

An Investigation into Google Translates Translation of English Proverbs into Vietnamese



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ABSTRACT: When learning English, once in a while, learners may need help to cope with English proverbs, and the dictionary may not help them explain the proverbs' meaning. Then, it leads them to find Google Translate (GT) as a safe place to help translate proverbs. The present study attempts to discover how GT renders English proverbs into Vietnamese. To have the data for the study, the author adopted 17 proverbs from an educational website full of explanations of such proverbs. The data was collected in about 45 minutes from the GT translation platform. The results revealed that GT could translate all the words in each proverb and put them in acceptable Vietnamese structures. However, GT needs to provide Vietnamese readers with the intended meaning of the proverbs, which is to give advice to people on work and work effort. The study also includes some limitations for further study.

KEYWORDS: English proverbs, GT, Vietnamese, work, effort

INTRODUCTION

English has been increasingly spoken around the world, or put in another way; it is considered a lingua franca (Mauranen & Ranta, 2009). English is used in different ways. For example, it is treated as an English subject or as a means of instruction in content classes or called Content and Language Integrated Learning - CLIL (García, 2009). Besides, English is also used for specific purposes- ESP (Hutchinson & Waters (1987). Furthermore, English is used for academic purposes-EAP (Peacock & Flowerdew, 2001). Then, many learners of English and other users may find themselves comfortable with translation-aid tools to help with their learning, studies, or work. In this study, the author investigated the Google Translate (GT) tool to see how it translated. GT is a freely available online translation tool (Groves & Mundt, 2015). According to CNET (2022), GT serves 200 million users to translate a billion translations daily. With the advancement in artificial intelligence, people have the propensity to use GT for their own sake, such as in language learning, health education, and business (Aiken & Ghosh, 2009; Chen et al., 2016). GT is a valuable tool for translation, but it needs improvement in the translation of language diversity as it tends to be better at rendering European languages in terms of comprehension sufficiency (Aiken & Balan, 2011). As seen, GT has its pros and cons, so the present study aims to investigate how GT renders English proverbs about work and effort into Vietnamese to have an answer to the question below:

How does Google Translate render English proverbs about work and effort into Vietnamese?

The study findings can be valuable for students following their English programs in universities or schools in Vietnam when dealing with English and Vietnamese proverbs about work and effort. They will learn more about GT's translation ability in this context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual framework

When a translator translates, he or she translates the meaning of one language's text into another according to his or her purpose (Newmark, 2009). Can GT do the same? Vietnamese proverbs mainly focus on symmetrical, asymmetrical, asymmetrical, and simile (Pham, 2006). Vietnam is an agricultural country, so many proverbs are found to link with farm animals and country life, such as buffaloes with ploughs, elephants, and wood (Nguyen, 2020). *Ploughs* are a tool pulled by buffaloes to make the soil softer before seeding. The present study thinks of proverbs as what Whitting (1932) commented: They present a fundamental truth, usually represented in adorned homely language decorated with alliteration and rhyme, usually short, presenting either literal or figurative meaning, showing a sign of antiquity receiving the country's people's veneration (as cited in Mieder, 2004). Similarly, according to Mieder (1985), a proverb is usually a short, typical sentence used by the folk presenting wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed. It is found to go into one's heart quickly, and then it can be handed down from generation to generation (as cited in Mieder, 2004).

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Related studies

As the Google machine could be more stable, improving gradually, and dealing with many languages worldwide, this study aims to continue investigating how it renders 17 English proverbs about work and effort into Vietnamese. This study is conducted to further comment on this machine for academic purposes. When talking about GT, the authors would like to mention many of the works that help bring information about this translation machine system.

