see through something can partly help convey the meaning. The word *tự tánh* is translated literally into English as "nature", and *vô thường* which literally means "not lasting forever", is translated as "impermanent". The rendering of individual words requires the translator's profound knowledge of the field as well as a language competence that is not bilingual, but plurilingual, considering the varieties of Vietnamese in Buddhism.

In the cases of collocations, as there is no equivalent found in the target language, the translator adopted through translation by translating components of the collocations to create a new vocabulary in the TL.

[4] ST: *Nhập lưu*
TT: Stream-Enterer

Nhập lưu, which literally means entering the stream, has been created into a new English term. This rendering helps the translator avoid a long explanation of the term, but its efficiency in carrying the meaning to the reader remained sceptical. Translating Buddhist terms not only needs the translator's multi-language competence but also requires the translator's ability to understand and/or anticipate the target reader. This is referred to as the service provision competence in the EMT (2022) translation competence framework. It requires the skills to offer and handle translation work to meet the demands of the client. The use of through translation failed to gain a high level of service provision competence, suggesting a Buddha centric disposition. Fortunately, through translation occurred only 10 times in the data.

Due to the low popularity of Buddhist-related words in everyday use, an optimal way of translating these words is to clarify them with description. Descriptive equivalent, therefore, holds great significance in helping the readers fully understand the source concepts. Instances of descriptive equivalents appeared in the data set with a fairly high frequency. For example, *bát* was translated into English as "begging bowl". The word *bát* is literally translated as "bowl". However, in Buddhist context, it not only refers to the concept of a normal bowl but to one of the six necessary personal belongings of a monk or a nun in their monastic life (Thich Tri Thu, 2023). According to the sacred precepts, monks have to carry a bowl to ask for food in the morning and will eat with that bowl at

noon. In the TT version, the word "begging" helps to describe the function of the "bowl" in Buddhist life.

Another Buddhist word, *xuất gia,* was translated into a lengthy expression as "leave home and become a monk". Although *xuất* means "leave" and *gia* means "family", the translation of the terms illustrates the Buddhist notion which refers to the act of shaving hair, wearing saffron robes, giving up the family life, and live a monastic life as a monk or a nun. Similar to descriptive equivalent, contextual equivalent was a technique that the translator deployed successfully to deal with the lexical asymmetry between the two languages.

[5] ST: *ngày tự tứ*

TT: the final day of the retreat

Ngày tự tứ is a ceremony taking place at the end of the retreat season, on the full moon day of the ninth lunar month. On this day, monks and nuns confess their sins or mistakes in front of others, and ask for forgiveness. The English translation of this term "the final day of the retreat" provides readers with some information about the time when the event happens.

The high frequency of the strategy of equivalence in the data set realised through four main techniques showed that the translator has been intrinsically competent in terms of language, especially the Sino-Vietnamese vocabulary repertoire. In addition, the extra-linguistic competence, typically the knowledge of the Buddhism, was also profound. However, the notion of language competence as adopted in the present study concerns a system of knowledge and skills necessary for an intelligible production of the translated text. The language competence is thus related to other competence and skills discussed in the previous models such as EMT (2022) or PACTE (2003). For example, the psycho-physiological competence that is shown through the creativity and logical reasoning in the choice of translation strategies.

The strategy of creation

The frequency of occurring of creation strategy as shown in statistics has been at the average level. Among the three techniques found in the data set, omission took a significant proportion of 18 percent with 46 instances. Most of the instances of omission in the data set were due to the complexity of the Buddhist terms. If the term were translated, it could have caused the reader unnecessary embarrassment of interpretation.

[6] ST: *Ông thấy mỗi tế bào trong cơ thể chứa đựng được cả tam thiên đại thiên thế giới. Cái thấy ấy là túc mệnh minh.*

TT: He saw that every cell of his body contained all of Heaven and Earth.

In Buddhist texts, *tam thiên đại thiên thế giới* (literally translated as 'three thousand great thousand worlds') is a Buddhist cosmology, taking Mount Sumeru as the centre, surrounding by the same sun and moon called a "small world". One thousand "small worlds" are called "small thousand worlds"; one thousand "small thousand worlds" are called "middle thousand worlds"; one thousand "middle thousand worlds" are called "great thousand worlds". Because a "great thousand world" is composed of three "small, middle, and great thousand worlds", it is called "three thousand great thousand worlds" (Mai, 2016). The notion was too complicated to render with an English equivalent, and thus it was omitted and replaced by "Heaven and Earth" to connote a similar thing from the Western world view. In addition, within the same instance, the notion of *túc mệnh minh* and the sentence that contains it was entirely omitted. This Sino-Vietnamese word is derived from the original Sanskrit word *Pubbenivāsānussatināna* which refers to one person's ability to know clearly all the events happening in his and others' past lifetimes. There is, of course, no such equivalent in English, but the choice to omit the phrase has caused a loss in the significance of *túc mệnh minh*, which was about the Buddha's foreseeing of the onset of reincarnation, and thus failing to explain the Buddhist world view.

The translator's competence manifested in the manipulation of [6] indicates a complex combination of language competence (the ability to understand Sanskrit and Sino-Vietnamese), extra-linguistic competence (including the knowledge of Buddhist history) and strategic competence (displayed through the choice of strategy and technique for translation).

