

PASSIVE SENTENCES IN ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS BOOKS COMMON MISTAKES WHEN TRANSLATED INTO VIETNAMESE AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

CÂU BỊ ĐỘNG TRONG SÁCH TIẾNG ANH KINH TẾ VÀ KINH DOANH LỖI THƯỜNG GẶP KHI DỊCH SANG TIẾNG VIỆT VÀ CÁCH KHẮC PHỤC

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Abstract: Passive Voice is considered to be one of the most difficult grammatical items for learners to master, especially for students of University of Economics and Technologies for Industries (UNETI). The article presents studies on passive sentences in the book “Insurance - Principles and Practice” and students’ common mistakes when translated into Vietnamese. 70 students randomly selected from UNETI Finance and Banking Department participated in the research. Mistakes were collected from a test including 10 passive sentences, and students were asked to translate into Vietnamese. The results show that the highest number of students making mistakes is unnatural translation; the second is miss-selection of voice. The article not only finds out common mistakes but also offers suggestions to help students overcome the above mistakes.

Keywords: Passive sentences, English books for Economics and Business, common mistakes.

Abstract: Câu bị động được xem là một trong những cấu trúc ngữ pháp khó đối với người học, đặc biệt là đối với sinh viên không chuyên ngữ như sinh viên Trường Đại học Kinh tế - Kỹ thuật Công nghiệp (UNETI). Bài báo trình bày nghiên cứu về câu bị động trong cuốn “Nguyên lý và thực hành bảo hiểm” (“Insurance - Principles and Practice”) và tìm hiểu những lỗi sinh viên thường mắc phải khi dịch sang tiếng Việt. Có 70 sinh viên Khoa Tài chính Ngân hàng UNETI được lựa chọn ngẫu nhiên tham gia vào nghiên cứu. Các lỗi được thu thập từ một bài kiểm tra gồm 10 câu bị động và sinh viên được yêu cầu dịch sang tiếng Việt. Kết quả điều tra cho thấy số sinh viên mắc lỗi cao nhất là sử dụng lời dịch tiếng Việt không tự nhiên, thứ hai là câu dịch sai dạng do thói quen suy nghĩ theo tiếng mẹ đẻ. Bài báo không chỉ phát hiện ra các lỗi phổ biến mà còn đưa ra các đề xuất giúp sinh viên khắc phục các lỗi trên.

Keywords: Câu bị động, sách tiếng Anh kinh tế và kinh doanh, lỗi thường gặp.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale for the study

In the globalization era, English plays an important role in communication and social, economic development as well. Being able to work and communicate with people from different backgrounds and cultures is not only a strong motivation but also a qualified

requirement for all the modern labour force. However, learning English requires learners a lot of efforts and obviously, learners encounter many difficulties when they often misunderstand the similarities and differences between English and their mother tongue.

From my observation, passive voice is considered to be one of the most difficult

grammatical items for learners to master, especially for students of University of Economics and Technologies for Industries (UNETI).

Through this article, I would like to point out some common mistakes when students translate passive sentences into Vietnamese and suggest some solutions. Besides, I would also like to emphasize the reasons for frequent use of passive sentences in English and Vietnamese.

Therefore “Passive sentences in Economic and Business books – Common mistakes when translated into Vietnamese and suggested solutions” is chosen for the topic of the article.

1.2. Scope of the study

The study focuses on Passive sentences in English books for Economics and Business and contrasts them with Vietnamese equivalents. However, it is not my ambition to cover every issue of the Passive voice in all English books for Economics and Business. I desire to give readers the uses of these sentences in books: “Insurance – Principles and Practice” (compiled by Dr. David Bland and published by The Finance Publishing House, 1993), “Business mails in English” (translated by Nguyen Thanh Yen, and published by Ho Chi Minh Publishing House, 2009). I study in syntax only and take examples mainly from declaratives sentences. The study also takes English as the basic language and Vietnamese as the language to compare.

To UNETI students, English grammar sometimes makes them confused due to the differences between English and their mother tongue - Vietnamese. In this article, I desire to give them some aspects of passive voice: a description of the passive sentences and the forms of passive sentences that are

normally used in English books for Economics and Business.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research setting

The data of the study are passive sentences which are collected from the books “Insurance - Principles and Practice” (compiled by Dr. David Bland and published by The Finance Publishing House, 1993) and “Business mails in English” (translated by Nguyen Thanh Yen, and published by Ho Chi Minh Publishing House, 2009).

The study is carried out in the educational environment with the purpose of helping UNETI students to understand and translate English passive sentences, especially when they are used in books for Economics and Business, as well as suggesting some learning and translating implications.

2.2. Research approach

The paper is a descriptive and analytical research, in which the qualitative and quantitative approaches are combined to implement this study. In reference with quantitative approach, the study collects data for the study including both English and Vietnamese reliable sources.

2.3. Data collection techniques

The selected material related to English and Vietnamese passive sentences plays a crucial role in terms of supplementary data for the study.

