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Strategies for Translating Endearment Terms: The Case of Oxford Thương Yêu ('Beloved Oxford')

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Keywords

Literary Translation; Vietnamese Terms of Endearment; Translation Strategies; Untranslatability; Semantic Equivalence; English–Vietnamese Translation; Contemporary Vietnamese Literature

Abstract

Literary translation involves more than the transfer of semantic content from a source text into a target language; it also requires the recreation of emotional, interpersonal, and culturally embedded meanings so that target readers may engage with the literary work in ways comparable to the original readership. This study examines the strategies employed in translating Vietnamese terms of endearment into English. It focuses on Duong Thuy's contemporary Vietnamese novel Oxford thương yêu and Elbert Bloom's English translation, Beloved Oxford. Drawing on Newmark's (1988) and Baker's (1992) classifications of translation strategies, the study develops a nine-strategy framework for analysing each endearment term. It further identifies the dimensions of meaning that are successfully transferred and those that resist translation, while providing explanations for cases of partial or full untranslatability. The combination of qualitative interpretation and quantitative description enhances the rigour and coherence of the analytical process. The findings indicate that seven of the nine strategies were used in translating endearment terms: literal translation, transposition, paraphrase, omission, superordination, borrowing, and couplets or triplets. Although most semantic components were adequately conveyed, some strategies generated partial semantic loss, thereby affecting translation quality. The study suggests that endearment terms remain particularly challenging because they encode culturally specific forms of affection, intimacy, hierarchy, and interpersonal relations in Vietnamese and English. Its findings contribute to research on the translation of affective and relational language and offer a basis for further studies on endearment terms in literary translation.

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Từ khóa

Dịch văn học; Thuật ngữ xưng hô thân mật trong tiếng Việt; Chiến lược dịch thuật; Tính bất khả dịch; Tương đương ngữ nghĩa; Dịch thuật Anh–Việt; Văn học Việt Nam đương đại

Tóm tắt

*Dịch thuật văn học không chỉ đơn thuần là chuyển tải nội dung ngữ nghĩa của văn bản nguồn. Loại hình dịch này còn truyền tải cả ý nghĩa cảm xúc và ý nghĩa liên nhân trong văn bản giúp người đọc mục tiêu có trải nghiệm tác phẩm văn học tương đồng với độc giả ngôn ngữ nguồn. Nghiên cứu này khảo sát các chiến lược được sử dụng để chuyển dịch các từ ngữ xưng hô thân mật trong tiếng Việt sang tiếng Anh. Nghiên cứu dựa trên tiểu thuyết đương đại Việt Nam *Oxford thương yêu* của Dương Thụy và bản dịch tiếng Anh *Beloved Oxford* do Elbert Bloom thực hiện. Bằng cách kết hợp các phân loại chiến lược dịch thuật của Newmark (1988) và Baker (1992), nghiên cứu tổng hợp chín chiến lược dịch thuật để phân tích từng từ ngữ xưng hô thân mật. Bên cạnh đó, nghiên cứu xác định những khía cạnh ý nghĩa được chuyển tải thành công cũng như những khía cạnh kháng cự quá trình dịch, đồng thời đưa ra những giải thích rõ ràng cho các trường hợp bất khả dịch. Việc kết hợp phương pháp phân tích định tính và định lượng góp phần tăng cường tính chặt chẽ và hiệu quả của quá trình phân tích dữ liệu. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy bảy trong số chín chiến lược dịch thuật đã được sử dụng để chuyển dịch các từ ngữ xưng hô thân mật, bao gồm: dịch nguyên văn, chuyển đổi từ loại/cấu trúc, diễn giải, lược bỏ, sử dụng từ khái quát hơn, sử dụng từ vay mượn và kết hợp hai hoặc ba chiến lược. Mặc dù phần lớn các khía cạnh ngữ nghĩa đã được chuyển tải thành công, một số chiến lược vẫn dẫn đến sự mất mát ý nghĩa ở mức độ nhất định, từ đó ảnh hưởng đến chất lượng tổng thể của bản dịch. Điều này cho thấy việc dịch các từ ngữ xưng hô thân mật vẫn là một thách thức do những khác biệt về văn hóa giữa tiếng Việt và tiếng Anh, đặc biệt là vì những từ ngữ này thể hiện những tình cảm, sự thân mật và các mối quan hệ mang tính đặc thù về văn hóa. Những phát hiện của nghiên cứu góp phần bổ sung nguồn tài liệu tham khảo về dịch thuật các từ ngữ xưng hô thân mật và tạo nền tảng cho các nghiên cứu tiếp theo trong lĩnh vực này.*

