

Title: ERRORS IN THE TRANSLATION OF TOPIC-COMMENT STRUCTURES OF VIETNAMESE INTO ENGLISH

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Abstract

Starting with the assumption that Vietnamese is a topic-prominent language and the basic structure of Vietnamese manifests a topic-comment relation rather than a subject-predicate relation (Thompson 1965, Dyvik 1984, Hao 1991, Rosen 1998, Anh 2000), the aim of the study is to investigate the extent to which the typological differences between Vietnamese and English influence the process of translating authentic Vietnamese sentences into English. This investigation uses preliminary findings drawn from an error analysis of the Vietnamese-English translations by Vietnamese EFL students. The analysis focuses on the errors made when translating the dropped subject and empty elements of Vietnamese. This is important given the fact that the grammatical subject is always required in English but not in Vietnamese sentences. The translators for this study were 95 students from English translation classes in their first, second, third, and fourth years of the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City,

Vietnam. The data was collected from the translation texts of these students using the same source text. This study should help to pinpoint the potential problematic errors to which students are prone when translating the topic-comment structure of Vietnamese, and provide some practical guidelines to teachers so that they can prevent these errors from the learners in the teaching of Vietnamese-English translations.

Key words: translation error, error analysis, topic-comment structure, language learners

TRANSLATING OF TOPIC-COMMENT STRUCTURES OF VIETNAMESE INTO ENGLISH

1. Introduction:

Although many studies have been carried out in error analysis and contrastive analysis in second language learning, language teaching and materials development, there have been few studies using these types of analysis with Vietnamese university students as informants. Even fewer studies have been carried out to analyse Vietnamese students' errors in translation. To illustrate, in Spillner's (1991) comprehensive bibliography of the field of error analysis, out of 108 studies (2% of a total 5,398) focusing on translation, none examined the syntactic errors in Vietnamese-English translation. This present study aims to fill this gap in the field of error analysis in Vietnamese-English translation. The study's main hypothesis is that the Vietnamese topic-comment structure and its empty elements can cause some difficulties for the translation process. It is hoped that the present study will shed light on the common types of errors by Vietnamese students in translating the topic-comment structures and that it will have implications for translation pedagogy.

Although these errors may not be just translation errors, since the student informants were in the process of completing a four-year course specializing in translation, they may reveal the types of errors to be expected from students during the course of studying translation. Therefore, the problems found in this present study may help teachers and the material designers choose an appropriate pedagogical method. It needs to be stressed here that this study seeks more to aid teachers of translation rather than professional translations as such and that the informants for the research, while advanced second language learners, could be considered to be novice translators.

2. Research Questions:

- a. Do Vietnamese students have problems in translating Vietnamese sentence types in which the Topic in the Topic-Comment structure of the sentence does not coincide with the Subject? What sorts of errors do they make in translating this specific type of structure?
- b. What pedagogical implications for teachers can be drawn from the findings of this study to help students deal with such errors?

3. Definition of Topic-Comment

Originally, the term TOPIC is the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of the term THEME, which was coined by the Prague School of functional linguistics, following Mathesius (English translation: 1975), e.g. Firbas (1969), Danes (1974). Topic is often defined in terms of its linguistic structures, either syntactic or phonetic. It has been defined in terms of linear order – as the first expression of the sentence (e.g. Halliday, 1967), in grammatical terms – as the subject (Gundel 1974) and in intonational terms – as the non-stressed expression (Chomsky 1971). The shortcomings of these definitions lie in their inability to answer the question related to the discourse conditions under which a given expression would count as topic. According to Reinhart (1981: 57), since any parts of the same sentence can serve as a topic in different contexts of utterance, topic is a term that cannot be defined directly on the basis of syntactic structures or semantic relation. Rather, it is a pragmatic relation.

This paper adopts the definition of topic as put forward by Hockett (1958: 201): ‘the speaker announces a topic and then says something about it’. Hockett also discusses one point that this paper aims to illustrate: in English and familiar languages of Europe, topics are usually also subjects and comments are predicates (as in example 1 below); however, it is not always the case that the sentential topic (That new book by Thomas Guernsey) coincides with the grammatical subject (I), as shown in example 2.

- (1) *John* / ran away
- (2) *That new book by Thomas Guernsey* / I haven’t read yet.

These two examples demonstrate the typological difference between Vietnamese and English. While in English, subject is an obligatory constituent and occupies the initial position of a sentence, it may be dropped in Vietnamese. Vietnamese sentence often starts with a topic which can be taken over by any part of speech. This leads to two phenomena: (1) the subject is often dropped in Vietnamese sentence and (2) the position of a topic in Vietnamese can be occupied by a grammatical subject, an

adverb, an object or indirect object or simply a word semantically relating to the comment discussed in the topic.

4. Rosen (1998)'s categorization and examples from Elicitation Task:

This paper is based on the claim that Rosen (1998) has proved in her PhD thesis, that topic-comment constructions and empty elements are basic constructions in the Vietnamese language. According to Rosen's (1998) classification, there are five types of relations that may exist between a Noun Phrase topic and the comment in Vietnamese, which will be listed below. The examples illustrating these five types are quoted directly from the text used as Elicitation Task for the present study. In case there is no sentence of such type in the Elicitation Task, Rosen's examples from her PhD thesis are quoted. Words in italics and brackets are used to refer to dropped subject or null topic (i.e. topic of the sentence which is dropped). Where there are three capitalized lines, the first line is the analysis of Topic-Comment structure of the whole sentence, the second line is the analysis of Topic-Comment of each embedded clause. The last capitalized line is the analysis of Subject-Predicate structure of each sentence, using structuralist approach. The last line is the suggested translation, while the order of the sentence in the source text will appear at the end of the translation (see Appendix A and B for numbered sentences in the Test and the analysis of topic-comment constructions and empty pronouns of 18 sentences) (TM: Topic Marker)

(1) The topic may be understood as filling a gap in the comment.

Tôi	thì	(<i>tôi</i>)	không	ngủ	được.
I	TM	(<i>I</i>)	not	sleep	manage
TOPIC	TM	COMMENT			
As for me, (I) couldn't sleep.					

(2) The topic may be coreferential with a noun phrase or pronoun in the comment.

Tâm,	cây đàn nguyệt	tuyệt vời	tới mức	tuyệt vọng,	u uẩn,
Tam	moon-shaped guitar	excellent	to degree	disappointed	hidden
TOPIC	COMMENT				
	TOPIC 1	COMMENT 1			
SUBJECT 1	APPOSITION	PREDICATE 1			

_ bế tắc	mà	nghĩa khí,			
_ deadlock	but	noble,			
Tam, a player of the moon-shaped guitar, is so excellent that he appears desperate and mysterious, frustrated but still giving.					

cử chỉ	thật	chính xác	với	tâm trạng.
gesture	very	accurate	with	state of mind.
TOPIC 2	COMMENT 2			
SUBJECT 2	PREDICATE 2			

his gestures reflect his mood precisely. (sentence 17)

3) The topic may be semantically related to any specific constituent in the comment, its referent is simply what the comment is about.

