

SOME REMARKS ON INTERLINGUAL ERRORS IN VIETNAMESE BY CAMBODIANS

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Theoretical foundation for study

The theoretical foundation we have used in this study is the theory of error analysis introduced by Pid Corder in late 1960s and then developed by Larry Selinker (1971, 1972) in the theory of interlanguage. The theory of Pid Corder and Larry Selinker brought about a revolution in language teaching of applied linguistics since the early 70s. This theory regards errors as a sign of the process in which learners actively discover the target language and not as their failure. In the view of error analysis school, there are two main sorts of errors: Interlingual errors and Intralingual errors. *Interlingual errors* are the errors, arising from the influence of the learners' mother tongue on the product of the target language, especially in the area where the two languages differ significantly. Essentially, the learners have "borrowed", and applied the knowledge available in the source language to the formation of assumptions about the target language. *Intralingual errors* are errors arising from the internal structure of the target language. Essentially, the learners have used previous knowledge about the target language in the acquisition process as a means to develop their ability in connection with the target language.

When Cambodians learn Vietnamese at a basic level, in addition to the intralingual errors, they also commit certain interlingual errors due to the influence of the grammar of Khmer.

In a more extensive work, we described and explained 14 sorts interlingual errors in Vietnamese by Cambodians. In this paper, we can only address some errors in using syntactic words, such as "được" and "đã", "phải" and "bị" in Vietnamese, committed by Cambodian students. These syntactic words in Vietnamese are usually used after the subject and before the verb and distinguished in terms of the meaning. When learning Vietnamese, however, Cambodian students often misuse these syntactic words.

In the words of modern error analysts, the learners have "borrowed" the previous knowledge — in this case the Khmer language (source language) - to structure Vietnamese (target language) in their own way.

Confusion between "ĐƯỢC" and "đã"

Our statistics show that Cambodians learning Vietnamese may confuse the two words "được" and "đã" located before a verb - this error cannot be found among students from other countries according to our statistics.

Survey results are as follows:

- Misusing "đã" instead of "được": 27 cases.
- Misusing "được" instead of "đã": 8 cases.

1.1. Misusing "đã" instead of "được"

E.g.

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(1) Cầm pu chia sẽ đã đổi mới.

(RS) Cầm pu chia đã được đổi mới. (RS: Reconstructed sentence)

(2) Em sẽ đã đi Hà Nội.

(RS) Em sẽ được đi Hà Nội.

(3) Nếu bạn đã đi Việt Nam thì bạn phải biết gì trước?

(RS) Nếu bạn được đi Việt Nam thì bạn phải biết gì trước?

(4) Nếu em đã đi Việt Nam thì em phải biết tiếng Việt trước.

(RS) Nếu em được đi Việt Nam thì em phải biết tiếng Việt trước.

If we're not sure about the causes at such errors, explanations to students about proper language will hardly work. In fact, it's "interference" that is the origin of these errors. Specifically, the word "được" before the verb with the meaning of "luck" and "being permitted" and word "đã" before the verb with the meaning of the "completion of an action, a state before a time-mark" have only one form of expression of "ban" (បាវ) in Khmer.

Consequently, Cambodian beginners usually cannot distinguish between "được" and "đã", though in Vietnamese there is no relationship between them both in terms of the appearance and the meaning. In the above cases, why do the learners use "đã" instead of "được"? It can be said that the "impression" of the previous knowledge is very strong and when overseas students begin learning Vietnamese, the structure "đã + verb" is usually presented before the structure "được + verb". So, in the mind of the learners, "đã" (the element linked with time) is equivalent to "ban" in Khmer. Therefore, when the learners would like to express the meanings "being permitted", "enjoyed" and "lucky", whose the equivalent in Vietnamese is the structure "được + verb", some Cambodians misuse the form "đã" as "ban" in Khmer instead of "được". In the above errors, examples (1) and (2) were taken from the exercise books of students and examples (3) and (4) were taken from the item "Translation from Khmer into Vietnamese" in the examination work. The error ratio of misusing "được" instead of "đã" is 23/100.

1.2 Misusing "được" instead of "đã"

E.g.

(1) Thứ bảy vừa rồi, em được thi lại rồi.

(RS): Thứ bảy vừa rồi, em đã thi lại rồi.

(2) Mẹ em được nói là mẹ em không thể đi họp vì mẹ em rất bận.

(RS): Mẹ em đã nói là mẹ em không thể đi họp vì mẹ em rất bận.

(3) Anh ấy được bảo em về việc này để em không đi.

(RS): Anh ấy đã bảo em về việc này để em không đi.

Although the number of misuses of "được" instead of "đã" is not as many as in the case of misusing "đã" instead of "được", in the above examples we can see another aspect of this confusion phenomenon, namely the Cambodians not only misuse "đã" instead of "được" but also misuse it in the opposite direction.

In example (1), the learners undoubtedly don't want to fail in the exam, so using "được" of course doesn't suit the meaning of this sentence. "được + verb" as we mention it here is the structure expressing the meaning that the speaker /writer enjoyed, was permitted and expressed his/her assessment of the situation. For example, "được ăn, được nói, được gói đem về", "Lần đầu được đi máy bay, tôi rất thích". We cannot replace "được" in these examples with "đã". "Được" in these examples means the speaker believes that the opportunities, and actions expressed in the verb are all lucky and enjoyable (at least for the speaker). The learner wrote example (1) because he/she had used the meaning and form of "ban", meaning "được" in their mind while writing and speaking.

