

PRAGMATIC MARKERS “WELL” AND “SO” IN FINDING NEMO AND THEIR VIETNAMESE TRANSLATION EQUIVALENTS IN “ĐI TÌM NEMO”

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Abstract – *Pragmatic markers, considered as one of the best-known sources of troubles in translation, have received considerable attention from researchers. This study therefore, offers a contrastive analysis of “well” and “so” occurring in an extract of the film Finding Nemo and their translation in the Vietnamese dubbed and subtitled versions. The occurrences of “well” and “so” in the data were analyzed according to a functional classification framework and compared with their translation equivalents by contrastive analysis (CA) to find out the translation strategies applied and to evaluate translation effectiveness. The findings reveal that “well” tends to be omitted more often than “so” in the Vietnamese translations while “so” appears to be the easier item whose functions are usually well captured by single-word equivalents. The study also shows how careful analysis may help the translators achieve effective and natural translation. Implications for EFL teaching and translating tasks as well as suggestions for further research are also discussed.*

Keywords: *contrastive analysis, equivalent, particle, pragmatic marker, Vietnamese translation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Fraser [1], pragmatic markers are lexical expressions that signal the relationship between the segment they introduce and the prior one, they achieve their procedural core meaning thanks to the context. Trans-

lating pragmatic markers from one language to another language, therefore, becomes a challenge faced by almost all translators due to several factors. In fact, Vietnamese English major students often find it challenging to achieve a natural translation of an English utterance containing pragmatic markers. Even the teachers themselves are also struggling to find effective teaching methods to help their students cope with this problem. Unfortunately, there are not many studies focusing on English – Vietnamese pragmatic marker translation. This paper therefore, explores the Vietnamese translation of English pragmatic markers “well” and “so” with an aim to gain some useful insights for EFL teachers and students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Definition and the functions of pragmatic markers

Despite its common usage, pragmatic marker is challenging to define. In fact, different terms such as pragmatic particle, pragmatic marker, discourse marker have been interchangeably used in several studies. The term pragmatic marker; however, seems to be the most suitable one in the sense of reflecting the pragmatic functions of signalling speaker’s attitude. As Brinton [2] states, a variety of functions filled by these items are better captured by the term *pragmatic*. More specifically, Aijmer and Simon-Vandenberg [3] describe pragmatic markers as linguistic items that are used in conversation for expressing the speaker’s attitudes, negotiating background assumptions, expressing emotions and contributing to coherence rather than contribute to the utterance’s propositional content.

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With regard to the functions of pragmatic markers, it is difficult to find a taxonomy which is able to cover all of the pragmatic markers' possible functions. Brinton [2] has compiled a list of nine functions of pragmatic markers which are entirely presented as follow:

(a) to initiate discourse, including claiming the attention of the hearer, and to close discourse;

(b) to aid the speaker in acquiring or relinquishing the floor;

(c) to serve as a filler or delaying tactic used to sustain discourse or hold the floor;

(d) to mark a boundary in discourse, that is, to indicate a new topic, a partial shift in the topic (correction, elaboration, specification, expansion), or the resumption of an earlier topic (after an interruption);

(e) to denote either new information or old information;

(f) to mark "sequential dependence", to constrain the relevance of one clause to the preceding clause by making explicit the conversational implicatures relating the two clauses, or to indicate by means of conventional implicatures how an utterance matches cooperative principles of conversation;

(g) to repair one's own or others' discourse;

(h) subjectively, to express a response or a reaction to the preceding discourse or attitude towards the following discourse, including also "back-channel" signals of understanding and continued attention spoken while another speaker is having his or her turn and perhaps "hedges" expressing speaker tentativeness; and (i) interpersonally, to effect cooperation, sharing, or intimacy between speaker and hearer, including confirming shared assumptions, checking or expressing understanding, requesting confirmation, expressing deference, or saving face (politeness).' (p.36-38)

In the current study, the list of pragmatic marker functions is applied as a useful guide in identifying the function(s) of pragmatic markers in the source text and evaluating to what extent the translation solutions can fulfill these functions in the target text.

B. Translating pragmatic markers

As we know, pragmatic markers are multi-functional and context sensitive, their meanings are variably negotiated under the effect of context and there are probably no fixed dictionary meanings for discourse makers. Regarding this fact, Aijmer [4] proposes the idea that pragmatic markers do not obtain fixed meanings but a meaning potential which always involves an interplay with the contextual factors. Moreover, Hellberg [5] notes that the matter would be even more problematic when a word or an expression serves as a pragmatic marker in some contexts, but in other contexts, it covers different propositional meanings and cannot be counted as a pragmatic marker. Another challenge is that there is rarely conventional one-to-one pragmatic marker correspondence between two different languages, and usually, a range of possibilities in the target language can be used to translate a discourse marker from the source language. The translators then have to carefully consider several factors to find the most appropriate equivalents. However, there are also situations in which all of the possible choices seem to be unable to maintain the different shades of meaning and functions of the original item.

