Effects of Strategy Instruction on the Translation of Vietnamese Culture-Specific Expressions and Cultural Awareness: A Quasi-Experimental Study with English-Major Students

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Abstract

Translating culture-specific items (CSIs) poses a challenge for English-major students because effective translation requires not only linguistic equivalence but also the preservation of culturally embedded meanings and values. This quasi-experimental study investigated the effects of explicit translation strategy instruction (TSI) on students' ability to translate Vietnamese CSIs and their cultural awareness. Eighty English-major students at a Vietnamese university participated in the study, with 40 assigned to an experimental group receiving six weeks of TSI in addition to the regular curriculum and 40 to a control group receiving regular instruction only. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests, a Likert-scale questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative results revealed substantially greater gains in translation performance for the experimental group than for the control group (M = 20.28 vs. 6.87). After controlling for pre-test scores, ANCOVA confirmed a significant effect of TSI, $F(1,77) = 164.57$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .681$. Questionnaire findings further indicated higher levels of cultural awareness (M = 4.01 vs. 3.57, d = 0.89) and confidence in translation and intercultural communication (M = 4.02 vs. 3.21, d = 1.83) among students receiving TSI. Qualitative findings revealed increased awareness of cultural dimensions in translation, greater confidence in handling CSIs, perceived usefulness of translation strategies, and stronger recognition of the translator's role as a cultural mediator. The findings suggest that explicit strategy instruction can effectively enhance both translation competence and intercultural awareness, highlighting its value in translation pedagogy and the promotion of Vietnamese cultural values in global communication.

Keywords: *translation strategy instruction (TSI); culture-specific items (CSIs); translation competence; cultural awareness; Vietnamese-English Translation*

1. Introduction

Translation has become a much-needed bridge between cultures and languages due to the increasingly fast pace of communication globally. Modern Vietnam, thus, has numerous uses for English translation - on one level as an occupation and another as a social obligation; hence, the rich Vietnamese nature, tradition, and living voice can go global for the world to feel its fragrance. The combination of being a student translator at two different but complementary levels create considerable pressure on students, who must become competent not just as linguists, but also with the sensitivity to convey meanings that embody the specificity and subtlety of Vietnamese living.

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The cultural identity of the Vietnamese nation is formed and developed on a rich system of humanistic values during thousands of years of civilisation. Filial piety (hiếu thảo), communal solidarity (tình làng nghĩa xóm), ancestor veneration (thờ cúng tổ tiên) and gratitude for one's origins (uống nước nhớ nguồn) are embedded within the ethics and social fabric of the Vietnamese. The values are manifested in proverbs, sayings, rituals and social customs, making up the living heritage of Vietnamese civilisation. But, when easily mistranslatable expressions of this kind are rendered without care for their cultural basis they can be emptied of human meaning in what is becoming a more and more homogenized communico-sphere.

According to Baker (1992) and Newmark (1988), learners tend to revert to word-for-word strategies when dealing with culture-specific items. This might have output which is linguistically fluid but culturally poor. Thus, the essential problem is not so much the command of English lexis or grammar as the knowledge that translation scholars call intercultural translation competence - the ability to recognise and interpret cultural meaning for delivery across language lines (PACTE Group, 2003). However, despite an increasing literature on translation strategies and intercultural competence, only a limited number of studies have systematically explored the ways explicit strategy-focused instruction affects L2 learners' approaches to translating culture-specific expressions from Vietnamese into English. This forms a major gap in the context of Vietnamese education, where English-major programs often pursue general translation skills but do not purposefully build cultural mediation competency.

In a think-aloud protocol study with German undergraduates translating an English text rich in British cultural references, Olk (2002) found that many students lacked the cultural knowledge needed to interpret the references and tended to adopt a source-oriented, literal approach that did not always suit the translation brief. Similar patterns have been reported in other EFL contexts. Al-khadem (2024) identified unfamiliarity with translation strategies as a main cause of unsuccessful renderings. In Vietnam, Phan et al. (2021) examined the Vietnamese–English translations of 74 third-year English majors and found that 59.46% of them reported relying on word-for-word translation; culture-specific words were often rendered with generic English words that lost their cultural meaning, even though the students ranked cultural problems below grammar and vocabulary in their self-reports. These studies are diagnostic: they describe the problem but do not test an instructional remedy.

Nguyen et al. (2021) showed that the choice between exoticization, explanation, and assimilation depends on whether an English equivalent exists. Tran et al. (2024) found that transference was the most frequent strategy, often combined with another strategy, whereas neutralization regularly led to a loss of cultural nuance. These studies provide useful typologies of Vietnamese CSIs and translation strategies, but they examine professional products rather than learners and do not address how such strategies can be taught.