1. Introduction

Literature and life have always been in a mutual relationship. While life is a vivid material for literature, literature has made life beautiful through creative works of romance and love. The beauty is made widely known between audiences of two different languages through translation. Literary translation, therefore, has a mission of an ambassador that connects languages and cultures through literary works presented in the language of the target readers. Nevertheless, literary translation has always been a complex process in which various problems might arise when translators deal with texts. Cultural transitions in literary translation involve addressing not only linguistic differences but also historical, ethical, and emotional contexts. Wang discusses the challenges and innovations that arise during this process, proposing that understanding these aspects is crucial for successful cross-cultural communication (Wang, 2024). For example, the subject matter of the source text may limit the translator's ability to produce an effective target text, thereby influencing the overall quality of the translation.

Among various themes, love is often regarded as particularly challenging, as it poses difficulties in selecting appropriate equivalents. Khalil and Larina (2022) explained

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that the affection and intimacy of love can be expressed variously, including the use of idiomatic expressions, nicknames, and endearment terms, making them culture- and language-specific. Therefore, ensuring appropriate natural equivalents for address forms, including endearment terms, requires a deep mediation of cultural knowledge (Braun, 1988; Thomas et al., 2023). The translator must skilfully manage the cultural resonances that shape both the source and target languages, acknowledging that the affective force of endearment terms is tightly interwoven with culturally specific norms and relational dynamics. The choice of translating strategies, therefore, is of great significance for translators to deal with the rendering of endearment terms. An interesting linguistic feature, as they are, endearment terms have not captured adequate attention from researchers in translation studies in terms of how translating strategies are deployed to handle them in authentic texts. In several research studies, endearment terms were often treated as part of terms of address (Lubis & Shara, 2022; Yu & Qiu, 2024).

Considering studies into literary translation between Vietnamese and English, these studies often exploited the cultural differences in terms of address and the quality of hierarchy in Vietnamese (e.g., Ngo, 2006; Truong, 2016). There is a paucity of studies that look into these linguistic expressions as a culture-specific phenomenon in translation. Notably, Vietnamese literary works selected in previous research were often classic works rather than works of the contemporary. For these reasons, the present study attempts to investigate endearment terms on their own right. In this study, the data set was selected from a well-known Vietnamese contemporary novel '*Oxford thương yêu*' written by Duong Thuy, with its English version '*Beloved Oxford,*' translated by Elbert Bloom. This study aims to analyse the translation strategies used to render Vietnamese endearment terms into English and to evaluate the degree of (un)translatability observed, using the novel *'Oxford thương yêu'* and its English translation as a case study. To achieve the aims, the study addresses the following research questions:

- What translating strategies were adopted to render Vietnamese endearment terms in *'Oxford thương yêu'* into English?
- How relevant was the choice of these strategies to the affection and intimacy of endearment terms in individual cases?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Endearment terms

'Endearment' is defined as a word or phrase intended to show affection, such as *darling* or *sweetie* (Trash, 1997). McConnell-Ginet (2003, p. 78) specifies "*honey, dear, sweetie, love, darling, baby,* and *cutie*" as endearment terms. Endearment terms can be considered as words to express our affection or words that encourage positive feelings. They are also seen as forms of address used in spoken communication (Thelwall, 2008).

