

An Investigation of Vietnamese Classifiers in English – Vietnamese Translation

Dang Thi Kim Phuong^{1*}

¹ Hoa Sen University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

*Corresponding author's email: kimphuong040994@gmail.com

*  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8920-8240>

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: numeral classifiers, stative verbs, animate, inanimate.

The research was conducted to investigate the use of the three most common classifiers *cái*, *con*, *ngươi*, and figure out the patterns of how to use them when English noun phrases are translated into Vietnamese. To do this, a corpus has been built from the two bestselling literary works *The Great Gatsby* and *Tuesday with Morrie* in the English version accompanied by the Vietnamese translated version. The data collected were analyzed in terms of counting numbers of occurrences, calculating percentages and frequency to conclude what classifier among the three is the most frequently used. The findings of this research can be summarized as follow: first, *cái* is a classifier for inanimate objects, whereas *con* and *ngươi* are used with animate ones; however, there is one exception that emerges during the research, which is the classifier *con* followed by inanimate nouns. Second, from a typical structure of CL + N, formulae are given for the translation of each classifier in specific cases. Finally, double and triple classifiers are chronologically formed by these three classifiers with suggested formulae for Vietnamese translation. The findings aim to support Vietnamese learners using classifiers correctly when translating English noun phrases into Vietnamese noun phrases.

Introduction

Classifiers (CL) have become a barrier for English native speakers studying Vietnamese as they do not know which classifiers can be used appropriately. This problem results from English being considered a non-classifier language, whereas classifiers appear dominantly in most Vietnamese noun phrases (NP). In addition, Vietnamese has a wide range of classifiers, so it is not easy to learn which nouns are used with which type of classifier. Moreover, there are cases where a noun (N) can be used with different types of classifiers, but the combination denotes different meanings. The choice of classifiers has become complicated as it requires not only the cognition of categories but also the cultural knowledge of language learners. Each language has

its own culture, which also leads to distinct ways of using a language. Indeed, Vietnamese people consider chairs as inanimate objects as it has no emotions and abilities to carry on actions; however, Thai people mention chairs as having four legs like human beings, so they use chairs with an animate classifier.

In addition, there was a set of error patterns shared across English - Vietnamese relating to classifier errors (Dam & Pham, 2020). From other perspectives, in the era of communication and connection, translation has become high in demand, but it is not easy to be satisfied (Tran, 2021), and sometimes the translation process deals with various problems related to the differences among languages. Taking the words *được/bị* in Vietnamese, which are normally used in the passive form in English, it was stated that *the structural differences between English passive sentences and the corresponding structures in Vietnamese are assumed to pose various problems for English -Vietnamese learners* (Nguyen, 2021). Understanding such situations and the similarities and differences in linguistic features as well as different points of linguistic view, this paper attempts to untangle the knot and support Vietnamese learners to solve the aforementioned issue in translation with a corpus-based approach. Specifically, the author filtered all the noun phrases in English that were translated into Vietnamese with the appearance of the three most common classifiers *cái, con, người*, from the two best-seller literary works *The Great Gatsby* and *Tuesday with Morrie*. Then, formulae will be suggested for different cases of translation that aim to support Vietnamese learners in their learning process.

Literature review

Classifiers system

Classifiers have become a debate among linguists in terms of defining and structural building with different typological perspectives. According to Allan (1977), classifiers have been defined with two criteria: (a) they occur as morphemes in surface structures under specific conditions; and (b) they have meaning, in the sense that a classifier denotes some salient perceived or imputed characteristic of the entity to which an associated noun refers (or may refer). Allan also considered four types of languages classified in classifiers: numeral classifier languages, concordial classifier languages, predicate classifier languages, and intra-locative classifier languages. Among the four language types, Vietnamese has been mentioned as a numeral classifier language, which means classifiers, in most cases, appear as a part of the structure of the Vietnamese noun phrase. Contributing to the diversity of the classifier system from a distinct perspective, Grinevald (2015) has proposed four different types of classifiers which are numeral classifier (numeral + CL), noun classifier (CL + noun), the genitive classifier (possessive + CL) and verbal classifier (verb + CL).

