

**VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, HANOI
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VŨ THỊ THU THỦY

**RECONSTRUCTING WAR REALITY IN TWO ENGLISH
TRANSLATIONS OF BẢO NINH'S *THE SORROW OF WAR***

*(Tái cấu trúc hiện thực chiến tranh trong hai bản dịch tiếng Anh tác phẩm Nỗi
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale

While a large corpus of English literary works has been translated into Vietnamese – accompanied by an expanding body of scholarship focusing on English source texts and their Vietnamese translations – the reverse movement remains marginal. Vietnamese literature in English translation continues to be scarce, resulting in limited global visibility and scholarly engagement. Addressing this imbalance offers both cultural and academic significance: it enables a more equitable representation of Vietnamese voices in global discourse and promotes intercultural understanding of Vietnam's historical experience.

Within this context, Bảo Ninh's *Nỗi Buồn Chiến Tranh* (1990) stands as a pivotal text. Although widely recognized as a postmodern reconfiguration of the Vietnam war novel, its global reception has largely depended on its English translation, particularly Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* by Frank Palmos (1994/1998) which is originally based on Phan Thanh Hảo's translation (1992/2005). The two distinct English versions thus provide a rare empirical opportunity to examine how the same source text can be reconstructed through different linguistic and ideological lenses.

Given the fact that *The Sorrow of War* is a war narrative, this research adopts the concept of 'war reality' as its analytical focus. In this study 'war reality' is understood as the lived and narrated experience of war as constructed through linguistic patterns that represent violence, trauma, memory and geopolitical conflict. It encapsulates both the physical battlefield and the psychological aftermath that define the novel's portrayal of war.

Since Bảo Ninh's depiction of war is realized through lexico-grammatical patterns that encode experience, emotion and ideology, examining the transitivity system and lexis provides a rigorous means of tracing how war reality is constructed and potentially re-written in translation.

1.2. Aims and Objectives of the Study:

The study aims to investigate how the 'war reality' constructed in Bảo Ninh's novel is linguistically realized and subsequently reconfigured in its two English versions. Ultimately, the study seeks to critically discern the distinct contributions of Phan Thanh Hảo and Frank Palmos in the translation of this seminal Vietnamese literary text, given their differing backgrounds and presumed target audiences, which directly relate to their translation strategies embedded in their linguistic choices. The study, therefore, pursues the following aims:

- (1) To uncover how the original 'war reality' is linguistically construed in Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* through its Transitivity system and lexical choices.
- (2) To examine the nature and extent of translation shifts in transitivity and lexis across the two English versions.
- (3) To elucidate the translation strategies (e.g. explicitation, implicitation, modulation) employed by Phan Thanh Hảo and Frank Palmos in negotiating these shifts.
- (4) To interpret how these shifts and strategies contribute to differing reconstruction of 'war reality' for new audiences.

In order to achieve the aforementioned aims, this study sets out to:

- To identify and describe the specific lexico-grammatical patterns, particularly Transitivity system, and lexical choices employed by Bảo Ninh in the original Vietnamese text in construing the war reality.
- To analyse and categorise the linguistic shifts in Transitivity system, and lexical choices between the ST and its two English translations and to determine the translation strategies (e.g. explicitation, implicitation, modulation, etc.) underlying these shifts.
- To interpret how these identified shifts and strategies contribute to the reconstruction of war reality in the two English versions compared to the source text, revealing differing translational orientations and ideological implications between translators.

1.3. Research Question of the Study:

How do the linguistic shifts in the transitivity system and lexical choices of two English translations of *The Sorrow of War* contribute to the reconstruction of the original's 'war reality' for a new audience?

This overarching question is tackled by addressing the specific sub-questions as follows:

1. How is the 'war reality' constructed in the source text of *The Sorrow of War* through its transitivity system and lexical choices?
2. What linguistic shifts in the Transitivity system and lexical choices are evident in the reconstruction of war reality in the two English translations, and what translation strategies are employed in these shifts?
3. What can be inferred about the translators' orientation and the ideological implications of the reconstructed 'war reality' in the two English versions of *The Sorrow of War*?

1.4. Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to a comparative linguistic analysis of Bảo Ninh's *Nỗi Buồn Chiến Tranh* (1990) and its two English versions: the 1992/2005 translation by Phan Thanh Hảo and the 1994/1998 adaptation by Frank Palmos. The corpus comprises seventy-two purposively selected excerpts drawn from across the novels, representing key textual domains where war reality is linguistically construed through experiential meaning. The analysis focuses specifically on the transitivity system and lexical choices as realized in the experiential metafunction of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) Transitivity system, thereby excluding detailed treatment of interpersonal or textual metafunctions such as modality, appraisal, or thematic structure.

While the primary analysis remains textual, the research also draws selectively on paratextual materials – including published interviews and a personal interview with Phan Thanh Hảo – to illuminate the translator's stated intentions and decision-making processes. These sources are treated as supporting evidence for interpreting initial norms under Toury's framework, complementing the systematic analysis of operational norms reflected in the linguistic data. The research, however, does not extend to reception studies, reader-response analysis, or comparative evaluation of subsequent re-editions.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study holds significant theoretical, methodological, and practical implications for several fields, particularly translation studies, Vietnamese literary studies, and discourse analysis.

By fusing Toury's descriptive norms, Halliday's transitivity system, and Lefevere's notion of rewriting constraints, complemented by Venuti's orientations of domestication and foreignisation, this research establishes an analytical bridge between translation as a social act and as a linguistic process. The present study thus provides a model for conducting a comparative translation analysis by integrating a micro-level linguistic tool with a macro-level theoretical framework, specifically how 'war reality' is linguistically reconstructed across the two English versions of the source text, which ultimately reveals respective translation orientations and ideological implications.

