Analysis of Translation Trends of the Modal Verb "Can" and Its Alternatives in Vietnamese Based on Corpus-Based Study

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ABSTRACT

As the author has observed, "can" and its English alternative modal verbs like "could", "may" or "might" are usually translated into Vietnamese under a general word: "có thể". However, those words do express not only the subject's ability or probability of happening of an event but also other meanings such as permission or general characteristics (Thomson and Martinet, 1986; Alexander, 1990; Eastwood, 1994). The question is that how we can grasp the tendencies of translating the modal verb "can" and its alternatives in specific situations into Vietnamese and vice versa without causing ambiguities or negative effects on target readers. Hence, the author decided to conduct the research with translation data which is combined from the source of 30 popular English books and their translation versions in the Vietnamese language, making a set of about 40,000 pairs of sentences to investigate how the modal verb "can" and other modal verbs are translated in Vietnamese with some basic statistics analyzed together with their pictorial graphs in order to highlight those translation trends.

Introduction

As observed, "can" and its English alternative modal verbs like "could", "may" or "might" are usually translated into Vietnamese under a general word: "có thể". However, as Thomson and Martinet (1986), Alexander (1990), and Eastwood (1994) suggested, these kinds of words did express not only the subject's ability or probability of happening of an event but also other meanings such as permission or general characteristics. This is the reason why the researcher of this paper decided to conduct the research with translation data which is combined from the source of 30 popular English books and their translation versions in the Vietnamese language, making a set of about 40,000 pairs of sentences to investigate how the modal verb "can" and other modal verbs are translated in Vietnamese with some basic statistics analyzed from the given data.

Literature review

In English, the concept of "modality" is explained that:

> Modality is a rich resource for speakers to intrude their own views into the discourse: their assessments of what is likely or typical, their judgments of the rights and wrongs of the situation, and of where other people stand in this regard (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, 526).

It is complicated to divide the meaning of modality into relatively separative categories because of its wide range of meanings which are strongly dependent on the "speaker's judgment of what he or she is saying" (Lise Fontaine, 2012, p. 120).

According to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), modal verbs are basically categorized:

> The modal verbs express a range of meanings that relate to the speaker's view or opinion about the event. Traditionally these meanings are divided between epistemic meanings (probability-related) and deontic meanings (obligation-related) (Lise Fontaine, 2012, p. 32).

When it comes to Vietnamese, there are few research studies about the topic of "modality" due to its complexity (Nguyen & Nguyen, 1998; Cao et al., 1998). To (2018) conducted a study on English expressions of some modal verbs with the so-called equivalent *"có thể"* in some Vietnamese translation products which was mainly based on the qualitative method. This research consequently inherits that valuable contribution and continues to find out something new in terms of quantitative analysis and corpus-based study.

Hence, this research only focuses on a small part of modal verbs – *"can"* and its Vietnamese counterpart *"có thể"* with the expectation to reveal some common ways that are used to translate these English modal verbs into Vietnamese.

Since Barker (1993) first introduced her corpora, many translation research studies have been conducted and developed remarkably (McEnery & Wilson, 1997; Sealey & Thompson, 2004; Chambers, 2009; Cobb, 2009). A wide range of corpus types has been designed for not only translation but also interpretation fields such as Oslo Multilingual Corpus (OMC) or Translational English Corpus (TEC) to investigate various features of linguistics: "monolingual, bilingual, and even multilingual" aspects (Malamatidou, 2019, p. 3). Hence, the field of corpus-based translation study has ended its "teenage angst" (Olohan, 2004, p. 1) and has started to develop "its own identity and establish itself as a fast-growing area of research" (Malamatidou, 2019, p. 3).

Catford (1965) regarded that source-language (SL) and target-language (TL) texts or items were translation equivalents when interchangeable in one specific situation. Juliane House (1977) also highlighted the most crucial feature in translation was equivalent because of its characteristic of meaning preservation.

Newmark (1988) emphasized the central role of functional equivalence that "the overriding purpose of any translation should be to achieve equivalent effect" so as to make the same influence or usually "as close as possible" on the readership of the TL texts as "was obtained on" the SL text (p. 48).

Andrew Chesterman (1989) listed some typical categories of equivalence proposed in various theories of translation such as content, stylistic, formal, functional or pragmatic equivalences (p. 100).

Equivalence, in another way, is seen as the quality maintenance of both SL and TL texts by Koller (1979) with the general formula:

$$F_1(x) = F_2(x),$$

Where:

• x is type of equivalence in SL text and;

• F_1, F_2 are the quality of original texts (SL texts) and translation products (TL texts), respectively.