Farahzad et al. (2011) compared Iranian undergraduates who were taught cultural

translation theories and applied them in collaborative translation practice (n = 58) with control groups receiving traditional product-oriented instruction; only the experimental group improved significantly from pre-test to post-test, although the gain was modest (about 10%). Omar and Salih (2023), in an action-research study with 28 Omani translation students, combined instruction based on Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence with online collaboration with American peers and reported that the proportion of students choosing foreignizing solutions rose from 28.5% to 78.5%. Drawing on a European curriculum project, Tomozeiu et al. (2016) argued that intercultural competence should be taught explicitly and systematically in translator training rather than left to develop implicitly, but they proposed curricular principles rather than testing their effects empirically.

This paper provides a quasi-experimental design addressing this research gap, and is based on three individual research questions: (RQ1) To what extent does explicit translation strategy instruction improve English-major students' performance in translating Vietnamese culture-specific expressions into English? (RQ2) Does translation strategy instruction enhance students' cultural awareness of Vietnamese humanistic values and their orientation toward preserving cultural identity in translation? (RQ3) What are students' perceptions of the usefulness of translation strategy instruction in the context of translating Vietnamese culture-specific expressions?

2. Translation Challenges, Strategies, Competence and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Culture-Specific Items and Translation Challenges

Vietnamese cultural identity is a thorough mixture of values forming many features of humanism by the confluence of Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist thought (Nguyen, 2016). Core values that have persisted through historical change include loyalty to family, respect for elders and teachers, harmony, love of learning, compassion, patriotism and diligence (Nguyen, 2016). They are not abstract principles but are actually embodied in the common usage of the vernacular, in proverbs and idioms, kinship nomenclature, and ritual practice that form together the cultural heritage of the whole nation.

Translation is a main vehicle of these values across languages and cultures. Translation is never a neutral act; it can either maintain the cultural specificity of the source text or obliterate that specificity and conform to target-culture conventions (Bassnett, 2002). This, however, becomes an especially complex challenge in the Vietnamese context, where so many core Vietnamese concepts do not lend themselves easily to a straight equivalent translation into English. Thus, it is the responsibility of translators to not only carry propositional meaning, but the underlying humanistic spirit behind the source expression as well.

Research on Vietnamese–English translation has likewise shown that rendering Vietnamese culture-specific items requires an analysis of their connotative meanings within their cultural context, not merely of their linguistic form (Nguyen et al., 2021), and that neutralizing such items often causes a loss of cultural nuance (Tran et al., 2024). This perspective is consistent

with wider comprehensive theories in translation studies where translators are viewed as cultural mediators or brokers, rather than mere language converters (Katan, 2004). Culture-specific items (CSIs) are linguistic units that contain signification originating from a certain community and do not have direct equivalents in another language (Aixelá, 1996). CSIs in Vietnamese cover a wide range of items from proverbs (tục ngữ), idiomatic phrases (thành ngữ), kinship and social role terms with cultural meaning, expressions of traditional practices and festivals, to material culture items such as "áo dài" or "mâm cơm gia đình".

Baker (1992) points out that CSIs create three types of translation problems: cultural gaps (no equivalent concept exists in the target language); connotative divergences (a superficially similar term does not have the same connotations in the target language); and pragmatic mismatches (an expression that is intended to produce a particular communicative effect fails). However, these difficulties are raised to a higher level amongst language learners if they do not have the metalinguistic and cultural know-how in order to deal with them properly.

Research has shown that translating things that are specific to a culture often results in literal translation. This can lead to loss of meaning and cultural neutrality. This is especially true for student translators. They usually do not have awareness of different cultures and the skills to handle translation strategically (Fernández Guerra, 2012). These problems happen because the cultural meanings in expressions in the source language often do not have equivalents, in the target language.

2.2. Translation Strategies for Culture-Specific Items

There are several underlying theoretical frameworks for the selection and application of translation strategies for CSIs. Newmark (1988) defined two different translation methods: semantic versus communicative translation. Semantic Translation is when the emphasis is on fidelity to source-language meaning. Communicative Translation is when the emphasis is on natural effect in the target language. He points out transfer (borrowing the source term directly), cultural equivalent, descriptive equivalent, and functional equivalent. Baker (1992) has suggested some complementary strategies: translation by generalisation; translation by neutral or less expressive words; translation using cultural substitution; use of a loan word (with or without explanation); paraphrase using related words; and omission. In particular, two methods that can be considered appropriate for Vietnamese CSIs are paraphrase and loan word plus explanation because they both retain cultural specificness and enhance international acceptability.

Venuti (1995) articulates this problem of strategy choice as the basic conflict between domestication - reshaping a text to satisfy target-culture norms - and foreignization: maintaining the strangeness of the ST. A certain extent of foreignization is often more appreciated in the service of preserving Vietnamese cultural identity: keeping terms like "Tết" or "áo dài" and adding explanations contextualizes them for a global audience rather than exchanging them for corresponding Western elements.