Numeral classifiers

According to Kuipers (1967), numeral classifiers can vary morphologically from a free morpheme to an affix to a fused morpheme, which is also stated by Grinevald (2000) that

numeral classifiers are the most commonly recognized type, and they appear in the context of quantification. Grinevald (2000) also mentioned the two subtypes of numeral classifiers, sortal or true classifiers, and mensural or quantitative classifiers, which are akin to measure terms. According to Greenberg (1972), numeral (NUM) classifiers had four basic structures as below:

- [NUM – CL] – N
- N – [NUM – CL]
- [CL – NUM] – N
- N – [CL – NUM]

English classifiers

Celce-Murica and Larsen-Freeman (1998) stated that English does not have a wide range of classifiers compared to other classifier languages, but "English does have some general measure words (or unit words)," and they also suggest one more classifier category, which is parallel with measure words is collective phrases. However, the researcher focuses on the numeral classifier only, but not collective phrases or measure phrases.

Vietnamese classifiers

As mentioned above, Vietnamese is claimed to follow the numeral classifier system (Allan, 1977) as Vietnamese nouns need classifiers to denote that they can be counted or individuals. Specifically, it is claimed by Aikhenvald (2000) that the constituent order of numeral classifiers and Vietnamese nouns followed the structure of Numeral – Classifier – Noun.

As being a classifier language, it is claimed by Emeneau (1951) that Vietnamese has about One hundred twenty-one classifiers, while Adams (1989) estimates that Vietnamese has about 140 classifiers. The

diversity of classifiers has caused a lot of confusion for learners who are attempting to learn Vietnamese. Understanding this hardship, Nguyen, H. T. (2004) categorized Vietnamese classifiers into four groups depending on the denotation of the nouns as below:

- Humans
- Animals
- Plants
- Objects, things, natural phenomena, and abstract notions.

From another perspective, Croft (1994) defines the noun system following the semantics the distinction in which animate/inanimate and human/non-human distinctions are used for numeral classifiers.

Vietnamese noun phrases

A noun phrase is a group of words in which a noun or pronoun is a compulsory part and acts as the head of the phrase. The other two constituents accompanied by the head noun are pre-modifiers and post-modifiers, which are optional in the phrase. According to Nguyen (1996), the noun phrase structure consists of a head and two other optional parts: the initial and final elements. He also stated that the noun is preceded by a classifier, and both the classifier (T1) and the noun (T2) form the head of the phrase.

Table 1. Structure of the Vietnamese noun phrase

No.	Initial elements	Head noun		Final elements
		T1 classifier	T2 noun	
(1)	<i>một</i>	<i>con</i>	<i>gà</i>	<i>trống</i>
(2)	<i>hai</i>	<i>người</i>	<i>đàn ông</i>	<i>ở trong nhà</i>

English translation for (1): a rooster

(2): two men in the house

English noun phrases

Howard (1980) introduced the structure of the English noun phrase, which consists of three constituents: pre-modification, head noun, and post-modification, in which the pre-modification and post-modification are optional, and the head noun is compulsory. The head noun of the phrase can be a noun or a pronoun. Pre-modification can be a demonstrative pronoun, possessive pronoun, numeral/quantifier, or adjectives. Postmodification can be a relative clause, non-finite clause, adjective phrase, preposition phrase, or adverb phrase.

Table 2. Structure of the English noun phrase

No.	Pre-modification	Head noun	Post-modification
(3)	<i>a beautiful</i>	<i>girl</i>	<i>in red dress</i>
(4)	<i>the</i>	<i>cat</i>	<i>which is at the window</i>

Vietnamese translation for (3): *một người con gái đẹp trong chiếc váy màu đỏ*

(4): *cái con mèo mà ở chỗ cửa sổ*

Research Questions

This research aims to answer the two questions below:

1. Are there any differences in the use of numeral classifiers *cái*, *con*, and *người* in Vietnamese noun phrases?
2. Is there any structure for Vietnamese learners to translate English noun phrases to Vietnamese noun phrases with the presence of numeral classifiers *cái*, *con*, and *người*?