The "=" character in the formula presents the concept of equivalence, aiming at the process of preservation of SL text's qualities in TL texts. Types of equivalence, based on Koller's view, are denotation, connotation, text-normativity, pragmatics, and formality. No matter what type of equivalence is, the quality of SL texts has to be preserved in their corresponding translated texts. Besides, the word "quality" here presents a set of standards that are thoroughly discussed and reviewed before and after translation stages, including the original author's purposes, the whole meaning of SL text and targeted reader categories.

Baker (2018) claimed that equivalence at the word level was able to cover a figure of aspects like gender, number, part of speech or any differences in the structure of grammar that can affect the integrity of messages rendered from one target text to its translated versions.

Research Questions

In order to fulfill the author's objectives in this study, the two following questions were raised:

1. What are the translation trends of the modal verb "can" and its alternatives in specific cases when translating into Vietnamese and vice versa?

2. How can we draw an overall picture of translation modal verbs like "can" into Vietnamese and "có thể" into English with the purpose to avoid ambiguities and increase the naturality of our translation products?

Methods

Design of the Study

The mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed method) is employed for some reasons. Firstly, Williams (2002) pointed out that the quantitative method could help researchers to make "claims about universality" by seeking to "measure things, to count, and to compare statistically" (pp. 64-65). The work of studying statistical data via the analysis of corpus patterns is therefore used to explore some new translation trends of the researched words. Besides, the qualitative method helps to lead to important conclusions about "what is possible, what can happen, or what can happen at least sometimes" (Williams, 2002, p. 64). Alison Mackey & Lara Bryfonski (2018) also pointed out that mixed methods research "employs aspects of both

quantitative and qualitative methods and designs to better understand a given phenomenon" (p. 103). Additionally, the combination of both methods can provide "a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone" (Creswell, 2021, p. 23).

Hence, this research would make use of a quantitative method to provide descriptive statistics of the occurrence of researched words and their corresponding Vietnamese meanings (some steps were conducted following previous research in Vietnamese translation such as Tran (2021) or To (2022)), followed by some in-depth explanations of typical examples which are extracted from the database based on previous translation studies' findings.

Data collection & analysis

- Data collection:

Data employed for analysis activity in this research is Translation memory which combined thirteen English books and their translated versions in the Vietnamese language. Via the raw data, it is expected to provide approximately 40,000 sentence pairs (an individual pair includes one English sentence and its translation in Vietnamese) in order to then process for statistical and analyzing work.

- Tools and software for analyzing work:

Firstly, SDL Trados version 2017 is used to combine and compare pairs of sentences. If there is any pair not under the unit of a sentence, they will be removed.

Secondly, Python software is then used to convert translation memory into an Excel file for further research activities. The reason for choosing this software is that it is free and the community of Python users working in the translation area is actually so large that I can get some tips and codes for building some applications to analyze data and export graphs, which could make me spend a huge time for repeating tasks such as finding specific works and counting their emerging frequency.

Finally, Microsoft (MS) Excel and Word are very popular and convenient software for any work, especially statistical analysis. Raw data from the process of digitalization of printing books is converted into MS Word for other steps like storage, contrastive comparison and presenting statistical analysis results. Data from Trados translation memory is filled in an Excel sheet and graphs for a description of data is created by Excel's tools.

- Procedure to analyze data:
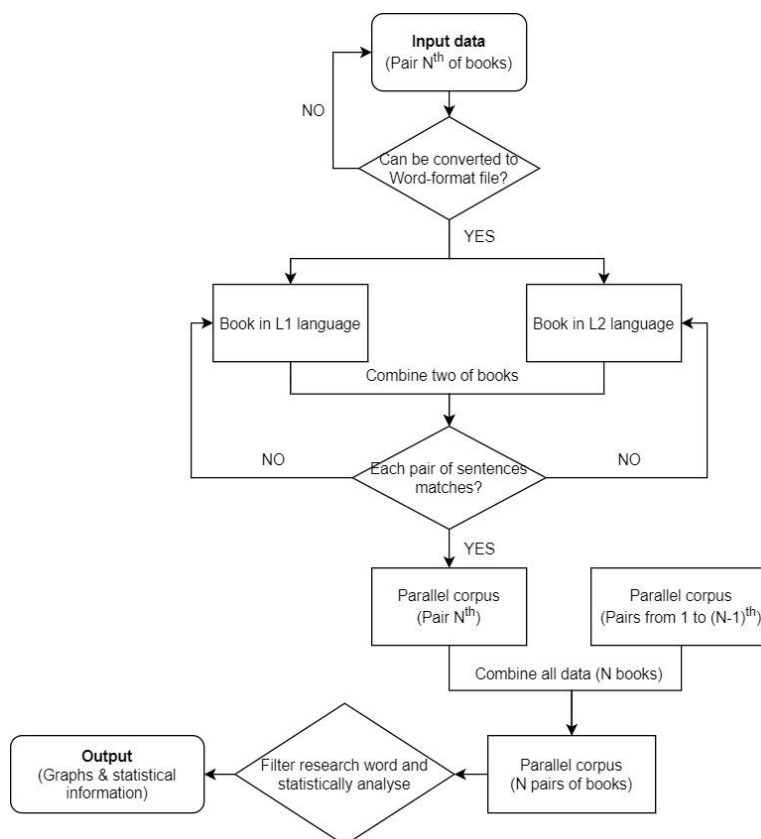
Figure 1. Procedure of processing linguistic data and statistically analyzing corpus