Cảnh thả đèn trời	(người ta)	tương như	chỉ có	ma thuật	mới
scene drop light sky	(people)	seem	only	magic	in order to
TOPIC	COMMENT				
OBJECT OF VERB 2	NULL SUBJECT 1	VERB 1		SUBJECT 2	

_ làm nổi
 _do manage
_COMMENT
 _VERB 2

The scene of dropping the lantern that we/ one may think can only happen by magic. (sentence 5)

(4) The topic may not be related to any constituents, empty or overt, in the comment.

Cảnh quay nào	(người ta/ người xem)	cũng	thấy	mồ hôi.
Scene any	(people/audience)	also	see	sweat
TOPIC	COMMENT			
TOPICALISED ADVERB OF CLAUSAL COMMENT	NULL SUBJECT		VERB	OBJECT

You/we/one can see the sweat behind every scene. (sentence 6)

(5) The topic may be a verb phrase, a clause or an embedded topic-comment construction.

Đi Sài Gòn,	thì	tôi	đi	mỗi	tuần	ba	lần
Go Saigon	TM	I	go	each	week	three	time.
TOPIC	TM	COMMENT					

As for going to Sai Gon, I go three times every week.

Regarding the empty pronoun, Emeneau (1951:114) has mentioned tacitly this characteristic of Vietnamese in the following extract: ‘When the subject, however, would be an anaphoric pronoun or a pronoun denoting the speaker or the hearer, lack of occurrence is very frequently the option chosen. This holds also for the other constructions in which such pronoun may occur, e.g., as object of a verb or as an attribute following a noun. It may be a general rule that pronouns are omissible when no ambiguity could arise through the omission’. Rosen (1998:144) remarks that the Vietnamese system for pronominal reference is quite complicated. However, her most consistent generalization is that empty pronouns are possible for subjects, direct objects and indirect objects, but never for objects of prepositions. In English, the deletion of anaphoric pronoun is also possible, in the case when the special effect is targeted or when the pronoun in the first clause has been located, for example ‘I like fish, but not cat’. However, In Vietnamese, the empty pronoun is allowed even at the first clause of

the first sentence, when referring to the speaker. Rosen (1998) listed four types of empty pronouns in Vietnamese, which will be discussed below with examples from the Elicitation Task.

(6) Empty pronouns in simple sentences.

Trước hết là	(<i>tôi</i>)	mê mẩn	với	những hình ảnh	‘rất’
First of all	(<i>I</i>)	be charmed	with	classifier images	typical
FRAME TOPIC	NULL TOPIC	COMMENT			
	NULL SUBJECT	PREDICATE			

_ ngôn ngữ điện ảnh.
 _ language movie industry

Firstly, I am fascinated by the images [which are] entirely typical of film language. (sentence 1)

(7) Empty pronouns in embedded clauses.

giá	(<i>người ta/đạo diễn</i>)	chỉ	đặt tên	phim	là	Mê Thảo	thôi
if	(<i>people/film director</i>)	only	name	film	to be	Me Thao	only
	TOPIC						
	NULL TOPIC 1		COMMENT 1				
	NULL SUBJECT 1		PREDICATE 1				

supposing the film had been named simply *Mê Thảo*,

thì	(<i>bộ phim</i>)	nghe	giản dị hơn	và	‘đã’	hơn.]
TM	(<i>film</i>)	hear	simple more	and	exciting	more
TM	COMMENT					
	NULL TOPIC 2		COMMENT 2			
	NULL SUBJECT 2		PREDICATE 2			

it would have been pleasant to the ears. (sentence 1)

(8) Empty Pronouns in consecutive clauses.

Trong nhiều	nhân vật	phụ	thành công,	ông	bổ	già	rất	sinh động
In many	character	secondary	successful	man	servant	old	very	lively
FRAME TOPIC				TOPIC			COMMENT 1	
				SUBJECT			PREDICATE 1	

_ và cảm động
 _ and touching

Among the many successful supporting characters, [that of] the old servant is very vivid and touching

(<i>ông</i>) xứng đáng	được	bầu	là	vai	phụ	xuất sắc	nhất
(<i>he</i>) deserving	be/get	nominate	be	character	secondary	excellent	best
NULL TOPIC 2	COMMENT 2						
NULL SUBJECT	PREDICATE 2						

and worthy to be nominated for most successful supporting actor. (sentence 14)

(9) Empty Pronouns with Indefinite Reference

(.....) Ăn quả, (...) nhớ kẻ trồng cây.

(...) Eat fruit (...) remember person plant tree

When you eat fruit, remember the person who planted the tree.

Sentence 17 consists of two comments. The first comment is an embedded topic-comment structure (or ‘double-subject construction’¹), in which the NP topic is coreferential with the main topic, as stated in (2). The second comment of sentence 17 is an embedded topic-comment structure, the topic of which is semantically related to the main topic of the sentence, as shown in (3) above. Sentence 5 is an example of a sentence where the topic is semantically related to a specific constituent in the comment, as shown in (3) above (i.e. the topic is the object of the verb mentioned in the comment). Sentence 18 also has two comments: the first comment is an embedded topic-comment structure, the second comment is also an embedded one, but there is a gap within this second comment filled by the main topic of the sentence, as shown in (3) above. Sentence 6 is an example of the topic not being related to any constituents, empty or overt, in the comment (i.e. the topic is the adverb of the comment) as shown in (4) above. Sentence 2 and 13 are examples of empty pronouns in simple sentences, as shown in (6) above. Sentence 1 has the empty pronoun in embedded clauses, shown in (7) above. The explanatory sentence at the end of Sentence 1 (inside the bracket), and sentence 14, 15, 16 are examples of empty pronouns in consecutive clauses as shown in (8) above. Sentence 7, 8, 9, 10 are elliptical sentences.

5. Subjects:

Four groups of 95 students from the Department of English Languages and Literature of University of Social Sciences and Humanities of Ho Chi Minh City were chosen as the informants for this study. Most of the students had studied English for nine years at high school. At the time of the test, the students of Year 1 had not attended the obligatory course in Vietnamese-English translation, the students from Year 2 had taken one module (60 periods = 45 hours in total), the students of Year 3 had completed three modules while those in Year 4 had completed five modules in Vietnamese-English translation.