Moreover, frequent talks with experience lecturers and experts on the field have proved to be a very useful way for the completion of the study. Also, the study is carried out on the basis of the author’s personal experience.

2.4. Data analysis

In this article, the data are investigated on the

basis of structural perspectives. The collected data will be qualitatively and quantitatively processed to investigate some linguistic features of English passive sentences with reference to the Vietnamese equivalents.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Forms of passive sentences mostly used in books for Economics and Business

Through the examples collected in the materials, I have found the following forms of passives that commonly used in these books:

▪ *Basic (BE + P2)*

This is one of the two dominant forms of passives that I found in the materials. They account for 60% of the total examples that we have collected. We can look at the examples:

- English version: Insurance is based on a contract. (5:67) → Author's translation: *Bảo hiểm dựa trên cơ sở một hợp đồng.* (5:68)
- English version: In the meantime we will not dwell on the legalistic aspects of insurance but focus on the more practical aspects of how insurance is transacted. (5:67) → Author's translation: *Hiện tại, ta sẽ không tập trung vào khía cạnh pháp lý của bảo hiểm mà tập trung vào những khía cạnh mang tính thực tiễn hơn của phương thức giao dịch bảo hiểm.* (5:67)
- English version: In the early days of insurance, each individual policy was prepared by hand and issued to the insured. (5:71) → Author's translation: *Vào những ngày đầu của bảo hiểm, người ta phải viết tay mỗi đơn bảo hiểm riêng lẻ và cấp cho người được bảo hiểm.* (5:72)

Through these examples, we can see that translators used different ways to translate

these English sentences into Vietnamese: they used the same Vietnamese passive sentences, or Vietnamese active sentences; or Vietnamese noun phrases and Vietnamese active sentence with indefinite subject (*người ta*).

▪ *Modal (Modal + be + P2)*

These sentences account for 24% of the total examples that I have collected. Here are some examples:

- English version: At this stage the insured could more properly be termed the proposer as this is at the point of describing the risk to the insurer in order to obtain insurance; (5:67) → Author's translation: *Trong giai đoạn này, người bảo hiểm có thể được gọi một cách chính xác hơn là người yêu cầu bảo hiểm bởi vì đây mới chỉ là giai đoạn miêu tả rủi ro cho người bảo hiểm để được bảo hiểm;* (5:68)
- English version: These forms may be requested from an insurer direct or could be provided by a broker or intermediary. (5:69) → Author's translation: *Các đơn này có thể do công ty bảo hiểm gốc hoặc môi giới bảo hiểm hay trung gian bảo hiểm cung cấp.* (5:70)
- The broker often prepares full details of a risk for an insurer, in a form which can be used by the insurer. (5:69) → Author's translation: *Môi giới bảo hiểm thường chuẩn bị đầy đủ chi tiết về rủi ro và chuyển cho công ty bảo hiểm theo mẫu mà công ty này có thể sử dụng được.* (5:70)

Through these examples, we can see that in addition to the mentioned ways of translation in above part, the translators also used Vietnamese passive sentences without words “*được*” or “*bị*” to translate English passive sentences into Vietnamese (in Vietnamese some linguists call these sentences neutral sentences).

▪ **Perfective (have + been + P2)**

Among I collected examples, this form of passive sentences accounts for about 8% of the total examples. We can look at these sentences:

- English version: The declaration says that the information that has been supplied by the person asking to be insured 'is true to the best of my knowledge and belief' (5:71) → Author's translation: *Nội dung của phần cam kết là thông tin do người yêu cầu bảo hiểm cung cấp 'là hoàn toàn đúng sự thật trong giới hạn tối đa mà người đó biết và tin tưởng'* (5:72)

- English version: They have already been outlined in the preceding chapter. (5:75) → Author's translation: *Những thuật ngữ này đã được trình bày ở chương trước.* (5:76)

Study these Vietnamese sentences; we can see that most of the sentences are in passive voice as English sentences. In addition, the translators used one more way of translation. They used the following Vietnamese structure: S1 + *được/ bị* + S2 + V. In this structure, S1 is the subject of English passive sentence; S2 is the agent of the action in the passive sentence. Sometimes this agent is the first personal plural pronoun or impersonal plural pronoun (in Vietnamese they are '*chúng tôi, họ, người ta*').

▪ **Modal perfective (Modal + have + been + P2)**

This form of passive sentences accounts for nearly 6%. The following are some examples:

- English version: The definitions could easily have been included in the various operative clauses. (5:77) → Author's translation: *Hẳn là ta có thể dễ dàng gộp các định nghĩa vào những điều khoản khác nhau.* (5:78)

- English version: If the policy runs to maturity, bonuses will be higher than if it becomes a death claim because they will have been added for a longer period. (5:169) → Author's translation: *Nếu đơn bảo hiểm đến ngày thanh toán, số tiền thưởng sẽ cao hơn so với khiếu nại trong trường hợp chết bởi vì, số tiền thưởng đã được cộng thêm cho một khoảng thời gian dài hơn* (5:170)

Through most of the Vietnamese sentences, we can see that translators used passive sentences without the words "*được*" and "*bị*". These two words are typically used in Vietnamese passive sentences. However, the perfect aspect of English verbs is not expressed in Vietnamese sentences. The reason for this may be that in Vietnamese grammar there is not concept of aspect.

