

## Strategies for Translating English Passive Sentences into Vietnamese

Nguyen Xuan My<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hoa Sen University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

\*Corresponding author's email: my.nx14931@sinhvien.hoasen.edu.vn

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54855/ijte22216>

Received: 16/09/2021

Revision: 15/12/2021

Accepted: 18/12/2021

Online: 20/12/2021

### ABSTRACT

This study examines some most common strategies for the Vietnamese translation of English passive voice such as “The use of markers ‘được’/‘bị’”, “Change to active”, “Paraphrasing” in order to find out the frequency and the rules for the use of those strategies by collecting and analyzing the data from the English and Vietnamese versions of a novel named “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone” and a book named “A Brief History of Time”.

And the findings of this study disapproves the view that Vietnamese active sentences are the dominant choice for translating English passive voice since its results indicate that English It-clefts or English agentless passive sentences where the agent of the action is unclear or concerned with generalization rather than specific individuals have a high tendency of being translated into active structures in Vietnamese while using a marker like 'được' or 'bị' and subject-less active sentences are the primary ways for translating other kinds of English agentless passive sentences into Vietnamese.

Besides, the results of the research also indicate that the use of markers 'được'/'bị' is frequently applied to translate agent-included passives, but the position of the agent in Vietnamese sentences varies according to its features.

**Keywords:** English passive sentences, Translation strategies, ‘được’/‘bị’, Vietnamese translation, Vietnamese active structures

### Introduction

Passive voice is used frequently in many varieties of written English, but the structural differences between English passive sentences and the corresponding structures in Vietnamese are assumed to pose various problems for English - Vietnamese learners since they belong to "a hierarchy of difficulty by which a teacher or linguist can make a prediction of the relative difficulty of a given aspect of the second language" (Stockwell et al., 1965, as cited in Mohammad, 2012, p.16). Furthermore, English passive structures can be translated into active

structures or "a neutral structure" (Bui, 2005; Luu, 2010; Le, Nguyen, & Vu, 2016). Therefore, this paper examines some most common strategies for translating English passive voice into Vietnamese and the rules for the use of these strategies and introduces general procedures for the Vietnamese translation of English passives (here called "Vietnamese translation") by gathering and analyzing the full form of English passive sentences collected from English and Vietnamese versions of a novel called "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" (abbreviated to "Harry Potter") and a book named "A Brief History of Time".

## Literature review

Vietnamese scholars have mainly discussed models or strategies for translating passive sentences from English into Vietnamese. Generally, four translation strategies were claimed by some scholars, which are: (1) *Using a passive marker (abbreviated<sup>1</sup> to "marker") like "bị/được" to translate English passive sentences into "passive forms" in Vietnamese*; (2) *Changing English passive sentences into active structures in Vietnamese, including "impersonal active structures"*; (3) *Translating English passive sentences into a neutral structure/middle structure that lines between active and passive structures.* (Bui, 2005; Nguyen, 2005; Hoang, 2015; Luu, 2010; Le, Nguyen, & Vu, 2016); and (4) *Using a two-layer "theme-rheme structure" ("the active structure inside the passive structure") for the translation* (Tran, 2004, as cited in Luu, 2010). And the rules for the use of each strategy were claimed as follows:

- 1) **Using passive markers:** should be applied when: (i) *there was no agent in the source text (abbreviated to "ST")* (Bui, 2005; Le et al., 2016); or; (ii) *"the passive structure in the source text is a ring of the theme-rheme chain"* (Luu, 2010, p. 101):

(1) [ENG<sup>2</sup>] Aspirin [...] are the drugs of choice. *These drugs* should be **given** [...].

[VIET<sup>3</sup>] Aspirin [...] là các thuốc được chọn dùng. *Các thuốc này nên* **được dùng** [...].

(2) [ENG] *Several methods of ignition were used* [...].

[VIET] *Một số phương pháp đánh lửa đã* **được sử dụng** [...].

- 2) **Changing to Vietnamese active forms:** Some scholars claimed that this strategy should be used to "ensure logic" and to be more suitable for the style of Vietnamese due to the tendency of using the active sentences and that it should be applied when: (i) *the agent occurs in English passives* (Bui, 2005), *the agent of the sentence is the doer of the verb* (Luu, 2010); or; (ii) *when it can be referred from the preceding sentence*; or; (iii) *when English sentences can be translated into Vietnamese active sentences that do not have*

<sup>1</sup> The List of Abbreviations is in Appendix 01

<sup>2</sup> [ENG] means English

<sup>3</sup> [VIET] means Vietnamese

a subject within (Bui, 2005):

(3) [ENG] He can't be **found** anywhere.

[VIET] Họ không **tìm thấy** **đứa bé** ở đâu.

(4) [ENG] **Computers** are **thought** to have [...].

[VIET] Người ta **cho rằng** **máy tính** có [...].

3) **Using a neutral structure**: “neutral” forms or subjectless active forms can be used for the Vietnamese translation when: (i) *the translators want to avoid expressing negative meaning by using the marker “bị” or positive meaning by using the marker “được”*; or; (ii) *when those meanings are not transparently expressed in ST* (Bui, 2005; Le et al., 2016); or; (iii) *when main verbs in English passives express “propositional attitude” (thái độ mệnh đề), such as “assume”, “believe”, “estimate”, “report” etc.,* (Bui, 2005):

(5) [ENG] **The window** was **shut** [...].

[VIET] **Cửa sổ** đã **đóng** hết [...].

4) **Using a two-layer “theme-rheme structure”**: applied for passive sentences whose agent is the doer of the verb (Luu, 2010):

(6) [ENG] He was **scolded** by the teacher.

[VIET] Anh ta **bị** thầy **mắng**

The findings of previous studies are indeed helpful and precious. Nevertheless, there are underlying rules that restrict the use of techniques for the Vietnamese translation, for example, in the below instances, in which there is no agent or there exists a ring of a theme-rheme chain in ST but the target texts (abbreviated to “TT”), are still translated into active forms as in (7) & (8), or when the agent is the doer, but the translation is not an active form or a “two-layer theme-rheme structure” in Vietnamese as in (9):

(7) [ENG] ‘Potter’s been **sent** a broomstick, Professor.’.

[VIET] “Thưa giáo sư, **có người gửi cho** Harry cây chổi ạ!”

(8) [ENG] I was a research student [...]. Two years before, I had been diagnosed, [...] and **given to understand** [...]

[VIET] [...] thì **tôi** còn là một nghiên cứu sinh [...]. Hai năm trước đó, tôi được chuẩn đoán là, [...] và **người ta đã cho** **tôi** hiểu rằng [...].

(9) [ENG] A better model [...] was **put** forward by Linde [...].

[VIET] Một mô hình hay hơn [...] đã **được phát triển** cũng bởi Linde [...].

Some verbs like “assume”, “believe”, “claim”, “think” etc., can be translated in passive forms with a marker “*bị*” or “*được*” like (10) & (11); hence these verbs are not the only rule for the use of “impersonal active structure”:

(10) [ENG] [...] most **have been** uncritically *assumed* by one or another author, [...].