This is also pertinent to Nida (1964), dynamic equivalence translates functional effect in the target language over formal

correspondence with the source text. Based on culture-focused Vietnamese expressions, when paraphrasing or explaining a cultural meaning, this method must express not only the literal form of the phrase but also its humanistic spirit.

2.3. Translation Strategy Instruction and Intercultural Translation Competence

Strategy-based instruction (SBI) is a well-known framework in language education where students learn strategies to negotiate complex tasks (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). In translation education, SBI encompasses direct instruction on the procedures involved in translating through teacher modeling of strategy application and practice with feedback, leading to responsive guidance-based learning (Kiraly, 2000). This contrasts with conventional translation pedagogy where emphasis is placed on error correction as opposed to strategy development (Albir, 2007).

The efficacy of SBI to develop translation competence is supported by accumulating evidence. For example, Farahzad et al. (2011) found that undergraduates who were explicitly taught cultural translation theories improved their translation performance significantly, whereas peers receiving traditional instruction did not. Translation competence is not something that comes from natural exposure, but a purposefully taught practice of strategic behavior that requires guided practice to mature (Albir, 2015).

However, Albir (2015) argued that among the available literature on strategy-based instruction, its application throughout the various educational contexts had received little attention. In the Vietnamese context, strategy-based translation teaching remains under-investigated. Both the focus on learning strategies in English language instruction and translation-oriented strategy training for Vietnamese university students have received very limited attention, as indicated by a review of relevant literature.

Intercultural translation proficiency refers to the ability to transfer meaning across both cultural and linguistic boundaries. PACTE Group's (2003) multi-component model of translation competence describes five interrelated sub-competences: the bilingual sub-competence, extra-linguistic sub-competence (comprising cultural, encyclopedic and subject knowledge), translation knowledge, instrumental sub-competence, and strategic sub-competence. Among the mentioned competencies, it is the extra-linguistic and strategic sub-competence that can be considered as being connected to the translation of CSIs.

Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, originally developed for language learning, has been adapted by translation scholars to describe the intercultural dimensions of translation competence (Katan, 2004). This includes knowledge of source- and target-culture norms, openness and curiosity towards cultural differences, and skills in cultural interpretation and mediation.

The intercultural translation competence of the learners, English-major students in Vietnam, comprises not only knowledge of target-language cultural conventions but also a reinvigorated engagement with and pride in their own culture. This emergent dual development of cultural knowledge and cultural identity represents a pedagogical focal point of the current study.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

In this study, the experimental manipulation and the measures are grounded in an outcome-based, principled framework - for translation competence as it relates to our design - from which to define how to operationalize it (PACTE Group, 2003). The five teaching strategies of translation during the intervention: (1) basic literal with critical awareness; (2) paraphrasing; (3) borrowing with explanation; (4) descriptive equivalence; and (5) communicative translation. These strategies mainly relate to components of strategic and the extralinguistic sub-competence based on the PACTE Model.

The rubric for scoring translation tests comprises four criteria, namely (i) accuracy of meaning; (ii) meaningfulness in brief; (iii) appropriateness of the strategy used; and (iv) naturalness of English expression. The PACTE model recognizes that each dimension is supported by one or more abilities and corresponding competences: bilingual sub-competence supports accuracy and naturalness; extra-linguistic sub-competence supports the transfer of cultural meaning, whereas strategic sub-competence underlies strategy appropriateness.

The four subscales of the questionnaire represent students' self-reported development across the related dimensions: cultural awareness (extra-linguistic sub-competence), perceived difficulty (challenges to strategic sub-competence), usefulness of instruction (knowledge about translation), and confidence/ intercultural competence (integrated competence development). This explicit alignment of the theoretical framework, intervention design, and assessment instruments and data analysis is designed to enhance internal coherence and interpretive validity in a study.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

The present study used a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest nonequivalent groups design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963) to examine the effects of translation strategy instruction on students' translation performance and cultural awareness. Because participants could not be randomly assigned to conditions in the intact classroom, a nonrandomized quasi-experimental procedure was used. Before analysis, comparisons of groups on pre-test scores were statistically verified to ensure that pre-existing differences between the two groups would not endanger internal validity.

Participants were 80 third-year English-major students from Ho Chi Minh City University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology (HUFLIT), with 40 students in the experimental group and 40 in control group. The experimental group took part in a six-week explicit instruction program focusing on Vietnamese culture-specific expressions. The program relied on five translation strategies taken from Newmark (1988) and Baker (1992): (1) literal translation (while also stressing the limitations of this strategy); (2) paraphrase; (3) borrowing with explanation; (4) descriptive equivalent; and, finally, (5) communicative translation (Table 1).

Each of the four phases in a 90-minute instructional session consisted of: (a) explicit modeling and instruction by an instructor with authentic Vietnamese CSIs, (b) guided practice with examples extracted from the target text, (c) collaborative translation workshops that paired students to

negotiate and rationalize their strategy choices, and (d) structured reflective discussion to articulate the cultural rationale for their selections and highlight humanistic values implicated therein.

