

# INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL IN TEACHING TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION: A CASE STUDY

**Pham Vu Phi Ho**

Ho Chi Minh City Open University

Email: [ho.pham@ou.edu.vn](mailto:ho.pham@ou.edu.vn)

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## ABSTRACT

*Recently the teaching activities that correspond to the material used in the translation and interpretation classes at Ho Chi Minh City Open University (HCMC OU) haven't satisfied the students' needs and interests due to monotonous activities. The Faculty of Foreign Languages of HCMC OU is seeking for an innovation. The study aims to investigate if the new model applied to training students of this subject is effective. The design of this study is based on the existing problems to seek for an innovative method rather than dealing with theoretical issues in this field. 125 undergrad students who registered for the 50-hour-course of translation and interpretation at HCMC OU participated in the study. The training models were classroom activities, dubbing voice in Video clips, and final project of translation. The study provides innovative activities that the instructor/researcher applied for the translation and interpretation classroom and measures the effectiveness of the training models. The study sets guidelines for the instructors at HCMC OU to use extra activities to help students improve their skills in translation and interpretation classes.*

**Keywords:** *Course-book, dubbing voice, projects translation, task activities.*

## 1. Introduction

Translating is often hard work for both lecturer and students, especially those who are novice in translation areas. Students often have a lot of difficulties in translating activities because of their limits of vocabulary, grammatical structure, cultural issues, knowledge of the translating texts, even the problems of their own mother tongue language. Yet, the lecturer also has his or her own difficulties in explaining each translated version that relates to collocation, context knowledge, or cultural issues. And there is no single translating version for each text. The possibilities of translation might be various

that sometimes it's hard to explain which one/sentence should be the most appropriate translated version. Another problem for the novice translators is that of the influence of the mother tongue language. The novice translators often base on the structure of the source language (SL) to translate into the target language (TL). Hence, the structure of the translated version is often of the structure of the source language which is not what the translators are supposed to do. The other problem occurred in the translation courses was that most of the activities in the classrooms at the Faculty of Foreign Languages were correcting the translated texts

of homework for the students. This seemed to be limited in terms of classroom activities. There should be some innovation in the instructional models to help make the learning activities more effective.

In my own professional context at the Faculty of Foreign languages at HCMC OU, when I asked the students to translate an English text into Vietnamese version, I realized that the students did not use skills of pre-reading or scanning the content before they conducted their translation, they just took each sentence and translated sentence by sentence (personal communication, 2013). To confirm my view on this issue, I asked them to translate the reading of “The Power of holding hands” extracted from a book of “Chicken soup for the soul” used in the course-book material. I found that the students just read the title and translated it, and read each sentence to translate without any prior reference to the whole content of the reading. For example, the title of the reading is “The Power of Holding Hands,” the students translated as “Sức mạnh của nắm tay.” After translating the whole text, the students were explained clearly the meaning of the content of the reading text. Then I asked them to re-consider the title and translated it again based on the content that I instructed them to do translation. One group of the students in the classroom changed their first translated version as “sức mạnh của tinh thần đoàn kết.” This translated version was much better than the first one because it was based on the content of the reading and based on the culture of the target language, Vietnamese.

Besides, the Translation-Interpretation courses are compulsory subjects at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Ho Chi Minh City Open University (HCMC OU). Training students to do translation and interpretation is always a challenge to instructors at HCMC OU. Razmjou (2003) claims that theoretical knowledge and practical skills alone are not

adequate to prepare students in this field. Only a sophisticated and systematic treatment of translation education can lead to the development of successful translators. Searls-Ridge’s (2000) argues that good translators are made, not born. This indicates that the translators, especially novice translators need to work a lot in order to deal with the texts when they conduct their translation/interpretation.

During the translating activities, Melby and Foster (2010) suggest that the context of the source language is of importance which really affects translation and they define context as five factors which are relevant to the understanding of source text and the production of target text such as co-text, chron-text, rel-text, bi-text, and non-text. First, the co-text of a word or phrase is limited surrounding text within a particular version of one document but not limited to the current sentence. Second, the term *chron-text* means the chronological changes in a source text, which includes keeping track of different versions of a text and what edits were made at each stage. Third, *rel-text* refers to translation which is almost always necessary to consult not only the document being translated but also related documents and other resources. Fourth, *bi-text* is a bilingual resource. In other words, documents are re-translated in a comparison of various ways to translate the same document. Finally, *non-text* refers to aspects of context that are not accessed through written texts during a translation process. They might include technical knowledge and cultural awareness about the subject matter of the source text.