[VIET] [...] hầu hết có thể **được** một hoặc nhiều tác giả *biện luận* và *giả thiết*, [...].

(11) [ENG] [...], acids would **have been** *thought of* [...].

[VIET] [...], axit **được** *coi là* [...].

Furthermore, the marker-using strategy is far complicated in the light of the presence or absence of agents in ST, and the rules for translating English passives into a “two-layer theme-rheme structure” or other structures in Vietnamese should be analyzed in further detail. On that account, this research aims to seek for some dominant translation strategies in the bilingual corpus built from the two aforementioned books, analyzing those strategies, and to establish general translation procedures for rendering English passives into Vietnamese, based on translation procedures introduced by Newmark (1988) and translation strategies introduced by Baker (2018). The translating procedure by Newmark is operational and begins with choosing a method of approach (Newmark, 1988), while Baker (2018) used the term “strategies” when addressing non-equivalent in translation. This paper uses the term “translation strategies” to indicate ways of translating English passives into Vietnamese that the researcher has found in his corpus.

### Research Questions

By analyzing the data from the corpus, the author of this paper seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What are common strategies for translating English passives into Vietnamese, and the rules for the use of these strategies?
2. What are the general procedures which could be used to translate English passives into Vietnamese?

### Methods

Quantitative method, contrastive linguistics, and corpus linguistics are some main research methods in the paper. And a small corpus was built from the two selected novels to serve the research’s purposes. Nevertheless, instances retrieved as samples of the research are the full form of English passive voice, excluding passives that are postmodifiers of a noun (short forms without auxiliary “to be”) and passives with “get” for the reason that “*the get passive is*

*extremely rare*” (Bilber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999, p. 476). Furthermore, this paper mainly focuses on the structures and components of passive sentences in English and Vietnamese, and semantics and pragmatics will be discussed when necessary.

In addition, the corpus does not include sentences that have English verbs in “V-ed” form used as an adjective in the sentence as in 01):

01) [...], but he didn't want to get **involved**.

Words in the V-ed form are judged to be an adjective on the following criteria:

- i. *Their part of speech in Oxford Dictionary of English (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) (Stevenson, 2010).*
- ii. *Suppose the first criterion fails to determine the V-ed form. In that case, the second one will be applied: If preceding an adverb of degree like "totally" before the V-ed and changing "to be" to another copula are feasible, the V-ed, then, is judged as an adjective.*

Besides, there has been much debate on the question of whether there is a passive structure in Vietnamese. According to Nguyen (2009), some researchers and linguists denied the existence of the passive sentences in Vietnamese, such as Tran (1936), Thompson (1965), Nguyen (2000), Cao (2001), Nguyen (1977), Nguyen (1986, 1998), while others like Diep & Nguyen (2000), Le (1989), Nguyen (1976), Hoang (1980), recognized the existence of this kind of structure in Vietnamese. This research only discusses the strategies for translating English passives into Vietnamese and will not address the question about the existence of Vietnamese passives. Nevertheless, the term “passive sentence/structure” is used in this paper due to the ease of presenting the ideas.

And the corpus was built with the following procedures:

#### *Procedures for building the bilingual corpus*

- 1) Search instances that comprise a full form of English passives;
- 2) Collect all the corresponding Vietnamese translations of those English instances found in the first step;
- 3) Use Microsoft Excel to align the samples collected in steps 1) and 2);
- 4) Remove any sample that does not meet the full form of English passive voice criteria and build a bilingual corpus for the research.

#### *Data categories & analysis*

- 1) Use Microsoft Excel to categorize and conduct the statistics of the data;
- 2) Analyze the data to find the answers to the research questions.

## Results/Findings and discussion

Based on the corpus with 672 passive instances that meet the criteria of the collected samples, translation strategies have been categorized, and their frequency is indicated in Table 1, which shows that using a marker “*bị*” or “*được*” is predominant in Vietnamese translations with 406 out of 672 instances, accounting for 60%. And the second most popular strategy is changing English passives into active forms in TT with 15%, followed by “Paraphrase” with 12%. The two least common strategies are “Omit markers” and “Omit passive structures” with 10% and 3%, respectively:

**Table 1.** *The frequency of each Translation strategy*

No.	Strategies	Number of instances	Percentage <sup>4</sup>
1	Use a marker	406	60%
2	Change to active forms	99	15%
3	Paraphrase	80	12%
4	Omit markers	66	10%
5	Omit passive structures	21	3%
<i>Total</i>		<i>672</i>	<i>100%</i>

### *The use of markers and the use of active forms for the Vietnamese translation.*

Sun & Zhou (2010) claimed that forms were a tool to serve content and different forms expressed different meanings and that in many cases, using the same form with ST for translations could more fully and appropriately express the meaning in ST rather than using another form that is common in TT. Consequently, using another form might be at the risk of distorting the meaning in ST. This may account for the result that marker strategy is the most dominant one for translating English passives in the researcher’s data. And the data also indicates that this strategy is still a primary one for translating agent-included passives in English, as presented in table 2, which disapproves the idea that such English sentences should be translated into active forms in Vietnamese.

**Table 2.** *The occurrence of each strategy in agent-included sentences*

No.	Strategies	Number of instances	Percentage
1	Use a marker	129	79%
2	Paraphrase	16	10%
3	Change to actives	15	9%
4	Omit markers	4	2%
<i>Total</i>		<i>164</i>	<i>100%</i>

And most of those 15 English instances of change-to-active strategy (abbreviated to “active strategy”) in table 2 do not have a tight connection with their preceding sentences, which is reflected in the position of the sentences in a paragraph or in the loose connection between the patients of passive sentences, “*the entity being acted on*” (Bilber et al., 1999, p. 477), with participants in the preceding sentence. While those in sentences of marker-using strategy

<sup>4</sup> The percentage in the tables in this paper is rounded up

(abbreviated to “marker strategy”) have a tight connection with their preceding ones, which is reflected in the features of the patients, most of them are or are modified by “anaphoric reference items” which include “*pronouns, demonstratives, the article ‘the’ and items like ‘such a’*” (McCarthy, 1996, p.35) that make patients known information. Therefore, the marker strategy should be used in the light of making the text cohesive as the anaphoric reference item will be in the position near the one it presents, and due to “information principle” in which “*the clause characteristically opens with given or background information and ends with new information*” (Bilber et al., 1999, p. 896):

- (1) [ENG] *The fact that light travels at a finite, but very high, speed was first **discovered** in 1676 by the Danish astronomer [...].*
- [VIET] Năm 1676, **nhà thiên văn học Đan Mạch** [...] là người đầu tiên **phát hiện ra** rằng ánh sáng truyền với vận tốc hữu hạn, mặc dù rất lớn.
- (2) [ENG] *There was a different interpretation..., which was **advocated** by **Roger** [...]*
- [VIET] *Có một cách giải thích khác..., mà **Roger** [...] **rất ủng hộ**.*
- (3) [ENG] *The proposal [...] was called the steady-state theory. **It** was **suggested** in 1948 by two refugees [...].*
- [VIET] **Nó được đưa ra** vào năm 1948, bởi hai người tị nạn [...].
- (4) [ENG] *[...] that circular motion was the most perfect. **This idea** was **elaborated** by Ptolemy into a complete cosmological model.*
- [VIET] [...] rằng chuyển động tròn là chuyển động hoàn thiên nhất. **Ý tưởng này đã được Ptolemy phát triển** thành một mô hình vũ trụ hoàn chỉnh.