6. Data Collection and the Test:

The study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of University of Western Sydney, Australia. All participants were informed about the purpose, the nature and the author of the study and were asked to sign into consent forms if they were willing to attend the study. The subjects were

¹ Constructions have the basic form [NP1, [NP2 PREDICATE]]. NP1 has topic-like function with respect to NP2 and both noun phrases have some claim to being subjects.

asked to translate a 250-word text from Vietnamese into English in 180 minutes without being told which structure was tested.

The Vietnamese text is an extract from an article named ‘Mê Thảo- thời vang bóng (Me Thao - the golden age) of *Tuổi Trẻ* (The Youth), a fairly well-known newspaper in Vietnam. The text was chosen because of its richness in sentence types: many different types of ‘authentic’ Vietnamese sentences could be found in the text, including minor sentences, i.e. elliptical sentences, sentences without either Topic or Comment, sentences in which the Topic is identical with the Subject, sentences in which the Topic is not identical with the Subject, sentences in which the Topic or Comment itself is another Topic-Comment structure. With such a variety in sentence types, the text promised to be a good tool for discovering the most problematic structures for the students when translating from Vietnamese to English. The text was also chosen because it contained traces of the topic-prominence of Vietnamese languages, which was hypothesized in this study as posing a number of translation problems for students. The present author analysed the sentence to see whether students tended to make more errors where the Topic does not coincide with the grammatical subject or where both the topic and the subject are dropped.

7. Data Analysis

The errors in the students’ translations were firstly detected by an American academic highly competent in Vietnamese. His background is in teaching Vietnamese history in the Vietnamese language at the National University of Singapore. He also has five years’ experience teaching English as a second language at Vietnamese National Universities). After the first marking, the author and two other Vietnamese ESL teachers rechecked the error correction of the native speaker to ensure that his error correction is appropriate. Only the errors relating to the task of handling the subject and the empty elements was focused as they are directly related to the research questions. The analysis counted the number of errors to find their representativeness. The examples of each kind of error are discussed below.

8. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the translations produced by 95 students shows the five types of errors in the specific task of locating and translating the sentence’s subject. These are: Omission of Subject, Repetition of

Subject, Inappropriate Choice of Subject, No Logical Connection Between Subject and Predicate, Inappropriate Connection Between Subject and Passive Verbs.

Table 1. Distribution of errors relating to the translation of subjects

Types of errors	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
Omission Of Subject	2	10	21	1	34
Repetition Of Subject	1	5	10	1	17
Inappropriate Choice Of Subject	1	5	1	0	7
No Logical Connection Between Subject And Predicate	3	5	7	2	17
Inappropriate Connection Between Subject And Passive Verb		5	1		6

Table 1 shows the distribution of errors relating to the translation of subjects in four years. As there were more participants in Year 3 (36 students) than participants in Year 1 (15 students), 2 (27 students), and 4 (17 students), the number of errors in Year 3 is accordingly bigger than those of other years.

As Table 1 shows, omitting the subject is the most frequent type of error among all types of errors relating to the sentence subject. Although most Vietnamese can understand (or have the impression that they understand) the empty pronoun or dropped subject when they read a text, they do not always correctly identify the referent of the missing subject when they need to transfer these sentences into English. The omission of the subjects may be traced to two reasons: firstly, the students may not be able to identify the referent of the missing subject or, secondly, they do not know that it is necessary to find the missing subject for it to be rendered into a correct English sentence. Besides these types of errors, students also make inappropriate choice of subjects, repeat the subject, or write sentences in which the subjects do not semantically match the predicate of the sentences, nor the passive verbs. The distribution of errors across 18 sentences is discussed in details below.

Table 2. Frequency of errors relating to translating subjects in 18 sentences

Sentence Number from the Source Text	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Omission Of Subject	11	6											13	1			7	1
Repetition Of Subject			5	1							1				3		4	3

Inappropriate Choice Of Subject		5		1										1				
No Logical Connection Between Subject And Predicate					16	1												
Inappropriate Connection Between Subject And Passive Verb	1																	5

Sentence 1 and 13 show the highest percentage of subject omission. In these two sentences, the subject is completely dropped and the translators had to refer to the context to identify the subject, which, in this case, is ‘I’ referring to the narrator/writer of the source text. Errors where subject is repeated are observed in sentence 3, 15, 17 and 18. These sentences have complex structures with embedded topic-comment constructions, requiring the skill of manipulating the subject and the sentence structure. Therefore students who persist with the literal meaning of the text and the surface structure of the source text are more likely to make this type of errors. Five students made the wrong choice of subject in Sentence 2, which shows they did not make a very careful analysis of the text before they began their translating. The dropped subject of sentence 2 is ‘I’; however, these students erroneously chose ‘Trước hết’ (Firstly) as the subject of the sentence, which is actually a transitional adverb. 16 cases of errors happen when the subjects do not match the predicate in sentence 5. In this sentence, the topic ‘Cảnh thả đèn trời’ (scene of dropping lanterns) does not coincide with the grammatical subject of the main verb: it is the object of the verb ‘làm’ (make/carry out) in the comment. The actual subject is ‘người ta’ or ‘người xem’, which is dropped. To translate this sentence, students are required to identify the referent of the empty pronoun ‘người ta’ or ‘người xem’. However, many of them choose the wrong subject when they select the topic of the sentence ‘Cảnh thả đèn trời’ (scene of dropping lanterns), an inanimate referent, as the subject of the verb ‘tưởng như’ in their translation. This leads to numerous errors appearing in the translations of this sentence. The last type of error which can be attributed to the poor handling of the subject is the mismatch in meaning between the subject and the passive verb, which occur most often in sentence 18.

9. Examples of Errors and Discussion:

The following tables (8.1- 8.5) display sample sentences for the five error types mentioned above, with the distribution of errors by student Year group.