Some instances indicated that the omission technique was applied to create a natural expression in a particular context. For example, *Đại đức Ananda* was translated into English as *Anada*, omitting the title *Đại đức* (often translated as 'Venerable'), which can be misunderstood by the target reader for the honorific notion of the word "venerable", while *Ananda* is the name of one of the Buddha's principal disciples in this situation. Another reason for partial omission lies in the collocational combinability. For example, in Buddhism, the phrase *giác ngộ hoàn toàn* refers to the highest spiritual state that a person can achieve. Its translation is "total enlightenment". Another related concept is "partial enlightenment" referring to lower spiritual states. In fact, those who do not have a good command of Zen (Buddhist meditation) will find it very difficult to understand "total enlightenment" or "partial enlightenment" because of the rarity of combination of "enlightenment" with adjectives such as "total" and "partial" in English. As a result, partial omission is an ideal choice in such situation.

In addition to omission, a creative way of dealing with non-existent terms in the TL is using a superordinate or a subordinate. By rendering a superordinate in place of a non-equivalent term, the translator enables the target readers to make sense of a general meaning. For example, the term *sa môn* in Buddhism refers to Buddhist monks, who follow Buddhism

and practise hard to achieve enlightenment. It was translated into English as "hermit", which has a wider meaning denoting a person who lives a simple life and lives apart from the rest of human society for religious reasons. By employing a superordinate, the translator could make it easy for the target reader to understand the general meaning through a familiar vocabulary item. However, some instances were not successful. For example, *lễ trà tỳ* was translated as "funeral". This instance indicated that the translator only relied on the knowledge of Buddhism based on Vietnamese practice, but failed to relate it to the original meaning of the word. *Lễ trà tỳ* had the Indian origin, describing the event of burning the dead body of a person. It might be part of funeral rituals, and thus rendering a general word "funeral" would be acceptable if there were no equivalent in English. However, the word "cremation" literally matches the meaning of *lễ trà tỳ*. The loss in translating this term highlights the importance of the translator's integration of different competences in the translation procedure.

In specialized translation, using a subordinate to render a broader non-equivalent notion is sometimes a remedy. The employment of this technique, however, is argued to result in overinterpretation of the ST (Nguyen, 2019). In the data set, a typical example is the rendering of "ignorance" as an equivalent for *vô minh,* a word that comprises the meaning of ignorance, greed, and anger (Hoang, 2011). In Buddhism, it is the opposite of enlightenment. The concretization of the original word meaning could convey one particular aspect of a broad notion. Despite a loss in the full meaning of the word, this choice has shown the translator's strategic and extra-linguistic competences in a sense that the translator managed to select the most important aspect of meaning based on the meaning of the original word in Buddhist texts.

The strategy of transference

As mentioned earlier, evidence of borrowing found in the data set was not as simple as the use of the original word of the ST in the TT. There was the presence of the third language in the TT, that is, Sanskrit. The borrowed words were of Sanskrit origin and the translation procedure usually underwent a historical trace back to the primary source. For example, *Phạm Thiên* refers to a person who was said to have achieved a certain realm in meditation and was reborn in heaven after death. The word was not reused in the TT, but translated as *Brahmā*, a Sanskrit word. Another example was the pair *Tỳ-khâu* and *Tỳ-khâu-ni* (male and female Buddhist practitioners). These two words were the transliteration of the Sanskrit terms *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni,* respectively. These two terms were then borrowed in the target text. In general, the translation technique of borrowing in the data set is arguably the kind of "third-party" borrowing, in which a word from another language is used for a non-equivalent instead of the word of the original text. The use of Sanskrit words in the data is plausible as Buddhist text readers must have certain knowledge about Buddhism and Sanskrit terms have been a crucial part of this knowledge.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, this study has investigated the translator's competence through the choice of translation strategies being used in the translation of selected Buddhist texts from *Đường xưa mây trắng* ('Old Path White Cloud'). The findings have shown that all the prevalent strategies for translating Buddhist texts previously discussed in translation theories and empirical studies were present in the data of the study. The strategy of equivalence not only prevailed in the number of instances but also outnumbered other strategies in terms of realisation techniques. On the contrary, the strategy of transference was represented by only one technique of borrowing. However, the borrowed terms were of Sanskrit origin, undergoing a process of back translation into Sanskrit before being used in the target text. The instances of both strategies of equivalence and transference indicated that the translator had advanced levels of language competence, which is multilingual (Vietnamese, Sino-Vietnamese, and Sanskrit) and extra-linguistic competence (especially, the command of Buddhism). In addition, the translator also displayed knowledge and skills in translation that belong to the strategic competence. Regarding the creation strategy, despite certain acceptable employment of omission, the translator has shown weakness in using this strategy group with techniques like total omission and using a superordinate or a subordinate. A total omission posed a risk of losing some crucial meaning. The replacement of a word of too general or too specific meaning, while being able to partly convey the intended meaning, left unnecessary loss in translation. This translation flaw highlighted the importance of integrating translation competence in decision-making for translation strategies.

Overall, the analysis of translation strategies in *Đường xưa mây trắng* ('Old Path White Cloud') has proved the mutual effects of translation competence and translation strategies of a translator. This implies a need for an integration of translation competence and translation strategies into the professional translator training. One of the limitations of this study is the scarcity of references related to translation Buddhist texts from Vietnamese into English, which hinders a more specific and in-depth analytical framework. This suggests that more research should be conducted for the sake of translation in a specialized field such as translating Buddhism.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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