On the one hand, GT has been found to help improve translation work. Nguyen and Khau (2021) found that GT can keep the original meanings of many modal verbs expressing social functions in Vietnamese, although it could have been better. According to Tsai (2019), GT can produce better writing texts compared to students' writing as it can produce better grammar and spelling. It can select higher-level words than students. As Le and Schuster (2016) put it, GT helps ameliorate students' writing papers. GT helps enhance translation quality with grammatical accuracy. Groves and Mundt (2015) agreed that GT could produce accuracy that matched the minimum requirements for university admission at many institutions. GT is necessary for large amounts of materials to be translated, helps select consistent terminologies, speed up translation, and requires low costs (Sinhla & Gupta, 2014).

On the other hand, GT still needs improving. Chon et al. (2021) discovered that machine translation still needs to enhance its quality in contextual translations to prevent misunderstanding of translated texts with sources. When talking about this machine translation, Wang et al. (2021) also perceived that the machine requires improvement by adding combined symbolic rules, knowledge, and neural networks for translation quality. Abidin et al. (2020) also found that GT produced better idiom translation outcomes than when it dealt with the translation of idioms without precise contexts. It is interesting when GT can translate contextual idioms. Jabak (2019) found that GT struggled with lexical, syntactic and expression aspects, and it tended to translate the texts literally, devaluating the texts' contextual aspects. He said this translation tendency was because the two languages have distinctive linguistics and cultures. Hence, the machine could only pick the superficial meaning of the texts and claimed that machine translation could not replace humans in the field of translation. Al-khreshah and Almaaytah (2018) found that GT still has some problems picking the correct meaning of English proverbs because the machine selected literal meaning and word-for-word translation. Consequently, the translated texts sound weird and unnatural. Oke et al. (2016) discovered that 66% of online translations were unacceptable, incomprehensible or not acquiring the intended meaning, and 26% had grammatical mistakes. Sheppard (2011) found that GT tended to pick up word by word in a sentence to translate the overall meaning of the whole sentence. Komeili et al. (2011) also discovered that the machine tended to translate the literal meaning rather than the contextual meaning, creating ambiguity in meaning.

In short, the GT needs to enhance its quality translation and focus on the diversity of languages worldwide; this can need great time and effort.

METHODOLOGY

In order to have the data for the study, the author lent support from the educational website Enox Education Limited (2022) provided for the American proverbs about work and effort. Seventeen proverbs on this website were extracted, copied and pasted on the GT to observe how this machine renders the proverbs into Vietnamese. The author decided to use the proverbs in terms of general notions of human beings, so they are not so much complicated for GT to translate. As mentioned in the literature, there are also proverbs about work in Vietnamese society. It is, thus, presumed to be fair for the machine to translate. The translation work was carried out by GT between 10:30 a.m. and 11:17 a.m. on the sixth of November, 2022.

The comments on the translated texts provided by GT were based on two sources. The author referred to this website for how each American proverb was explained. As known, proverbs also contain figurative meaning beyond word presentation, as mentioned by (Whitting,1932) or metaphor referred to by (Mieder, 1985; Pham, 2006). The explanation on this website is helpful and understandable. The other comment source was given by the two senior Translation teachers from the English Department of the School of Foreign Languages, Tra Vinh City. They were invited to a small group discussion about the GT's texts. The author gave them the translation work provided by GT, and they remarked. Then, the two teachers and the author judged the Vietnamese translation produced by GT and produced a translation sample for readers to refer to. The translation result provided by GT is presented in Section 4 below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Seventeen English proverbs about work and effort were put in the GT translation platform: the right side represents the English version, and the left represents the Vietnamese translation.