Table 8.1: Sample Sentences of the Error Type ‘Omission of Subject’

Year	Sample Sentences	Distribution
1	✓ Being fascinated by named and nameless characters again.	2
2	Also, ✓ being fascinated by the named characters and nameless ones.	10
3	✓ Still fascinated by named and anonymous characters.	21
4	Supposed (supposing) that it was (were) named MT, ✓ sounds (it would sound) candid and more unique.	1

Table 8.2: Sample Sentences of the Error Type ‘Repetition of Subject’

Year	Sample Sentences	Distribution
1	Almost each topic, it’s permeated with the soul of Vietnamese	1
2	To, the singer is dramatic, wandered (wandering) but dignified, amorous but loyal, both seductive and serious, petite but ✓ unimportant	5
3	The scene of burning furniture, the explosive sound of furnishings, the scene of a gunshot firing at the doll, all of them make ✓ viewer’s blood run cold.	10
4	Tam, a player of the moon shaped guitar was so wonderful that he was desperate, frustrated but giving, the gesture (gestures) totally suited the mood.	1

Table 8.3: Sample Sentences of the Error Type ‘Inappropriate Choice of Subject’

Year	Sample Sentences	Distribution
1	First, it is the being fascinated by images ‘full of film’s language’	1
2	Among successful supporting characters, the old servant is so vivid and moving and that (he) is worthy to be nominated as the best supporting character	5
3	The first is fascinated by all language of motion picture images.	1

Table 8.4: Sample Sentences of the Error Type ‘No Logical Connection between Subject and Predicate’

Year	Sample Sentences	Distribution
1	The scene of dropping ✓ outside lantern is made (can happen) only by charm.	3
2	The sight of dropping lanterns is considered that can be only carried out by magic.	5
3	The sight of dropping lanterns seems that only magic could make it.	7
4	The scene of dropping lantern is believed that only magic can do it.	2

Table 8.5: Sample Sentences of the Error Type ‘Inappropriate Connection Between Subject And Passive Verb’

Year	Sample Sentences	Distribution
2	Miss To, who is beautiful but miserable, vagabond but dignified, amorous but loyal, both seductive and serious, petite but not important is played the role best by no one except Thuy Nga	5

The errors under the category of ‘Omission of Subjects’ can be classified into two types: Omission of subject within a clause and Omission of subject within a sentence.

Omission of subject within a clause There are 17 cases of subjects being omitted within a clause. Most of them take place in sentence 1 (11/17), sentence 17 (5/17) and sentence 14 (1/17).

- 1) If only ✓ name the film MT, it will be more simple and more satiable.
- 2) if only the film ✓ named MT, ✓ is more simple and better to hear.
- 3) supposed (supposing) that it was (were) named MT, ✓ sounds (it would sound) candid and more unique.

In sentence 1, the explanatory sentence inside the bracket shows two instances of dropped subject: the subject ‘người ta’ is omitted in the first clause and ‘bộ phim’ is omitted in the second. This reflects a very common feature of Vietnamese grammar, in which empty pronouns exist in most sentences in every context, formal or informal. As Rosen mentioned (1998:144)

‘Not allowing any missing elements at any levels of the grammar to represent empty pronouns would, however, mean abandoning any kind of subcategorization for Vietnamese verbs. ... It would make it impossible to use any of the current grammatical frameworks for analyzing Vietnamese ... In the second place, it would be difficult to account for native speaker reactions to sentences with empty pronouns. If such sentences are presented out of context, they will often be considered unacceptable; the informants will ‘ask for’ the missing argument. If the missing argument is provided by an appropriate context the informant will accept the sentence. This shows that there is nothing wrong with the sentence, but that each argument of the verb must be provided either in the sentence itself or in the context’.

That is to say, a Vietnamese student with enough general knowledge of Vietnamese and using their common sense should have the necessary intuition to identify the empty pronoun or the dropped subject in a sentence.

In sentence 1, the dropped subject of the first clause can be understood as ‘the film makers, the director or the one who has the right to name the film’. However, the author’s decision to drop the subject may not be explained completely by the Vietnamese’s practice of using empty pronouns. It could also be caused by the author’s emphasis of the event of changing the film’s name rather than on the person who has the right to name the film. With this sentence, there are two approaches students can choose to assist their translation: to use passive voice to avoid identifying the subject, or to identify the subject and render them into English. However, up to 11 over 95 students translated this sentence without a subject or appropriate passive voice.

In the second clause, the only interpretation of the dropped subject is ‘the film’. However, four of 95 students ignore this dropped subject and do not locate the subject; they simply begin the second clause without any subject.

Sentence 17 reveals five instances of errors, mostly because the students fail to put the subject into the second clause in the structure *so/such+adjective+that*. This error may have resulted from the nature of the source text, as the subject is not revealed in the original.

- 4) Tam, the player of the moon shaped guitar was so wonderful to such an extent that ✓ was desperate, mysterious, frustrated but giving, gesture (gestures) was really appropriate for ✓ mood.

In short, the total of 22 cases of omission of subjects within a clause is not enough to conclude that Vietnamese student cannot locate the subject in their translation. Rather, these errors seem to arise from a lack of care towards and concentration on the translation task by some students.

Omission of subject within a sentence. There are 17 cases of subjects being omitted in a sentence, mostly in sentence 2, 13 and 18.

- 1) First, ✓ fascinated by ‘the real film language images’.
- 2) ✓ Being fascinated by named and nameless characters again.
- 3) ✓ hard to find someone else to play the role better than Thuy Nga
- 4) If ✓ naming the film Me Thao, it’s simple and more wonderful.

Clearly, the influence of the source text and the source language, as well as an insufficient knowledge of English syntax seems to result in students ignoring the need to locate and translate the subjects in

these three sentences. In the sentence 2, the subject is completely omitted, but students can deduce from the context that it is the author who is fascinated by the authentic language of movie industry. However, either because the students remain faithful to the original on purpose, or because they forget the necessity of not dropping the subject from sentences in English, they tend to begin their translated sentences with ‘fascinated’ for the subject and main verb. Five students make this error in translating this sentence.

In the same way, the subject in sentence 13 is also dropped, showing the popular trend in Vietnamese to omit the subject. Although it is also possible in English to drop the subject, this form of omission cannot always be applied and sometimes the dropping of the subject makes the sentence sound odd. To illustrate, this example is not acceptable in English, but is quite acceptable in Vietnamese:

A: Who does this book belong to?

B: It belongs to me

To me.

Me.

(?) Belongs to me.

According to Rosen (1998:146), in the case of independent sentences where the subject is dropped, several translations will be possible, for instance the subject could be ‘I/you/he/she/we/they’. It is the context that assists the translators/readers in deciphering the subject of the sentence. However, the erroneous translations of students in sentence 13 (example 2 above) shows that students may fail to realize the importance of translating the subject, although they may feel they understand the text on first impression. This supports Gile (1995)’s claim that some texts may be actually more difficult than translators realise on their first reading.

Example 3 shows another case of subject omission (sentence 18), arising not from the existence of empty pronoun in Vietnamese, but from the practice of word-by-word translation. As the original sentence does not show any subject of the action ‘find an actress’ the students need to use the expletive ‘It’ to render this sentence appropriate in translation. The appropriate translation should be ‘It would be hard to find someone who could play the role better than Thuy Nga’. However, since in Vietnamese the sentence starts with ‘khò’ (which is an adjective), some students may translate this into English as ‘hard to find someone else to play the role’. Fortunately, only one student made an error of this kind.