Methods

The two corpora – Data collection procedure

The corpora are built from the two well-known literature books, *Tuesday with Morrie* and *The Great Gatsby*. *Tuesday with Morrie* by Mitch Albom was on the New York Times Non-Fiction Best-seller list in 2000, and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald is a popular title on the USA Today's Best-Selling Books list. The two Vietnamese-translated versions have attracted the attention of many readers and are suggested as must-have literature novels in Vietnam.

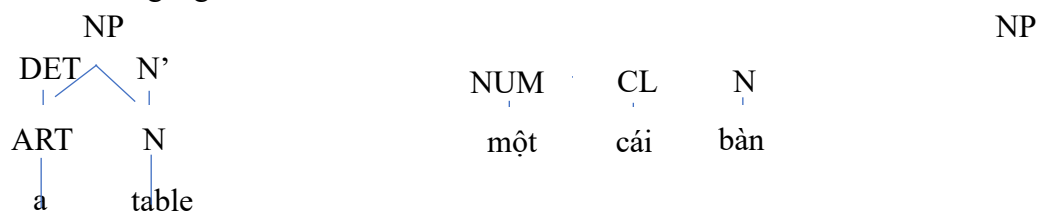
Within the two writings, I extracted all the English phrases that contain numeral classifiers *cái*, *con*, and *người* in the Vietnamese translation and typed them in an Excel spreadsheet. Afterward, I sorted the data for each type of classifier, calculated the frequency in each text, and constructed tables with each type of noun denotation corresponding to each classifier *cái*, *con*, and *người*. With the tables, I can conclude with patterns needed to translate English noun phrases to Vietnamese with the use of classifiers.

Table 3. Occurrences of classifier *cái*, *con*, and *người* in each text.

Classifiers \ Texts	<i>Tuesday with Morrie</i> Mitch Albom	<i>The Great Gatsby</i> F. Scott Fitzgerald
<i>Cái</i>	61	60
<i>Con</i>	52	181
<i>Người</i>	62	201

Analysis classifiers cái, con, and người

As mentioned above, English is not a numeral classifier language, but in Vietnamese translation, Vietnamese learners need to know which classifiers they need to use for certain types of nouns. Taking *a table – một cái bàn* as an example, the tree diagram below shows a basic difference between the two languages in terms of classifiers.



In the English tree diagram, the noun phrase includes two elements which are a determiner (DET) and a smaller noun phrase (N'). The DET, in this case, is an article (ART) that is translated as numeral *một*. The Vietnamese syntactic structure, in this case, consists of three elements with a classifier in the middle of numeral and noun.

Below are some findings of English noun phrases when translated into Vietnamese noun phrases with the presence of the three most common Vietnamese classifiers *cái*, *con*, and *người*. A total of 565 English noun phrases are translated into Vietnamese from the two chosen novels.

Table 4. Occurrences of classifier *cái*, *con*, and *người* in both texts.

Classifiers	Occurrences	Percentage
<i>Cái</i>	121	21%
<i>Con</i>	181	32%
<i>Người</i>	263	47%

In the two texts, classifier *cái* is used the least, with 121 occurrences, which accounts for 21%, whereas classifier *người* dominates nearly half of the findings with 263 occurrences. As the two research texts are literature novels, basically, they mention the characters more than the objects or things. Each classifier has distinct ways of use, which depend on the denotation of the nouns.