Morton (2003) argued that endearment terms are commonly used by lovers, so they are in some way personal and distinctive, and their meaning is understood only by a

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partner or within a group. Morton's (2003) approaches to endearment terms, however, is Anglocentric, concentrating on English endearment terms, leaving little room for cross-cultural comparison. Moreover, modern sociolinguistics considers endearment functions in conversation. This implies that any word can probably be considered as an endearment term, especially those used in a relationship (Thelwall, 2008). Olędzka (2014) systematized endearment terms into different categories, as presented in Table 1, while still accepting cases of words without specific meaning.

Table 1.

Categories of endearment terms

Categories of endearment term	Examples
words of animals	*little bear, little frog*
words of happiness and love	*my beloved, my paradise*
words referring to a special role of the recipient	*little gold, little pearl, treasure, my sun, my little star*
words to call kids	*baby, little one*
plant names	*little rose, little flower, daisy*
words of food	*cutlet, candy*
words referring to titles	*queen, princess*
words related to psycho-physical state	*mad man, pretty, ugly one*
roles in family or gender	*husband, little wife, man, woman*
proper names in romances	*Romeo*

In sociolinguistics, endearment terms are considered a subset of forms of address (Trudgill, 1992), so their use is highly influenced by these four factors: their gender, age, social group, and personal relationship (Richards et al., 1999). In Vietnamese, although there are several linguistic investigations into terms of address by both domestic and foreign scholars over time (Cao, 2003; Nguyen, 1998; Nguyen, 2014; Szymańska-Matusiewicz, 2014), there is little research into terms of endearment as a special sociolinguistic phenomenon. Endearment terms are mentioned in those studies as a category of address terms, closely tied to the dimensions of power, solidarity, and formality in the relationships among speakers, hearers, and referents (Luong, 1990). In Vietnamese, the choice of an appropriate endearment term is shaped not only by affection or intimacy but also by factors such as age, gender, social status, and the degree of closeness between interlocutors (Vo, 2020).

It is also worth noticing that in Vietnamese, the use of the interjection *'ơi'*, which is often preceded by an addressing term, is very common, and is sometimes inappropriately translated into English as 'hey'. However, this interjection is arguably untranslatable because it is intuitively used in conversation with sentiment rather than just getting the

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attention of the other. There has not been much academic discussion of this interjection so far, but it is undeniably used for most of time to draw the attention of someone (e.g., *anh ơi* [brother-interjection], *chị ơi,* [sister-interjection]), and depending on the contexts of the conversation and the level of intimacy between the speaker and addressee, *'ơi'* could be considered a component of the endearment term: *em yêu ơi* [honey-interjection], *cục cưng ơi* [cutie-interjection].

2.2 Translation strategies

There has long been ambiguity in both the taxonomy and terminology of translation strategies. Newmark (1988) distinguished between *translation methods*, which apply to entire texts, and *translation procedures*, which operate at the level of sentences or smaller linguistic units. Noticeably, these two terms may have coincided with the term 'strategies' in Bell (1998) when he referred to *global strategies* as those dealing with whole texts and *local strategies* as those dealing with text segments. Qassem (2021) had a different perspective on translation strategies, emphasizing *product-related strategies* and *process-related strategies*. Previous studies often used Baker's (1992) taxonomy of translation strategies to analyse specific lexical or cultural challenges, while they used Newmark's (1988) to discuss the communicative effect of a translation technique. The present study considers both individual cases of lexical translation and the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural aspects of endearment terms in between English and Vietnamese. Therefore, the present study combined ideas from Baker (1992) and Newmark (1988) and presented them in the inventory in Table 2. However, due to their terminology mismatch (i.e., for what Baker calls "strategies," Newmark might classify as "procedures"), the term 'strategy' is conceptualized for rigorous analytical terms in the present study.

Table 2.