This research addresses a critical gap in scholarship concerning Vietnamese literary studies and intercultural communication. By focusing on *The Sorrow of War* this study offers a unique opportunity to: (1) enhance the visibility and understanding of how Vietnamese literary traditions, particularly those depicting sensitive historical events like the war mentioned in Bảo Ninh's novel, are mediated to a global English-speaking audience; (2) provide a comprehensive analysis of how different translational approaches and ideological positions can shape the interpretation and reproduction of a significant Vietnamese literary work, thereby fostering greater intercultural understanding, enhancing global awareness of Vietnamese literary and historical experience.

By precisely discriminating between the translational choices of Phan Thanh Hảo and Frank Palmos in reconstructing the 'war reality' of Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War*, the research: (1) provides a concrete model for translation pedagogy; (2) highlights the role of the translator as a co-creator and cultural mediator; (3) provide valuable insights for Vietnamese literary studies.

1.6. Structure of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters, each focusing on a specific aspect of the research.

- Chapter 1 introduces the background and aims of the study, outlining the research questions and objectives prior to the scope and significance of the study.
- Chapter 2 reviews the literature on war literature, particularly Vietnam War literature, literary and linguistic representation of war reality and the relevant translation theories. This chapter also examines previous studies, globally and locally, in order to expose the research gaps. The conceptual framework is presented prior to chapter summary.
- Chapter 3 presents the research methodology, starting with the research paradigm, the theoretical framework, research approach and design, research method prior to the analytical framework for data analysis.
- Chapter 4 discusses the research results under the norms of Descriptive Translation Studies, presenting a linguistic – thematic analysis that configures the war reality in the source text and its two translations.
- Chapter 5 rounds up with a summary of key findings, contributions to Translation Studies, practical and theoretical implications, as well as limitations and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the key theoretical and empirical literature that informs the present study. Ultimately, this culminates in a conceptual framework that synthesizes the reviewed theories and constructs.

2.2. War Literature

2.2.1. Definition and Characteristics

The literature of war considers texts treating the diverse impacts of war on those who experience it, whether as soldiers or civilians, and examines the ways in which war is transformed through writing. War literature has traditionally fulfilled a broad range of functions that extend beyond simple narration of events: it is not only aesthetic, heroic and nationalistic, psychological and personal, mythic and cultural, it is also deeply engaged with moral and social questions while demystifying war (Brosman 1992; Dawes, 2009; Calloway, 2013).

2.2.2. Vietnam War in Literature

The Vietnam War in literature is constructed in fundamentally different ways across national traditions through a variety of narrative strategies ranging from realism and personal testimony to allegory, trauma narrative, and transnational critique. American texts emphasise trauma, moral ambiguity, and cultural memory, often experimenting with allegorical or fragmented forms to grapple with the war's incoherence. Vietnamese narratives, particularly those translated into English, destabilise both American myth-making and official state narratives, foregrounding contested memory, trauma, disillusionment, and the everyday human costs of conflict (Herbele, 2009; Q.M.Ha, 2016; Wood, 2016; Calloway, 2017; Herzog, 2017).

2.3. Representation of War Reality

Jameson (2009) discusses how European aesthetics have evolved through realist and post-realist approaches to depicting war, identifying eight recurring frameworks that shape how war is represented in Western literature.

2.3.1. Literary Representation of War Reality

Representation, explained by Webb (2008) in broad terms, is the communicative act of conveying or portraying individuals, concepts, and lived experiences through language, images and other expressive forms. While historical or scientific texts represent particulars (real objects or events), literature often represents types – patterns of human behavior, emotions, and social realities. Literary representation therefore offers knowledge not through factual truth but through illustrative understanding – by showing how people think, act, and feel. It conveys insights into moral, emotional, and existential realities through imaginative exemplification. Literary representation of reality is a complex epistemological and textual phenomenon where literary works do not merely mirror the world but actively construct and mediate it. Each literary system reflects its society's worldview, ideology, and moral codes, influencing how human experience (e.g. war, suffering, or identity) is depicted (Caroll, 1999; Young, 1999; Neumann, 2008). This view is further consolidated by Christodoulou (2013) and Davidson (2018) who converge on the idea that authors/ presenters make deliberate choices, for example narrative techniques or selection of specific elements that shape the reader's understanding of 'reality'. War reality is therefore

portrayed differently across cultures (Christopher, 1995; Fabiszak, 2007; Middleton, 2008; Martin, 2012).

2.3.2. Linguistic Representation of War Reality

Rosenberg (1974) defines linguistic representation as one species of symbolic representation involving a system of naming, reference, or denotation. Fuchs (1999) positions linguistic representation as a constructive, dynamic process through which each language organizes reality according to its cognitive and cultural logic.

2.3.2.1. Lexical Semantics

The componential analysis shows how war reality in Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* is expressed across physical, psychological, temporal, and spiritual dimensions. By establishing key semantic features, this componential analysis paves the way for a thematic examination of the representation of war reality in translation.

2.3.2.2. Systemic Functional Linguistics as tools for Representation

Language functions as a resource for constructing human experience. Through naming, it organizes phenomena into categories and further arranges these categories into taxonomies, thereby transforming experience into meaning. This meaning potential is captured by what Halliday terms the 'ideational metafunction' of language or experiential meaning because it originates from the clause as a representation of reality (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). The system in which every clause can be understood as a representation of experience, in SFL, is the transitivity system (Simpson, 2003; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). The central question asked in a transitivity analysis is 'who or what does what to whom or what?', modelling through a process, participants, and circumstances.