Results/Findings and Discussion

Classifier *cái*

Within the range of the two corpora, the researcher recognizes that there are three different types of noun denotation that use classifier *cái* as below:

Table 5. Occurrences of classifier *cái*

No.	Typical example	Noun class	Occurrences
1	a bed – một cái (CL) giường a bell - một cái (CL) chuông	Things (inanimate)	53%
2	death – cái (CL) chết the sensation – cái (CL) cảm giác	Abstract noun	38%
3	a nose - một cái (CL) mũi a head - một cái (CL) đầu	Body parts	9%

The three usages of classifiers *cái* in the two corpora are abstract nouns, nouns of objects or things (inanimate), and body parts in which we can see that the inanimate objects in English that are translated into Vietnamese have the highest percentage of use of *cái* whereas classifier *cái* is used with body parts with a much smaller proportion.

According to Verspoor & Sauter (2000), abstract nouns refer to things that are not tangible, like *death*, *heat*, and *idea*. Abstract nouns can form a noun phrase by themselves without the presence of any pre-modifier or post-modifier, and when translated into Vietnamese, they sometimes need classifiers to modify the noun. However, *cái* is not a unique classifier for abstract nouns, so in order to have an appropriate translation; we need to pay attention to these points:

- ❖ When the English noun phrase is formed by article *the* with an adjective such as *the ugly*, *the good* with the meaning of a state of being of nouns (not denote for any group of people), then the suggested translation would be *cái* + *stative verb*¹. For example: *the ugly* – *cái xấu*, *the good* – *cái tốt*.
- ❖ With other abstract nouns denoting a state of being, such as *death*, *sensation*, or *heat* (not following the structure of *The* + *adjective*), action verbs or stative verbs will be used in the Vietnamese translation to nominalize the verbs into the noun. The classifier *cái* is placed in front of these verbs.

For example: *dead* – *cái chết*, *heat* – *cái nóng*.

The syntactic translation would also be *cái* + *stative verb* for this type of abstract noun. For these two patterns, classifier *cái* is used with inanimate objects and body parts, and it follows the structure of Numeral/Quantifier – Classifier – Noun. It can be seen easily that when a numeral is used, classifier *cái* is compulsory in the structure of noun phrases, and its removal makes the phrase become incorrect in use. In other words, classifier *cái* makes the head noun countable. In Vietnamese translation, the position of numerals or quantifiers is unchanged, which is still in front of the head noun. However, to show the plurality, the head nouns are added by morpheme *-s* or *-es*. In contrast, the Vietnamese noun phrases do not need to have morphemes because numbers or quantifiers themselves denote plurality in front of classifier *cái*. The syntactic structure of the English noun phrase is NUM/Q + N [+body part] and it is translated into Vietnamese followed the pattern NUM/Q + *cái* (CL) + N [+body part].

However, there are some conversations in the text in which the classifier *cái* can be omitted, and the omission does not affect the meaning of the phrase.

In text: A bed - một cái (CL) giường/ *một giường

Two beds – hai cái (CL) giường/ *hai giường

A nose - một cái (CL) mũi/ *một mũi

In conversation: How many boxes do you need? – Two boxes.

Bạn cần bao nhiêu (cái) hộp? Hai (cái) hộp.

Classifier *cái* is used with body parts, but it does not mean that all of the body parts can be used with this type of classifier. Some body parts can go with classifier *con* which will be discussed later in this study.

When the head noun in English is a pronoun, there are some suggested patterns recognized below:

¹ According to Cao, X. H. (2004), all the words which describe the qualities or states of being of the nouns are stative verbs, and they are categorized as adjectives in English.

- ❖ Indefinite pronoun: *something* – *cái gì*, *what* – *cái gì*, *whatever* – *bất cứ cái gì*

We ought to plan something. – *Ta phải bàn với nhau làm cái gì đi.*

I think he could make something of it – *Tôi chắc anh ấy sẽ sáng tác được một cái gì ra trò.*

To mention indefinite objects or things, native speakers use indefinite pronouns *something*, *what*, or *whatever*; which is the same in Vietnamese, *gì* is an indefinite pronoun for objects, according to Cao (2004), and to denote the countability of pronoun, classifier *cái* is placed in front of the pronoun.