A list of translation strategies

Strategies	Explanations
Literal translation	Known as word-for-word translation, which converts the grammatical constructions to their nearest target language (TL) equivalents, and the words are translated singly, out of context.
Translation by a superordinate	Using a general or a more commonly known word to replace a specific one.
Translation by a specific word	Using another word in TL, which has a more specific meaning, to replace a general one
Translation by a paraphrase	Using a term that is already known in the TL at the expense of literality to replace a semantically complex expression.
Translation by omission	Deleting a lexical item for a lack of a TL equivalent or for redundant information

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Strategies	Explanations
Translation by a synonym	Using a word of near meaning when there is no clear one-to-one equivalent, and the word is not important in the text, in particular for adjectives or adverbs of quality (Newmark, 1988)
Transference	Using a loan word or a loan word with an explanation to deal with culture-specific items or modern concepts
Transpositions (Shift)	Known as a grammatical replacement of a word class by another without making any changes to the meaning of the TL.
Couplets, triplets, quadruplets	Combining two (couplets), three (triplets), or four (quadruplets) of the mentioned strategies to solve translation problems

2.3 Translating endearment terms

It is widely acknowledged that there is a close link between translation and culture. According to Newmark (1988), culture encompasses the specific modes of living and their expressions that define a language community. The differences among distinct cultures are normally found at the word level during the translation process, triggering several problems for translators if they do not adequately understand the SL beliefs, attitudes, and values. For instance, research by (Ethelb, 2015) illustrates that the translation of address terms involves not only a transfer of semantic content but also the intricate performance of politeness strategies and face-work. Newmark (1988) proposed five different categories of culture-specific items, namely: (1) Ecology; (2) Material culture (artefacts); (3) Social culture, work and leisure; (4) Organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts; (5) Gestures and habits. Based on this classification, endearment terms belong to the fourth category.

Many studies have examined how culturally specific address forms, including terms of endearment, are translated between English and other languages in literary and art works (Al-Kaabi et al., 2024; Ethelb, 2015; Lubis & Shara, 2022; Thomas et al., 2023). For example, Lubis and Shara (2022) analysed the use of address terms in the film *Love Rosie* and the strategies employed to translate them into Bahasa Indonesia. Their findings indicated that approximately 15% of the address terms functioned as endearments. The translation strategies identified ranged from literal translation and borrowing to transposition, calque, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation, reflecting the diversity of approaches required to capture both linguistic and cultural nuances. However, there is an argument that endearment terms are sometimes untranslatable. Jansson (2023) examined the translation of endearment terms in two novels, *The Book of Mother* and *Love in the Big City* and pointed out that certain expressions of endearment could not be properly translated due to "their cultural particularities" (p. 91).

With respect to Vietnamese endearment terms, their translation is believed to face a wide range of difficulties at the lexical level because these terms are highly influenced by factors such as age, gender, social status, and degree of intimacy. Notably, there is no fixed equivalent to the pronouns *I* and *You*, which are considered as potential endearment

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terms in some situations, due to the fact that they do not imply age, sex, social power and degree of intimacy. For instance, the English '*honey*' could be rendered into '*anh yêu*' or '*chồng yêu*' (beloved husband) in a conversation between a couple and the speaker is a female. Similarly, the term can also be translated into '*em yêu*' or '*vợ yêu*' (beloved wife) in a reverse situation. '*Cháu yêu*' (beloved grandchild) is certainly another way of translating '*honey*' if it is used by a grandparent to address their grandchildren. Complicated and culture-specific as they are, endearment terms have not been much attended in research in linguistics and translation studies, especially in Vietnamese-related research works. Therefore, the present study is worth of an investigation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study was mainly corpus-based qualitative research, which looked into individual instances of translating strategies to explain, if possible, the reasons for the strategy employment as well as the untranslatable aspects. The quantitative enumeration in the corpus was intended to support the qualitative data as well as laying the ground for generalization and explanation.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

As the present study looks into translation strategies, the data source is the novel *Oxford thương yêu* written by Duong Thuy and its English version *Beloved Oxford* translated by Elbert Bloom. The novel was a love story between Kim, a Vietnamese female scholarship recipient at the prestigious Oxford University and Fernando, a Portuguese assistant professor. They faced various challenges in their relationship, but they ultimately enjoy a joyful marriage in the end. It was selected as the data source on the assumption that the conversation between characters in love may contain expressions of intimacy and endearment. The scripts of the two novels were used as parallel corpora, with the Vietnamese as the source text and the English version as the target text. The procedure consisted of two stages.