At the beginning stage, each pair of books including one English publishing and its translation version in the Vietnamese language are chosen, processed and then converted into Microsoft Word-format files; if the selected books are not in digital versions, they will be scanned and processed by Adobe Acrobat Pro DC or Python software until they are completely available for converting process in the computer. Next, SDL Trados software is used to create translation memory from the digital data of selected books. More clearly, this step will split each book into sentence units and combine every single English sentence with its corresponding Vietnamese translation; in case English sentences are not translated or ignored for some reason, resulting in pairs of one English sentence and zero Vietnamese sentences, they will be eliminated from the research data. This step is applied to all pairs of books and the parallel corpus data is consequentially ready for analysis activity. Finally, Python is used again to process, and analyze the corpus data and export statistical reports such as graphs as well as tables.

Findings and discussion

Findings

Overall picture of data description

First and foremost, the statistics of frequency of modal verbs is presented to point out how often

a translator meet a sentence including these modal verbs. I have run the demo of analysis with the data of twelve pairs of books (around 40,000 pairs of sentences) and hoped that the trend of using these words will not change so strongly that can affect my future results negatively.
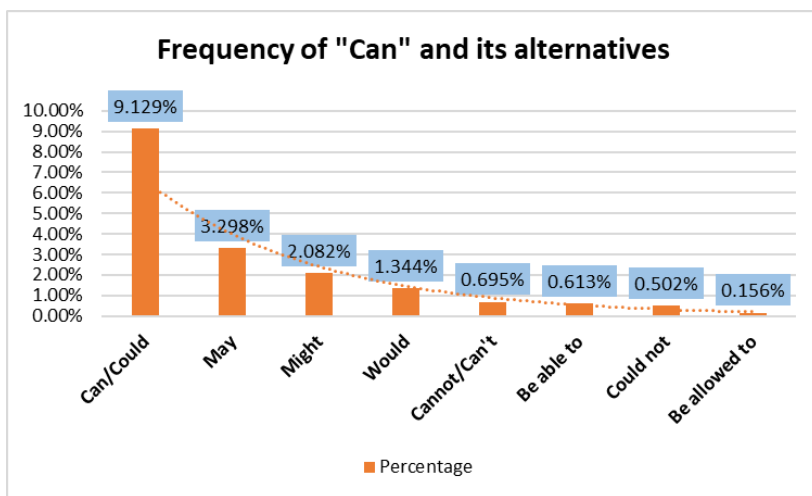
Figure 2. Frequency of "Can" and its alternatives in English texts