2.3.2.2.1. Processes

Halliday lists out six common types of processes in English in the transitivity system: Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioral, and Existential processes. 'Material' clauses are clauses of 'doing' and/ or 'happening' with Actor, Goal as participants. Mental clauses can be perceptive (seeing, hearing), cognitive (processes of deciding, knowing, or understanding), desiderative (i.e. want or wish something), and emotive (i.e. like, hate, fear etc.) within the structure of *Senser + Process + Phenomenon*. Relational clauses serve to characterize (attributive) and to identify (identifying) with a Carrier as the participant. Behavioral processes are typically human physiological and psychological behaviours of a Behaver. Verbal clauses refer to a Sayer, contributing to the creation of narrative by making it possible to set up dialogic passages. Existential clauses represent something that exists or happens.

2.3.2.2.2. Participants

Participants, in the SFL transitivity system, are central to understanding *who does what to whom* in the presentation of war reality. In the context of *The Sorrow of War*, participants frequently represent soldiers, civilians, enemies, nations, as well as abstract forces such as memory or ideology. By tracing how actors, goals, and other participant roles are named, categorized, or generalized in translation, the analysis reveals how the war reality of the source text is reconstructed or reframed in English.

2.3.2.2.3. Circumstances

The circumstantial elements in the Transitivity system occur freely in all types of processes, carrying essentially the same significance wherever they appear. A circumstance can be thought of as a mini-process that attaches itself to a main process, denoting extent, location, manner, cause, contingency, accompaniment, role, matter, or angle.

2.4. Translation of War Narratives

2.4.1. Literary Translation: Definition and Nature

Literary works often engage with subjective experience, emotion, and imagination, utilizing language in ways that prioritise connotative meaning, stylistic innovation, and ambiguity (Leech & Shorts, 2007). Literary translation is a hybrid and complex activity. It is an act that mediates between two literary systems and cultural traditions (Hermans, 2007; Koster, 2014). Literary translations have a unique purpose: to enable readers to perceive the original text's intended impact and effects, even if they do not experience them in the exact same way as the original audience might have (Boase-Beier, 2014). However, the challenges and solutions encountered in literary translation illuminate a wide array of issues: the role of the translator's agency, the transformative nature of translation (where texts are re-created for new audiences), the interplay between source and target cultural systems (e.g. Polysystem theory), and the ethical implications of representational choices (Bassnett, 2013; Tymoczko, 2014; Giraldo, 2018; Rosi, 2018; Baker, 2018b).

2.4.2. Role of Translated Literature

Evan-Zohar (1979) proposed the Polysystem theory, repositioning translated literature as an active and functional part of literary history, rather than a secondary or derivative activity. When translated literature occupies a central position in the literary polysystem, it is likely to be identified with major events in literary history when these are taking place and there is no "clear-cut distinction" between translated writings and writings originally produced in the target system. When translated literature assumes a peripheral position in the polysystem, it is modelled according to norms already conventionally established by an already dominant type in the target language – those already discarded by the prevailing literary center, whether recently or in the distant past. Understanding the role of translated literature is particularly relevant for the present study since Vietnamese literature in English translation still occupies a peripheral position in the global literary polysystem. However, Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* represents a case where translation enabled a Vietnamese war narrative to enter the international system and gain central visibility, especially through Pálmos's version (1994/1998), which was adapted to meet the expectations of Western literary markets.

2.4.3. Vietnamese Literature in English Translation

For much of the twentieth century, Vietnamese literature was underrepresented in world literature due to linguistic barriers, political ideologies (Pham, 2011). While early translations focused largely on folklores, poetry, the Đổi Mới era (from 1986 onwards) opened Vietnam further to international readerships, bringing war and post-war fiction into English through diverse thematic patterns. Scholars note the Vietnamese literature in translation serves as a counterpoint to dominant American narratives of the Vietnam War. However, the representation of Vietnamese voices in the global literature is limited. The translated corpus also reveals asymmetries of representation: Vietnamese war literature, in particular, is frequently mediated by foreign translators and editors,

raising questions about how Vietnam's cultural memory is reconstructed or reframed for Anglophone audiences.

2.4.4. Descriptive Translation

According to Toury's (2012) DTS, even if two translations appear linguistically identical, they differ in meaning, function, or interpretation if produced at distinct times or in varied cultures. In this respect, DTS provides the theoretical foundation for this thesis, where translation shifts are not judged as 'right' or 'wrong', but described and explained in terms of cultural and linguistic patterns. Toury introduces the concept of translation norms, or 'regularities of translation behavior': the initial norms (a general choice made by translators), preliminary norms (translation policy and directness of translation), and operational norms (matricial and textual-linguistic norms).

Toury presents a three-phase methodology for systemic Descriptive Translation Studies (Munday et al., 2022). First, the text is situated within the target culture system to observe its significance or acceptability. Secondly, a textual analysis of the ST and TT is undertaken in order to identify relationships between corresponding segments. In the final phase, recurring patterns are generalized to reconstruct the overall process of translation for that ST-TT pair. This systematic approach is particularly relevant to the present study, which seeks to trace how Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* is reshaped in English through identifiable linguistic shifts.

Toury fundamentally asserts that the description and explanation of shifts in translation ought to be concerned with the dynamics of culture rather than the static contrastive description of languages alone. Shifts, from this DTS perspective, are therefore seen as crucial empirical evidence of the translator's operational norms and the strategies employed to render a source text for a new target audience and literary polysystem.

2.4.5. Domestication and Foreignisation

Venuti (2017) argues that translation is always an intervention, a selective and interpretive act that yields not an equivalent but an approximation or representation of the foreign text, embedded within the target culture. He frames translation as fundamentally ethical attitudes towards a foreign text and culture through the twin concepts of 'domestication' and 'foreignisation', manifesting in both the selection of texts for translation and the specific strategies deployed during the translation process. Domestication produces a translation that reads as transparent, fluent, and in essence, 'invisible', thereby minimizing any sense of foreignness for the target audience. This frequently aligns with the existing literary canons and commercial interest of target culture. Meanwhile, foreignization consciously departs from the dominant cultural values and fluent norms of the target language by emphasizing a close adherence to aspects of the source text's structure, syntax, and cultural specificities, even at the risk of appearing less 'natural' or 'transparent' to the target audience.