The first stage was to identify endearment terms. After the original novel *Oxford thương yêu* was uploaded to Sketch Engine, Vietnamese endearment terms were identified and categorised based on Olędzka's (2014) categorisation of endearment terms presented in the Literature Review, Vietnamese endearment terms. Next, the English translated version *Beloved Oxford* was uploaded as a parallel corpus to search for translations of endearment terms for an equivalent list, and an English equivalent list was then extracted. Both the source and target language terms were explored in considering the example sentences in context. This identification of terms was done independently by two researchers as coders. The lists of endearment terms obtained by the two coders were compared and finalized. The two coders agreed on the selected items. If a set of instances are too similar, only one is used as a representative and other were eliminated. The decision was finally made on the selection of 36 instances of endearment terms.

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The second stage dealt with labelling translation strategies, based on the taxonomy presented in Table 2. The two coders also worked independently before discussing to resolve discrepancies and deciding on the two collections of endearment terms.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The distribution of strategies in the translation of endearment terms

The analysis of the 36 instances of endearment terms has shown that there were seven translation strategies grounded in the classifications by Newmark (1988) and Baker (1992) found in the data set. They were distributed as follows.

Table 3.

The distribution of translation strategies of endearment terms

Strategies	Proportion
Couplets/Triplets	40%
Translation by a superordinate	23%
Transference	11%
Literal translation	11%
Transposition	6%
Translation by a paraphrase	6%
Omission	3%

As shown in Table 3, there was no instance of synonymy and translation by a more specific word, while couplets and triplets are the most commonly used strategies, accounting 40% across the data set. Interestingly, synonymy was present in the combined strategies (couplets/triplets). Translation by a general word emerged as the second most used strategy, accounting for 23% of the data. In contrast, transference, which is the use of loan words, with or without explanation, and literal translation were less common, each representing 11% of the instances. Transpositions were as less common as paraphrase, accounting for 6% of the total data. Omission was the least used strategy with only 3%.

The statistics imply that there were similarities in the use of endearment terms between Vietnamese and English, enabling the target text to be appropriately and equivalently rendered. The findings also revealed parallels between the strategies used for translating address forms and those applied to endearment terms, as observed in Lubis and Shara (2022). The absence of the two strategies could be reasonable considering the differences in linguistic and cultural characteristics between the two languages. In the subsequent section, individual cases of translation strategies will be discussed.

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4.2 Strategies used to translate endearment terms

4.2.1 Literal translation

Literal translation demonstrates its efficiency in bringing about the closest corresponding terms in the target text (TT) that truly reflect their primary meanings in the source text (ST). Generally, this strategy is applied to short terms with no complicated grammatical structures. They are neither related to cultural terms nor influenced by the context. The instances of literal translation in the data were prominently translated into English using the possessive adjective "my", which shows the intimacy in the interpersonal relationship. For example,

ST: *Đây là* ***bạn gái tôi****!*

TT: This is **my girlfriend**!

'My' literally means *'của tôi'* in Vietnamese. Despite the absence of the possessive word *'của'* (of/belong to) in the TL, the endearment term *'bạn gái tôi'* was translated as *'my girlfriend'* because it is a common practice for Vietnamese people not to explicitly state the possession *'của'* when it comes to interpersonal relationships. Recognizing the characteristic of the Vietnamese language on this matter, the translator managed to take advantage of the literal translation.

4.2.2 Translation by a superordinate

This strategy ranked as the second most frequent in the data set, accounting for nearly all cases where no direct equivalent existed in the TT. In particular, differences in second-person address forms between Vietnamese and English gave rise to non-equivalence issues. For example, the endearment expression '*cô em*' in the ST serves as a second singular person, reflecting that the addressee is a female who is younger than the speaker, and they have quite a close relationship with each other. However, there is no other choice but *'you'* when it is rendered in English. As a result, despite many ways to address a person in Vietnamese cases, *'you'* was used in all other similar instances, including *'cưng'* (someone cherished, to be used to mean a person is of special love and cherish) and *'con'* (child, to be used by an older to mean the addressee is like his/her child).