As expected, *"can"* and its alternative *"could"* emerge in the texts at the highest frequency level, with around 10 percent of total sentences for each word in the data, meaning that for every one hundred sentences, we may have to translate four sentences involving *"can"* or *"could"*. Moreover, when doing the same statistical procedure with Vietnamese translations, the word *"có thể"* is used at a significant level of frequency, with around twelve percent of total sentences. This suggests that most of the modal verbs are preferentially translated as *"có thể"* in Vietnamese versions. Interestingly, Vietnamese translated versions do have many sentences with the conveyed meaning as negative forms like *"cannot/can't"* or *"không thể/không được phép"*. That may be another question needed to research in the future.
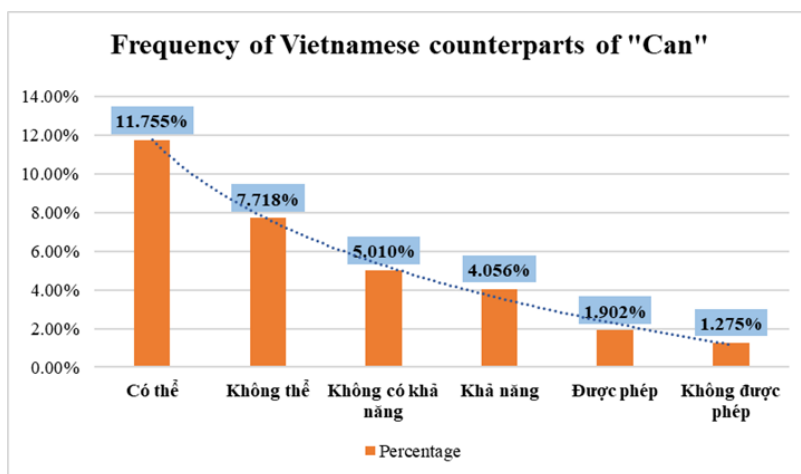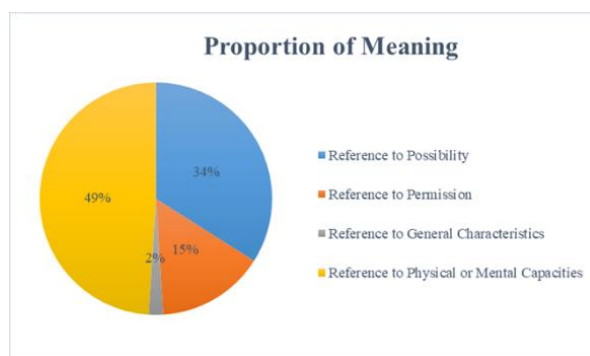
Figure 3. Frequency of Vietnamese counterparts of "Can"

Secondly, I conducted the indeed research in specific aspects of modal verbs and its corresponding translations as follow:

Detailed descriptions of each type of modal verb

- Analysis of the modal verb "can"

Figure 4. Proportion of meaning expressed by "Can" in English texts

Based on suggestions of linguistics, researchers already mentioned in the Literature review, there are four main meanings that the modal verb *"can"* expresses. As my trial statistics, physical/mental capacity is the most frequent meaning that *"can"* expresses and general characteristics are rarely used. Compared to previous research in merely English language related to the modal verb *"can"*, the tendency of using them proposed by them is similar to mine.

Firstly, in terms of physical/mental capacity, *"can"* is often translated as *"có thể"* in Vietnamese like (1a) and (1b) or *"có thể ... được"* like (2a) and (2b):

(1a) … because he *can* run faster than he *can* swim and would be wise to increase the dry-land proportion of his travel time. (Book source: Richard Dawkins, 1989, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford, Oxford University Press)

(1b) … bởi vì anh ta *có thể* chạy nhanh hơn là bơi và sẽ là khôn ngoan khi gia tăng phần đất khô trong thời gian di chuyển của anh ấy. (Book source: Duong Ngoc Cuong, Ho Tu Cuong, 2019, *Gen Vị Kỷ*, Ha Noi, KNOWLEDGE Publishing House)

(2a) What generalisations can we make about life in the pre-agricultural world nevertheless? (Book source: Yuval Noah Harari, 2014, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Canada, McClelland & Stewart)

(2b) Tuy nhiên, chúng ta có thể khái quát được những gì về thế giới thời kỳ tiền nông nghiệp? (Book source: Nguyen Thuy Chung, 2017, *Sapiens - Lược sử loài người*, Ha Noi, KNOWLEDGE Publishing House)

Besides, *"có khả năng"* is another option for this translation tip as (3a) and (3b):

(3a) Of course, the Planck energy is a very long way from the energies of around a hundred GeV, which are the most that we *can* produce in the laboratory at the present time. (Book source: Hawking, Stephen, 2008, *A Brief History of Time*, UK, Bantam Press)

(3b) Lẽ dĩ nhiên, năng lượng Planck là một quãng đường dài kể từ những năng lượng cỡ nghìn GeV mà hiện nay là năng lượng lớn nhất chúng ta *có khả năng* tạo ra trong phòng thí nghiệm. (Book source: Cao Chi and Pham Van Thieu, 2020, *Lược sử thời*

gian, Ho Chi Minh, TRE Publishing House)

Secondly, the possibility is another expression of the meaning of *"can"*, describing that "it is possible" for the subject to do one action (Thomson and Martinet, 1986). In this case, it is found that the sentences expressing this type of meaning often go with some conjunctions to describe causes/reasons, results and purposes like *"because"* or *"so ... that"* in order to distinguish it from physical/mental capacity; these cases are usually translated in Vietnamese as *"bởi vì"* and *"để"*, respectively. The following examples extracted from the researched translation data will illustrate this point of view:

(4a) Their existence *can* be ignored *because* it would have no observational consequences. (Book source: Hawking, Stephen, 2008, *A Brief History of Time*, UK, Bantam Press)