Instance (1) & (2) both occur in the first sentence of a paragraph, and therefore, they have a loose connection with the last sentence in the previous paragraph, particularly the loose connection between participants in the passives with those in the previous sentence, allowing the agent who is new information to occupy the subject position in the Vietnamese text. Consequently, the active strategy is preferred for the translation of such sentences. While in (3) & (4), the passive structures have a tight connection with their preceding sentences: the patient "it" in (3) and "this idea" in (4) can be recognized by referring back to the phrase adjoining them. Therefore the marker strategy makes the text more cohesive and more suitable to the order in which known information precedes unknown information than the active strategy does.

Furthermore, the choice between markers “*được*” and “*bị*” and the position of agents in the marker strategy vary according to the occurrence of the agent in English passives and other factors. For this reason, this research examines this strategy according to two kinds of English passives: “agent-included passives” and “agentless passives”.

## The marker strategy for agent-included and agentless passives in English

### Agent-included passives

If English passives include an agent, the agent will always be reserved in TT, but its position in TT varies according to its characters and its structural complexity in comparison to the main verb. Table 3 shows two positions of an agent in Vietnamese translations: (i) *before the main verb* (abbreviated to “before V”), and (ii) *after the main verb* (abbreviated to “after V”).

**Table 3.** Positions of agents in Vietnamese translations

No	Position of agents	Number of instances	Percentage
1	“Before V”: <i>Marker + Agent + Verb</i>	40	32%
2	“After V”: <i>Marker + Verb + “Bởi/Bằng/Do...” (By) + Agent</i>	86	68%
<i>Total</i>		126 <sup>5</sup>	100%

Table 3 indicates that the primary position of agents is “after V” (68%). Nevertheless, table 4 and table 5 show that the “after V” position will be preferred when the agent is inanimate as in (6), while “before V” is preferred when the agent is animate as in (5):

(5) [ENG] *This idea was **elaborated** by Ptolemy [...]*

[VIET] *Ý tưởng này đã **được** Ptolemy **phát triển** thành [...]*

(6) [ENG] *[...] which was not **affected** by what happened in it.*

[VIET] *[...] và không **chịu ảnh hưởng** bởi những điều xảy ra trong nó.*

**Table 4.** Positions of agents in Vietnamese translations for *animate-agent passives*

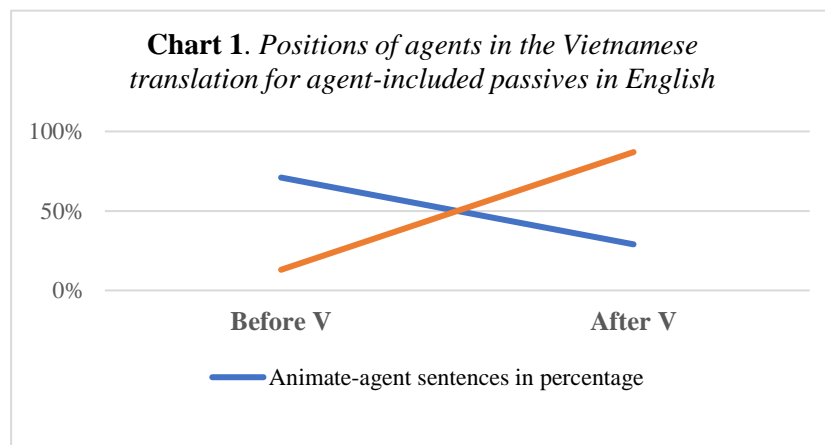
No	Position of agents	Number of instances	Percentage
1	Before V	29	71%
2	After V	12	29%
<i>Total</i>		41	100%

**Table 5.** Positions of agents in Vietnamese translations for *inanimate-agent passives*

No	Position of agents	Number of instances	Percentage
1	After V	74	87%
2	Before V	11	13%
<i>Total</i>		85	100%

<sup>5</sup> There are 129 agent-included passives in English, but there are 3 sentences whose agents lose the feature of a typical agent in Vietnamese translation. Hence these instances are excluded in the statistic table.





Since the animate agent in English passives is the “doer” or “implementer” who conducts or finishes the action, it has a high tendency to be placed before the verb to form an active sentence in Vietnamese on the grounds that active forms are a highly common form in Vietnamese as claimed by Bui (2005), Nguyen (2005). Therefore, markers like “*bị*” or “*được*” are used to reserve the style and character of ST in TT and placing animate agents “before V” in Vietnamese is applied to give the Vietnamese translation all the ease of TT and not to make the Vietnamese sentences sound like a translation. And this strategy is supported by 71% of instances, as shown in Table 4. Nevertheless, there are 12 instances in the corpus where agents follow main verbs. Those agents, however, are particularly complex structures modified by other components and more cumbersome than the main verb. Consequently, those agents have a high tendency for being placed after the main verb due to “the principle of end-weight”, which explains “*the tendency for long and complex elements to be placed towards the end of a clause*” (Bilber et al., 1999, p. 898):

- (7) [ENG] [...] until *similar models **were discovered*** in 1935 by *the American physicist Howard Robertson and the British mathematician Arthur Walker* [...].

[...] cho tới khi *những mô hình tương tự **được phát minh** bởi nhà vật lý Mỹ Howard Robertson và nhà toán học Anh Arthur Walker* [...].

- (8) [ENG] It was *suggested* in 1948 by *two refugees from Nazi-occupied Austria, Hermann Bondi and Thomas Gold* [...].

[VIET] Nó **được đưa ra** vào năm 1948, bởi *hai người tị nạn chạy khỏi nước Áo đang bị bọn phát xít chiếm đóng, đó là Hermann Bondi và Thamas Gold* [...].

In above instances , the agents can be put before the verbs, but the sentences will lose their naturalness as in (8b):

? (8b) Nó **được** hai người tị nạn chạy khỏi nước Áo đang bị bọn phát xít chiếm đóng, đó là Hermann Bondi và Thamas Gold **đưa ra**.

And table 5 illustrates that among 85 instances that include an inanimate agent, there are 74 instances in which the agents are placed after the main verb as in (11) and only 11 instances where the agents are placed before the main verb as in (9) & (10). But in comparison to the main verb, most of these agents in those 74 instances have a rather complicated structure, as in (11), while those in 11 instances of “before V” have quite simple a structure, as in (9) & (10). Therefore, the position of agents is expected to be highly influenced by their length versus the length of the verb and their features (animate vs. inanimate).