Table 1. Weekly Schedule of Translation Strategy Instruction Program

Week	Strategy Focus	CSI Types Addressed	Sample Items
1	Literal translation & critical awareness	Proverbs	*Uống nước nhớ nguồn; Lá lành đùm lá rách*
2	Paraphrase	Idiomatic expressions	*Tình làng nghĩa xóm; Hiếu thảo*
3	Borrowing with explanation	Material culture	*Áo dài; Tết Nguyên đán*
4	Descriptive equivalent	Social/kinship roles	*Bà con họ hàng; Ông bà tổ tiên*
5	Communicative translation	Ritual and ceremony expressions	*Thờ cúng tổ tiên; Giỗ*
6	Integrated review & consolidation	Mixed CSI types	Comprehensive revision tasks

Treatment fidelity was evaluated via weekly lesson plans submitted by the instructor, peer observations documented in Weeks 2 and 5, and a short post-session checklist completed at each of the ensuing sessions. To reduce the teacher effect, both groups were conducted by the same instructor.

Instruction in the control group. The control group followed the regular syllabus of the same translation course over the same six-week period, with the same instructor, the same number of sessions (six 90-minute sessions), and Vietnamese source texts on comparable cultural topics. The two conditions therefore differed in how culture-specific items were taught, not in contact time or exposure to cultural content. In the control group, lessons followed the conventional product-oriented approach of the program (Albir, 2007): students translated the assigned passages individually, the instructor then presented a model translation, and feedback concentrated on correcting errors in meaning, vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure. When culture-specific items appeared in the texts, they were dealt with incidentally, usually by supplying an acceptable English rendering during error correction. Control-group students were not introduced to the taxonomy of CSI strategies (Newmark, 1988; Baker, 1992), were not asked to select and justify strategies, and did not take part in the collaborative strategy workshops or the reflective discussions on the humanistic values carried by the expressions. In short, “the standard

translation curriculum without any explicit strategy instruction focused on CSIs" refers to this regular, product-oriented instruction. Table 2 summarizes the differences between the two conditions.

Table 2. Description of Instruction in the Experimental and Control Groups

Feature	Experimental group (n = 40)	Control group (n = 40)
Instructor	Same instructor	Same instructor
Duration	Six 90-minute sessions	Six 90-minute sessions (regular syllabus)
Source texts	Vietnamese texts containing the CSIs listed in Table 1	Vietnamese texts on comparable topics from the regular syllabus
Strategy instruction	Explicit teaching and modeling of five CSI strategies	None; no strategy taxonomy introduced
Treatment of CSIs	Cultural value identified first; strategy selected and justified	Handled incidentally; acceptable rendering supplied during correction
Classroom activities	Modelling, guided practice, collaborative workshops, reflective discussion	Individual translation, model translation, teacher correction
Feedback focus	Strategy appropriateness and preservation of cultural meaning	Accuracy of meaning, vocabulary and grammar

3.2. Research Procedure and Alignment of Instruments with Research Questions

Translation pre-test and post-test contained ten expressions presenting either Vietnamese cultural concepts or more universal, neutral concepts. These expressions were embedded in sentences adapted from the source text, including proverbs, family values, traditional customs and festivals, and material culture items. Pre-test and post-test were performed using parallel forms with equal difficulty. Students' translation responses were scored using a four-criterion analytic rubric: (a) accuracy of meaning (maximum: 5 points), (b) cultural meaningfulness, defined as the extent to which the humanistic value was preserved compared with the original receiving sentence (maximum: 5 points); (c) appropriateness of translation strategy used, including the effective selection of a suitable source-language or target-language-oriented strategy (maximum: 5 points), and (d) naturalness of English expression (maximum: 5 points). The maximum raw score per item was 20, and the maximum total was 200. For reporting purposes, raw scores were converted to a hundred-point scale.

Prior to its use, the rubric underwent an evaluation for content validity by three experts in bilingual translation. Two independently trained raters scored the responses. To compute inter-rater reliability, the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was used, indicating good inter-rater

reliability (Koo and Li, 2016). Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of test scores suggesting excellent reliability (George and Mallery, 2003). Ten students from an equivalent cohort were pilot-tested with the instrument before the main study; changes to item wording stemmed from feedback during piloting.

The participants completed a 20-item Likert-type questionnaire, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, which measured four constructs: (A) awareness of Vietnamese cultural identity in translation (5 items), (B) perceived difficulty of culture-bound expressions (5 items), (C) perceived usefulness of translation strategy teaching (5 items), and (D) confidence & intercultural translation competence (5 items). The items of the questionnaire were adapted from validated instruments in translation competence research (Albir, 2015; PACTE Group, 2003) to the Vietnamese context and reviewed for content validity by three expert judges, then piloted with 10 students.