Example (2) isn't a totally wrong sentence grammatically if viewed in another context, e.g. : "Mẹ em bị công an cấm nói những chuyện khác nhưng mẹ em được nói là mẹ em không thể đi họp vì mẹ em rất bận". But here, what the speaker would like to say : "Mẹ em đã nói là mẹ em không thể đi họp vì mẹ em rất bận" doesn't involve any forbidding or permission. The learner made this mistake only because he/she used "được" to express "ban" when meaning to confirm a completed action in connection with a time-mark. In example (3), as in examples (1) and (2), the learner structured Vietnamese in the manner he/she found most convenient, expressing the given knowledge of "được" in the formal position of "đã". Of course, this can only take place at the point of time of speaking. Cambodians easily take "đã" for "được" (as proved by the statistics) as "đã" was first learned and so transposed first into "ban" of Khmer.

From the examples and figures in connection with the confusion between "đã" and "được" in Vietnamese and "ban" in Khmer, we can see that in Vietnamese teaching materials for Cambodians, the distinction between "được", expressing the assessment attitude, permission, luck and "đã", expressing tense and aspect in connection with the time-mark and the confirmation (emphasis) of the change of the process is much needed.

The learners understand well that in Khmer there exists a word "ban", meaning permission or luck, and is equivalent to "được" in Vietnamese and another "ban", meaning tense and aspect, usually linked to a time-mark in the past, and confirmation, or the change of the process, equivalent to "đã" in Vietnamese. When expressing tense, aspect, emphasis, confirmation of completion or change of an action, state, we should use "đã + verb". When expressing permission, luck, or assessment by the speaker of a state of affairs, we should use "được + verb". When expressing both of them, we should use "đã được + verb".

This distinction is of course unnecessary for students of many other countries since there is no relationship between "đã" and "được" through the mother tongue of the learners as in the case of the Cambodians.

Confusion between "phải + verb" and "bị + verb"

In the documentation we have collected there were 14 cases in which the learners misused "phải + verb" instead of "bị + verb".

E.g.

(1) Con chuột phải con mèo ăn.

(CS): Con chuột bị con mèo ăn.


(2) Bọn Pôn Pốt phải nhân dân CPC đánh bại.

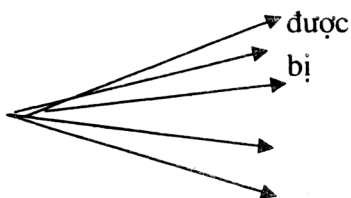
(CS): Bọn Pôn Pốt bị nhân dân CPC đánh bại.

(3) Anh Xom kuông phải thầy giáo phê bình.

(CS): Anh Xom kuông bị thầy giáo phê bình.

These three examples were taken out of 14 cases of error in the tests translating passive sentences from Khmer into Vietnamese completed by 20 second-year students of Phnom penh Medical

University. The cause of misusing "phải" instead of "bị" is that "trầu" () in Khmer has 5 different meanings when translated into Vietnamese and they are as follows:



“T’râu”

phải
đúng
trúng

So, for Cambodian students, the choice between these elements is sometimes very difficult. However, the fact that the learners often misuse “phải” instead of “bị” in passive sentences may be due to the impression of “phải” with the meaning of “t’râu” in the sentences: “*Tôi phải làm bài tập*”, “*phải học chăm chỉ*”, “*Trong thời Pôn Pốt, nhân dân CPC phải sống trong nhà tù không tương*”, has become familiar to them and when translating the passive sentences from Khmer into Vietnamese, they used “phải” of the structure “phải + verb” since in the learners’ mind, “bị” was overwhelmed by “phải”. Giving a presentation of “được”, “bị” and “phải” in Vietnamese is a complicated and interesting issue, studied in depth by many authors [Nguyễn Tài Cẩn, Vũ Thế Thạch, Nguyễn Minh Thuyết...], however, our purpose is just to describe and explain the errors and that’s the reason why we do not deal with this problem.

The conclusion here is that in this case, we should remind the learners of the way to use “phải”, “bị” and “được” in comparison with “t’râu”. When the learners want to write a passive sentence in Vietnamese, “t’râu” can only be translated into Vietnamese as “được” or “bị”, in which “được” is close to “t’râu ban” or “bạn”, whereas “bị” is in connection with “t’râu”, “t’râu ban”. “T’râu” in the passive sentence in Khmer never has the equivalent form of “phải” in modern Vietnamese. Only in the case where “t’râu” means an obligation, a compulsion for the subject of an action, should it be translated in the form of “phải + verb” in Vietnamese.

E.g.

Tôi phải đi đây.

Con phải nghe lời bà nghe chưa?

Anh phải làm hết bài tập đi đã.

2. Conclusion

What we would like to emphasise is:

- The above errors are interlingual errors from Khmer, occurring in the Vietnamese of Cambodian students.
- Errors are a natural phenomenon in the foreign language learning process but a textbook, paying attention to the characteristics of the two languages (source and target), combined with a good method, can help learners shorten the learning time and achieve better results.