- ❖ Demonstrative pronouns: *these* – *những cái này*, *those* – *những cái đó/ những cái đấy*, *this* – *cái này*, *that* – *cái đó/cái đấy*.

Take a look at this – *Ông coi thử cái này.*

When a demonstrative pronoun is a head noun of the noun phrase, the speakers would like to mention the anaphoric or cataphoric information, and all speakers already know exactly the objects which are being mentioned. In other words, *cái* can be used to denote definite objects, and the suggested translation is (*những*) *cái* + *này/ kia/ nọ/ đấy/đó*, in which *những* is used to denote plurality.

Classifier *con*

Table 6. Occurrences of classifier *con*

No.	Typical example	Noun class	Occurrences
1	human – <i>con</i> (CL) người my son – <i>con</i> (CL) trai ² tôi	Humans/ Gender	52 %
2	a chicken – <i>một con</i> (CL) gà a bird - <i>một con</i> (CL) chim	Animals	19 %
3	a street - <i>một con</i> (CL) đường a train - <i>một con</i> (CL) tàu	Things	11 %
4	an eye – <i>một con</i> (CL) mắt a pupil – <i>một con</i> (CL) người	Body parts	18 %

Classifier *con* is used for animate nouns, and most classifier *con* in the two corpora denote humans or the gender of human beings, which accounts for more than half of the occurrences. For the gender of human beings, the phrase *con trai* is used to mention masculine gender, and *con gái* is used to denote feminine gender. There are some cases in the corpus where the whole structure *con* + *head noun* is used with generic meaning, which denotes a specific group of people (*children* – *con cái*, *offspring* - *con cháu*) or a group of people with specific characteristics (*baby* – *con nít*, *gambler* – *con bạc*). The suggested Vietnamese translation for this pattern is *con* (CL) + *N [+human]*.

² son - *con* (CL) trai denotes the masculine gender of the human being as in the analysis; however, the same phrase is also used to denote a kind of animal, which is the clam – *con* (CL) trai.

I told Morrie about my generation's dilemma with having children.

Tôi nói với Thầy Morrie về vấn đề khó xử của thế hệ chúng tôi trong việc có con cái.

I sat down and cried like a baby.

Tôi đã ngồi sụp xuống khóc như con nít.

The structure *con* + *noun* [+animate] is used for animals, so if the English noun denotes animals, then the translation is *con* (CL) + *N* [+animal].

a bird – *một con* [+animate] *chim*

a tiger – *một con* [+animate] *hổ*

a chicken - *một con* [+animate] *gà*

As mentioned above, classifier *cái* is used with inanimate objects, and classifier *con* is considered as an animate classifier; however, in certain cases, classifier *con* can be used with inanimate nouns, such as in the third row of table 6. The examples below show that the change of classifier *con* to classifier *cái* in the use of inanimate nouns will cause ambiguity.

a street - *một con* [+animate] *đường*/ *³*một cái* [-inanimate] *đường*

a train – *con* [+animate] *tàu*/ **một cái* [-inanimate] *tàu*

However, in some cases, classifier, *cái*, and classifier *con* can be used interchangeably, and either way, it is both accepted and used by Vietnamese but not frequent.

a knife – *một con* [+animate] *dao*/ *một cái* [-inanimate] *dao*?⁴

Classifier *con* is often associated with moving, turning objects like people and animals. As for the street, boat, or train, they are moving or spreading from this location to the other locations, so in the Vietnamese translation, they are personalized to be living things and used with animate classifier *con*. Goddard (2011) stated that “classifiers ... do not classify nouns but the referents of nouns - the actual things in the world which the speaker ‘picks out’ to say something about on a particular occasion.” which means that the use of *con* or *cái* depends on not only the denotation of nouns but also the referents of the noun. That is the reason why there are some exceptions in the use of classifier *con* but cannot be replaced by classifier *cái* as it becomes a habit when using a language.