As far as the complexity of pragmatic marker translation is concerned, several approaches have been devised to get around this issue and contrastive analysis appears to be one of the most effective ways. Contrastive analysis (CA) refers to the study of a pair of languages in order to observe the differences and similarities between them [6]. According to Rey [7], CA is a useful method in the area of discourse makers because it is able to 'highlight the parameters that determine the speaker's preference for one marker over another' (p.177). The advantages of CA have also been confirmed by Cuenca [8], who concludes that CA is a powerful tool for exploring pragmatic meanings in general and pragmatic markers in particular. It allows the researchers to focus on and uncover the hidden meanings or nuances of the prag-

matic markers. A more comprehensive understanding of their meanings and functions is consequently accomplished. Indeed, CA has been applied by many researchers and yielded significant results.

For instance, Aijmer et al. [3] have analyzed the translation of "well" in Swedish and Dutch in their contrastive study. The study then reported that a sharper picture of the English well's meanings and functions can be shown by its counterparts. Through the translations, the interpersonal functions (i.e. resignation, intensifier) and textual functions (i.e. topic introducer, flagging conclusion) of "well" are more clearly reflected. Significantly, "well" is not often omitted and can be translated by a variety of equivalents in the target languages rather than a single corresponding item. This finding is maintained by Hellberg [5] in a study investigating how different types of English pragmatic markers can be translated into Swedish. Hellberg's findings confirmed the difficulty of translating pragmatic markers and indicated that careful consideration is necessary to choose the closest and most natural translation among the available equivalents, or to find solutions for cases in which the pragmatic marker does not have a compatible counterpart in the target language. In another contrastive analysis carried out by Overstreet [9], German and English share some functional similarities in the way they use general extenders - a type of pragmatic markers. Nevertheless, some English general extenders still probably have no German equivalent and vice versa.

A particularly remarkable study is Chaume's [10] research in the Spanish translation of some English pragmatic markers in the movie *Pulp Fiction*. Focusing on the effects of omitting pragmatic markers, this study revealed that the translation seems to be 'less cohesion text than their source counterparts' (p.844) due to the lack of interpersonal meaning. This problem is then made up of images, gestures, facial expressions, intonations... which are not available in merely written translation.

The audience receives tremendous help from these specific characteristics and easily accept deficiencies in cohesion and coherence of the Spanish version. This finding is really a point to consider in studying movie translation. However, translation options other than omission have not been addressed in this study. Cuenca [8] also investigated the translation of "well" in the Catalan and Spanish dubbed versions of a film using contrastive analysis. Focusing on identifying the core meaning of pragmatic marker "well", the author has generally presented "well" as a radial category including interactive meanings and pure textual meanings. Significantly, this study also indicated that "well" omission is the most outstanding strategies used by the translator.

Regarding the strategy for translating the English pragmatic marker "well" into Vietnamese, Ngo [11] applied a different approach by proposing a general translating process instead of identifying specific strategies. According to Ngo [11], effective translation can be achieved by following three steps: contextualize "well", comprehend "well" with meta-language and look for appropriate Vietnamese equivalents. Notably, it is emphasized that the concept of equivalent should be considered more generally: "well" can have equivalents from not only Vietnamese modal particles or conjunctions but also other more complicated expressions or even dialect words, as long as they are able to capture the spirit of the original text. The author also pointed out that merely relying on simple particles or exclamations is a common restriction in many English - Vietnamese written translations. Nevertheless, this study mostly focused on the translation of "well" in written texts, the other channels (i.e. film translation) have not been discussed.

In light of the above, the current study examines different solutions used in Vietnamese translation of pragmatic markers "well" and "so" in a popular film. Some extension is made by analyzing the distinction between the subtitled version and the dubbed

version as well as the possible explanation for these differences.

III. CONTENT

Finding Nemo is a world-famous film with a large body of the audience, even in non-English speaking countries as Vietnam. Due to the characteristics of the target children audience, characters’ mood, nuance and interpersonal meanings expressed by pragmatic markers in this film are quite clear and unambiguous. Thus, the accuracy of pragmatic marker analysis can ensure higher accuracy. Especially, *Finding Nemo* was the first foreign animated film to be dubbed in Vietnam. The effectiveness of translation work in this film has partly proved by the audience’s interest later. This paper, therefore, aims to investigate pragmatic marker translation in the subtitle version (SV) and dubbed version (DV) of this film to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What are common difficulties in translating “well” and “so” into Vietnamese?
- (2) Which translation solutions are most frequently used?
- (3) Which factors are essential for effective pragmatic marker translation?