Repetition of subject. There are 17 instances of this error in the data, in sentence 3, 4, 11, 15, 17 and 18. In the following examples, the subject is repeated as either a coreferential pronoun, the indefinite pronoun ‘all’, or an appositive.

- 1) Almost **each topic, it’s** permeated with the soul of Vietnamese.
- 2) **All leading characters, everyone** to his look, are original and dramatic, how naturally and profoundly they are portrayed.
- 3) The scene of burning furniture, the explosive sound of furnishings, the scene of a gunshot firing at the doll, **all of them** make ✓ viewer’s blood run cold
- 4) **Tam, the player of the moon shaped guitar, he** is too wonderful to such an extent that he is desperate, mysterious, frustrated, whereas his giving and gesture exactly suit the mood
- 5) **To, a singer** ✓ is beautiful but ill fate, wandering but dignified, amorous but loyal, seductive and serious, petite but not insignificant.

It is very difficult to trace the reason for these errors to the context or the influence of the target language. The cause of these errors can only arise from the Vietnamese habit of mentioning both topic and subject in one sentence, in the so-called ‘double subject construction’. After mentioning the topic of the sentence, the students may feel it ‘natural’, from the habit of language use in Vietnamese, to repeat the topic in order to emphasize or clarify the sentence. These kinds of sentences are not very different from the Vietnamese sentence quoted by Rosen (1998:87). In this example, the topic ‘cow’ corresponds to the pronoun ‘it’ in the comment clause ‘it eats very little grass’.

Con	bò	á	ý,	nó	ăn	ít	cỏ	lắm
Classifier	cow	that	it	eat	few	grass	very	

As for that cow, it eats very little grass.

Examples 1 and 2 are similar to Rosen’s example, showing the very clear effect of Vietnamese topic-comment structure on translation. ‘It’ is used to replace ‘each topic’ in example 1 and ‘everyone’ is used to replace ‘all leading characters’ in example 2. In example 3, the student commits two errors at the same time. Firstly, he misinterprets ‘the scene of burning furniture, the explosive sound of furnishings, the scene of a gunshot firing at the doll’ as three separate scenes of the film and treats them as a combination of scenes. Then he uses the pronoun ‘all of them’ as a coreferential pronoun to refer to all of these scenes. Example 4 is very appealing, as the student repeats the pronoun ‘he’ not after the topic ‘To’ but after the appositive. This proves the error is not necessarily caused by the context.

As for example 5, it represents many cases in the corpus where the students simply start the sentence with ‘To’ or ‘Tâm’ and then continue with ‘a singer is ...’ or ‘a moon-shaped guitar is...’. This error encompasses two problems. Firstly, students still rely heavily on the source text and employ its exact structure. Secondly, students seem to forget that in English only one subject is allowed with the main verb. If further explanation is required, the only two linguistic devices possible are appositives or relative clauses, and these students use neither.

No logical connection between subject and predicate. Another type of syntactic errors in the process of handling the subject is presenting sentence without any semantic connection between the subject and predicate in English translation. There are 17 cases of this error. All of them are in sentence 5 ‘Cảnh thả đèn trời tưởng như chỉ có ma thuật mới làm nổi’. The literal translation of this sentence should be ‘The scene of dropping the lantern that we/one may think can only happen by magic’. In this sentence, ‘Cảnh thả đèn trời’ is the Topic - what the author is focusing on - but it also coincides with the subject of the sentence. Based on the context, the dropped subject can be understood in many ways, as ‘we’, ‘one’ or ‘audience’. The predicate ‘tưởng như chỉ có ma thuật mới làm nổi’ [think can only happen in magic] goes well with the dropped subject ‘we’, ‘one’ or ‘audience’, but it does not semantically match the topic ‘the scene of dropping the lantern’ as the scene is not an animate object who can ‘think’. Therefore, the students who cannot identify the dropped subject and the relationship between the topic/subject/predicate end up choosing the topic ‘the scene of dropping lanterns’ as the subject to go with the predicate. The first consequence is the sentence may become a merging of words not obeying any syntactic rule, or a sentence without main verb or an incomplete sentence. In terms of semantic, there is no logical connection between the subject and predicate in the English sentence, as illustrated by the following examples.

- 1) The sight of dropping lanterns seems that only magic could make it.
- 2) The sight that lanterns were dropped, which imagined that magic could make out.
- 3) The sight of dropping lanterns is considered that can be only carried out by magic.

10. Summary:

The five types of syntactic errors found to be prevalent in the data in the task of locating and rendering the subject into the target text include: Omission of Subject, Repetition of Subject, Inappropriate Choice of Subject, No Logical Connection Between Subject and Predicate, Inappropriate Connection Between Subject and Passive Verb. The data reveals that ‘Omission of

Subject' is the most frequent type of error, with the second most frequent type being 'Repetition of Subject' and 'No Logical Connection Between Subject and Predicate'. However, it is worth noting that these errors are not the most frequent of all kinds of syntactic errors. That is to say, although students did have errors because of this typological difference, they seem to have less difficulty with locating and translating subjects than with other fields, such as article, subject-verb agreement.

In short, in sentences in which the topic-comment structure is remarkably different from the subject-predicate structure, students did have problem in locating the subject and made the above-mentioned five types of errors. However, they seem to have more problems in the task of handling the relationship between the subject and the verb: they are puzzled to recognize the difference between verbal predicates (in the form of a verb) and substantival predicates (in the form of an adjective) in Vietnamese language and they often omit the verbs in the target text versions. This issue, nevertheless, is not the focus of the present paper. Students also have difficulty in handling the relative clause in sentences with two topic-comment structures and have problems in constructing the sentence in an appropriate way.

11. Some strategies for translating Topic-Comment Structures of Vietnamese

a. Paying attention to the omission of pronoun in Vietnamese: (subject, object position)

This feature has to be highlighted for students. They must be aware that in Vietnamese sentences the subject is often dropped, but not in English. Consequently, they must carefully analyze and comprehend the source text to find the missing subjects, direct or indirect objects, or else other structures without a semantic subject must be used.

b. Translating topic-comment structures of Vietnamese

For the sake of didactic implications, the present author will divide Rosen's (1998) five topic constructions quoted above into 2 main types: 1) sentences with 'double subject' constructions in which the topic of the sentence does not coincide with the grammatical subject (examples (3), (4) and (5) in Rosen's categorization); and 2) sentences without 'double subject' constructions where the topic is also the sentence subject (example (1) and (2) in Rosen's categorization).

b1. Sentences with ‘double subject’ constructions of Vietnamese: the topic is not identical with the subject: (Sentences 5, 6, 15, and 18 from the Elicitation Task will be used as demonstrative examples.)