(4b) Do đó, sự tồn tại của chúng *có thể* bỏ qua *bởi vì* nó không có những hậu quả quan sát được. (Book source: Cao Chi and Pham Van Thieu, 2020, *Lược sử thời gian*, Ho Chi Minh, TRE Publishing House)

(5a) A pack of hyenas *can* catch prey *so* much larger than a lone hyena can bring down *that* it pays each selfish individual to hunt in a pack, even though this involves sharing food. (Book source: Richard Dawkins, 1989, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford, Oxford University Press)

(5b) Một bầy linh cẩu *có thể* bắt được nhiều con mồi hơn so với một con linh cẩu đơn độc, *do đó* các cá thể vị kỷ sẵn sàng đi săn cùng nhau trong một bầy, cho dù chúng phải chia sẻ thức ăn. (Book source: Duong Ngoc Cuong, Ho Tu Cuong, 2019, *Gen Vị Kỷ*, Ha Noi, KNOWLEDGE Publishing House)

In this research, it is found that this meaning expressed by *"can"* sometimes is not translated as normal although the whole meaning of possibility appears to be completely preserved (6a&b). Therefore, it is requested to consider those sentences under semantic and sometimes pragmatic analysis for correct catching of conveyed meaning and certainly, this work would take more time and effort to achieve that. This is also challenging work that I would like to continue to try in my future research.

(6a) Any observer *can* work out precisely what time and position any other observer will assign to an event, provided he knows the other observer's relative velocity. (Book source: Hawking, Stephen, 2008, *A Brief History of Time*, UK, Bantam Press)

(6b) Bất kỳ một người quan sát nào cũng tính ra được một cách chính xác thời gian và vị trí mà một người quan sát khác gán cho một sự kiện, miễn là người đó biết được vận tốc tương đối của người kia. (Book source: Cao Chi and Pham Van Thieu, 2020, *Lược sử thời gian*, Ho Chi Minh, TRE Publishing House)

Thirdly, according to Eastwood (1994), the message of the permission which is given or refused is conveyed via *"can"* and its negative form *"cannot/can't"*. In the researched data, few utterances were found that these kinds of words depicting the meaning of permission in a clearer way, maybe due to the limits of data size. This raises an opening question for my further research in the future. In this case, the Vietnamese translation is *"được phép"* or *"có quyền"*

like pair of sentences numbers (7a) and (7b).

(7a) Has the male really become the sought-after sex, the one that is in demand, the sex that *can* afford to be choosy? (Book source: Richard Dawkins, 1989, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford, Oxford University Press)

(7b) Có phải đàn ông thực sự đã trở thành giới tính được săn đón, giới tính được những kẻ khác giới ưa chuộng, giới tính *có quyền* kén chọn? (Book source: Duong Ngoc Cuong, Ho Tu Cuong, 2019, *Gen Vị Kỷ*, Ha Noi, KNOWLEDGE Publishing House)

However, in daily conversations, people tend to use the structure "can + verb" for making suggestion ((8a&b) and (9a&b)) in a polite way (Turnbull, 2013). Through my data, it points out that this word was translated as "*xin* + verb" in Vietnamese:

(8a) We *can* venture to speak at some length without any departure from the habit of our country. (Book source: Richard Crawley, 2012, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Electronic version, Duke Classics)

(8b) Chúng tôi *xin* mạo muội nói hơi dài dòng một chút nhưng không đi trệch khỏi truyền thống của xứ sở chúng tôi. (Book source: Takya Do, Nguyen Chi Hoan and Nguyen Chi Hieu, 2018, *Lịch Sử Chiến Tranh Peloponnese*, Ho Chi Minh, Thế Giới Publishers)

(9a) I now can call your attention to the questions you must consider, and upon which superior knowledge perhaps permits me to speak. (Book source: Richard Crawley, 2012, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Electronic version, Duke Classics)

(9b) Bây giờ tôi *xin* lưu ý các vị về những vấn đề mà các vị phải cân nhắc, những vấn đề mà có lẽ do tôi biết rõ hơn người khác nên tôi được phép nói đến. (Book source: Takya Do, Nguyen Chi Hoan and Nguyen Chi Hieu, 2018, *Lịch Sử Chiến Tranh Peloponnese*, Ho Chi Minh, Thế Giới Publishers)

Finally, Hofmann (1995) found that the modal verb *"can"* was also used to express general characteristics of a subject mentioned in both formal and informal texts in "a very natural way" in spite of its less frequent appearance (pp.102-103). Its meaning in this situation is the description of something happening in a general or characteristic way that probably annoys speakers.