Then, the semi-structured interview techniques was undertaken. A subsample of ten students were drawn from experimental group participants and interviewed immediately following completion of their answers to the corresponding usage questionnaire. The ten-question protocol engaged students' pre-instruction challenges, strategy use, developing cultural awareness, confidence to translate, and changing views of the translator. With participant consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Three instruments were used, each serving a specific purpose in answering the research questions (Table 3). The translation pre-test and post-test provided the primary evidence for RQ1: the pre-test established baseline equivalence and served as the covariate in the ANCOVA, while the post-test measured performance after the intervention. The questionnaire addressed RQ2 and RQ3. Subscale A (awareness of Vietnamese cultural identity in translation) was the main quantitative measure for RQ2 and was compared across groups. Subscale C (perceived usefulness of TSI) was the main quantitative measure for RQ3, while Subscales B (perceived difficulty) and D (confidence and intercultural translation competence) provided complementary information on how students perceived the instruction and its outcomes. The semi-structured interviews were used to explain and deepen the quantitative findings for RQ2 and RQ3, and they also helped to interpret the performance gains observed for RQ1.

The questionnaire was administered to both groups for two reasons. First, Subscales A, B, and D required a comparison group: a higher score in the experimental group can be attributed to TSI only when it is compared with the scores of students who followed the regular curriculum. Second, giving the same instrument to all participants at the same point kept the data-collection conditions identical across groups. However, the control group's responses to Subscale C were not treated as an evaluation of TSI, because these students did not receive the intervention. RQ3 was therefore answered mainly with the experimental group's data (Subscale C and the interviews), and the control group's Subscale C scores are reported only as a reference point.

Data were collected in four stages: (1) Before the intervention, both groups took the translation pre-test; (2) The experimental group then received the six-week TSI program, while the control group followed the regular syllabus; (3) After the final session, both groups took the parallel-form post-test and then completed the questionnaire; (4) Finally, ten students from the experimental group were interviewed immediately after completing the questionnaire. The quantitative data were analyzed first, and the interview data were then used to explain and elaborate on the quantitative results.

Table 3. Sequence, Participants and Purpose of the Research Instruments

Stage	Instrument	Participants	Purpose	RQ
1. Before Week 1	Translation pre-test	Both groups (N = 80)	Establish baseline equivalence; covariate in ANCOVA	RQ1
2. Weeks 1–6	Intervention; fidelity checks (lesson plans, peer observation, checklist)	Experimental: TSI; Control: regular syllabus	Deliver and monitor the treatment	–
3. After Week 6	Translation post-test (parallel form)	Both groups (N = 80)	Measure performance gains	RQ1
4. After the post-test	Questionnaire (20 items, 4 subscales)	Both groups (N = 80)	A: cultural awareness (between-group); C: perceived usefulness of TSI (experimental group; control reported for reference only); B, D: perceived difficulty, confidence/ITC	RQ2 (A); RQ3 (C, with B and D)
5. After the questionnaire	Semi-structured interviews	10 experimental-group students	Explain and deepen quantitative results (Themes 2 and 5 → RQ2; Themes 3 and 4 → RQ3; Theme 1 → RQ1)	RQ1–RQ3

3.3. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS (Version 28). All variables were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Within-group improvement was assessed using paired-samples t-tests, while gain scores and questionnaire subscale means were compared by independent-samples t-tests between groups, with Levene's test checked prior to each comparison. To

answer RQ3, the experimental group's Subscale C mean was also compared with the scale midpoint (3.0) using a one-sample t-test. For all the t-test comparisons, Cohen's d was computed as an effect size measure from each pair of distributions.

ANCOVA was performed with post-test score as the dependent variable and pre-test score as the covariate. The following assumptions were checked before interpretation: (1) homogeneity of error variance (Levene's test); (2) homogeneity of regression slopes (Pre-test interaction); (3) normality of residuals from ANCOVA; (4) linearity of covariate–relationship between the covariate and the covariate-dependent variable (scatterplot inspection); and independence between the covariate and treatment factor was confirmed by a non-significant difference between the two pre-test groups. ANCOVA effect size was denoted as partial η^2 (Cohen, 1988).

Qualitative data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006) six-phase framework of familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining & naming themes, and producing the report.

4. Results

4.1. Effects of Translation Strategy Instruction on Translation Performance (RQ1)

The overall mean score increased from 51.33 (*SD* = 9.58) at pre-test to 64.90 (*SD* = 12.53) at post-test, yielding a mean gain of 13.58 points (*SD* = 8.18) (Table 4).

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Overall Pre-Test, Post-Test, and Gain Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Pre-test	80	31	73	51.33	9.58
Post-test	80	36	96	64.90	12.53
Gain	80	0	32	13.58	8.18

Confirming baseline equivalence, pre-test means were similar (Experimental: M = 51.63, SD = 9.73; Control: M = 51.03, SD = 9.55). The mean score was subsequently higher in the post-test of the experimental group (71.90, SD = 10.46), with a mean gain of 20.28 points (SD = 5.35). The mean post-test score of the control group was 57.90 (SD = 10.40), a gain of 6.87 points (SD = 3.84) (Table 5).