A. Method

The material for this study was obtained by collecting the script of *Finding Nemo* which is available at <http://www.imsdb.com/scripts/Finding-Nemo.html> and recording the translation from the Vietnamese subtitled version and dubbed version. The occurrences of “well” and “so” in an extract of the movie were then noted and compared with their translation equivalents by CA.

General results such as the frequency of these pragmatic markers and the proportion of used translation solutions are presented by quantitative data. However, the analysis is mainly qualitative in order to achieve deeper insights into the multifunctionality of the pragmatic markers, translation solutions used as well as the effectiveness of those solutions.

Each pragmatic marker is analyzed based on Brinton’s [2] functional classification framework to determine its function in the target text as a foundation to evaluate the effectiveness of its equivalent translation.

B. Result and discussion

1) *Translation of pragmatic marker “well”*: The strategies for translating “well” used in the Vietnamese versions can be generally divided into three types: omission, direct equivalent and combination of direct equivalent and word reordering (see Table 1).

Table 1: Translations of “well” in Vietnamese subtitle and dubbed versions

Subtitle version		Dubbed version	
Omission	8 (61.5%)	Omission	8 (61.5%)
Direct equivalent	4 (30.8%)	Direct equivalent	4 (30.8%)
Equivalent + reordering	1 (7.7%)	Equivalent + reordering	1 (7.7%)
Total	13	Total	13

As in Table 1, omission stands out as the most frequent solution (61.5% and 69.2%) while word reordering with equivalent is the least popular one (7.7% and 15.4%). This tendency can be possibly explained by the fact that in some situations, no single Vietnamese word can fully capture the meaning/function of “well”.

(1) is a common situation in which well is translated by simple particle “à”

(1) DORY: You want me to leave?

MARLIN: **Well**, I mean not... yes.

SV: Không phải, ...à... ừ.

DV: Không phải là... à à... đúng rồi.

In (1), “well” serves as a hedge expressing the speaker’s tentativeness and making the following utterance less face-threatening to the listener. Both Vietnamese versions use simple particle “à” to convey hesitation and reservation. However, unlike the original text,

“à” is placed after the negative form “không phải”. The translations are then effective and sound more natural to Vietnamese audience.

(2) CRUSH: So, what brings you on this fine day to the EAC?

MARLIN: **Well**, Dory and I need to get to Sydney.

SV & DV: Dory và tôi cần đi Sydney.

(3) DENTIST: **Well**, Mr. Tucker, while that sets up...

SV: Ông Tucker, trong khi chờ chất trám khô...

DV: Ông Tucker, trong khi chất trám khô...

In (2), "well" simply aids the speaker in acquiring the floor while, in (3), it serves as a device for getting the hearer's attention and initiating new discourses. "Well" in these cases is omitted in both versions without significantly affecting the semantic meanings. The problem is that the original version's coherence is not maintained; fortunately, the audience does not have many difficulties seeking visual clues such as characters' intonation, gesture and facial expression. These cases are then consistent with Chaume [10], who confirmed the advantages of movie translation compared to other types of translation.

The situation is totally different in (4), when "well" is used to initiate thanking in the source text:

(4) MARLIN: **Well**, listen fellas, thank you.

SV: Cảm ơn anh nhiều lắm.

DV: Cảm ơn các anh nhiều.

Omitting "well" is the solution used in both subtitled and dubbed Vietnamese versions and it seems to be an understandable strategy because generally Vietnamese people do not have the habit of starting their thanking with a pragmatic marker. A Vietnamese word that can be acceptable in such situations is the exclamation “ôi” (alas) but it is quite incompatible to the original text's nuance and the speaker's character. This is indeed typical evidence for Hellberg's findings of cases in which no counterpart in

the target language is suitable enough for a natural translation.

(5) is a case in which well plays an important role and conveys certain nuance. Challenges posed to the translators; therefore, become much greater.

(5) CRUSH: **Well**, you never really know.

SV: **ừm**, chẳng bao giờ biết được cả.

DV: Thực ra **cũng** khó biết lắm.

Specifically, "well" is used to express the speaker's attitude towards his own following utterance about a vague, unexplainable issue. The omission of "well", in this case, might lead to serious lack of the utterance's interpersonal meaning. Hence, different solutions are used to translate "well". While the SV uses “ừm”, DV chooses another equivalent with similar function - “cũng”, to present uncertainty with a slight nuance of resignation.