Furthermore, to do research on a translation course, Takeda (2010) trained students with an 8-week course of Research on Interpreting to help students become familiar with the key milestones, concepts and recent trends in Interpreting Studies and to be initiated into basic research methods and approaches. The first four weeks of the course

was dedicated to reviewing and discussing the main concepts and issues in Interpreting Studies. The subsequent four weeks of the course was used for student presentations. At the end of the course the students were required to submit a research proposal, an action research report, a research report, or a critical review of previous literature. In addition to individual consultations with the teacher, students utilized feedback from their colleagues during their in-class presentations to finalize their submissions. The study found that first students seem to be very interested in the process of interpreting, especially strategies to deal with specific challenges in interpreting. Second, students seem to be sensitive to directionality and language competency issues, and feel that a long-established universal curriculum may not serve well to address specific needs in specific language combinations. Finally, students seem to be very interested in whether what they are taught is in line with the market reality. The study brought an idea to the researcher of the current study that encouraging students to conduct projects or reports is an important activity to enhance instructional effects and improve students' language competency.

Relating to the context of the current study, Le Thi Thanh Thu et al. (2012) investigated the graduates' status (academic year 2004-2008) from the English faculties of eight universities in Ho Chi Minh City. To the graduates who majored in translation and interpretation, the study found that 66.7% of them asserted that the training curriculum only provided them with medium knowledge and skills, and they were not quite confident in their professional knowledge. They complained about the inadequateness of credits and knowledge offered for this major. In addition, the study revealed that most of universities did not have faculty staff/instructors who specialized in translation

and interpretation in order to help students do their translation and interpretation tasks professionally.

Teaching activities that correspond to the material used in the translation and interpretation classes at HCMC OU haven't satisfied the students' needs and interests. Pham Vu Phi Ho and Phu Thi Kieu Bui (2013) conducted a survey to explore students' attitudes toward the training programs in this major and found that the HCMC OU students were not equipped enough knowledge and language proficiency for the translation/interpretation skills. Their problems in translation and interpretation include language issues and lacking of translation–interpretation strategies. In terms of materials and teaching methods, the students were not satisfied because of out-of-date information and monotonous teaching methods. For these reasons, the Faculty of Foreign Languages of HCMC OU is seeking for an innovation. Therefore, the study aims to investigate if the new model applied to training students of this subject is effective. First, I explored the translation strategies employed by the students during the translating activities; then I explored the students' attitudes towards the collaborative activities that I applied in the classroom to see if this helped students to learn from one other. I finally asked the students to evaluate the activities of dubbing voices into video clips after translation. These activities were supposed to be a motivating model in teaching translation courses at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at HCMC OU. These purposes were hypothesized in the forms of the following research questions.

#### **Research questions**

1. What strategies do the HCMC Open University students employ during the translation processes?
2. What are the students' attitudes towards the collaborative activities in

translation?

3. Do the activities of translating and dubbing voices into the Video clips motivate students in the learning processes?

## **2. Methodology**

### **Pedagogical setting and samples**

The study was conducted in three intact classes of translation and interpretation at HCMC Open University (HCMC OU). 125 undergraduate students who registered for these courses participated in the study. Before participated in this study, the students were trained one course of translation and interpretation (45 periods). This course of translation and interpretation training lasted for 15 weeks; each meeting lasted 3 periods (50 minutes/period). The instructor/researcher used the course-book of translation and interpretation - 2 designed by senior lecturers at HCMC OU. Other additional materials were also provided to the students such as VOA Special English - Economics and Education Reports, and English songs. The training models were translation and interpretation and doing projects. More description about the instructional models and project assignments will be presented in the following session.

### **Instructional Model**

#### **Course-book and activities in the classroom**

The course-work was designed with task activities. Every week the students were assigned to complete some parts of the textbook in which sentence structures and grammatical patterns were set up and then posted their translation version onto the green-board. The students were competitive to be selected as volunteers by raising their hands after the announcements were delivered by the instructor/ researcher. In addition, the students were randomly put into groups of four to help one another learn and did the translation together. They were asked to translate all

tasks from the textbook as the normal curriculum. The translation would be one part of the big project submitted at the end of the course.