Table 5. Pre-Test, Post-Test, and Gain Score Descriptive Statistics by Groups

Group	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	Gain M (SD)
Experimental (n = 40)	51.63 (9.73)	71.90 (10.46)	20.28 (5.35)
Control (n = 40)	51.03 (9.55)	57.90 (10.40)	6.87 (3.84)
Total (N = 80)	51.33 (9.58)	64.90 (12.53)	13.58 (8.18)

Paired-samples t-tests revealed that the within-group improvements in both conditions were statistically significant. There was a large pre-to-post increase for the

control group, t(39) = -11.330, p < .001, Cohen's d = 1.79. The experimental group showed an even larger increase, t(39) = -23.972, p < .001, Cohen's d = 3.79.

An independent-samples t-test on gain scores confirmed that the experimental group improved significantly more than the control group: t(70.74) = 12.873, p < .001, mean difference = 13.40, 95% CI [11.32, 15.48], Cohen's d = 2.88. This represents a very large effect size, indicating a practically meaningful difference between groups in terms of improvement.

After controlling for pre-test scores, ANCOVA revealed a statistically significant group effect on post-test scores, F(1, 77) = 164.567, p < .001, partial η^2 = .681 (68.1%). This indicates that 68.1% of the variance in post-test score was explained by group membership after controlling for covariate differences at baseline. Levene's test was not significant, F(1,78) = 3.494, p = .065; the Group × Pre-test interaction was non-significant, F(1,76) = .603, p = .440, partial η^2 = .008, and Shapiro-Wilk on standardized residuals was non-significant (p = .23); linearity was confirmed with a scatterplot; and covariate independence from treatment assignment was supported by the non-significant difference between the two groups at pre-test.

4.2 Effects of Translation Strategy Instruction on Cultural Awareness and Questionnaire Responses (RQ2 & RQ3)

Questionnaire subscale reliabilities were satisfactory to excellent across all scales (α = .771 to .905).

Table 6. Questionnaire Subscale Descriptive Statistics and Between-Group Comparisons

Subscale	Experimental M (SD)	Control M (SD)	t	p	Cohen's d
A: Cultural Awareness	4.01 (0.50)	3.57 (0.49)	3.970	< .001	0.89
B: Translation Difficulty	3.63 (0.53)	3.79 (0.56)	-1.273	.207	0.29
C: TSI Usefulness	4.22 (0.38)	3.14 (0.56)	10.097	< .001	2.28
D: Confidence/ ITC	4.02 (0.41)	3.21 (0.47)	8.169	< .001	1.83
Overall Mean	3.97 (0.25)	3.43 (0.25)	9.769	< .001	2.18

Between-group differences were statistically significant for Cultural Awareness (A), TSI Usefulness (C), Confidence/ Intercultural Translation Competence (D), and Overall Mean (all p < .001). The Translation Difficulty subscale (B) did not show a statistically significant difference, t(78) = -1.273, p = .207, Cohen's d = 0.29 (Table 6). This finding suggests that large performance gains that were not accompanied by significant changes in perceived difficulty have theoretical implications.

Because the control group did not receive TSI, the main quantitative evidence for RQ3 comes from the experimental group. A one-sample t-test showed that the experimental group's mean rating of TSI usefulness (M = 4.22, SD = 0.38) was significantly above the scale midpoint of 3.0, $t(39) = 20.31$, $p < .001$, $d = 3.21$, indicating that students who received TSI regarded it as highly useful for translating Vietnamese CSIs. The control group's Subscale C mean (M = 3.14) is reported in Table 6 only as a reference point and should not be read as an evaluation of TSI.

4.3 Qualitative Findings

Inductive thematic analysis of the ten semi-structured interviews generated three overarching themes. Together, these themes illustrate how translation strategy instruction influenced participants' translation practices, cultural understanding, and perceptions of themselves as developing translators.

Theme 1: From Literal Translation to Strategic Translation

Participants indicated that before instruction, they tended to translate Vietnamese CSIs word for word. Such an approach was always linguistically correct, but failed to deliver cultural meaning. Through the instruction, they became more aware of the limitations of literal translation and learned to select strategies that better balanced linguistic accuracy with cultural transfer.

"Before the course, I translated Vietnamese expressions literally. For the first time when I searched for 'uống nước nhớ nguồn', I created an English translation to be 'drink water, remember your source.' I realised it was grammatically correct, but that there was something crucial that it lacked - the place of gratitude towards one's upbringing, what a moral necessity it is."