Besides, some nouns are used with classifier *con*, and if we change those nouns with classifier *cái*, then the phrase is still meaningful but not commonly used by Vietnamese native speakers. To support Vietnamese learners, especially the English native speakers, the researcher has a table in the appendix to show the interchangeable use of the two classifiers *con* and *cái* for such cases. Classifiers *con* is used with some of the body parts as below:

³ *: *incorrect use*

⁴ ? *is not used frequently*

heart – con tim

eye – con mắt

pupil – con ngươi

These are only three nouns denoting body parts that need classifier *con* in which *heart – con tim* is normally used in literature or music works, and the phrase *pupil – con ngươi* is a fixed term, and there is no other choice of the classifier with this noun. On the contrary, the phrase *eye – con mắt* is quite special. In the translation of *eyes – con mắt*, we can see that although the English noun has plural morphemes added at the end of the noun, in the Vietnamese translation, we do not see any quantifiers that denote plurality for the noun. This is because the Vietnamese noun phrase *con mắt* already implies the plural meaning, as in these examples:

I couldn't keep my eyes off him. – Tôi bút nổi con mắt khỏi anh ấy.

It increases her value in his eyes. – Nó càng làm tăng giá trị của nàng trước con mắt anh.

Classifier người

Table 7. Occurrences of classifier *người*

No.	Typical example	Noun class	Occurrences
1	a brother – một người (CL) em trai a teacher – một người (CL) thầy a friend – người (CL) bạn	Kinship/ Relationship/ Occupations	69%
2	a man- một người (CL) đàn ông a woman- một người (CL) đàn bà	Humans - Gender	28%
3	the poor – người (CL) nghèo the white – người (CL) da trắng	Humans – Age, status, physical features.	3%

Classifier *người* is used with nouns denoting human beings only. The researcher categorizes the use of the classifier *người* into three categories depending on the meaning that the nouns denote.

Among the three categories, the nouns denoting kinship system, social relationship, and occupation account for the largest proportion with 69%, followed by the use of classifier *người* with the nouns denoting masculine and feminine gender of human beings with 28%.

two friends – hai người bạn

a teacher – một người thầy

this man – người đàn ông này

his woman – người tình của anh ấy

The syntactic structure of the English noun phrase is (*demonstrative pronoun*) + *numeral/quantifier* + *noun* whereas the structure for translation is *numeral/quantifier* + *classifier* + *noun* + (*demonstrative pronoun*).

As mentioned above, classifier *con* and *người* are both used with nouns that denote gender; however, there is a minor difference between the two ways of using it.

- (1) *boy* – *con trai*/**người trai*/*người con trai*
- (2) *girl* – *con gái*/ **người gái*/*người con gái*
- (3) *man/male* - *người đàn ông*/ **con đàn ông*
- (4) *woman/female* – *con đàn bà*/*người đàn bà*
- (5) *woman/female* – *người phụ nữ*/**con phụ nữ*

In examples (1) and (2), classifier *người* cannot replace *con*, but they can be used together as double classifiers, which will be discussed later in this study. In examples (3), (4), and (5), if the noun denotes masculine gender, then classifier *con* is not proper for use, whereas if the noun denotes feminine gender, then whichever classifier *con* or *người* are both commonly used by Vietnamese native speakers. The notable point is that the phrase *con đàn bà* is normally used in informal speaking with no respect; however, if the phrase *phụ nữ* is used to mention feminine gender, then just only classifier *người* is in place as *phụ nữ* is Sino-Vietnamese which tends to be more formal in use. Classifier *người* is also used for denoting a group of people with similar status, physical or characteristics features.