The students were instructed to do the translation with following considerable issues. First, the novice translators should read and understand the meaning of the source language of the text before doing any translation. With this issue, the translators were supposed to conduct a lot of reading to obtain the knowledge of the related areas. Cultural issues were also considered. Second, any translated version from English to Vietnamese should be for Vietnamese readers who did not know much of English. Therefore, the language of the Vietnamese-translated version should be used for Vietnamese readers, and the structure of Vietnamese version should be of the Vietnamese language structure, not of the English - structures. This required the novice translators to obtain good knowledge of their own mother tongue language. Finally, for whatever translating theories or strategies that the students applied in their translation activities, making sense of the translated version for the target language readers, remaining the original meaning of the source language, should be conducted. This required the novice translators to apply different skills and theories of translation into their work. The main purpose is to help the readers have a feeling that that translated version is similar to that of the local language writers’.

### **Additional assignments to the course**

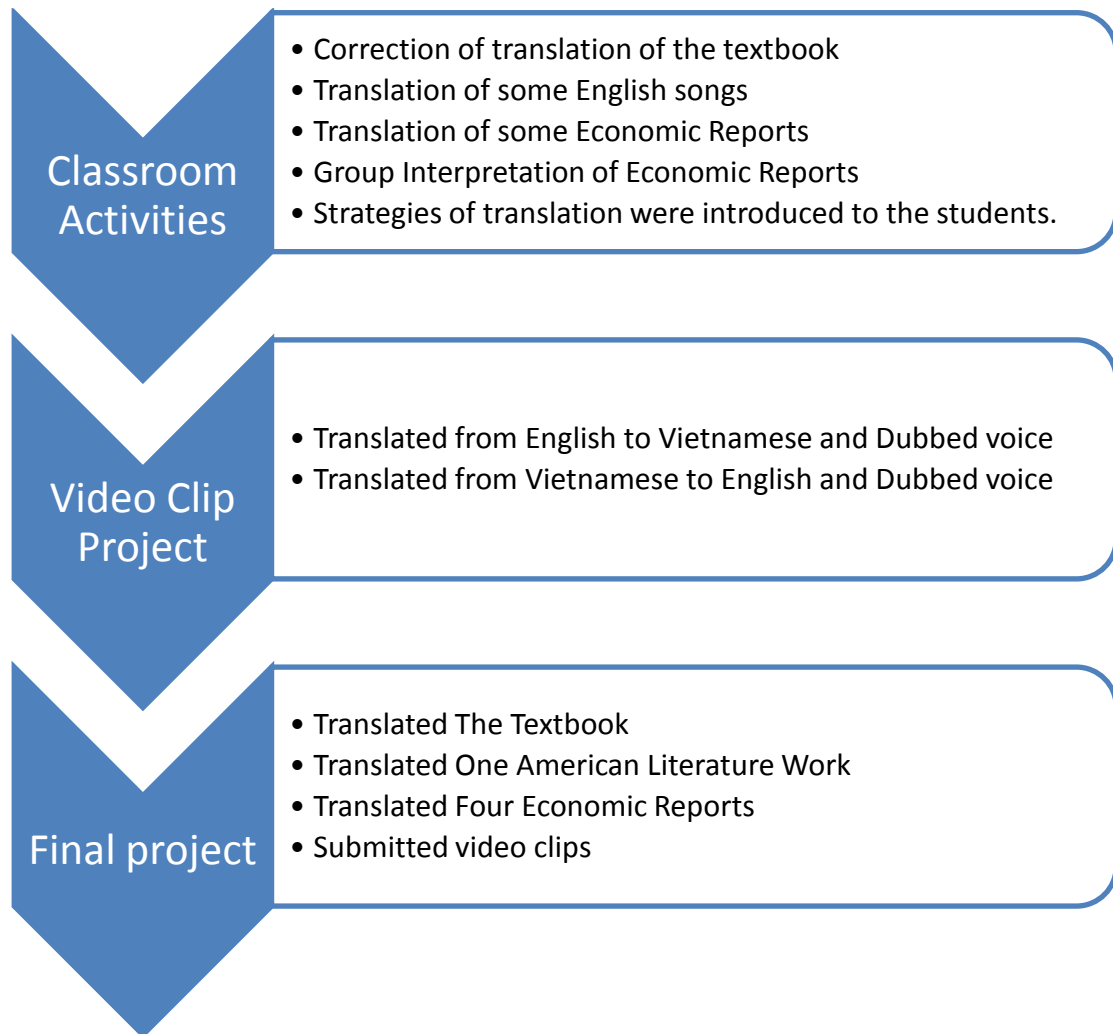
Apart from the translation activities conducted in the classroom as described in the above session, the students were challenged to do additional assignments. First, the instructor/researcher sometimes let the students listen to an English song three times and asked them to translate the meaning of it. Totally three English songs were added to the training which were downloaded from