The strategies that participants consider most useful to deal with Vietnamese CSIs are paraphrasing, borrowing with explanation, and communicative translation. Participants valued these strategies because they helped preserve the cultural texture of Vietnamese expressions while making the translations more readable for international readers.

"Now instead of translating/explaining concepts like 'áo dài' or 'Tết', I just write the Vietnamese term and add in a small description. It contextualizes Vietnamese culture, rather than obscures it. For me, that comes across as a more honest translation."

The findings suggest that participants developed greater strategic competence in selecting translation solutions appropriate to specific communicative contexts. This shift reflects an emerging understanding that successful translation involves both linguistic transfer and the mediation of cultural meanings.

Theme 2: Emerging Cultural Awareness

After the intervention, participants exhibited significantly higher awareness of the humanistic values reflected in Vietnamese expressions, recognizing that CSIs are not simply linguistic challenges but the carriers of civilization.

"It dawned on me that these expressions like hiếu thảo or tình làng nghĩa xóm are more than idioms. Everything about our value systems - about family duty, community, the relationship between generations. When you translate them, you need to choose how much of that to keep and how to show it to someone who has never experienced it."

At the most abstract level, there was a reconceptualization of the basic role of the translator: from passive code-switcher to actively safeguarding Vietnamese identity.

"I consider myself the intermediary between Vietnam and the world. A decent translation has to be both faithful and legible, but it also has to be culturally true: it has (and in my view this is the most important) to let Vietnamese voices speak for themselves, not filter them into something more palatable for a foreign readership."

These findings suggest that translation strategy instruction contributed not only to the development of strategic competence but also to participants' awareness of the cultural dimensions of translation. Through their engagement with Vietnamese CSIs, participants became more conscious of the translator's role in representing cultural meanings across languages and audiences.

Theme 3: Increased Translation Confidence

Participants in the program expressed significantly increased confidence with CSI translation tasks and characterized strategies from their repertoire as a resource that alleviated anxiety.

"Before, whenever I encountered an expression with no English equivalent, I would get stuck. Now, I know that I am aware of these options, such as paraphrasing, retaining the original term with explanation, or using functional equivalence. Having a toolkit changes everything."

5. Discussion

5.1. Strategy Instruction and Translation Performance

The statistically significant and practically sizeable difference in gain scores between the experimental and control groups (Cohen's d = 2.88) provides strong support for the conclusion that explicit TSI greatly accelerates the building of translation competence in Vietnamese CSIs. Such a finding is in line with the assertion made by Albir (2015), which states that translation competence manages to develop because of conscious training guided by strategies and not merely through exposure provided by curricula. The experimental group also demonstrated a much larger magnitude of gain, 20.28 points versus 6.87 points, respectively. In addition, the smaller standard deviation of gain scores in the experimental group suggests that strategy instruction not only increased the overall magnitude of improvement but also produced more consistent benefits across individual learners. Taken together, these results indicate that explicit strategy instruction was more effective than regular instruction in promoting students' ability to translate Vietnamese CSIs. In addition, the smaller standard deviation of gain scores in the experimental group suggests that strategy instruction not only increased the overall magnitude of improvement but also produced more consistent benefits across individual learners. Taken together, these results indicate that explicit strategy instruction was more effective than regular instruction in promoting students' ability to translate Vietnamese CSIs.

The strategies that participants rated the highest - paraphrasing, borrowing with explanation, and communicative translation - align with Baker's (1992) top-level strategies for negotiating cultural voids. In addition to bilingual competence, these strategies necessitate metalinguistic awareness and cultural knowledge, and

their efficacious use demonstrates the growing strategic sub-competence identified by the PACTE Group (2003). The fact that the control group improved significantly (albeit with a gain only about one-third as large) suggests that some level of ability to infer cultural meaning developed as a result of just taking standard classes, but the instruction clearly leads to much faster and deeper development.

5.2. Cultural Awareness and the Development of Intercultural Translation Competence

Both questionnaire and interview data demonstrate that TSI provided not only technical improvement but also revitalized deeper cultural orientation to Vietnamese identity. The students of the experimental group scored higher on cultural awareness ($d = 0.89$) and confidence/intercultural competence ($d = 1.83$) than control group students, with significance levels of $p < 0.001$ in all cases. Qualitative results indicate that students began to recognize the humanistic values of "uống nước nhớ nguồn", "lá lành đùm lá rách" and "tình làng nghĩa xóm" not as translation problems with a right answer but rather honorable values communicated through language.

The non-significant between-group difference on the Translation Difficulty subscale ($d = 0.29$) is of theoretical interest. Although the experimental group achieved substantially greater performance gains, they did not perceive the translation of CSIs as significantly easier than the control group did. This could be taken to mean that the TSI program made students aware of the depth and complexity of cultural meaning in Vietnamese expressions - making them better equipped (but more aware of how far they have to go). This interpretation is consistent with expert-development research showing that expertise often leads to a heightened sense of complexity in a domain rather than minimizing the perception of difficulty. This relationship deserves more investigation: competency to cope versus ongoing perception of difficulty.