(10a) Whenever someone suggests that mothers are better suited to raising children, Nell knows in the deepest way possible that fathers *can* parent with as much love, devotion, and joy. (Sheryl Sandberg, 2013, *Lean In*, New York, Knopf)

(10b) Khi có ai đó cho rằng các bà mẹ là người phù hợp để chăm nuôi con trẻ, Nell là người hiểu rõ nhất bậc làm cha cũng *có thể* chăm nuôi con với tình yêu, tận tụy, và niềm vui không kém. (Tran Thi Ngan Tuyet, 2014, *Dấn Thân*, Ho Chi Minh, TRE Publishing House)

(11a) A child *can* cry one moment and run off to play the next. (Sheryl Sandberg, 2013, *Lean In*, New York, Knopf)

(11b) Đứa trẻ *có thể* khóc lúc này nhưng rồi chạy nhảy vui đùa ngay đấy thôi. (Tran Thi

Ngan Tuyet, 2014, *Dấn Thân*, Ho Chi Minh, TRE Publishing House)

- Analysis of some alternatives of *"can"*

Alexander (1990) noted that the ability that the subject of a sentence used to have in the past was often depicted by *"could"* – a past-tense form of *"can"* (examples (12a) and (12b)). Besides, *"be able to"* in both present or past tense also has the same meaning as *"can"* and "could". In some cases, *"may"* is seen as an alternative for *"can"* despite the less usual employment of people, especially the native ones (To, 2018). Via my research data, these alternatives are almost translated as *"đã có thể"* in Vietnamese.

(12a) If they had brought plenty of supplies with them, and had persevered in the war without scattering for piracy and agriculture, they would have easily defeated the Trojans in the field, since they *could* hold their own against them with the division on service. (Book source: Richard Crawley, 2012, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Electronic version, Duke Classics)

(12b) Nếu họ mang theo quân nhu dồi dào và chiến đấu bền bỉ mà không phân tán vào việc cướp biển và canh tác thì họ đã dễ dàng đánh bại quân Troy trên chiến trường, bởi chỉ bằng mỗi biệt đội đang trực chiến đó họ *đã có thể* trụ vững được trước quân Troy. (Book source: Takya Do, Nguyen Chi Hoan and Nguyen Chi Hieu, 2018, *Lịch Sử Chiến Tranh Peloponnese*, Ho Chi Minh, Thế Giới Publishers)

(13a) Their losses were not heavy, because their cavalry *was able to* check the Athenian pursuit. (Ian Scott-Kilvert, 1960, *The Rise and Fall of Athens: Nine Greek Lives*, New York, Penguin Group)

(13b) Thiệt hại của họ không nặng, vì kỵ binh của họ *đã có thể* ngăn cản cuộc truy sát của người Athens. (Bui Thanh Chau, 2019, *Sự Hưng Thịnh Và Suy Tàn Của Athens*, Ho Chi Minh, Thế Giới Publishers)

(14a) … the least disturbance, such as the presence of an astronaut, *may* change them so that the astronaut could not see the singularity until he hit it and his time came to an end. (Book source: Hawking, Stephen, 2008, *A Brief History of Time*, UK, Bantam Press)

(14b) … chỉ cần một nhiễu động nhỏ, ví dụ như sự có mặt của nhà du hành, là *đã có thể* làm cho chúng thay đổi tới mức nhà du hành không còn nhìn thấy kỳ dị nữa cho tới khi chạm vào nó và thời gian của anh ta sẽ chấm hết. (Book source: Cao Chi and Pham Van Thieu, 2020, *Lược sử thời gian*, Ho Chi Minh, TRE Publishing House)
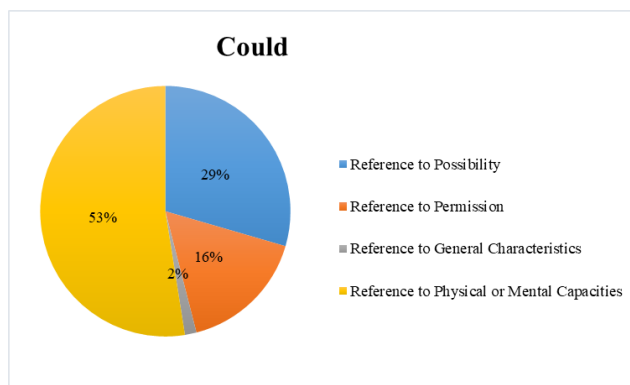
Figure 5. Proportion of meaning expressed by "Could" in English texts

As drawn from the data, the work of using *"could"* has the same trend as "can", with most of them for transferring the meaning of physical/mental capacities and the least cases for a description of general characteristics. Thus, this paper would concentrate on finding the differences in translation between *"can"* and *"could"* for each case.