2.4.6. Translation as Rewriting

While Toury's descriptive framework illuminates how translators operate within systemic norms of adequacy and acceptability, it offers limited insight into the external cultural and ideological forces that determine why translators make certain decisions. Lefevere (2016) expands this discussion to include the broader mechanism of ideology, poetics and patronage that governs the production and reception of translated literature. He introduces the concept of 'rewriting' which serves as an umbrella term encompassing all forms of textual mediation – translation, editing, adaptation – each shaped by a complex interplay of ideological, poetological and institutional

constraints. Lefevere underscores two principal forces that exert influence on the act of rewriting: poetics and ideology; the former belonging to internal constraint within the literary system, while the latter an external constraint encompassing the broader societal beliefs, values, political systems, ethical stances, and power structures of the target culture. Lefevere's notion of rewriting significantly extends Toury's Descriptive Translation Studies, particularly by enriching the less-discussed dimension of preliminary norms. Lefevere's framework enables this study to link the linguistic shifts identified in the transitivity and lexical analysis to their contextual causes in the ideological and poetic system of the culture in which they are produced.

2.4.7. The Causes of Translation

The causes of translation encompass a wide range of socio-cultural, political, literary, and market factors that motivate and shape the production of translations. Literary demand – as explained by Even-Zohar's Polysystem theory – made space for a Vietnamese war narrative in English; institutional and ideological patronage – as highlighted by Lefevere – shaped the different forms each translation took; preliminary norms – as theorized by Toury – explain why two versions came into being; and strategic choices of domestication and foreignization – as articulated by Venuti – reveal how these translations were positioned for different readerships. For the present study, recognizing these causes is crucial: they provide the contextual backdrop for the translation shifts and strategies analysed at the textual level. Hào's translation reflects the cause of domestic cultural export, prioritizing adequacy; Palmos's version reflects the cause of international market demand, prioritizing acceptability. These causes, therefore, underpin the translators' operational norms and directly shape how Bảo Ninh's war reality is reconstructed in English.

2.4.8. Translation Strategies

Strategies provide insight into the conscious or unconscious choices translators make when encountering challenges, leading to observable translation shifts in the target language.

2.4.8.1. Newmark's Semantic and Communicative Translation

Newmark's (1988) 'flattened V diagram' conceptually illustrates a spectrum of methods ranging from source language-oriented (e.g. word-for-word, literal translation) to target language-oriented (e.g. adaptation, communicative translation). While these methods describe general translation philosophies, it is his translation procedures that offer specific insights into the micro-level linguistic manipulations that result in shifts.

2.4.8.2. Explication and Implication

The concept of translation shifts was first introduced by Catford (1965) and further discussed by other scholars (Popoviè, 1970; Klaudy, 2003; Hatim & Munday, 2019). Klaudy believes that explication and implication (i.e. transfer operations) are always the results of translation strategies and introduces a detailed typology of lexical and grammatical transfer operations that contribute to these shifts. Since Toury's DTS does not detail on specific types of obligatory or non-obligatory shifts, this research will adopt Klaudy's framework on explication and implication in describing the observable shifts that take place between the ST and TTs under study.

2.5. Previous Studies and Research Gaps

2.5.1. Global Scholarship

Studies of war literature have long emphasized its memorializing and critical functions. Brosman (1992) identifies war literature as a form of cultural testimony, while Fussell (2009) examines how literary traditions emerging from World War I shaped later representations of war. Burns (2006) focuses on the Vietnam War specifically, arguing that allegory became a preferred narrative strategy to capture the conflict's ambiguity. Boyle (2014), as summarized by Rísquez (2017), expands the scope by bringing together American and Vietnamese perspectives. These studies are invaluable in identifying the central themes of war narratives and revealing a contextual gap with Western texts being privileged over Vietnamese narratives. A related body of scholarship (Mostafa, 2009; Roland & Arva, 2014; Tembo, 2017; Abubakar & Abubakar, 2017) underscores the conceptual significance of trauma and memory for understanding war narratives; however, they remain at the level of high-level literary interpretation. Their methodologies are predominantly qualitative and thematic, rather than empirical or linguistic. Another small body of work on Vietnamese literature in translation also shows little concern for micro-linguistic shifts. Even a few minor studies into Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* in translation tend to adopt literary or linguistic viewpoints, rather than translation perspectives.

When it comes to methodological considerations, a number of studies exemplifies the potential of combining descriptive translation theories with systemic linguistic analysis (Elyono, 2014; Yin Ng, 2009; Elnaili, 2014; Abualadas, 2015). However, they also reveal a methodological gap: although SFL has been applied in literary translation studies, it has not yet been systematically used to investigate the reconstruction of war narratives.