ST: ***Con*** *có nụ cười tươi rói! Sẽ đem lại niềm vui cho những ai ở gần* ***con****!*

TT: **You** have a bright smile! It will bring joy to anyone near **you**!

It is also worth admitting that this strategy often failed to convey the full meaning of the ST, as in many cases the corresponding term in the target text could not capture certain semantic nuances, such as the hierarchy, gender, age or the degree of intimacy, creating a loss in the endearing implications for almost every term in the ST.

4.2.3 Translation by omission

In the data set, translation by omission occurred only once. Although this strategy inevitably entails some loss of meaning, the translator successfully conveyed the intended message in an alternative form that remained comprehensible.

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ST: *"Sao,* ***em bé****?", Fernando bực bội cao giọng, "Em mấy tuổi rồi? Chịu đi chưa hay chờ người lớn đánh cho mấy roi!"*

TT: "Are you willing to go yet? Or are you waiting for an adult to beat you several times with a cane?"

The Vietnamese endearment term "*em bé*" (a little kid) was omitted in the English sentence. Not only this term but also the information about Fernando's attitude was lost. The omission pieces are marked:

ST: ***"Sao, em bé?", Fernando bực bội cao giọng, "Em mấy tuổi rồi****? Chịu đi chưa hay chờ người lớn đánh cho mấy roi!"*

TT: **"So how, the little kid?" Fernando angrily raised his voice, "How old are you**? Are you willing to go yet? Or are you waiting for an adult to beat you several times with a cane?"

The omission is normally accepted when the translator finds it important to maintain cultural appropriateness in the target language, or to avoid unnecessary lengthy expression. However, the omission in unwarranted although it does not affect the meaning of the conversation and the plot in general. Since words to call kids are common endearment terms as classified in Olędzka's (2014) taxonomy, there is an existing equivalent in English. The translation as suggested, albeit long, does not conflict with the target culture in this case.

4.2.4 Transference

The strategy of transference was used in four instances. Loanwords are generally defined as lexical items from other languages. They are adopted and retained in the target text to preserve the uniqueness of the original expression. Loanwords in translation are unnecessarily the SL words. Regarding the use of loanwords in the data set, for example, *'chồng sắp cưới'* (a man to whom one is about to get married) was translated into English as *'a fiancé that I will marry shortly'*. In this case, *fiancé* is a French loanword that is widely used in English. Given its popularity, the explanatory addition *"that I will marry shortly"* is redundant and unnecessary. However, as this expression implies the temporal notion of a man becoming someone's husband, the translator chose to add the explanation to highlight this notion. Another example is the word *'Lolita'*, which was retained in the target text. *'Lolita*' is a famous novel written by Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov. It tells the story of a professor named Humbert, who loved the twelve-year-old daughter of his second wife. The word *'Lolita'* has been used to refer to a young and beautiful girl in her teenage. For this, when Kim was called *'Lolita'*, it is implied that Kim was just as young as a teenage girl. However, this loan word was kept unchanged without any further explanation. As the use of this word was quite metaphorical, this way of translation may cause confusion for readers, especially those who have no ideas about the novel. Thus, an explanation should have been necessary in this case. Newmark (1988, p. 86) argued that

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the retained cultural words would "give local colour, to attract the reader." Nonetheless, as the examples show, the translated versions would be much transparent if the explanations for the loan words were placed in a more reasonable way.

4.2.5 Transpositions

Only two instances of transposition were identified in the data set. These transpositions allowed the translator to adjust the ST word forms or structures, rendering them more natural and appropriate in the TT. For example, the Vietnamese interjection '*quá'* in Vietnamese is typically inserted into sentences to show emotional reaction to something significantly surpassing or to express empathy to someone. It frequently appears in exclamation sentences.

ST: *Tội nghiệp **quá**!*

TT: Poor **my little Lolita**!

Nonetheless, there is no direct equivalent for *'quá'* in English. The translator conveyed its meaning by introducing the endearment "my little Lolita," which implicitly expresses empathy. This substitution not only compensates for the non-equivalence of the source term, but also results in a shift in word form between the source and target texts.