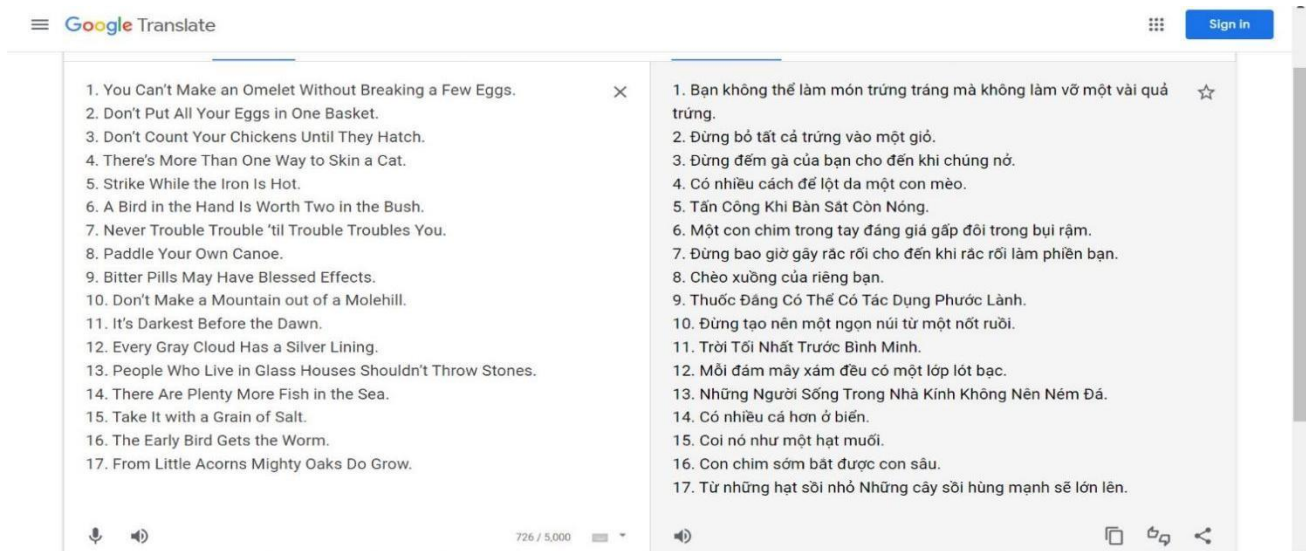


Figure 1. The texts translated by Google Translate

Discussion

Generally, GT translated all seventeen English proverbs in the way that it selected the symbols of words and the order of words and followed the subject-verb translation as well. In addition, GT can pick similar Vietnamese meanings for the English versions.

Let us start with the Vietnamese translated texts. Proverb 1 “Bạn không thể làm món trứng tráng mà không làm vỡ một vài quả trứng” is literally translated. It should be “Muốn ăn phải lăn vào bếp”, so it has clear meaning in the Vietnamese context. Proverb 2 “Đừng bỏ tất cả trứng vào một giỏ” is a literal piece of translation. It is suggested as “Được ăn cả, ngã về không”, so it poses the intended meaning. Proverb 3 “Đừng đếm gà của bạn cho đến khi trứng nở” is also literally rendered. It should go as “Nói trước bước không qua”. Hence, Vietnamese people know this smart piece of advice. Proverb 4 “Có nhiều cách để lột da một con mèo” is literally translated. It is suggested like “Đề đạt được mục tiêu có rất nhiều cách”. Thus, Vietnamese folks know what to do based on this advice. Proverb 5 “Tấn công khi bàn sắt còn nóng” is not correctly translated in the Vietnamese context. It should go as “Cờ đến tay ai người đó phát/ Tre non dễ uốn”. Proverb 6 “Một con chim trong tay đáng giá gấp đôi trong bụi rậm” is seen as a relatively good translated text. As it is quite aligned with the meaning of “Ăn chắc mặc bền”. Proverb 7 “Đừng bao giờ gây rắc rối cho đến khi rắc rối làm phiền bạn” is heard unnaturally in the Vietnamese context; it should go like “Tránh voi chẳng xấu mặt nào”. Proverb 8 “Chèo xuồng của riêng bạn” has no clear meaning, but it should be translated as “Tự lực cánh sinh”. Proverb 9 “Thuốc đắng có thể có tác dụng phước lành” can be seen acceptable as it shows clear advice, or it can be suggested as “Thuốc đắng dã tật”. Proverb 10 “Đừng tạo nên một ngọn núi từ một nốt ruồi” is completely unacceptable. Instead, it should be “Chuyện bé xé ra to”. Proverb 11 “Trời tối nhất trước bình minh” does not display the intended meaning. It should be “Qua cơn bão, trời hời hợt lại”. Proverb 12 “Mỗi đám mây xám đều có một lớp lót bạc” is not clear, so it should be rendered as “Trong cái rủi, có cái may”. Proverb 13 “Những người sống trong nhà kính không nên ném đá” is not clear. Hence, it should be translated as “Kẻ tám lạng, người nửa cân”. Proverb 14 “Có nhiều cá hơn ở biển” has no meaning of a piece of advice. It should go like “Mất cơ hội này không có nghĩa là không còn cơ hội nào khác”, instead. Proverb 15 “Coi nó như một hạt muối” has no meaning at all. It should be “Nửa tin, nửa ngờ” for Vietnamese people to understand the intended meaning. Proverb 16 “Con chim sớm bắt được con sâu” is not correctly translated. It should be rendered like “Trâu chậm uống nước đục”, so Vietnamese people know that this is a piece of wise advice. Finally, Proverb 17 “Từ những hạt sồi nhỏ những cây sồi hùng mạnh sẽ lớn lên” is not so clear, so it should go as “Đừng nói dối kể cả những điều nhỏ nhặt nhất” for the Vietnamese to understand the meaning of this proverb.