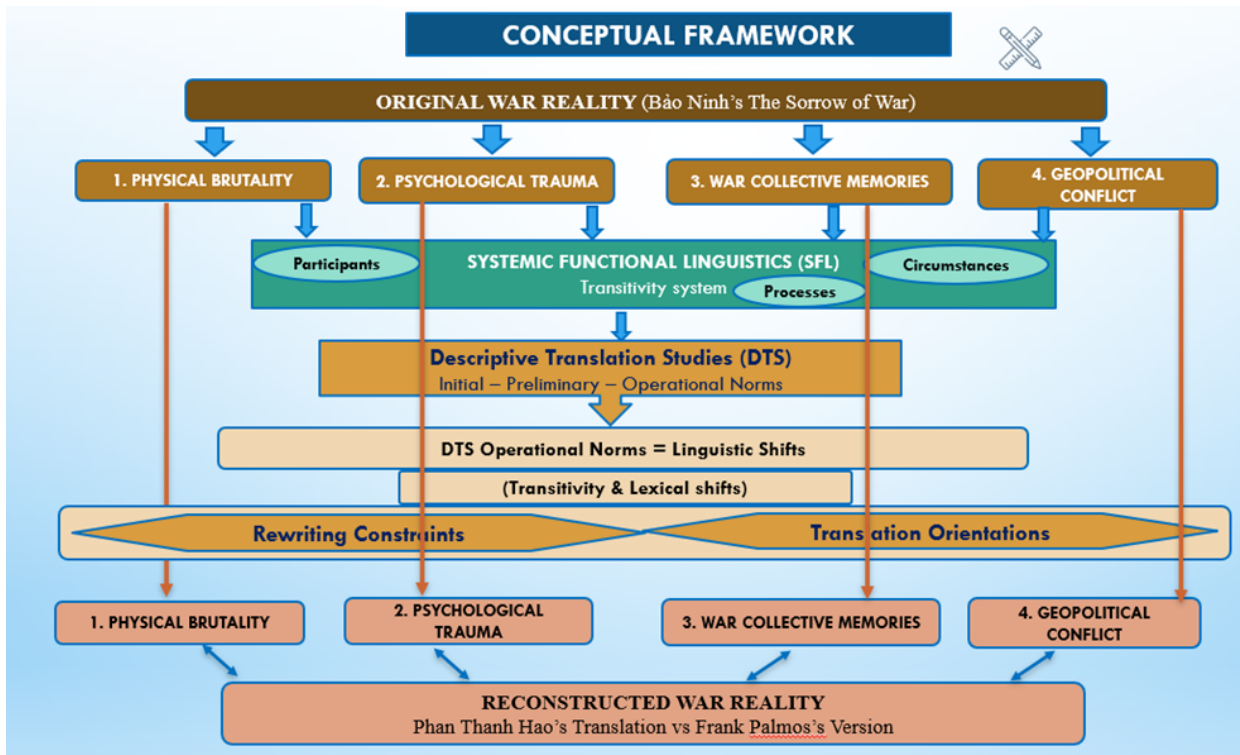
2.5.2. Literary Translation Research in Vietnam

Studies conducted in Vietnam reveal similar limitations to those observed globally, with a strong emphasis on equivalence and micro-linguistic shifts but little engagement with broader narrative and ideological concerns (Pham, 2021; Luong, 2014; Nguyen and Nguenyn, 2020; Thuy, 2015; Trieu, 2018). There exists a plentitude of critical writings on *The Sorrow of War* in both Vietnamese and English but they tend to focus on literary aspects or linguistic issues (Ngo, 2011; Quan Manh Ha, 2016; Qui-Phiet, 2019; Thanh, 2024). Few minor studies have turned to Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* in translation (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2025). However, the analysis remains at the thematic level or and does not address how these features are reproduced in translation.

2.5.3. Research gaps

There are a number of gaps from the review of previous studies. First, trauma, memory, or war reality and ideology are rarely operationalized into analyzable linguistic categories (conceptual gap). Second, most precedented studies remain thematic and interpretive rather than empirical and linguistic (methodological gap). Third, Vietnamese war narratives remain underrepresented compared to American ones (contextual gap). Finally, no systematic comparative study of the two English versions of *The Sorrow of War* exists (empirical gap).

2.6. Conceptual Framework



2.7. Chapter Summary

This chapter has established the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the study by situating *The Sorrow of War* and its translations within a wider scholarly discussion of war literature, representation, and translation. The chapter also presents a discussion of previous studies on war literature, trauma, memory, and literary translation, identifying major conceptual, methodological, and contextual gaps in both global and Vietnamese scholarship.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter details the methodological approach employed to address the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 and the research gaps identified in Chapter 2. The ultimate purpose is to introduce an analytical framework for data analysis and discussion of findings.

3.2. Research Paradigm

The present study adopts an interpretivist paradigm, which aligns with the qualitative nature of the research and its focus on understanding how meaning is constructed and recontextualized through translation.

3.3. Theoretical Framework

This study employs an integrative theoretical framework that brings together Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Toury's (2012) Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), and Lefevere's (2016) Rewriting Theory, complemented by insights from Venuti's notions of domestication and foreignization as descriptive orientation categories.

3.3.1. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

In the context of this study, SFL transitivity analysis exposes how war reality is realized through specific process types: Material processes dominate the depiction of physical actions, violence, and destruction; Mental processes articulate fear, obsession, and psychological fragmentation; Relational and Existential processes describe moral states, loss, and collective reflection; Behavioral processes capture the borderline between physical and psychological response.

3.3.2. Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS)

Operating at the systemic level, DTS provides the structural framework through which textual shifts are interpreted as manifestations of translational behavior rather than individual idiosyncrasy. The three interrelated norms inform the present analysis are initial norms, preliminary norms, and operational norms.

3.3.3. Lefevere's Rewriting Theory

Translation is a form of rewriting that adapts a text to fit the poetological and ideological norms of the receiving culture. This perspective provides the explanatory foundation for the present study: observed linguistic shift – such as omissions, additions, or reformulations identified through transitivity and lexical analysis – are interpreted as manifestations of these broader rewriting constraints shaping how *The Sorrow of War* is recontextualized for distinct literary and ideological environments.

3.3.4. Venuti's Orientation: Foreignisation versus Domestication

For this study, Venuti's framework of domestication and foreignization provides the supplementary, descriptive lens for reading the outcomes of Toury's norm-governed translation shifts at both linguistic and compositional levels.