Another example is a shift from a second singular object to a noun as a vocative.

ST: *Xin lỗi **con**.*

TT: Please forgive us, **child**.

The people involved in this conversation are Kim, the female main character, and her boyfriend's parents. The word '*con*' (child) in the ST functioned as the second-person singular object, hence a second-person pronoun like "you" in English. However, the English equivalent *child'* in the TT was used as a sentence-end vocative, implying the relationship of the addressee to the speaker. This shift in the translation created a naturalness in expression while still fully conveying its meaning.

4.2.6 Translation by a paraphrase,

Like omission, translation by a paraphrase is important in translation when there is a lack of TT equivalent. In the data set, there were two instances of translation by a paraphrase. In the following example, the endearment term '*cô bé đang tuổi dậy thì*' in the ST is essentially a noun phrase, but it was rendered in the TT in the form of a relative clause to explain the meaning of the noun phrase *'a young girl'*.

ST: *Thái độ và tính tình của em cũng y như một **cô bé đang tuổi dậy thì.***

TT: Your attitude and character are also like **a young girl who has just reached puberty**.

Translation by a paraphrase can only achieve the literal meaning. There is still a lack of a nuance embedded in the phrase '*cô bé đang tuổi dậy thì*' in Vietnamese, which implies a young girl with changeable characters and behaviours. Therefore, paraphrasing should

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only be applied for simple terms with the careful management of the word count in order not to bring about wordy versions.

4.2.7 Couplets and triplets

Couplets and triplets accounted for a substantial proportion of the translation strategies in the data set (40%). Various combinations were observed, with literal translation and transposition occurring most frequently alongside other strategies. There were evidence of literal translation coming together with one or more strategies in a rendering instance. For example,

ST: *Anh cần em cho anh một khoảng không khí gia đình đầm ấm, một căn nhà chung được chăm sóc cẩn thận, và… và những đứa con ngộ nghĩnh… giống* ***mẹ.***

TT: I need… you to create a happy family together, a home where we can carefully take care of, and… and several cute children… like **their mother**.

The word *'mẹ'* (mother) was literally translated and a change in the possessive form was made, making it a noun phrase *'their mother'* because the preceding expression '*những đứa con ngộ nghĩnh*' implied the mother of these children. A similar case was found with a combination between literal translation and a synonym:

ST: *Chưa bao giờ tôi tưởng tượng nổi* ***con gái yêu của mình*** *phải làm lễ đính hôn trong không khí kỳ cục với một người nước ngoài như vầy!*

TT: I never imagined that I would have to prepare an engagement party for **my beloved daughter** in this strange atmosphere with a foreigner.

The endearment phrase "*con gái yêu của mình*" consists of two parts: a noun phrase with the head noun '*con gái*' (daughter) and an adjective '*yêu*' (beloved), and the possessive form *'của mình'* (of one's own). The first part was literally translated but the second part was translated into the first-person possessive adjective *'my'*. If translated back from the TT into the ST, *'my'* would be mostly rendered into *'của tôi'* as its literal meaning. It can be recognized in Vietnamese that '*mình*' and '*tôi*' are both first singular person implying the speaker, and they are in fact, the synonyms of each other. Therefore, the translator used a synonym effectively in this case, and three other instances.

Another noticeable pattern was the combination between a superordinate and one or two more strategies. In the data of this study, superordinate had patterns in both couplets and triplets. In a couplet, a superordinate could combine with a shift, a loan word, or a literal translation. For example,

ST: ***Nàng*** *tên Lousiana, bình thường rất dịu dàng và dễ thương.*

TT: **Her** name is Louisiana. She is ordinarily very sweet and pleasant.