- The poor* – *người nghèo*
The white – *người da trắng*
Careless people – *người bất cẩn*
Honest people – *người trung thực*

There are two patterns in the English sentences for this type of use: *the* + *adjective* and *adjective* + *people*, but in the translation, they all have the same structure as *người* + stative verb. Once again, we can see that the classifier and the stative verb are attached to form a noun phrase, so the absence of either will make the phrase meaningless.

- The poor* – *người nghèo*/**người*/ **nghèo*

From the finding of classifier *con* and *người*, the researcher finds out the notable point is that the word *người* can be a classifier attached to a noun but also a noun itself when it is used with another classifier(s). In other words, when *người* is a noun, it is uncountable, and the classifier in front of it, such as *con*, makes it countable, whereas when *người* is a classifier, then it supports the countability of the noun behind it.

- people* – *con* (CL) *người* (N)

man - người (CL) đàn ông (N)

Double classifiers and triple classifiers

Some of the English noun phrase translations show the combination of more than one classifier. Although not present much in the two texts, double classifiers and triple classifiers also appear with 11 phrases which are counted separately from the single classifiers.

As mentioned above, the classifier *người* is used with nouns denoting human beings only, so whichever classifier is used with *người* does not make any change to this rule. The order of classifiers is also concrete in the structure, and any change in position will make the sentence incorrect and meaningless.

this cat - cái con mèo này/ con mèo cái này⁵

*men - con người ta/ *người con ta*

*that man - cái người đàn ông ấy/ *người cái đàn ông ấy*

*this person - cái con người này/*con cái người này/ *con người cái này*

myself – cái con người tôi

The order of the three classifiers in translation is *cái + con + người + Noun[+human]*. The double or triple classifiers are to emphasize the noun that the speakers or writers are mentioning and require the readers or the communicators to pay attention to it.

this cat – con mèo này/ cái con mèo này

Additionally, it was noted by Tran (2021) that the use of classifier *cái* for inanimate objects as an emphatic appears more frequent in spoken Vietnamese but not in written language.

The double classifiers *con – người* and *người – con* is quite special when they mention the gender of human beings. Then the order has to be *người + con + N [+gender]*. The change in the order of these two classifiers, in this case, will make the phrase incorrect.

*this girl – người con gái này/ *con người gái này*

⁵ Classifier *cái* changes the position which makes the change in meaning. In other words, the syntactic change leads to the semantic change. The phrase ‘con mèo cái này’ means ‘this female cat’ and the word *cái* here plays the role of an attribute which denotes feminine gender of animals.

Discussion

This study has addressed the three classifiers *cái*, *con*, and *người* in the Vietnamese noun phrases when they are translated from the English noun phrase. Each type of classifier will accompany certain types of nouns depending on the “referents” and the semantic function of the nouns. Besides, the researcher also shortens the concepts into the syntactic structure for each type of classifier in the noun phrase, including some minor exceptions resulting from the habitual use of Vietnamese speakers.

❖ *Cái* is an inanimate classifier and is used with inanimate objects with the translated structure as *Num/Q + cái (CL) + N [+animate]*, and it is also used with body parts with the translation as *Num/Q + cái (CL) + N [+body part]*. The special use of classifier *cái* is the translation of an abstract noun in which the English noun phrase is translated as a stative verb, and the classifier *cái* with the function of nominalizing the verb into the noun as in *cái + stative verb*.

❖ *Con* is an animate classifier and is used with the nouns denoting human beings or the gender of human beings with the pattern of *con + N [+human/+gender]*. Specifically, although *con* is considered an animate classifier but, in some cases, it is accompanied by inanimate objects, which are listed in the appendix. Moreover, classifier *con* is used with three body parts which are *heart – con tim*, *pupil – con ngươi*, and *eye(s) – con mắt*.