According to Rosen (1998), the only generalization that can be made about ‘double subject construction’ cross-linguistically is that they are topic-comment constructions with embedded subject-predicate constructions. The relationship between the topic and the subject can be possessive, partitive or inclusive, or ‘aboutness’ relation. To translate this type of topic-comment structure, the student first of all must identify the relationship between the subject and the topic or the ‘aboutness’.

Sentence 15 is actually the combination of two smaller topic-comment structures, with only the second one using the topic that is not identical with the subject:

- (5a). **Tâm** **cây đàn nguyệt** tuyệt vời tới mức tuyệt vọng
Tam, **the moonshaped guitar** excellent to the extent desperate
- (5b). **Tâm** **cử chỉ** thật chính xác với tâm trạng
Tam **gestures** so exact with mood.

In the sentence (5b) the topic of the sentence is ‘Tam’ and the subject of the embedded subject-predicate structure is ‘cử chỉ’ (gestures). The relationship between them is *possessor-possessee, partitive-inclusive*. There are three ways to translate this type of ‘double subject’ construction. The first way is to use a noun phrase with possessive case ‘Tam’s gestures’ or with a possessive adjective ‘his gestures’. The second way is to use the phrase ‘As for’ for the topic ‘Tam’, by which the subject of the embedded subject-predicate constructions ‘cử chỉ’ will be retained as the main subject in the English sentence. The third way is to choose ‘Tam’ as the subject of the sentence and express the possessor-possessive relationship through the verb ‘have’. In this way, the subject of the subject-predicate construction will become the object of the verb ‘have’. So there are three possible translations for sentence 5b.

1. Tam’s gestures precisely reflect his mood.
2. As for Tam, his gestures precisely reflect his mood.
3. Tam has gestures which exactly reflect his mood.

However, the relationship of the topic and the subject of the comment clause is not always possessor-possessee. According to Rosen (1998), the kind of relation between the topic and a noun phrase within the comment is not limited to double subject constructions. The referent of the topic can also

be related in such a way to the referent of some other Noun Phrases in the comment, for instance, as the *direct object of the verb in the comment clause*. This type of relation is demonstrated by Rosen's type 3. In the Elicitation Task, the example illustrating this type is sentence 5.

- (5) **Cảnh thả đèn trời (...)** tưởng như chỉ có ma thuật mới làm nổi
Scene drop light sky (...) think only magic new do
→ We/You/One may think that only magic could do such a scene of dropping lanterns.
→ (The scene of dropping the lantern that we/one may think can only happen by magic)

We have two possibilities for this case. First, the subject of the comment clause is chosen to be the subject of the whole sentence and the topic 'Cảnh thả đèn trời' [scene of dropping lanterns] is located into the position of an object. Alternatively, the topic may be separated out in a phrase and located at the sentence beginning 'As for the scene of dropping the sky lanterns, the viewers may think only magic could do that'.

Some similar examples with sentence 5 that can be found in Vietnamese are:

1. **Nhà này chỉ có nhà giàu** mua.
House this only have person rich buy
→ Only the rich want to buy this house.
→ As for this house, only the rich want to buy it.

2. **Sách này tôi đã đọc rồi.**
Book this I tense marker read already
→ I already read this book.
→ As for this book, I already read it.

However, in the sentences where the topic is the object of the verb in the comment clause but the main verb refers to perception process such as 'look', 'seem', 'sound', 'taste', there is no need to locate a new subject for the sentence and block the topic with 'As for'. Since English syntax allows such structures as 'The scene seems to be done by magic' or 'The scene looks as if it can only be done by magic', 'The food tastes good', the topic can be retained to be the subject of the sentence with these verbs as predicate. To illustrate, as the main verb of example 5 is 'seem', the topic 'Cảnh thả đèn trời' can be retained as the subject in the English translation. These are the possible ways of translating this type of topic-comment structure in sentence 5:

1. We/You/One may think that only magic could do such a scene of dropping lanterns.
2. The scene of dropping the lantern that we/one may think can only happen by magic.
3. The scene seems to be done only by magic.
4. As for the scene of dropping the sky lanterns, the viewers may think only magic could do that.

The topic can also be the *adverb* or *adverbial clause* to modify the verb in the comment clause. This is type 4 in Rosen's categorisation where the topic may not be related to any constituents, empty or overt, in the comment. The example from the Elicitation Task is sentence 6, with the topic functioning as the adverbial clause of place of the verb in the comment clause.

- (6) **Cảnh quay** **nào** (...) cũng thấy mồ hôi.
Scene **any** (...) also see sweat
 You/we/one can see the sweat behind every scene

In this case, the subject of the comment clause has to be identified and located into the position of the subject in the English sentence. And the topic will become the adverb phrase which we can put at the beginning or the end of the sentence depending on what the translator wishes to be the focus of attention. To illustrate, the students need to recognise that the dropped subject of the comment clause in sentence 5 can have an indefinite reference as 'you', 'we', 'one', or it can refer to 'people' or 'viewers'. Then the suitable translation could be:

1. In every scene, you/we/one/people/viewers can see the 'sweat' of hard work.
2. You/we/one/people/viewers can see the 'sweat' of hard work behind every scene.

As there are many kinds of adverbs in English, the semantic role of the noun phrase functioning as topic is varied. They can be adverb of time, manner, place, etc. Some similar examples with this sentence that can be found in Vietnamese are:

1. **Chìa khóa** **này** **kệ** **nào** chẳng mở được.
Key **this** **shelf** **any** cannot open manage
 Any shelf can be opened with this key.
2. **Tiền này** thì (...) mua tiên cũng được
Money this TM (...) buy fairy also manage
 With this amount of money, you can even buy a fairy with it.

The referent of the topic may also be *the indirect object of the verb in the clause*. There is no example of this kind in the Elicitation Task, so most of examples will be taken from Vietnamese language in general.