Furthermore, *"could"* combined with "have + past participle" has the ability to mention the ability or even a chance that was left undone in the past. In this case, Vietnamese equivalents like *"đáng lẽ/nhẽ"* or *"lẽ ra…đã có thể"* are used to express these messages.

(15a) These are claims that *could have been* made for Lorenz's On Aggression, Ardrey's The Social Contract, and Eibl-Eibesfeldt's Love and Hate. (Book source: Richard Dawkins, 1989, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford, Oxford University Press)

(15b) Những khẳng định này *đáng nhẽ* phải được dùng làm cơ sở cho các cuốn sách: Về tính hiếu chiến của Lorenz, Khế ước xã hội của Ardrey và Tình yêu và thù hận của Eibl-Eihesfeldt. (Book source: Duong Ngoc Cuong, Ho Tu Cuong, 2019, *Gen Vị Kỷ*, Ha Noi, KNOWLEDGE Publishing House)

(16a) And I *could have* wished that the reputations of many brave men were not to be imperilled in the mouth of a single individual... (Book source: Richard Crawley, 2012, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Electronic version, Duke Classics)

(16b) Và *lẽ ra* tôi đã có thể mong rằng danh tiếng của rất nhiều người dũng cảm không bị đe dọa bởi khẩu tài của một cá nhân nào... (Book source: Takya Do, Nguyen Chi Hoan and Nguyen Chi Hieu, 2018, *Lịch Sử Chiến Tranh Peloponnese*, Ho Chi Minh, Thế Giới Publishers)

Sometimes, *"be allowed to"* structure is more preferable than *"can"* in order to imply "the permission does not depend on the speaker or the person spoken to" with the grammatical aspects of present or future (Eastwood, 1994, p.120). In this research, the meaning of permission expressed by *"be allowed to"* is translated as *"được phép"* or *"được + verb"*:

(17a) Absolute Poker was later fined by a gaming commission but *was allowed to* keep its license. (Book source: Stephen J. Dubner, Steven D. Levitt, 2015, *When to Rob a Bank*, New York, William Morrow)

(17b) Absolute Poker sau đó đã bị ủy ban trò chơi bắt phải nộp phạt, nhưng vẫn *được*

giữ giấy phép hoạt động. (Nguyen Hoai An, 2018, *Khi Nào Cướp Nhà Băng*, Ha Noi, THẾ GIỚI Publishers)

(18a) For example, in one experiment mice were put in an outdoor enclosure with plenty of food, and *allowed to* breed freely. (Book source: Richard Dawkins, 1989, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford, Oxford University Press)

(18b) Ví dụ, trong một thí nghiệm, những con chuột được đặt ngoài trời trong một môi trường bao quanh bởi rất nhiều thức ăn, và *được phép* sinh sản một cách tự do. (Book source: Duong Ngoc Cuong, Ho Tu Cuong, 2019, *Gen Vị Kỷ*, Ha Noi, KNOWLEDGE Publishing House)

When speakers want to talk or mention something that they are unsure of due to lack of trust, Coates (1995) realized that the modal verb *"may"* or *"might"* was then used with the meaning that the reliability of matter was lower than they had expected (high reliability is conveyed in *"can"* clauses in the proposition of a specific utterance). The strategy for translating these words is using the Vietnamese word "có vẻ" to express them:

(19a) At first blush, this may seem an overstatement, but it's a truth that should have become common knowledge long ago. (Book source: Christopher Ryan, 2011, *Sex at Dawn*, New York, Harper Perennial)