Additionally, if inanimate agents are instruments or methods rather than “doers” or initiators of the action, their position is “after V” as in (11):

(9) [ENG] **A cannonball fired upward from the earth** will be *slowed down* by gravity and [...].

[VIET] **Một viên đạn đại bác khi bắn lên từ mặt đất sẽ bị lực hấp dẫn làm cho chuyển động chậm lại** và [...].

(10) [ENG] **any normal object** is forever *confined* by relativity to move [...].

[VIET] **một vật bình thường** vĩnh viễn bị *tính tương đối giới hạn* chuyển động [...].

(11) [ENG] [...] **the position of a point** can be *specified* by two coordinates, latitude and longitude.

[VIET] [...] **vị trí của một điểm trên đó** có thể được ghi bằng hai tọa độ, kinh độ và vĩ độ.

(12) [ENG] [...] **light** should be *bent* by gravitational fields.

(12a) [VIET] [...] **ánh sáng** có thể bị *bẻ cong* bởi các trường hấp dẫn.

(12b) [VIET] [...] **ánh sáng** có thể bị các trường hấp dẫn *bẻ cong*.

In (11), the agents “two coordinates, latitude and longitude” in English sentences are translated into “hai tọa độ, kinh độ và vĩ độ”, which are instruments to conduct the action (“specify”) rather than the “doer” or “implementer” and which are longer and more complex than the main verb “specify” in term of structure. Consequently, the preferred position is “after V”. In contrast, the agent in (12) is in a rather simple form and is the “doer”/“implementer” of the action (“bend”); hence it can precede the main verb as in (12a) or follow the main verb as in (12b).

Besides, if the marker is “do” instead of “bị” or “được”, the agent will be placed right after the marker “do” and before V, regardless of the complexity of its structure, as in (13) & (14):

(13) [ENG] **Hanoi's delegation at the EC – Vietnam conference will be led by its top investment manager Dau Ngoc Xuan, [...].**

[VIET] **Phái đoàn của Hà Nội tại Hội nghị EC – Việt Nam sẽ do một viên chức hàng đầu về đầu tư, ông Đậu Ngọc Xuân, [...] dẫn đầu.**

(14) [ENG] [...] but **the money was provided** for Plato by Dion of Syracuse [...].

[VIET] [...] nhưng **tiền là do** Dion xứ Syracuse **chu cấp** cho Plato, [...].

### Agentless passives

Table 6 shows that 508 English passive instances do not include an agent, and the marker strategy is still the most frequent with 277 instances (55%), followed by active strategy and "Paraphrase" with 17% 13%, respectively. The omissions of markers and of passives in Vietnamese translations are least common.

**Table 6.** The frequency of Vietnamese translation strategies for agentless passives in English

No	Strategies	Number of instances	Percentage
1	Use a marker	277	55%
2	Change to actives	84	17%
3	Paraphrase	64	13%
4	Omit the marker	62	12%
5	Omit passive structures	21	4%
<i>Total</i>		<i>508</i>	<i>100%</i>

Due to the lack of an agent in English passives, using a marker is the most suitable way for translating English passives since there is no device to change to active sentences in Vietnamese while paraphrasing passives will be at the risk of distorting the meaning of ST, and the omission of markers is not always feasible.

In addition, there is a choice of using the marker “*bị*” or “*được*” in the marker strategy, and the marker “*được*” is believed to be used for expressing [+positive], [+favorable] meanings while the marker “*bị*” has [+negative], [+unfavorable] meanings (Bui (2005), Nguyen (2005), Hoang (2015), Luu T.T (2010)). However, the data of this research shows that there are instances in which “*được*” can also be used for neutral meanings:

(15) [ENG] [...] **a certain critical value, determined** by the rate [...].

[VIET] [...] **một giá trị tới hạn nào đó được xác định** bởi tốc độ [...].

(16) [ENG] **Any point on such a world-sheet can be described** by two numbers [...].

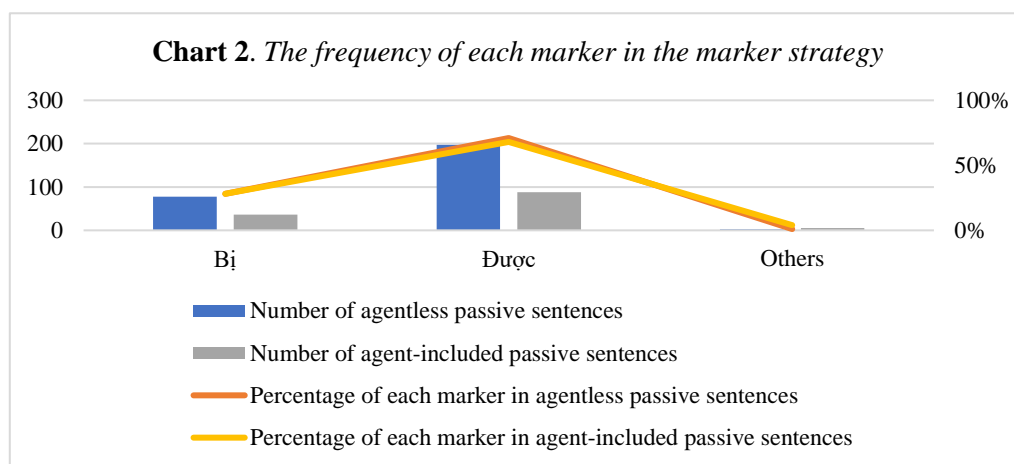
[VIET] **Mỗi điểm trên mặt vũ trụ như thế được mô tả** bởi hai số: [...].

In (15) & (16), “*được*” cannot be replaced by “*bị*” to convey a negative meaning since the main verbs express quite “neutral” a meaning. This accounts for the high percentage of the marker

“*được*”, which is more than double the rate of the marker “*bị*” as presented in table 7. And for this reason, “*được*” should be added a [+neutral] semantic feature.

**Table 7.** *The frequency of each marker in the marker strategy*

Type of English sentences	Marker	Bị	Được	Others	Total
<b>Agentless passives in number</b>		78	197	2	277
Agentless passives in percentage		28%	71%	1%	100%
<b>Agent-included passives in number</b>		36	88	5	129
Agent-included passives in percentage		28%	68%	4%	100%



Additionally, since English scientific texts rely heavily on passive structures to give “*the impression of objectivity and to distance the writer from the statements*” (Baker, 2018, p.115), the marker “*được*” with its [+neutral] semantic feature will be used most frequently to avoid [+positive] or [+negative] meaning in the Vietnamese translation of English scientific and technical writing. The marker “*được*”, however, is found not only to precede the main verbs but also to follow the main verbs with 23 agentless instances in the researcher’s data:

(17) [ENG] **This** can be *done* very accurately.

[VIET] **Điều này** có thể *thực hiện được* một cách rất chính xác.

(18) [ENG] [...] our galaxy is [...] **that** can be *seen using modern telescopes* [...].