3.4. Research Approach and Design

3.4.1. Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-method approach (Creswell & Clark, 2017). In this approach, a qualitative analysis forms the core of the investigation, while basic quantitative counts provide supporting evidence and pattern recognition.

3.4.2. Research Design

This study employs a descriptive, comparative and product-oriented case study research design (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014) focusing on a single, bounded case: Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* and its two English translations. The design unfolds through three interrelated stages, corresponding to Toury's three analytical levels: macro-positioning (preliminary and initial norms), meso-level (operational norms), and micro-to-macro integration (thematic analysis).

3.5. Research Method

3.5.1. Corpus Selection

Published forms of the data were obtained before digitalization. For systemic comparison, the texts were imported in Excel spreadsheet with a paralleled corpus presented in three columns (ST-TT1-TT2) displaying each annotated sentence in a separate row. Passages were purposely sampled from the entire novel because they lexically and grammatically instantiate aspects of 'war reality' as operationalized in this study (death/ destruction; trauma/ haunting; memory/collective loss; geopolitical naming and ideological stance).

3.5.2. Data Preparation

The data preparation process unfolded in three main phrases: phase 1 is lexical-semantic flagging and extraction; phase 2 is transitivity coding (SFL); and phase 3 is thematic categorization and organization. An inter-coder cross-check was performed to confirm the reliability of the coded data.

3.5.3. Data Analysis Procedure

3.5.3.1. Linguistic Analysis

Each clause was analysed for Process types (Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioral, Existential), Participants (Actor, Senser, Carrier/ Token, Sayer, Behaver, Phenomenon, etc.) and Circumstances (location, time, manner, cause, accompaniment, and others). Results of transitivity and lexical coding were systematically compiled into analytical tables (see Appendix C) that summarize each feature for the ST, TT1 and TT2.

3.5.3.2. Identification of Translation Shifts

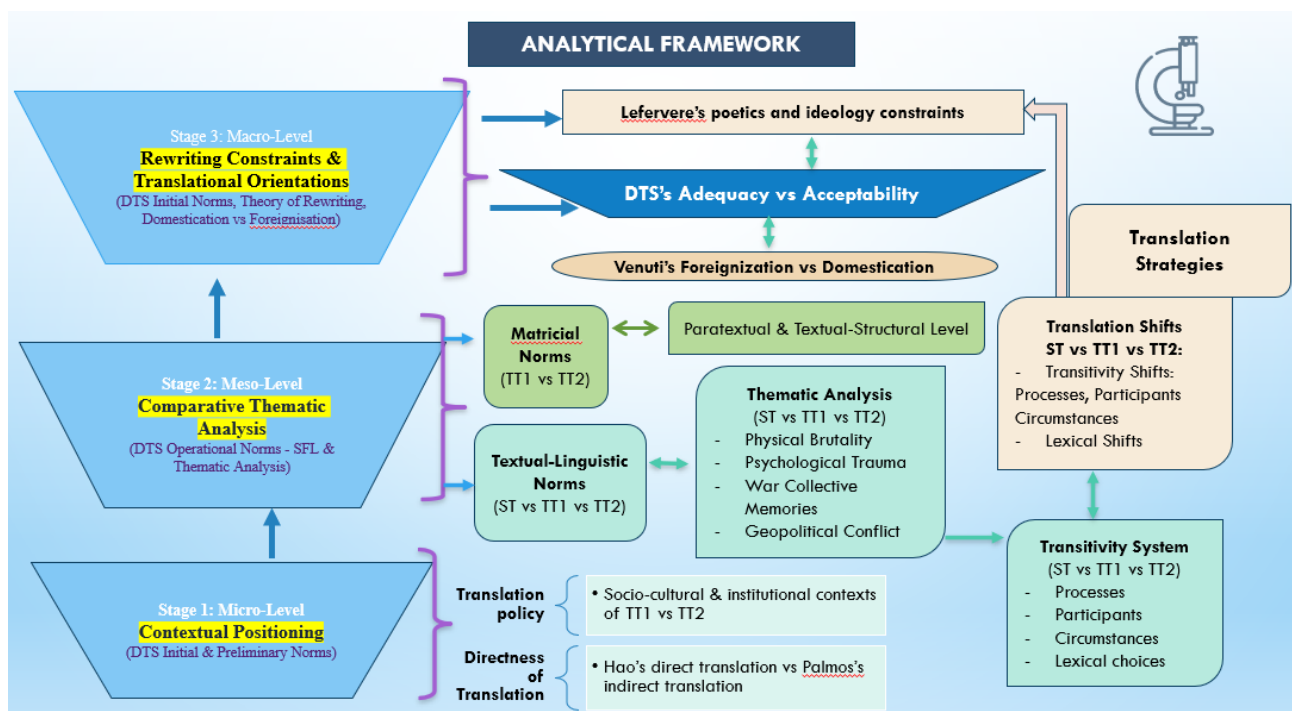
Every difference between the source and target texts was recorded as a translation shift such as (1) a process shift (e.g. a Mental process in the ST rendered as a Material Process in the TT), (2) a Participant shift (e.g. omission or addition of an Actor or Affected), or (3) a lexical shift (e.g. replacing a neutral term with a more expressive or ideologically charged one, or vice versa). Each shift was then classified under theoretically recognized categories such as explicitation, implicitation, transposition, modulation, addition, omission, or literal rendering.

3.5.3.3. Thematic Analysis of War Reality in *The Sorrow of War*

At the operational level, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) aligned closely with Toury's descriptive model. The lexical-semantic flagging and extraction work as initial coding for thematic categorization. Four major themes emerged as consistent across the corpus: physical brutality, psychological trauma, war collective memories, and geopolitical conflict. These themes provided the conceptual bridge between micro-linguistic analysis and macro-level interpretation, allowing the study to trace how *Nỗi Buồn Chiến Tranh/ The Sorrow of War*'s portrayal of violence, trauma, memory, and ideology was linguistically realized in Vietnamese and strategically configured in English.