The complexity of translating "well" is also evident in cases as in (6) and (7) when various equivalents are used:

(6) MARLIN: But it doesn't matter, 'cause no fish in this entire ocean is gonna help me.

DORY: **Well**, I'm helping you.

SV & DV: **Thì** tôi đang giúp anh đây.

In (6), a direct counterpart of "well" is used in both versions to avoid losing important pragmatic meaning. This is a difficult situation and careful consideration is essential to decide an appropriate Vietnamese equivalent which is able to preserve the original utterance's nuance. Specifically, we need a word that can implicit speaker's disagreement and indicate correctness. Vietnamese word “thì” appears to be a good choice by fulfilling pragmatic functions of "well": negatives Marlin's solitude and points out that the speaker is trying to help him.

(7) is also an example of the good translation:

(7) MARLIN: No, no, no, kids. I don't wanna talk about it.

TURTLE KIDS: Awww! Please?

MARLIN: **Well**, OK. I live on this reef, a long long way from here...

SV: **Thôi được rồi**. Tôi sống ở bãi đá ngầm rất xa nơi này...

DV: **Thôi cũng được.** Chú sống ở một dải đá ngầm cách đây rất xa...

In Vietnamese, the phrases “thôi được rồi” and “thôi cũng được” mean “yes” – agree to do something, with a nuance of reluctance. Hence, they capture the meaning and pragmatic function of both OK and "well" in the source text; the speaker’s deference and reluctance to tell a sad story are retained in these versions. As we can see, (5), (6) and (7) are examples of effective translation. These cases support the idea of Ngo [11], who suggested a 3 step process of translating pragmatic markers: careful consideration of context should be done before the translator can determine function(s) of a pragmatic marker and come up with a reasonable equivalent.

(8) is another interesting case when the complexity of identifying and translating a pragmatic marker can be clearly seen:

(8) MARLIN: **Well**, then here. Read this now!

SV: **Tốt**, đây, đọc ngay đi.
DV: Thế thì đọc ngay đi.

This case is probably an example for Hellberg’s [5], finding that challenges even come from determining whether a word in a specific utterance is a pragmatic marker or not. While the SV considers "well" an adverb with certain propositional meaning and translates it to “tốt”, DV, on the other hand, interprets "well" as pragmatic marker signaling initiation and omits it. Based on the context of this utterance and the connection with the previous one, DV appears to be more reasonable.

2) *Translation of pragmatic marker “so”:*
Data analysis also reveals three types of strategy applied in translating so (see Table 2)

In translating "so", SV and DV applied the translation solutions quite differently. (9) and (10) are the few cases where the same solution is applied in both versions:

(9) GILL: **So**, Sharkbait, what do you think?

SV: Sharkbait, cháu nghĩ sao?
DV: Sharkbait, cậu nghĩ thế nào?

Table 2: Translations of "so" in Vietnamese subtitle and dubbed versions

Subtitle version		Dubbed version	
Omission	6 (54.5%)	Omission	3 (27.3%)
Direct equivalent	4 (36.4%)	Direct equivalent	7 (63.6%)
Equivalent + reordering	1 (9.1%)	Equivalent + reordering	1 (9.1%)
Total	11	Total	11

(10) MOONFISH LEADER: So, what are we? Take a guess.

SV & DV: Cái gì đây? Đoán đi.
In term of function, "well" in both of the cases initiates new discourse and claims the attention of hearer. However, the difference stems from the following utterances: While (9) continues with a question and the omission of "so" in this situation is acceptable, omitting "so" in (10) unfortunately results in quite curts and impolite utterances to Vietnamese audience due to the imperative utterance that follows. This loss of nuance might be much more difficult to accept in written translation; the advantage of movie translation was then once again proved.

As stated by Aijmer et al. [3], there can be different equivalents in the target language for a pragmatic marker and this idea can be "well" demonstrated in (11), (12) and (13).

(11) GURGLE: **So** which one is it?
SV: **Thế** cháu từ đâu đến?
DV: **Vậy** chú em từ đâu về đây?
(12) BLOAT: **So** kid, you got a name or what?

SV: **Nào**, cháu bé, cháu có tên không?
DV: **Vậy** nhóc, có tên tuổi gì không?
(13) DENTIST: **So**, has that novocaine kicked in yet?

SV & DV: **Sao**, Thuốc tê ngấm chưa?
In these cases, "so" serves the interactional function. Specifically, it claims the hearer’s attention and initiates a question. These functions can be "well" covered by the Vietnamese particles “nào”, “vậy”, “thế”,

“sao”. Significantly, the difference among these words is that “nào” and “thế” are specific dialect of people from the North of Vietnam while “vậy” and “sao” are primarily used by southern people.