1. **Người lạ** **thì** **tôi** không biếu nhưng bạn thì tôi tặng
Strangers **TM** **I** do not offer but friends TM I offer
 As for the strangers, I don't give (it) to them for free but as for my friends, I will give (it) as a present.
 [I give don't give (it) to the strangers for free but I will give it as presents to my friends]

2. **Cha mẹ** **thì** **chị** **gửi** thiệp chúc Tết
Parents **TM** **she** send postcards congratulate New Year

- **còn anh em** **thì** **chị** gửi email
- **as for brothers** **TM** **she** send email

As for parents, she sends the postcards to them; as for her brothers, she sends emails.
[She sends the postcards to her parents but she sends emails to her brothers]

There are two suggested translation methods for this kind of sentence. First, the sentence can start with the phrase ‘As for’ with the topic and this phrase will appear at the beginning of the sentence (as we can observe in the above examples). Alternatively, we just put them back to the normal position of an indirect object in English sentence. However, in the normal position of an indirect object, the focus of the sentence may be changed. That is to say, when the topic appears at the beginning by the phrase ‘As for’ it attracts the emphasis and attention of the readers, but when it was located in the unmarked or normal position of an indirect object after the main verb, it lost its value of attracting readers’ attention.

b2. Sentences without ‘double subject’ construction of Vietnamese, or the topic is identical with subject of the embedded subject-predicate construction:

In sentence (5a), the topic of the sentence ‘Tam’ is semantically identical with the subject of the comment clause ‘cây đàn nguyệt’ (player of moon-shaped guitar), which is actually a noun phrase to illustrate the identity of the topic ‘Tam’. This is the sentence type 2 suggested by Rosen. There are many possible ways of translating this structure. Firstly, the topic can be located at the beginning with ‘As for’, then the subject of the sentence must be a pronoun to avoid the repetition. Secondly, the topic will be ‘Tam’ and the subject ‘cây đàn nguyệt’ will become the appositive phrase or a relative clause.

1. As for Tam, he is a great moon-shaped guitar player who is so excellent to the extent of desperation ...
2. Tam, the player of the moon shaped guitar, is so excellent to the extent of desperation.
3. Tam, who is the player of the moon shaped guitar, is so excellent to the extent of desperation.

When the topic of the sentence is exactly the same with the subject of the comment clause (as shown by Rosen’s type 1), we simply choose the topic to be the subject of the sentence in English.

Alternatively, ‘As for’ can be used to block the topic and the same pronoun will be repeated at the beginning of the sentence.

Tôi **thì** (*tôi*) không ngủ được
I **TM** (*I*) not sleep manage
→ I couldn't sleep
→ As for me, (I) couldn't sleep.

12. Conclusion:

The paper investigated two questions: a) whether the students have problem translating sentences in which the Topic of the topic-comment structure does not coincide with the Subject and b) what kinds of errors students made in translating this specific type of structure. The number of errors found in the data may not be large enough to substantiate the fact that Vietnamese EFL students always have a great deal of difficulty in handling the typological differences between Vietnamese and English. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that these errors still need to be identified and collected during Translation Training. The paper has identified some typical errors in the Vietnamese-English translation caused by the influence of the Vietnamese topic-comment structures. The most common errors in the translation of these structures include Omission of Subject, Repetition of Subject, Inappropriate Choice of Subject, No Logical Connection Between Subject and Predicate, Inappropriate Connection Between Subject and Passive Verbs. Some strategies were suggested that can be applied to prevent the possible problems arising from translating topic-prominent structures of Vietnamese into English.

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Appendix A ELICITATION TEST

Translate the following passages into English:

(1) Là kẻ từng chăm chú theo dõi cuộc ‘hành trình thai sản của bộ phim’, tôi mê mẩn với Mê Thảo-thời vang bóng (giá chỉ đặt tên phim là Mê Thảo thôi thì nghe giản dị hơn và ‘đã’ hơn). (2) Trước hết là mê mẩn với những hình ảnh ‘rất ngôn ngữ điện ảnh’. (3) Cảnh đốt bàn ghế, tiếng nổ của đồ đạc và phát súng bắn vào con búp bê khiến người xem lạnh gáy. (4) Cảnh nong tầm ngo ngoe đòi ăn và bàn chân giẫm nát những con tằm làm ta sớn gai ốc. (5) Cảnh thả đèn trời tưởng như chỉ có ma thuật mới làm nổi. (6) Cảnh quay nào cũng thấy mờ hôi. (7) Mờ hôi của ý nghĩ. (8) Mờ hôi của sự đi tìm. (9) Mờ hôi dàn dựng. (10) Mờ hôi tập luyện và diễn xuất. (11) Hầu như mỗi đoạn phim đều thấm đượm tâm hồn Việt. (12) Trong trí nhớ tôi, chưa có phim nào của nước Việt ta được thực hiện công phu và đạt chuẩn như vậy.

(13) Lại mê mẩn với những nhân vật có tên và không tên. (14) Trong nhiều nhân vật phụ thành công, ông bố già rất sinh động và cảm động, xứng đáng được bầu là vai phụ xuất sắc nhất. (15) Nhân vật chính nào cũng mỗi người một vẻ, độc đáo, đầy thân phận, được diễn tả tự nhiên và sâu sắc làm sao. (16) Nguyễn hào hoa, hào hiệp, lập dị ra mặt, rõ là anh điền chủ bất đắc chí, khật khùng. (17) Tâm, cây đàn nguyệt tuyệt vời tới mức tuyệt vọng, u uẩn, bế tắc mà nghĩa khí, cử chỉ thật chính xác với tâm trạng. (18) Tư, cô đào hát hồng nhan bạc phận, phiêu dạt mà cao sang, đa tình mà chung tình, vừa quynh rũ vừa nghiêm trang, nhỏ nhen mà không hèn mọn ... khó có ai nhập vai hay hơn Thúy Nga (với giọng ca vàng Thanh Hoài và lời bài hát châu văn do nhà thơ Văn Lê viết).

Title: Từ Chùa Đàn đến Mê Thảo – thời vang bóng

Author: Nguyễn Duy

Source: Tuổi Trẻ Chủ Nhật (Sunday Youth)

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Appendix 2

STRUCTURAL CONFIGURATION OF 18 SENTENCES IN THE ELICITATION TASK

- * Words in italics and brackets are used to refer to dropped subject or null topic (which are empty pronouns).
- * In case there are three capitalized lines, the first two capitalized lines are the analysis of Topic-Comment structure of each sentence (combining Hao 2001 and Rosen 1998's model). The first line is the analysis of Topic-Comment structure of the whole sentence, the second line is the analysis of Topic-Comment of the Embedded Clause.
- * The last capitalized line is the analysis of Subject-Predicate structure of each sentence (using structuralist approach).
- * The last line is the suggested translation of the whole sentence.

(1) (*Tôi*) Là kẻ từng chăm chú theo dõi cuộc 'hành trình' thai sản của bộ phim',
(*I*) As one tense marker attentively follow itinerary gestation of film
As someone who has closely followed the gestation/birthing of the film,

tôi mê mẩn với Mê Thảo- thời vang bóng
I be charmed with Me Thao- the golden age
TOPIC COMMENT
SUBJECT PREDICATE
I am fascinated by Mê Thảo – thời vang bóng

[(*giá* (người ta/ đạo diễn) chỉ đặt tên phim là Mê Thảo thôi)
if (*people/film director*) only name film to be Me Thao only]
TOPIC
NULL TOPIC 1 COMMENT 1
NULL SUBJECT 1 PREDICATE 1
(supposing the film had been named simply *Mê Thảo*,

thì (bộ phim) nghe giản dị hơn và 'đã' hơn.]
topic marker (*film*) hear simple more and exciting more
TOPIC MARKER COMMENT
NULL TOPIC 2 COMMENT 2
NULL SUBJECT 2 PREDICATE 2
it would have been pleasant to the ears.)