In short, GT can translate all the words in each sentence literally. In addition, it can stick to the order of the subject-verb of the sentence. Moreover, it can translate many types of sentences, such as a statement, a comparative, and an affirmative. The result is aligned with several findings, such as Nguyen and Khau (2021), who found that GT can translate many social contexts in English into Vietnamese. However, GT needs contexts to render the texts better. It also aligns with Tsai (2019), who found that GT had more quality texts than students' writing texts. However, all the intended meanings of the proverbs were not picked by GT, so the translated texts provided by GT lack a taste of advice or the intended meanings of the proverbs.

Nonetheless, GT may have been equipped with many words, phrases, and clauses in various topics, while students may need to be better equipped with linguistics that might help them excel in their writing. Le and Schuster (2016) and Groves and Mundt (2015) also agreed that GT can help sharpen students' writing. In this study, GT has shown that it has sufficient vocabulary and structures to deal with linguistic demands; that means GT can recognize and pick up the correct meanings for words, phrases and structures for all seventeen proverbs. The only problem is that GT has created a need for deep meaning, which means what each proverb means to advise people on what to do in life. This need for improvement of GT has been mentioned in other findings (e.g. by Chon et al.,

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2021); Wang et al., 2021); Abidin et al., 2020); Al-khresheh & Almaaytah, 2018; Oke et al., 2016; Sheppard, 2011; Komeili et al., 2011). Thus, the author suggests bringing more Vietnamese proverbs and English versions to the machine translation system so that the machine can pick the right one when either the Vietnamese or English versions are typed into the Google Translate box.

CONCLUSIONS

The current study explores GT's ability to translate 17 English proverbs about work and effort. The source of the proverbs was adopted from an educational website. It also includes an explanation of each of the meanings of the proverbs. It also provides further examples to explain each of the proverbs. On the one hand, GT has sufficient English and Vietnamese vocabulary when dealing with work and effort proverbs. In terms of structures, GT has good knowledge of Vietnamese and English and can present all words in acceptable Vietnamese sentences.

On the other hand, GT cannot tell the deep meanings of the English proverbs when they are transferred into Vietnamese. All the 17 proverbs have their advice values for people regarding work and effort, but GT needs to clarify such significant meanings in life. This study has some limitations. First, the context of the proverbs should be provided. For example, it should be presented in a conversation. Doing this can support the machine to better pick up the deep meaning of the proverb. Second, there should have applied the back-translation. After having the Vietnamese versions, the translation versions should be put back in the GT box for the English translation version. Doing this can be interesting to see if GT can pick up the original proverbs/sentences.

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