3.6. Analytical Framework

The present study integrates Toury's three analytical stages (Munday, 2022) with Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), thematic analysis, Lefevere's rewriting theory and Venuti's domestication versus foreignization orientations. This allows for a systematic movement from textual evidence to interpretation of rewriting constraints and translational orientations. Stage 1 is micro-level, discussing contextual positioning (DTS Initial and Preliminary Norms). Stage 2 is meso-level, conducting comparative linguistic analysis within Thematic Framework (DTS Operational Norms). Stage 3 is macro-level, examining rewriting constraints and translational orientation (DTS Initial Norms confirmation).



3.7. Chapter Summary

This chapter established a rigorous methodological foundation for the ensuing analysis and findings which will follow the analytical framework to examine how war reality is constructed in the source text and reconstructed across the two English versions.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and findings of how Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow War* (ST) and its two English translations (TT1 by Phan Thanh Hảo and TT2 by Frank Palmos) reconstruct the novel's war reality through linguistic and ideological mediation.

4.2. Results from Analysis of Initial Norms

The quantitative overview of transitivity data reveals distinct translational orientations between the two English versions. The source text (ST) contains 157 sentences and 427 processes (2.72 processes per sentences), confirming Bao Ninh's lexically dense, process-heavy prose that conveys the simultaneity and fragmentation of war experience.

Phan Thanh Hảo's translation (TT1) expands the text slightly to 199 sentences with 407 processes (2.05 per sentence), showing that while she simplifies syntactical structure for readability, she largely preserves the ST's semantic density and multiplicity of actions. Her strategy demonstrates an adequacy-oriented approach, maintaining the psychological and experiential realism of the original. Hảo herself, in interviews, acknowledged the tension between faithfulness and readability, emphasizing her desire "to keep the author's obsessional tone and inner voice intact for international readers unfamiliar with Vietnamese war experience".

Frank Palmos's version (TT2) contains 183 sentences and 378 processes (2.06 per sentence), reflecting systematic condensation and omission of processes. This reduction signals a shift toward target-oriented rewriting, prioritizing narrative fluency and emotional accessibility. Palmos's own admission that he reconstructed the text "for international readers" (Palmos, 2011) confirms this acceptability orientation.

4.3. Results from Analysis of Preliminary Norms

According to Toury's framework, preliminary norms address translation policy and directness of translation, revealing the institutional and cultural forces shaping the two English versions of *The Sorrow of War*. Phan Thanh Hảo's 1992 translation emerged under Vietnam's post-war cultural diplomacy, which sought to promote national reconciliation and literary visibility abroad. Produced directly from the Vietnamese source and published by the *Women's Publishing House*, her version reflects a direct translation approach aligned with state-endorsed policies emphasizing cultural authenticity and the preservation of national identity. It was conceived less as a commercial product than as a vehicle for representing modern Vietnamese perspectives on war. In contrast, Palmos's 1994/2005 version, commissioned by Secker & Warburg and later reissued by Vintage Classics, reflects an indirect translation – based on Hảo's original translation rather than the Vietnamese source. Guided by Western editorial patronage, it was reshaped for global readership through linguistic smoothing, narrative coherence, and heightened emotional immediacy. This approach prioritizes cultural accessibility and market appeal over linguistic fidelity.

4.4. Representation of War Reality in Translations under Operational Norms

4.4.1. Matricial Norms

4.4.1.1. Phan Thanh Hảo's translation (TT1)

The 1992/2005 *Women's Publishing House* edition of *The Sorrow of War* (translated by Phan Thanh Hao, with Võ Bằng Thanh and Katerina A. Pierce) reflects matricial norms shaped by

Vietnam's early post-war publishing system. At the paratextual level, the title page foregrounds Bảo Ninh's authorship, with translators' names in smaller type, emphasizing collectivist authorship and state control typical of early 1990s Vietnam. The *Women's Publishing House* imprint further marks the translation as a state-approved cultural product rather than a commercial enterprise. The absence of a translator's preface or contextual notes suggests an implicit orientation toward bilingual or Vietnamese diaspora readers presumed familiar with the war, while simultaneously downplaying the text's translated status – a form of matricial domestication that conceals mediation. At the textual level, Hào retains the original narrative organization and paragraphing, reproducing Bảo Ninh's long, multi-clausal sentences and fragmented stream of consciousness. Minimal structural adjustments – mainly standardized punctuation and occasional sentence segmentation – serve readability without compromising fidelity. Overall, Phan Thanh Hào's translation embodies matricial adequacy – its paratext, structure, and textual presentation align closely with the source text's material and ideological form.

4.4.1.2. Frank Palmos's version (TT2)

The *Vintage Classics* edition of *The Sorrow of War* (1994/1998) marks a major reconfiguration of matricial norms, reflecting its relocation into the Western literary marketplace. At the paratextual level, the cover adopts vivid wartime imagery and the *Vintage Classics* branding, situating the novel within the global canon. While Bảo Ninh's name appears prominently, the translator is omitted – reflecting the translator invisibility typical of Anglophone publishing (Venuti, 2000). Inside, the title page reads 'English version by Frank Palmos from the original translation by Phan Thanh Hao', a phrasing that hierarchically positions Palmos as adaptor and Hào as secondary contributor. This paratextual framing exemplifies Lefevere's 'rewriting under patronage', aligning the edition with Western editorial norms privileging readability, coherence, and marketability. The back cover blurb further redefines the novel as "the Vietnamese '*All Quiet on the Western Front*', marketing it through a Western lens of humanist anti-war narrative and political dissidence ('banned by the Communist Party'). At the textual-structural level, Palmos reorganizes the narrative for linear clarity – beginning with a chronologically anchored scene and restructuring chapters and paragraphing for smoother pacing. Dense, metaphorical prose is recast into shorter, more cinematic sentences, reflecting Toury's acceptability-oriented norms.