Youtube website. One was “Tell Me Why” sung by Declan Galbraith; one was “You’re My Everything” by Santa Esmeranda; and another one was “I Started a Joke” by Bee Gee. Second, the instructor/researcher sometimes let the students listen to some Education Reports from VOA Special English, “Linking Vocabulary and Employment,” “A Goal for 2012,” and “How an Allowance Help Children Learn about Money.” Because Education Reports were not as hard as other reports, they were played only twice for the students to listen for their translation. Then the students were asked to volunteer to do the translation. The main points of the report were focused. Three students translated what they had taken notes to present to the whole class. Three of them supplemented the missing information, if any, when they translated. These activities were conducted alternatively with the activities of textbook translation. The purpose was to change the activities to avoid boredom among students in the classroom learning. Third, the students were asked to work in groups to translate the Economic Reports apart from the activities in the classroom and the textbook. Each group had to visit the VOA Special English on Youtube.com to download the video clips. Each group was in charge of one-month reports, normally four reports each. They were asked to translate the reports into Vietnamese, prepared and noted the new vocabulary under each report, and shared with other students from other groups to help each other learn. These activities aimed at helping

students learn and increase their vocabulary bank. Then the instructor/researcher randomly picked out a group to read the report in English, and another group of students to interpret into Vietnamese. The activities of interpretation were announced to the whole class earlier in order that they could prepare and learn. Again the purpose was to motivate the students to learn and to enhance their vocabulary in Economics. Each week, two or three groups were appointed to do these interpretations. Other members of the class were asked to listen and learn from their partners.

### **Project**

During the course, the students were required to do two projects. One project was that the students worked in a group of three or four, translated a video clip of economic report into Vietnamese, and dubbed their voice into the clip. Each group produced two clips: one was from English to Vietnamese, and the other was from Vietnamese into English. For the Vietnamese version video clip, they could select any from the television news. Then worked together to translate into English; and one of them would dub their voice into it. They submitted to the instructor/researcher three weeks before the course ended. The other project was that the students also worked in group and translated all parts of the textbook (they did during the course), including four video clips of economic reports, one work of American Literature. They submitted a hard copy right in the last class meeting of the course.



**Figure 1. Instructional Model and Classroom Activities**

Three weeks before the course ended, each group sent their clips of dubbing voices to the teacher via Facebook or uploaded to Youtube and sent to the instructor/researcher via email. The instructor/researcher showed all the clips to the class for the students to listen, watch and evaluate their classmates' work. The instructor/researcher also checked and provided them with some comments on their translation, techniques of making clips, and the voices to improve the quality of their translated version. The purpose was to help students enjoy their products. Good translation was highly evaluated.

### **3. Data Collection and Analysis**

At the end of the translation course, a 15-item-end-of-term questionnaire was administered to 125 students from three

different classes that the instructor/researcher was in charge of and employed the model of training (Fig. 1). Of the 15-item questionnaire, items 1 – 5 explored the students' strategy use during the translation processes, items 6 – 9 investigated the students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of translation activities with groups, and items 10 – 15 examined the motivation of dubbing voices into video clips. These questions were designed in the 6-point Likert's scale. The responses of the students on these questions were analyzed by the SPSS vs. 20 to test the mean scores of each item (descriptive statistics). The Cronbach's Alpha of reliability analysis reached at .835.

### **4. Findings and discussion**

Research question 1: What strategies do the HCMC Open University students employ

during the translation processes?

In order to respond to research question 1, items 1 to 5 relating to students' strategies used during the translation processes. The criteria for the Likert-type scale ranged from 1

(strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) were set as follows: low evaluation: 1 – 2.66; medium evaluation: 2.67 – 4.33; and high evaluation: 4.34 – 6. Table 1 presents the students' translation strategies.