- (2) Trước hết là (tôi) mê mẩn với những hình ảnh ‘rất ngôn ngữ điện ảnh’ .
 First of all (I) be charmed with classifier images typical language movie industry .
FRAME TOPIC NULL TOPIC COMMENT
NULL SUBJECT PREDICATE

Firstly, I am fascinated by the images [which are] entirely typical of motion picture/film language.

- (3) Cảnh đốt bàn ghế, tiếng nổ của đồ đạc và phát súng bắn vào con búp bê
 scene burn furniture sound explode of furniture and the shoot shoot preposition the doll
TOPIC
SUBJECT

The scene of burning furniture, exploding furnishings and the gunshot fired at the doll

khiến người xem lạnh gáy.
 make audience cold

COMMENT
PREDICATE

makes the audience’s blood run cold.

- (4) Cảnh nong tằm ngo ngoe đòi ăn và bàn chân giẫm nát những con tằm
 Scene frying basket silkworms wriggle demand eat and foot tread crush silkworms
TOPIC
SUBJECT

The sight of silkworms wriggling in the drying basket and the foot trampling upon the silkworms

làm ta sớn gai ốc.
 make pronoun creep goose-flesh

COMMENT
PREDICATE

makes the audience’s flesh creep.

- (5) Cảnh thả đèn trời (người ta/người xem) tưởng như chỉ có ma thuật mới làm nổi.
 scene drop light sky (people/audience) seem only magic in order to do
TOPIC **COMMENT**
 OBJECT OF VERB 2 NULL SUBJECT 1 VERB 1 SUBJECT 2 VERB 2
 OF THE CLAUSAL COMMENT

The scene of dropping the lantern that we/ one may think can only happen by magic.

- (6) Cảnh quay nào (người ta/người xem) cũng thấy mồ hôi
 Scene any (people/audience) also see sweat
TOPIC **COMMENT**
 TOPICALISED ADVERB NULL SUBJECT VERB OBJECT OF VERB
 OF CLAUSAL COMMENT

You/we/one can see the sweat behind every scene.

- (7) Mồ hôi của ý nghĩ.
 Sweat of thought
TOPIC (NO COMMENT)

The sweat of thought.

- (12) Trong trí nhớ tôi, chưa có một phim nào của nước Việt ta
 In memory I not yet have one film any of Vietnam pronoun
FRAME TOPIC **TOPIC (EXISTENTIAL CLAUSE)**
 EXISTENTIAL CLAUSE (THERE...)

được thực hiện công phu và đạt chuẩn như vậy.
 be/get carry out elaborate and obtain standard like that.

As far as I can remember, no Vietnamese film has ever been produced as elaborately and perfectly as elaborate and perfect a film as this one.

(13) (Tôi) Lại mê mẩn với những nhân vật có tên và không tên.
 (I) again be charmed with plural marker character have name and no name.
 NULL TOPIC COMMENT
 NULL SUBJECT PREDICATE

I was fascinated again with the named and anonymous/ nameless characters.

(14) Trong nhiều nhân vật phụ thành công, ông bố già rất sinh động và cảm động,
 In many character secondary successful man servant old very lively and touching
 FRAME TOPIC TOPIC COMMENT 1
 SUBJECT PREDICATE 1

Among the many successful supporting characters, [that of] the old servant is very vivid and touching

(ông) xứng đáng được bầu là vai phụ xuất sắc nhất.
 (he) deserving be/get nominate be character secondary excellent best
 NULL TOPIC 2 COMMENT 2
 NULL SUBJECT PREDICATE 2

and worthy to be nominated for most successful supporting actor.

(15) Nhân vật chính nào cũng mỗi người một vẻ, độc đáo, đầy thân phận,
 Character main any also each person one style original full condition
 TOPIC COMMENT
 TOPIC 1 COMMENT 1
 SUBJECT PREDICATE 1

Each of the leading characters/every leading character is authentic in his/her own role - original, dramatic,

(họ) được diễn tả tự nhiên và sâu sắc làm sao.
 (they) manage describe natural and deep how
 COMMENT
 NULL TOPIC 2 COMMENT 2
 PREDICATE 2

and they are all portrayed very naturally and profoundly in the film.

(16) Nguyễn hào hoa, hào hiệp, lập dị ra mặt,
 . Nguyen chivalrous generous eccentric overtly

TOPIC COMMENT 1

SUBJECT PREDICATE 1

- (anh) rõ là anh điền chủ bất đắc chí, khật khùng
 - (he) really landowner frustrated silly

NULL TOPIC 2 COMMENT 2

NULL SUBJECT PREDICATE 2

Nguyen - a chivalrous, generous, obviously peculiar man - proves to be a frustrated and silly landowner.

(17) Tâm, cây đàn nguyệt tuyệt vời tới mức tuyệt vọng, u uẩn, bế tắc mà nghĩa khí,
 Tam moon-shaped guitar excellent to degree disappointed hidden deadlock but noble

TOPIC COMMENT

TOPIC 1 COMMENT 1

SUBJECT 1 APPOSITION PREDICATE 1

Tam, a player of the moon-shaped guitar, is so excellent that he appears desperate and mysterious, frustrated but still giving.

cử chỉ thật chính xác với tâm trạng.
 gesture very accurate with state of mind.

TOPIC 2 COMMENT 2

SUBJECT 2 PREDICATE 2

His gestures reflect his mood precisely.

(18) Tô, cô đào hát hồng nhan bạc phận, phiêu dạt mà cao sang, đa tình mà chung tình,
 Tô, singer beautiful girl ill fate wandering but dignified amorous but loyal

TOPIC COMMENT

TOPIC 1 COMMENT 1

SUBJECT APPOSITION PREDICATE

Tô, a beautiful singer who has known many ups and downs in life, is a romantic libertine but still very dignified,

vừa quyến rũ vừa nghiêm trang, nhỏ nhoi mà không hèn mọn ...
 both attractive and serious petite but not lowly

COMMENT (cont)

amorous but loyal, seductive but serious, petite but not insignificant/unimportant.

- -

khó có ai nhập vai hay hơn Thúy Nga
difficult have anyone play role good more Thuy Nga

TOPIC (EXISTENTIAL CLAUSE) COMMENT

SUBJECT-RAISING CONSTRUCTION

It would be hard to find someone who could play the role better than Thúy Nga