[VIET] [...] thiên hà của chúng ta chỉ là [...] **thiên hà** có thể *nhìn thấy được bằng các kính thiên văn hiện đại* [...].

In the above sentences, “*được*” follows main verbs, causing the sentences to lose their passive structure, and the emphasis is not on the passive meaning but on the possibility of conducting the action. With the use of this strategy, main verbs are normally modified by words expressing possibility like “*có thể*” (can) or “*không thể*” (cannot). In the researcher’s data, there are 17 out of 23 instances in which the main verbs are modified by “*có thể*” or “*không thể*”. However, in

these 23 instances, the marker “*được*” can precede before verbs to change the sentences into a typical passive structure. Therefore, it is expected that placing “*được*” after the main verb in agentless passives depends on where the emphasis is.

### *The active strategy and three ways for the change to active forms*

As shown in table 2 and table 6, the active strategy was applied for the translation of 15 agent-included passives and 84 agentless passives in English (in which 23 instances are It-cleft). However, changing an English passive structure into a Vietnamese active form varies according to the type of English passives, the semantic features of agents, and main verbs. Table 8 shows three ways for the change, in which adding an additional subject to convert English passives into an active in TT (abbreviated to “Adding-S”) is the most common method, followed by “Changing to a subject-less active” (abbreviated to “Subjectless active”) with 18% and the least common one is “Converting the agent into the subject in active sentences” (abbreviated to “Convert-the-agent”) with 12%.

**Table 8.** *Three ways of translating English passives into Vietnamese active forms*

No.	Methods of changing to active sentence	Number of instances	Percentage
1	Add an additional subject to change to Vietnamese actives	69	70%
2	Change to a subject-less active	18	18%
3	Convert the agents in English passives into subjects in Vietnamese actives	12	12%
<i>TOTAL</i>		99	100%

Bilber et al. (1999, p.938) stated that the initiator of action in the short dynamic passive was purposely left unexpressed because “*the agent is unknown, redundant, or irrelevant (i.e of particularly low information value)*”. And among 69 instances used the “Adding-S” strategy, there are 51 instances whose agents are left unexpressed and rather irrelevant since the sentences are not concerned with the initiators of the action as in (19) & (20). Such sentences, particularly dummy-subject ones in English, have a high tendency to be translated into Vietnamese actives with an additional subject. In 51 instances, there are 19 It-cleft sentences and 32 sentences that are concerned with generalization rather than specific initiators:

(19) [ENG] It is *believed* that *this force*...

[VIET] *Người ta tin* rằng *lực này* ...

It is remarkable that “additional subjects” in the Vietnamese translation are an “exophoric reference”, which is assumed to “*share worlds outside of the text*” as claimed by McCarthy (1996, p.35), and refers to a group of people, like: “Họ/Người ta” (they), “Ta/chúng ta”(We), “Mọi người” (Everyone) as in (19) & (20). Few “additional subject” are also concerned with an impersonal individual but the added subject must follow “*có*” (have) as in (21):

(20) [ENG] It is *not known* exactly *what length a stadium was*, [...].

[VIET] Hiện nay **ta không biết** chính xác *1 stadia dài bao nhiêu*, [...].

(21) [ENG] Please leave your luggage on the train, **it** will be *taken to the school separately*.

[VIET] Hành lý cứ để lại trên tàu, sẽ **có người mang về trường sau**.

Besides, some English passives can be translated into a subject-less active form in Vietnamese:

(22) [ENG] [...], there is *no spot* that can be *said to be the center* [...].

[VIET] [...], *không thể nói chấm màu nào là trung tâm* [...].

(23) [ENG] [...], even when the electrons **are sent** one at a time, [...].

[VIET] [...], thậm chí cả khi **gửi** mỗi lần một electron, [...]

(24) [ENG] The molecules *can be thought* of as [...].

[VIET] *Có thể xem* những phân tử như, [...]

The above examples, whose unexpressed agents are translated into subjectless actives in Vietnamese. And according to Diep (1996), subject-less sentences can be used in the case that:

- It is used in imperative moods, like: "*Đóng cửa lại!*" (Close the door!)
- It includes words like: "có thể" (can/be able to), "cần" (need, have to), "nên" (should, had better), "phải" (have to, must), etc., like: "*Tóm lại là phải học ...*".
- Its predicate has verbs that express talking activities, recognition, feeling, such as: *nói, cho rằng, nghĩ, trông thấy, trông, xem, etc.*, and in many cases, this kind of verbs refers to an event in general without the presence of a subject, for example: "*Bước vào cổng thôn Đoài, đã thấy nhà ông Nghị Quế*" (Ngô Tất Tố).

Subject-less Vietnamese translations in the researcher's data either include words like "có thể" (can/be able to), "phải" (have to, must) or the predicates that have verbs like "nói", "nhìn", "xem", which are consistent with Diep's studies as in (22) & (24). But the agents referred from these sentences are unclear as in (23) or are tacitly understood as a group of people in general, like "ta/chúng ta" (we) as in (24). And a specific individual agent is hardly added back to the sentence, as in (24b), unless the passive structure is in conditional sentences formed by "(mà)...thì" as in (24c) or in imperative sentences as in (24d):

(24b) ?Anh ta/Cô ấy/Ông David có thể xem những phân tử như....

(24c) [VIET] **Món này mà (bạn) nấu** như vậy **thì** mất ngon.

[ENG] This dish will lose its delicacy if it is cooked in that way

(24d) [VIET] Xe này phải *rửa sạch* đấy!

[ENG] This car must be cleaned

Another way for the change to actives is to convert the agent in agent-included passives to the subject of actives in Vietnamese as in (25) & (26):

(25) [ENG] This was first pointed out by *St. Augustine*.

[VIET] *St. Augustine* (là người đầu tiên) đã chỉ ra điều đó.

(26) [ENG] One of the important pieces of physical evidence was provided by *Einstein*.

[VIET] *Einstein* (là người) đã đưa ra được một bằng chứng vật lý quan trọng.

It is feasible and reasonable to change the above English sentences to Vietnamese actives since we have enough material (the agent) and reason for the conversion (actives are more preferred than passives). Nevertheless, as earlier discussed in 1., this strategy should be used only when the connection between the passives with their previous sentences is loose.

#### *The omission of markers*

The strategy of omitting markers (here called “marker-omitted”) presented in table 1 means that the translators did not use the marker “bị/được” to mark the passive meaning in the TT, but these sentences still reserve the passive meaning:

(27) [ENG] *The other two spatial dimensions* are ignored or, [...]

[VIET] *Hai chiều không gian còn lại sẽ (bị) bỏ qua* [...]

(28) [ENG] *The steady-state theory*, therefore, had to be abandoned.

[VIET] Do vậy lý thuyết trạng thái bền vững cần phải (bị) vứt bỏ.

(29) [ENG] One can *observe* what is called [...].

[VIET] Người ta có thể *quan sát được* cái (~~được~~) gọi là [...].