❖ Besides classifier *con*, *người* is an animate classifier as well, but a notable difference between the two is that *người* is just only used with nouns denoting human beings. The nouns with classifier *người* denote kinship system, social relationship, occupation, or gender and the translation of this pattern is *người + N [+kinship/ job/ gender/ relationship]*. For the English noun phrase with the pattern of *the + adjective*, which represents a certain group of people who are of the same age, and have the same physical feature or status, then the Vietnamese translation is *người + stative verb*. These three classifiers above can be combined to form double classifiers or triple classifiers with the order of *cái + con + người + noun [+human]*. If the nouns denote the gender of human beings, then the order of double classifiers is *người + con + N [+gender]*.

Classifiers have become a topic of debate for years as it is considered a hindrance for language learners when they learn a classified language whereas their mother tongue does not have that kind of system or vice versa. This leads to the appearance of various research related to Vietnamese classifiers, but they consider diverse aspects of the classifiers.

Tran (2021) from the University of Manitoba conducted a study named *A Corpus-based Study of Inanimate Classifiers in Vietnamese*, in which she figured out that the classifier *cái* is used very frequently in spoken Vietnamese may be because of the discourse style to emphasize something in the communicative interactions. Compared to the two research, both agree that the classifier *cái* is used for emphasizing purposes and appears in most Vietnamese utterances. However, Tran (2021) tried to investigate the use of all inanimate classifiers while this study only chose three classifiers *cái*, *con*, and *người*, as the central points of the research.

From other perspectives, a study named *An Investigation of Vietnamese Classifier Constructions* was conducted by Lau (2015), in which the author had collected data from teachers and students in Thu Dau Mot university related to the constructions of Vietnamese classifiers as well as found the semantics function of them. This investigation with the main focus on classifier construction but not in the translation contexts, so it basically considers Vietnamese. Meanwhile, this current research has expanded to Vietnamese – English translation.

Compared to these previous studies, firstly, this research has chosen a different path by finding general structures, narrowing down the scope of the study, and merely focusing on three basic classifiers *cái*, *con*, and *người*. Secondly, the two previous studies from different aspects of classifiers have supported this research's findings as no conflict appeared.

Conclusion

Cái, *con*, and *người* are the three most common classifiers used differently in various scenarios. Because of this complexity, many Vietnamese learners find it difficult to learn Vietnamese, although they have lived in this country for such a long time. With those findings from the two chosen texts, the researcher hopes that native English speakers may find them beneficial on the way learning Vietnamese as a second language and they can overcome difficulties caused by the differences among languages when it comes to the topic of classifiers. The outcomes of this study come out with another topic for future research, which is an investigation of other Vietnamese classifiers in English-Vietnamese translation. This further research may help Vietnamese learners have a general view of all Vietnamese classifiers and the necessary structures to translate them into certain contexts.

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Biodata

Dang Thi Kim Phuong is currently a Master's degree student at Hoa Sen University in the major of English Language. She is working at the International Schools of North America as a learning support teacher and she has been teaching in the private education sector for about 7 years. At the workplace, she has been facing situations in which Vietnamese students studying in an international environment have struggled to speak and write their mother tongue. This overshadows the beauty of Vietnamese. Understanding this, her research mainly focuses on contrastive English and Vietnamese to find out the easiest way for people to learn Vietnamese effectively.

Appendix

*Special cases in the use of classifiers **con** and **cái** in Vietnamese translation*

No.	English nouns	Vietnamese translation	
		con (CL) + N	cái (CL) + N
1	street/ road	con đường	x
2	ship	con tàu	x
3	stamp	con tem	cái tem
4	boat	con thuyền	cái thuyền
5	kite	con diều	cái diều?
6	chess piece	con cờ	x
7	knife	con dao	cái dao?
8	river	con sông	x
9	small street/ road	con phố	x
10	stamp	con dấu	x
11	shuttle	con thoi	x
12	chips (computer)	con chip	x
13	motorcycle/car	con xe	cái xe?
14	number	con số	x
15	stream	con suối	x
16	boat	con đò	x
17	alley	con hẻm	cái hẻm?
18	top spinner	con quay	cái quay
19	dike	con đê	x
20	dam	con đập	cái đập