5.3. Translation as Cultural Stewardship in Global Communication

The most remarkable finding is the increasing students' identification as cultural mediators. The change in professional identity - from language transfer passivity to active custodianship of Vietnamese humanistic values - is what Katan (2004) and Bassnett (2002) consider the essence of higher-level translation competence. This implies that when TSI is overtly directed towards culturally specific utterances in Vietnamese culture, it works as a pedagogical tool and at the same time entails a degree of cultural education - more closely associated with the protection and promotion of Vietnamese humanistic values at an international level.

A foreignization strategy (in the sense of Venuti, 1995) relies on students' stable pattern of borrowing Vietnamese terms along with explanations against cultural homogenisation; therefore, asserting their Vietnamese in an ever-growing global discourse. As an orientation that is grounded in pedagogy and situated against the tide of cultural norms in globally dominant languages, this represents a crucial antidote: asserting Vietnamese humanistic values on their own terms and within appropriate contexts rather than subsuming them to culturally transcendent, international forms.

5.4. Pedagogical Implications

The results contribute to the reasoning for a module on translating culturally-

specific expressions in English-major curricula. Such a module must revolve around an explicit strategy framework and expose students to as wide a variety of Vietnamese CSI as reasonably possible to cast its net of humanistic value domains broadly, including proverbs, idiomatic expressions, kinship terms, ritual vocabulary, material culture items, etc. Convening the module explicitly as cultural stewardship could encourage students to think of their own cultural heritage as a resource and not a barrier.

In this quasi-experimental study, three types of classroom activities were especially successful. Comparative translation analysis - in which students explore different interpretations of the same CSI and discuss the cultural and communicative implications of each option - simultaneously fosters both metalinguistic and cultural awareness. Tasks of cultural value identification, during which students identify the humanistic value underlying an expression before choosing translation strategies, construct the knowledge base needed to make principled choices about strategies. Collaborative translation/interpretation workshops, with pairs or small groups negotiating strategy choices and justifying them to peers, practice not only translation reasoning but also cultural articulation. These activities resonate with the social constructivist (Kiraly, 2000) and task-based (González Davies, 2004) approaches to translation pedagogy.

The four-dimensional analytic rubric developed in this study - accuracy of meaning, preservation of cultural meaning, appropriate strategy use, and naturalness of English expression - provides a more pedagogically valid method for assessing CSI translation than accuracy-only scoring. The rubric explicitly states that cultural meaningfulness is an assessment criterion, making it clear that cultural fidelity holds as much importance in the score as word-for-word correctness. This rubric can be used formatively and summatively, and instructors are invited to use or modify it for their own purposes.

Finally, Teachers must be well-trained as culturally aware educators and the theoreticians of cultural transmission within translation strategy frameworks and Vietnamese CSI typologies, if effective TSI is to take root. The implications for professional development would focus on training strategies-related instruction design, cultural knowledge of Vietnamese CSI domains, and analytic rubrics for feedback. Finally, collaborative curriculum development between translation teachers, practitioners, and cultural studies specialists should be encouraged to ensure that such modules are both pedagogically effective and culturally grounded.

6. Conclusion

This quasi-experimental study examined the effects of a six-week translation strategy instruction (TSI) program on English-major students' translation of Vietnamese culture-specific expressions and on their cultural awareness. The findings indicate that students who received explicit strategy instruction achieved significantly greater improvements in translation performance than those who followed the regular curriculum. In addition, the intervention contributed to higher levels of cultural awareness and more positive perceptions of translation competence. Qualitative evidence further revealed a shift from literal

translation practices toward more strategic decision-making. Participants reported greater awareness of the cultural values embedded in Vietnamese expressions and increasingly viewed translation as a process of intercultural mediation rather than mere linguistic transfer. They also expressed greater confidence in handling culturally embedded concepts that lack direct equivalents in English.

Taken together, the findings suggest that translation strategy instruction can support both the development of strategic competence and the cultivation of cultural awareness among student translators. The study therefore provides empirical support for integrating explicit strategy-based instruction into translation education, particularly in contexts where culturally specific meanings play a central role in translation practice.

The study was limited by its single-institution setting, single instructor, and relatively short six-week intervention. Further research should employ multi-institutional and longitudinal designs to examine the long-term development of strategic competence and reduce potential instructional bias.

Ethical Considerations

All participants provided written informed consent with respect to the study, and were informed that they could participate, or not, in any aspect of the study without any academic consequences at any time. To ensure confidentiality, data were anonymized (participant codes), and no information that might identify individual participants was maintained within the dataset. The study protocol was assessed and granted ethical approval by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee of HUFLIT (Reference: HUFLIT-REC-2023-007). Audio recordings of the interviews were deleted after a word-for-word transcription had been completed.

Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest is declared by this study's authors.

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