**Table 1. Students' translation strategies**  
**Descriptive Statistics**

No.	Translation strategies	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	When translating a sentence or a paragraph of a text, you conducted your translation word-for-word based on the meaning of the source language.	125	3.56	1.15
2	Whenever you translated a text, you read carefully the whole paragraph to understand its meaning, then you translated into Vietnamese.	125	4.72	1.11
3	When translating the text, you first translated the text based on the meaning of the original onto a draft, then transferred the structure of the English to the Vietnamese.	125	4.00	1.24
4	As usual, when you translated a text, you often read and translated part-by-part without connecting them to the whole context.	125	4.23	1.19
5	As usual, when translating a text, you often read the whole text before translating it.	125	4.33	1.13

Table 1 reveals that not many students, (1) when translating a sentence or a paragraph of a text, translated word-for-word based on the meaning of the source language ( $M = 3.56$ ;  $SD = 1.15$ ). This indicates that the novice translators overcome their styles of translation and applied new strategies in their translating activities after obtaining the training. This might come from the classroom activities when the instructor/researcher explained and provided comments on their translated version based on the new instructional model (Fig. 1). Bassnett (2005) advised translators to avoid word-for-word renderings when they translated one language into another. Hatim and Munday (2004) state that word-for-word substitution is not a solid base for translation. However, (2) most of the students confirmed that whenever they

translated a text, they read carefully the whole paragraph to understand its meaning, then they translated into Vietnamese ( $M = 4.72$ ;  $SD = 1.11$ ). This indicates the students made use of the strategies of translation trained by the instructor during the course. In other words, the students used the context for translation rather than word-for-word translation. Melby and Foster (2010) asserted that context played the key role in a translation process. Luther (1963 cited in Munday, 2008) rejected word-for-word translation because the translated version was unable to convey the meaning of the source language and sometimes incomprehensible.

Also, (3) some students reported that when they translated the text, they first translated the source language based on the meaning of the original onto a draft, then

transferred the structure of the SL to the TL ( $M = 4.00$ ;  $SD = .93$ ). This strategy came from the instructor/researcher who repeatedly told the students that a good translation version should be in Vietnamese structure rather than English structure.

Some students reported that (4) as their habits, when they translated a text, they read and translated part-by-part without connecting them to the whole context ( $M = 4.23$ ;  $SD = 1.19$ ). However, some stated that (5) they often read the whole text before they did translation ( $M = 4.33$ ;  $SD = 1.13$ ). Although these two questionnaire items were not highly evaluated, the mean scores of the latter was a

bit higher than that of the former indicating that the students attempted to connect part of the text to the whole context to understand and convey the original meaning of the SL as much as they could.

Research question 2: What are the students' attitudes towards the collaborative activities in translation?

Items 6 to 9 in the questionnaire relating to students' attitudes towards the effectiveness on the collaborative translation activities were analyzed to respond to this research question. Table 2 presents the students' attitudes towards the collaboration activities in translation.

**Table 2. The effectiveness of Collaborative Translation Activities**

No.	Translating activities with groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
6	Thanks to collaborative translation activities, I learned a lot of knowledge from one another.	125	4.91	0.97
7	I found that the activities of translating the textbook and economic reports, then sharing with other group members helped me improve my knowledge.	125	4.75	1.15
8	I found that doing project in group during the course helped me learn a lot of vocabulary as well as translation skills.	125	4.72	0.97
9	Apart from translating the exercises in the textbook, translating from 4 to 5 economic reports helped me enhance my necessary vocabulary.	125	4.54	1.04

As can be seen from table 2, in general, the students highly evaluated the activities of collaborative translation. (6) Most of the students agreed that they learned much from one another due to collaborative translation activities ( $M = 4.91$ ;  $SD = .97$ ). In addition, the students strongly agreed that (7) the activities of translating the textbook and economic reports, then sharing with other group members helped them improve their knowledge ( $M = 4.75$ ;  $SD = 1.15$ ). Also, in terms of doing projects during the course (8), the students confirmed that doing projects

together during the course helped them learn a lot of vocabulary as well as the translation skills ( $M = 4.72$ ;  $SD = .97$ ). Furthermore, (9) the students stated that apart from translating the exercises in the textbook, translating from 4 to 5 economic reports helped them enhance their necessary vocabulary in doing translation ( $M = 4.54$ ;  $SD = 1.04$ ). The study indicates that the collaboration in doing projects is of great activities to help students learn from one another. As the instructor/researcher of this class, I found that each sentence, when translated by a group of



students was much better than that if translated by individual. The instructors of translation classrooms should make use the power of group-work to enhance students' skills and knowledge of translation.