In Vietnamese, *'nàng'* (she) is generally used to address a young, beautiful woman as a third person term (but also as a second person term when a speaker has an affection to the addressee). In this instance, the term is used to address a female cat that was so pampered and adored, and *'nàng'* also acts as a subject of the sentence in ST. During the translation process, there was a change from the subject in the third singular person to the

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possessive adjective. This change was essential to ensure grammatical accuracy in the TT. Specifically, the boundary between subject and verb is relatively ambiguous, reflecting the flexible syntactic patterns of Vietnamese. Although written sentences in Vietnamese require a combination of a subject and a verb for standard grammaticality, this requirement is not often compulsory in spoken language. However, English sentences always need the subject and verb, regardless they belong to written or spoken mode. As a result, the translator shifted the subject from the third-person singular pronoun '*nàng*' to the possessive construction "her name," thereby reconfiguring the subject of the target sentence. This adjustment ensured grammaticality and naturalness in English, where subject–verb alignment is more rigidly defined. However, because '*nàng*' has no direct English equivalent, its connotations of intimacy and endearment were reduced to the more general possessive adjective "her," which is a general word. As a result, the affective nuance embedded in the ST was partially lost. Nevertheless, this strategy preserved narrative coherence and readability for the target audience. Similar instances in the data set reveal a recurring pattern: Vietnamese terms of address, rich in emotional and relational nuance, cannot be fully transferred into English due to the asymmetry in available forms of address between the two languages.

A case of triplet found in the data set showed a pattern of a superordinate combining with literal translation and a loan word (*'Lolita'*):

ST: *Anh ta hết làm phiền* ***nàng*** *rồi hả* ***Lolita bé nhỏ****?*

TT: Is he already finished bothering you, **little Lolita** huh?

Once again, *'nàng'* occurred in the data, but in this case, it was used as a second person term, and thus being rendered as 'you' although the endearment notion was not depicted. Another endearment item, the adjective '*bé nhỏ*', was literally translated as *'little'* and the metaphor *'Lolita'* was retained.

The proportion of 40% of the endearment terms in the data set were rendered using the couplets/triplets suggests the complication of translating endearment terms between Vietnamese and English. Endearments and kinship terms in Vietnamese carry relational meaning that English lacks. Truong (2016) argued that many English translations fail to capture the nuance of Vietnamese kinship-based address terms, leading to incomplete conveyance of relational meaning. Therefore, triplets were used as necessary adjustments to approximate the relational nuance, while still ensuring the grammaticality and the most naturality of the translated text. This implies that in translating endearment terms, there is often more than one problem needed to be solved. Thus, the combination of many different strategies in the translation process is arguably necessary to best retain the notion of endearment, which is culture-specific and is not always easy to translate.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study embraced the classification of translation strategies from Newmark (1988) and Baker (1992) as a referential framework to analyse ways of translating endearment

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terms collected from Duong Thuy's *Oxford thương yêu* and in its English version *Beloved Oxford* translated by Elbert Bloom. The study is qualitative descriptive in nature although both qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted in the data analysis. The findings showed that several strategies were employed to translate endearment terms from Vietnamese to English, and in most of the instances, there was a combination of strategies. This is to say that translating endearment terms has been a challenge in translation due to the cultural nuances between Vietnamese and English. The instances of translation indicate that the strategies used in the TT have not consistently been successful because some terms of endearment lose their affectionate meaning in the translation process. Also, the aspects of gender, degree of intimacy, and age that were shown in the ST were proved to be untranslatable in the TT. Presumably, the reason for the untranslatability could be caused by the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural factors that posed some difficulties in finding the equivalents in the translation process, accordingly.

Despite efforts to conduct this study, there are some unwanted shortcomings. Notably, translating endearment terms has not captured much attention from Vietnamese researchers, so there was a lack of documents related to this area. This makes it challenging for the present study to discuss some issues deeply. However, the study is significant to the extent that it has raised translation issues related to a less-attended linguistic area, namely endearment terms in Vietnamese, and pointed out the untranslatable aspects of meaning. This paves the way for other translators to take into consideration when making decisions about the strategies in translating literary works, regarding the untranslatability.

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writing the introduction and conclusion, checking and tabulating data, and proofreading and editing the manuscript. Thuy-Hang Tran was in charge of writing the literature review, participating in data coding and interpretation, and drafting the findings and discussion.
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