In marker-omitted translations, the marker “bị” or “được” can precede the main verb in the sentence to make it become a typical passive. The term “marker-omitted” in this paper is equal to the “neutral sentence” in Bui’s research (2005), but the frequency of this strategy is rather low (10%), and the marker “bị” or “được” mostly can be used to replace this strategy, which is consistent with the findings of Bui (2005). However, this strategy can only be applied for the Vietnamese translation of agentless passive sentences whose agents are unclear and text-internal (27) & (28). Besides, the patients in such sentences should be inanimate as in the above examples. Other rules for the use of this strategy are as follows:

*The emphasis is on the result; or to announce a change:*

(30) [ENG] Her black hair was *drawn into* a tight bun.

[VIET] Tóc bà *bới thành* một búi chặt.

(31) [ENG] The book has been *sent out*.

[VIET] Sách *đã gửi đi rồi*.

(32) [ENG] Clothes have been *washed*.

[VIET] Quần áo *đã giặt xong*.

Bui (2005) and Hoang (2015) distinguished “neutral” structure (N2 + V) from the typical passive (N2 + marker “được/bị” + V) and argued that predicates in “neutral” structures were not made to be stative (trạng thái hoá) by the marker “bị/được” but by other words that stated the results, time our means, etc. This research supports this idea, and there are 6 instances in the corpus whose main verbs are modified by the word “thành” as in (30). In those sentences, the focus is on the result rather than the passive meaning; hence the marker “bị” or “được” can be omitted. Besides, when the focus is to announce a change, reflected in the occurrence of “đã...rồi/xong” (already), markers can be removed, and as in (31) & (32).

*Some fixed expressions*

Some fixed expressions in Vietnamese, like “sinh ra” (be born), “gọi là” (be called), “xem như” (be regarded), “buộc” (be forced), etc., can be used in “neutral sentences” without the occurrence of markers, as in (33) & (34):

(33) [ENG] One such possibility is **what** are *called* chaotic boundary conditions.

[VIET] Một khả năng là chọn **cái gọi là** điều kiện hỗn độn (*chaotic*) ban đầu.

(34) [ENG] [...] as was *described* in the chapter on black holes

[VIET] [...] như đã miêu tả ở chương nói về các lỗ đen

In some fixed expressions, the combination is normally fixed and the structure of patients is simple, as in (33) the verb “gọi” (call) goes with “là” (to be) and the patient “cái” (what) is only a single word, or in (34) the marker “được” can be omitted when such verbs, like “miêu tả” (describe), “nhắc tới” (mention), “nói” (say), “thảo luận” (discuss), occur in a fixed combination, such as “như đã + V + ở +” (as + be + V<sub>ed</sub> + in). However, in these fixed expressions, the marker “được” or “bị” can also be added to emphasize the passive meaning or when the structure of patients is too complex as in (35):



- (35) [ENG] **Another objection to an infinite static universe** is normally *ascribed to the German philosopher* [...].
- [VIET] **Một phản bác nữa đối với mô hình vũ trụ tĩnh vô hạn** thường **được xem** là của nhà triết học người Đức [...].

*In some instructions where the focus is on the guidance, possibility rather than passive meanings*

When the focus is on the instruction or possibility rather than the passive voice, the marker-omitted strategy can be used for the translation of agentless passives whose agents are unclear and text-external. In those sentences, main verbs are normally modified by “có thể” (can), “cần phải” (need/should), “không thể” (cannot), “nên” (should) as in (36). In some cases, the removal of markers greatly relies on the focus of possibility with the occurrence of “có thể” (can) or “không thể” (cannot) as in (37), which explains the high frequency of this kind of sentence (38%) in table 9.

- (36) [ENG] [...] did not need to be *adjusted to fit the facts* [...].
- [VIET] [...] không cần **điều chỉnh** cho phù hợp với thực nghiệm [...].
- (37) [ENG] [...] **the infinities** can be *canceled out by a process* [...].
- [VIET] [...] **những đại lượng này** đều có thể **loại bỏ** nhờ quá trình [...].

#### **4.1. To avoid conveying positive or negative meanings:**

Bui (2005) stated that “neutral sentences” could be used to avoid expressing a negative meaning or positive meaning; or when those meanings were not transparently expressed in ST. There are 6 instances found in the corpus in which the removal of markers is served for the purpose of avoiding negative and positive meanings as in (38):

- (38) [ENG] [...] **the manuscript of his second major book** was *smuggled to a publisher* [...].
- [VIET] [...] **một bản thảo của cuốn sách kiệt tác thứ hai của ông** đã **lọt** đến một nhà xuất bản [...].

**Table 9.** *The frequency of each situation in the remove-marker strategy*

No	Situations in which markers are omitted	Number of instances	Percentage
1	Instruction structures	25	38%
2	Fixed expressions	16	24%
3	Emphasis on the result	6	9%
4	Avoid conveying positive or negative meanings	6	9%
5	Others	13	20%
<i>Total</i>		66	100%

### *Other translation strategies*

#### *Paraphrasing*

The strategy “Paraphrase” in table 1 means that the translators changed the structure of ST to a different structure in TT; for example, complex sentences in ST are changed to simple sentences in TT. The term “Paraphrase” in this paper is nearly the same as the term “transposition” first introduced by Vinay and Darbelnet (Newmark, 1998) and later was defined by Newmark (1998, p. 55) as “*a translation procedure involving a change in the grammar from SL to TL*”. This kind of “shift” can be used when “*literal translation is grammatically possible but may not accord with natural usage in the TL*”. Table 1 shows that there are 80 instances to which this paraphrasing strategy was applied, accounting for 12%. And 59% (47/80) of those instances were paraphrased due to the translators’ personal style since the marker strategy or the active strategy can be used without distorting the meaning of SL, as in (39) & (40):

(39) [ENG] [...] **the new macromolecule** could not *reproduce* itself and eventually would have been *destroyed*.

[VIET] [...] **những đại phân tử mới** không có khả năng *tự tạo* và do đó *tàn lụi dần*.

[Use markers] **Những đại phân tử mới** không có khả năng *tự tạo* và cuối cùng sẽ **bi tiêu diệt**.

(40) [ENG] ‘No one. **It** was *addressed* to you by mistake,’

[VIET] “*Không ai viết. Nhầm địa chỉ.*”

[Change to actives] “*Không ai cả. Người ta gửi nhầm thôi.*”  
No one. **They send** it by mistake.

Yet, there are English passives that cannot be translated into passive or active structures in Vietnamese due to the lack of equivalence in TT as in (41) & (42), or the complexity of the sentences in ST as in (43):

- (41) [ENG] **Harry** was strongly *reminded* of *Dudley*.  
 [VIET] **Harry** sức *liên tưởng* đến *Dudley*.
- (42) [ENG] [...] ‘it’s the only way ... I’ve got to be *taken*.’  
 [VIET] [...] “Đành vậy... chỉ còn cách duy nhất đó... phải *thí tội* thôi.”
- (43) [ENG] [...] in which **alpha-particles**, *which are positively charged particles given off by radioactive atoms*, are *deflected* [...].  
 [VIET] [...] *sự lệch hướng* của các **hạt alpha** - *hạt mang điện dương do các nguyên tử phóng xạ phát ra* [...]