▪ **Progressive (Be + being + P2)**

This form of passive sentences is rarely used in the materials on Economics and Business. Here are some of the examples:

- English version: One the one side is the marketing process which means being involved in the design of new products so as to be able to identify, anticipate and satisfy customer requirements. (5:235) → Author's translation: *Một bộ phận phụ trách quy trình tiếp thị liên quan đến việc thiết kế các sản phẩm mới để có thể nhận biết, dự đoán và đáp ứng các yêu cầu của khách hàng.* (5:236)

- English version: New price lists are being prepared and these will be sent to you as soon as they are ready. (4:150) → Author's translation: *Các bảng giá mới đang được tính toán và sẽ được gửi đến quý công ty ngay khi chúng được chuẩn bị xong.* (4:151)

We agree with English linguists, such as R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech and J. Svartvik (1985) that there is a notable difference in the frequency with which the active and passive voices are used. The active

is generally by far the more common, but there is considerable variation ten times as frequent in on text as in another.

3.2. Common mistakes made by UNETI students in translating passive sentences.

A total of 70 students from Finance and Banking Department – UNETI participated in the study. Most of them are familiar with the English terms of Economics and Business. Mistakes were collected from a test including 10 passive sentences, and students were asked to translate into Vietnamese. They are allowed to use dictionary for completion the test, and they have 60 minutes to write down all their answers.

**Table 1. The statistics of correct answers
(Number of students: 70)**

Item	Correct answers	%
1	8	11%
2	12	17%
3	5	7%
4	55	78%
5	35	50%
6	40	57%
7	30	42%
8	25	35%
9	40	57%
10	5	7%

▪ Unnatural translation due to unchanging the voice

After collecting the answers, I have found out that the students often rely too much on the form of the source language, making the English - Vietnamese translation through grammatically accepted but awkward in Vietnamese. This mistake accounts for 64% of the test. For instance, they often keep the same voice when interpreting the Vietnamese version of “S + passive verb + by-phrases” as “*bị... bởi ai đó*”.

▪ Probable cause of the mistakes: Interlingua errors

These mistakes are found in the miss-selection of voice. They account for nearly 25% of the test. One of the factors leading to these errors is that the students have a habit of thinking in their mother tongue.

3.3. Solution for translating passive sentences in English books for Economics and Business

- We can keep passive structure and add the word “*được*” before the verb.

For example:

- English version: All particulars are shown on the enclosed price list C.I.F Keelung as requested and our complete catalogs are sent by separate post. → Author’s translation: *Tất cả các chi tiết đều được ghi rõ trong bảng giá gửi kèm bao gồm giá hàng, phí bảo hiểm và phí vận chuyển đến Cơ Long theo yêu cầu, còn trọn bộ danh mục hàng của chúng tôi được gửi riêng.*

- We can change passive sentences into active sentences, including Vietnamese structure: ‘S1 + *được* + S2 + V’

For example:

- English version: Many offices add that the insured must be certified to be so disabled by a medical practitioner appointed by the office. → Author’s translation: *Nhiều công ty bảo hiểm nhân thọ còn quy định thêm người được bảo hiểm phải được bác sỹ tư do công ty bảo hiểm chỉ định hoặc phê chuẩn chứng nhận là mất khả năng làm việc.*

- We can use Vietnamese impersonal sentences

For example:

- English version: To avoid any difficulties with the customs authorities here, please

make sure that our shipping instructions are carefully observed → Author's translation: *Để tránh gặp khó khăn với các nhà chức trách hải quan ở đây, vui lòng đảm bảo tuân thủ thận trọng những chỉ thị gửi hàng của chúng tôi.*

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

4.1. Conclusions

This study has presented the overview of the English passive. Basing on this background and the data collection, an investigation into English passive sentences used in books for Economics and Business has been conducted to give a detailed description of this specific group with reference to the Vietnamese equivalents.

Consequently, a number of similarities and differences between English passive sentences and their Vietnamese equivalents have been found to help find out some possible implications for reading and translating books for Economics and Business.

4.2. Implications

The interference of the first language can be seen as an explanation for a majority of errors committed in the passive. The teachers are suggested to limit the interference of the source language and help students use the foreign language as much as possible. Translation exercises should be done until students already obtain a good grasp of the form, meaning and use of the passive patterns.

In a nutshell, to some extents, when teaching English passive voice, the teachers should refer to Vietnamese and English cultures in appropriate stages so that the students can get along with the passive without any difficulty. Another way to beat the interference errors is to get students to do more exercises. The students should practice again and again the same patterns until they can use them automatically.

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