**Research question 3:** Do the activities of translating and dubbing voices into the Video clips motivate students in the learning processes?

Questionnaire items 10 – 15 were analyzed to respond to this research question. Among four or five Economic reports that the students were assigned to do the translation for the classroom activities, they would purposively pick up one for dubbing their

voices into the clips. The students were advised to select the one that they felt most confident in their translation to do it. This is from English to Vietnamese translation. Besides, each group was also assigned to select one of the 4-to-5 minute clips from the Vietnamese television program (provided online) in order to translate it into English and dub voices. The best person of the group might dub his/her voice to the Video clips for this activity. Table 3 reports the students' attitudes towards the activities of dubbing students' voices of their translated version into the video clips.

**Table 3. Activities of translating and dubbing voices into the video clips**

No.	Dubbing voices into the clips	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
10	I really enjoy translating the texts of Economic reports from the VOA Special English.	125	4.28	1.04
11	I found that the activities of dubbing voices of the translated version in English into the video clips were motivating.	125	3.95	1.34
12	I found that the activities of dubbing voices of the translated version in Vietnamese into the video clips were motivating.	125	4.00	1.30
13	The activities of dubbing voices into the video clips make me concentrate more to enhance the quality of the translation versions.	125	4.34	1.16
14	Thanks to the activities of translations of the Economic Report from VOA, I learned a lot of new vocabulary in economic field.	125	4.59	1.11
15	The activities of translating the Economic Report from VOA helped me improve my knowledge in science.	125	4.58	1.13
	Valid N (listwise)	125		

Table 3 shows that, in general, the students were not highly motivated in the activities of translating the texts of Economic reports from the VOA Special English (M = 4.28; SD = 1.04) (item 10) or those of dubbing voices into the video clips either in

English version (M = 3.95; SD = 1.34) (item 11) or in Vietnamese version (M = 4.00; SD = 1.30) (item 12). This might come from the fact that just one or two representative members of each group dubbed his/her voice into it, so other might not find really

motivated in these activities. However, (13) most of the students assert that the activities of dubbing voices into the video clips make them focus more on enhancing the quality of the translation versions ( $M = 4.34$ ;  $SD = 1.16$ ). Particularly, the students confirmed that (14) thanks to the activities of translation the Economic Reports, they learned a lot of new vocabulary in the economic field ( $M = 4.59$ ;  $SD = 1.11$ ) and (14) improve their knowledge in science ( $M = 4.58$ ;  $SD = 1.13$ ). This was a remarkable finding of the instructional models of this paper in terms of pedagogical aspects when the students paid attention to the quality of their products and enhanced their vocabulary as well as knowledge in science. Though the hypothesis of this research question was rejected, the general purpose of education in promoting students to enhance quality of their learning products and knowledge was achieved when the students confirmed that they learned much vocabulary and improved their knowledge in science when participated in these activities.

### 5. Conclusion

The students in this study, after receiving a new instructional model, employed good strategies to obtain deep understanding of the source language in order to translate into the target language with the structure of the target language rather than that of the source language. This might come from the efforts of the lecturer who

consistently reminded them of the essential strategies during the translation activities in the classroom. Different from what I described in the introduction when I observed the students' translation activities, after training students with a new model, word-for-word translation is no longer favoured by the HCMC OU students. In addition, collaborative translation activities were reported as a powerful means to help students learn from one another, improve knowledge and translation skills in order to enhance the quality of the translated versions. Although dubbing voices into Video clips was not found to be highly motivating the students in the learning processes, it functioned as a means to help students focus more on the quality of their products and learn new knowledge.

Some limitations of this research are as follows. First, the current research is just a case study and functions as a preliminary study to test the instructional model employed at the Faculty of Foreign Language at HCMC OU, there is no means for generalization for any other contexts. Second, the quality of the translated version of the students were not measured by inter-raters. The researcher just tests the instructional model. Further research should focus on the following aspects: (1) the quality of students' translated version, (2) strategies for translation activities. Also, collaborative translation should be researched with pre- vs. post-tests design.

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