In (14) and (15), “so” is used not for the purpose of initiating questions. The combination of direct equivalents and reordering them seems reasonable.

(14) CRUSH: **So** give me some fin..

SV: Tay **nào**

(15) MARLIN: **so**, we’re cheating death now.

DV: ta đang đánh cuộc với thần chết **đấy**.

As we can see, in (14), “so” initiates an imperative form to mark sequential dependence and express speaker’s reaction to the preceding discourse (the speaker’s compliment on what his son has done). The translator has done a great job analyzing the context and interactants’ relation to come up with the equivalent “nào” which is usually used by Vietnamese speakers at the end of a request to make it more polite and indicate close relationships between the interactants.

In (15), “so” denotes declaration of what is happening. In this case, the appropriate equivalent is probably “đấy” which is generally used in a statement providing information. However, “đấy” mostly comes at the end of the utterance, and reordering the words is necessary to avoid awkward translation.

It appears that in the case of “so”, the omission is no longer the absolutely predominant strategy. The direct equivalent of “so” is even the most popular solution in the dubbed version (63.6%). This finding reflects those of Hellberg [5], who also found “so”, a pragmatic marker, “might seem easy enough to translate” (p.23).

IV. CONCLUSION

As can be seen from the data analysis, there are many challenges faced by the translator when attempting to achieve effective, natural Vietnamese translation of “well” and “so”. The first difficulty comes from pragmatic markers’ multifunctionality

and context-sensitiveness. There is no conventional rule to rely on in identifying which function of a pragmatic marker is being displayed in a specific context. In addition, sometimes it is almost impossible to find a satisfying Vietnamese counterpart for the English pragmatic marker. Especially, the unfamiliarity with the communication culture of native speakers can make it difficult for the translator at the first step: determining “well/so” is functioning as pragmatic marker or adverb/conjunction. The translators then need to go beyond the linguistic elements of single utterance and seek clues from context, assumed cultural, interpersonal background knowledge and the interactants’ relationship to overcome these challenges.

On the question of strategies used for translating “well” and “so”, the pragmatic marker “so” appears to be less challenging to the translator when most of the functions covered by “so” can be captured by single-word counterparts. Indeed, the data analysis shows that direct equivalent is applied most frequently in translating “so”. Unlike “so”, the current study is consistent with those of Cuenca [8], who found that omission is likely the outstanding translation solution for the pragmatic marker “well”. This can be possibly explained in relation to the differences between the two verbal communicative styles. Some functions and shades of meaning covered by “well” cannot be fulfilled by any Vietnamese word. Mechanically applying equivalents then might result in unnatural texts. On the other hand, omission in some cases can seriously affect the utterance’s interpersonal meaning and communicative effect. This finding supports previous observations confirming the important role of pragmatic markers and the risk of omitting them. Furko [12], in a study on translating English pragmatic markers into Hungarian even claims that serious consequence such as “unintended conversational implicatures, misrepresented interpersonal dynamics” or the absence of conversation’s naturalness may occur due to the omission of pragmatic markers in the target text (p.193). The translators

then have to take the non-verbal, semiotic potential helps available to the audience into consideration to decide appropriate method: rely on these aids and omit discourse marker or manage to find an acceptable equivalent.

Significantly, "well" and "so" can be translated by a variety of Vietnamese alternatives. These findings are consistent with other studies indicating that careful consideration of the source language pragmatic marker's function is essential because it enables translator to discard unnatural alternatives and come up with the most natural solution [3], [5], [11]. In some cases, flexible, free translation is required instead of single-word counterpart to fully capture the original text's function and nuance. It is also interesting to find that the choice of equivalents may reveal such factors as the target audience or the translators' regional linguistic characteristics.

In terms of pedagogical implication, the EFL educators' are expected to equip students with knowledge and skills to deal with potential difficulties in this linguistic area. Most importantly, the students should be aware of pragmatic markers' multifunctionality and context-sensitive nature rather than resorting to the decontextualised lists of one to one correspondences or being limited to a few simple, common particles. Guiding students to practice steps in the translation process such as analyzing contextual factors, interpreting pragmatic marker's different facets of meaning, brainstorming and evaluating equivalents. Since the study was limited to data from a short movie extract, more extensive analysis with larger sample of data is recommended to generalize the findings. Additionally, further work is needed to explore if there are additional functions of these pragmatic markers which have been overlooked in this study. More investigation into movie translation to determine the role of non-verbal and paraverbal cues like prosody, rhyme in identifying pragmatic marker's function is also strongly recommended.

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