In (41), the verb "remind" means "to bring back a memory to someone" and can be used in English passives. Its lexical equivalent in Vietnamese is “nhớ tới” or “nhớ về”, which hardly be used in passive forms. Consequently, the sentence should be paraphrased rather than using a marker as in (41b), which loses its naturalness in TT:

(41b) ?Harry **bị** làm gợi nhớ về *Dudley*.

Besides, paraphrasing can be used when there is non-equivalence above word level as in (44) & (45), or when other strategies are impracticable.

- (44) [ENG] **He** was being *made* a *cup of strong tea* back in *Hagrid’s hut*.  
 [VIET] Nó đang *làm* một tách trà nóng trong căn chòi của lão *Hagrid*.
- (45) [ENG] *There won’t be any Hogwarts* to get *expelled* from!  
 [VIET] E là không còn cả trường *Hogwarts* để mà *học* đó chứ!

### 5.1. The omission of passive structures

Table 1 shows that the translators occasionally omitted passive structures in ST and did not translate them, such as:

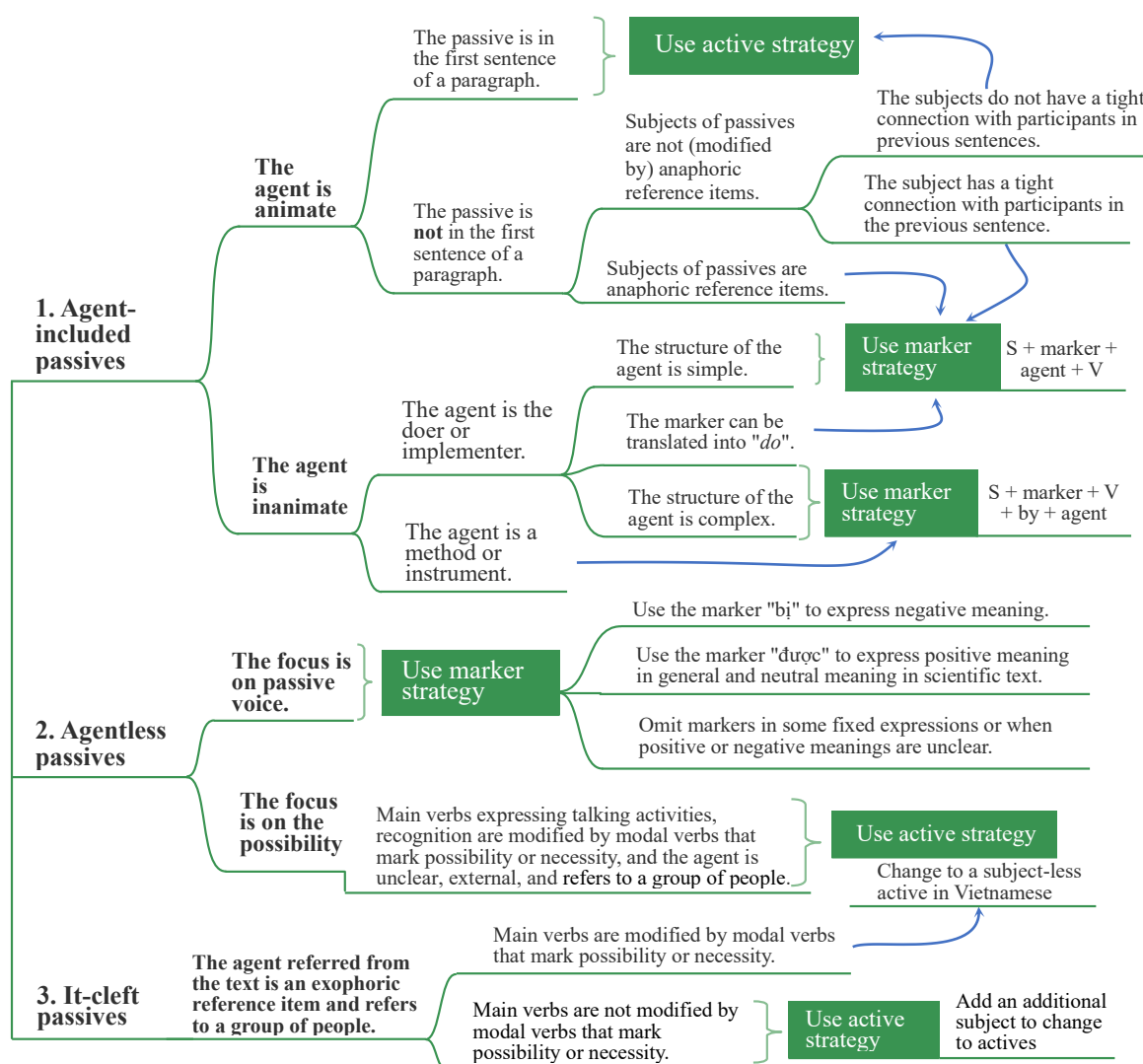
- (46) [ENG] *The time of the event* **is then said** to be the time halfway....  
 [VIET] *Thời gian xảy ra sự kiện khi đó* (~~được cho là~~) sẽ bằng một nửa thời gian...
- (47) [ENG] *This* **is simply defined** as [...].  
 [VIET] Nó (~~được định nghĩa~~) đơn giản là [...]

Baker (2018) claimed that omissions were also a strategy in translation that could be applied when the meaning conveyed by an expression was not “vital enough to the development of the text” or “when the advantages of producing a smooth, readable translation clearly outweigh the value of rendering a particular accurately in a given context”. And in 21 samples from the researcher's data, the omission does not harm the meaning of ST but produces a shorter translation in TT as in (47). However, according to Baker (2018), this strategy should be used only as a last resort.

*General procedures for the Vietnamese translation of English passives*

Based on the above analysis and findings, this research introduces general procedures for the Vietnamese translation of English passives as presented in chart 3.

**Chart 3.** *General procedures for translating English passive sentences into Vietnamese*



However, the above procedures do not include paraphrasing and are recommended for typical English passives. In practical situations where passives are not the main component of a sentence, the strategy is also influenced by the subject of the main clause and other factors.

## Conclusion

This research examines 672 collected English passives, and its findings indicate that using a marker "bị" or "được" is the most predominant strategy for the Vietnamese translation. And this strategy is almost used for both agent-included passives and agentless passives in English whose subjects are (modified by) anaphoric reference items and have a tight connection with the previous sentence, while the active strategy is normally used for English passives whose agents are animate and when the passives are in the first sentence of a paragraph or when their subjects are not closely linked with the participants in the preceding sentence. Besides, when the marker strategy is applied for English passives, the agent will be placed after the marker like "bị" or "được" and before the main verb in Vietnamese sentence if it is the doer of the action and has a simple structure, otherwise its position is normally after the main verb. Additionally, It-cleft passives are mostly translated into active structures in Vietnamese by adding an additional subject that is an exophoric reference item and refers to a group of people. Another kind of actives in Vietnamese, agentless actives, can also be used for the Vietnamese translation when the focus is mainly on the possibility rather than on the passive voice. Last, a paraphrasing strategy should be used for Vietnamese translations for non-equivalence above word level, but this strategy together with omitting English passives, should be used as the last resort.