(19b) Mới nghe thì *có vẻ* hơi quá lời, nhưng mọi người lẽ ra phải biết điều này từ lâu rồi mới phải. (Le Khanh Toan, 2018, *Tình dục thuở hồng hoang*, Ha Noi, THẾ GIỚI Publishers)
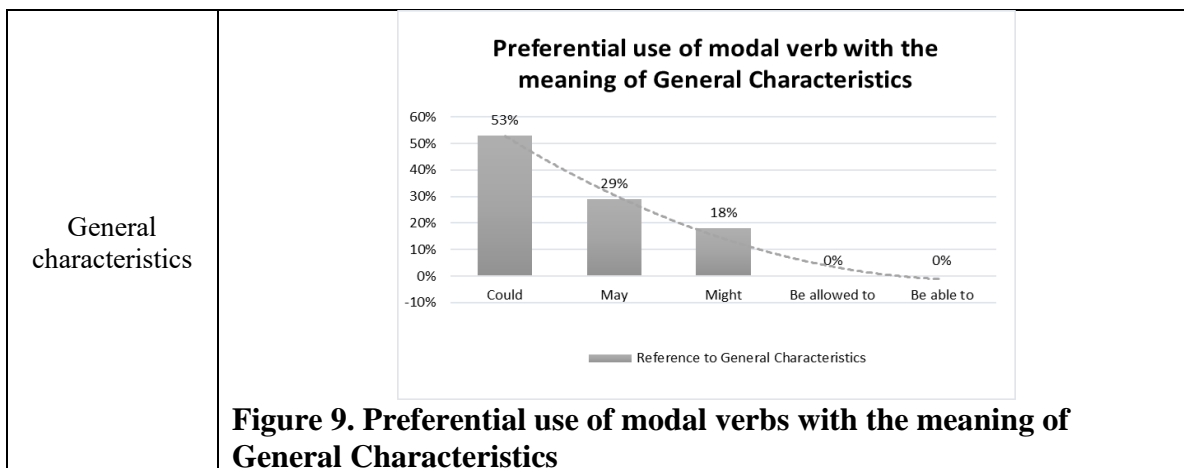
(20a) This *might* seem an easy task. (Book source: Richard Dawkins, 1989, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford, Oxford University Press)

(20b) Điều này *có vẻ* như là một nhiệm vụ dễ dàng. (Book source: Duong Ngoc Cuong, Ho Tu Cuong, 2019, *Gen Vị Kỷ*, Ha Noi, KNOWLEDGE Publishing House).

Discussion

As mentioned before, *"can"* tends to be the best option for the description of capacity, ability, possibility, permission, and sometimes general characteristics. Besides, for each situation needing to express a particular meaning, the suggested use is therefore presented with the hope that the research can contribute a small part to translation decisions in the future.

MEANINGS	TREND CHART
Physical/Mental Capacities	**Figure 6. Preferential use of modal verbs with the meaning of Physical/Mental Capacities**
Possibility	**Figure 7. Preferential use of modal verbs with the meaning of Possibility**
Permission	**Figure 8. Preferential use of modal verbs with the meaning of Permission**

General characteristics	
	Figure 9. Preferential use of modal verbs with the meaning of General Characteristics

The given data reveals the tendency of using modal verbs in concrete situations. When mentioning mental or physical capacities, alternatives of the modal verb *"can"* like "could", *"may"* or *"might"* are used to describe this meaning, with *"could"* is the best option for this. When it comes to the description of possibility or the level of certainty, "could", *"may"* and *"might"* are used at the same degree of frequency, strongly depending on how much the speaker's belief or certainty of information they intend to exchange. Moreover, in terms of permission, *"be allowed to"* is the most popular structure speakers or writers prefer to use in order to give the signal of a right that people involved in the conversations or settings can use to do an action. Finally, most of the general characteristics of the sentence's subjects are implicatively described by *"could"*, showing the guesses of the author about the character's traits mentioned in the texts. With the table including a trend analysis of use for each case, I hope it can contribute to a very small tip for choosing English words besides *"can"* to translate Vietnamese words with specific meanings related to those topics which are listed above.

However, all the sentences used for analysis in the paper are from the author's translation memory which was created from the source of thirteen English books and their Vietnamese translations, giving about 40,000 pairs of English-Vietnamese sentences. Although the data presents a variety of book genres such as history, science or politics, it is not statistically strong enough to result in any overall conclusion about the use of *"can"* and its alternatives in English and vice versa, compared to other corpus-based researches like Dinh (2017)'s or Nguyen (2018)'s with about millions of English-Vietnamese sentence pairs within one genre of book. Despite all drawbacks I have presented above, this is still a good basis for me to conduct further research related to this topic and mainly in my final thesis.

Conclusion

To conclude, the decision to translate the modal verb "can" and its alternatives in Vietnamese is based on its semantic and sometimes pragmatic meanings, besides the Vietnamese translation "có thể". Firstly, when needing to express the meaning of physical/mental capacities, "có thể … được" or "có khả năng" is a widely accepted choice for that. Secondly, when it comes to the expression of possibility, "có thể" combined with the clause of reason like "bởi vì" and "để" is used to clarify this meaning. Thirdly, besides "được phép" or "có quyền", "xin" is also another

good option for transmitting the message of permission in Vietnamese with more politeness. Finally, "có thể", "có vẻ" or "dường như" is a typical word for the description of general characteristics.

In my further research, I will collect more pairs of books so as to find out more possible ways to translate these kinds of modal verbs into Vietnamese.

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Biodata

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