This research introduces useful strategies and procedures for translating English passives into Vietnamese. Nevertheless, since the English passives in the research are full passive forms and their Vietnamese translations are limited in terms of genres, the Vietnamese translation strategies and procedures in this research might not be appropriate for short-form English passives or for those which are not the main component of a sentence. Additionally, the translation procedures introduced in this paper may need refining to be applied to the Vietnamese translation of English passives in another kind of genre.

## Acknowledgments

I am extremely grateful to Dr. Huynh Van Tai, Dr. Tran Ngoc Tien, and Assoc. Prof. To Minh Thanh for their invaluable encouragement to my research.

I sincerely thank all linguists and grammarians whose research has been quoted in my research paper.

## References

- Baker, M. (2018). *In Other Words* (3rd ed.). Oxfordshire: Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group).
- Bilber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. London: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Bui, D. T. (2005). Các Phương Thức Chuyển Dịch Câu Bị Động Tiếng Anh Sang Tiếng Việt (Modes of Translating English Passive Sentences into Vietnamese). *Tạp Chí Khoa Học ĐHQGHN, Ngoại Ngữ [VNU Journal of Science, Foreign Languages]*, 3, 36-42.
- Bui, T. M., & Nguyen, L. (2008). *A Textbook of Vietnamese Grammar*. Ha Noi: Pedagogical University.
- Bui, T. L. (2021). The Role of Collocations in the English Teaching and Learning. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*, 1(2), pp.99-109. EOI: <http://eoi.citefactor.org/10.11250/ijte.01.02.006>
- Bui, T. L. (2021). The Role of Collocations in the English Teaching and Learning. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*, 1(2), pp.99-109.
- Cao, C., & Pham, T. V. (2020). *Lược Sử Thời Gian [A Brief History of Time]*. Ho Chi Minh: Youth Publisher.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (2nd ed.). New York: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.
- Diep, B. Q. (1996). *Ngữ Pháp Tiếng Việt [Vietnamese Grammar]* (Vol. 2) (2nd ed.) Ha Noi: Education Press.
- Diep, B. Q. (1998). *Giáo Trình Ngữ Pháp Tiếng Việt [A Textbook of Vietnamese Grammar]*. Ho Chi Minh: Educational Publisher.
- Dinh, D.V. (2001). *Ngữ Pháp Tiếng Việt – Từ Loại [Vietnamese Grammar, Parts of Speech]*. Ha Noi: Ha Noi National University Publisher.
- Greenbaum, S., & Nelson, G. (2002). *An Introduction to English Grammar* (2nd ed.). London: Longman.
- Hawking, S. (1998). *A Brief History of Time*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc.
- Hoang, B. C. (2015). Các Phương Thức Dịch Câu Bị Động Tiếng Anh Sang Tiếng Việt (Strategies of Translating English Passive Sentences into Vietnamese). *Ngôn Ngữ & Đời Sống (Language and Life)*, 2(232), 48-53.
- Le, H. L., Nguyen, H. T., & Vu, Y. N. (2016). *Strategies for Translation of Passive Voice in the Mechanical Engineering and Materials Science Document* (Graduation Paper). Ha Noi: Ha Noi University of Science and Technology.
- Luu, T. T. (2010). Strategies for Translating the Passive Structure in Scientific Discourse. *Asian*

- Social Science*, 6(7), 97-107.
- Ly, L. (2017). *Harry Potter và Hòn Đá Phù Thủy [Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone]*. Ho Chi Minh: Youth Publisher.
- Marianne, C. M., Diane, L. M., & Williams, H. (1999). *The Grammar Book, An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course* (2nd ed.). Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- McCarthy, M. (1996). *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers* (6th printing). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mohammad, H.K. (2012). *Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis*. Tehran: Rahnama Press.
- Newmark, P. (1998). *A Textbook of Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Nguyen, C. H. (2009). Vietnamese Passive Sentences from a Typological Perspective. *Journal of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society*, 2, 105-118.
- Nguyen, C. H., & Bui, D. T. (2004). Passive Voice and Passive Construction in Vietnamese. *Language*, 4, 1-17.
- Nguyen, C. H., & Bui, D. T. (2008). Dạng Bị Động và Vấn Đề Câu Bị Động trong Tiếng Việt [Passive Voice and Issues about Passive Voice in Vietnamese]. In Ly T. T. (Ed.). *Ngữ Pháp Tiếng Việt – Những Vấn Đề Lí Luận [Vietnamese Grammar, Reasoning Problems]*. Ha Noi: Publisher of Society and Science.
- Nguyen, H. C. (2004). *Ngữ Pháp Tiếng Việt Thực Hành [A Practical Grammar of Vietnamese]*. (2nd ed.) Ha Noi: Ha Noi National University Publisher.
- Nguyen, T. T. (2005). *A Contrastive Analysis of Passive Voice in English and Vietnamese* (MA Thesis). Ha Noi.
- Pham, N. T. L. (2021). American English and Vietnamese Use in Public Signs: a Pragmatic Cultural Comparison and Translation. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*, 1(3), pp. 14-36. EOI: <http://eoi.citefactor.org/10.11250/ijte.01.03.002>
- Rowling, J. K. (1999). *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (25th Thus). New York: Scholastic.
- Stevenson, A. (Ed.). (2010). *Oxford Dictionary of English* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sun, L. Z., & Zhou, Y. (2010). *An Advanced Coursebook on English-Chinese Translation*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Researching Press.
- To, T. M. (2011). *Vai Nghĩa trong Câu Trần Thuật Tiếng Việt và Tiếng Anh [Semantic Roles in Vietnamese and English Declaratives]*. Ho Chi Minh: Publishing House of Vietnam National University.

## Biodata

*Nguyen Xuan My is a postgraduate studying towards a Master's degree in English Studies at Hoa Sen University in Viet Nam. He also holds a Master's degree in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages and has been working as a Chinese teacher for 10 years. His main research interests are contrastive linguistics, education and translation.*

## Appendix 01

### List of Abbreviations

Adding an additional subject to convert English passives into an active sentence in Vietnamese	Adding-S
After the main verb	After V
Before the main verb	Before V
Change-to-active strategy	Active strategy
Changing to a subject-less active form	Subjectless active
Converting the agent into the subject in active sentences	Convert-the-agent
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	Harry Potter
Marker-using strategy	Marker strategy
Passive marker	Marker
Source text	ST
Target text	TT
The strategy of omitting markers	Marker-omitted
The Vietnamese translation of English passives	Vietnamese translation