4.4.2. Textual-linguistic Norms

In this section, the analytical findings from tabular analyses (see Appendix C) are synthesized into coherent thematic narratives. Each section integrates micro-level description (processes, participants, and lexical shifts) with macro-level interpretation (translation strategies, rewriting constraints, and translation orientations).

4.4.2.1. Physical Brutality

4.4.2.1.1. Analysis of Representative Excerpts

The representation of 'war reality' as physical brutality is manifested across several focal aspects operationalized through seven analytical subgroups, each capturing a different experiential dimension of violence. These sub-groups are distinguished according to their transitivity configurations and semantic focus, reflecting varying ways in which brutality is linguistically and ideologically constructed. Specifically, (1) Direct Combats and Impacts with Implicit Agency (excerpts 1-4) depicts scenes of violence without identifiable human actors; (2) Direct Combats and Impacts with Explicit Agency (excerpts 5-9) foregrounds the participants directly responsible for acts of killing and destruction; (3) Direct Combats with Emphasis on Weaponry (excerpts 10-11)

highlights the material instruments of violence as the primary vehicles of action; (4) Deaths in Battlefield (excerpts 12-18) portrays the corporeal consequences of combat and the annihilation of human life; (5) Experiential Encounter of Hardship and Near-Death (excerpts 19-20) conveys the physical endurance and vulnerability of soldiers under extreme war conditions; (6) Battlefield Environment (excerpts 21-26) reconstructs the war-torn landscape as a sensory and moral extension of human suffering; and (7) Gendered Brutality in War (excerpts 27-28) focuses on the bodily and sexualized violence experienced by women in wartime.

4.4.2.1.2. Translational Representation of Physical Brutality

The analysis of physical brutality demonstrates how the translators' linguistic and stylistic choices reshape Bảo Ninh's depiction of war's corporeal and moral devastation. In the Vietnamese source text, brutality is rendered through dense configurations of Material, Behavioral, and Relational processes that dispense agency and naturalise violence: fire, bombs, and corpses act as agents, transforming war into an elemental rather than human phenomenon. Ellipsis, metaphor, and sensory imagery externalize violence as an existential condition, maintaining moral distance through linguistic abstraction.

Phan Thanh Hảo's translation (TT1) largely preserves these transitivity patterns but attenuates their extremity through lexical modulation and implicitation. Imagery is simplified and religious or moral connotations are softened, producing a restrained realism that maintains empathy without spectacle. TT1 therefore exemplifies adequacy-oriented translation under poetic and ethical constraints, translating horror through suggestion.

Frank Palmos's version (TT2) reconfigures these scenes through explicitation, addition, and narrative reordering. Human agents and political causality are inserted, and metaphoric or implicit violence becomes graphic and cinematic. This shift from perceptual Mental to Material process reflects acceptability-oriented norms shaped by Western expectations of psychological realism and journalistic immediacy.

Across the three versions, the war's brutality evolves from impersonal devastation (ST) to muted witness (TT1), to dramatized spectacle (TT2). These shifts illustrate how translation mediates not only linguistic representation but also moral perception – transforming collective endurance into individualized suffering and reframing Vietnamese silence into Western visibility.

4.4.2.2. Psychological Trauma

4.4.2.2.1. Analysis of Representative Excerpts

Psychological trauma exposes the invisible wounds of the mind – those formed through memory, guilt, and existential despair. For analytical clarity, this theme is categorized into five sub-groups according to distinct yet interrelated manifestation of trauma: (1) flashbacks and intrusive memories (excerpts 29-32); (2) post-war haunting and hallucination (excerpts 33-38); (3) post-war fear, avoidance, and temporal disorientation (excerpts 39-40); (4) moral crisis, dissociation in killing, and survivor's guilt (excerpts 41-43); and (5) existential despair and loss of hope (excerpts 44-45). Each group captures a different psychological process – ranging from immediate recollection to chronic hopelessness – and serves as the basis for analysing how these internal states are linguistically and ideologically reconstructed in translation.

4.4.2.2.2. Translatorial Representation of Psychological Trauma

The representation of psychological trauma in *Nỗi Buồn Chiến Tranh* captures the disintegration of post-war consciousness through fragmented perception, involuntary memory, and emotional numbness. In the Vietnamese source text, Bảo Ninh constructs trauma through recurrent Mental and Behavioral processes that externalize paralysis and dissociation – ‘không thể nào bước vào’, ‘trôi dạt trong bể khổ’, ‘ngây cứng toàn thân’. Temporal and circumstantial markers reinforce the persistence of memory, producing a cyclical temporality that mirrors the recursive nature of trauma.

In Phan Thanh Hào’s translation (TT1), these experiential configurations are retained but tempered through lexical simplification and syntactic clarity. Metaphorical violence and cultural idioms are modulated into accessible English expressions softening the sensory and emotional intensity of the original. Hào’s strategies of implicitation and modulation balance authenticity with readability, maintaining fidelity to experiential meaning while adhering to adequacy-oriented. Her translation thus reflects a moral and aesthetic restraint consistent with Vietnamese poetics of empathy and silence.

Frank Palmos’s version (TT2), however, reconfigures trauma as narrative coherence. Through additions, omissions, and reordering, Palmos transforms fragmented memory into reflective self-narration, shifting trauma from inward dislocation to articulated testimony. The inclusion of explicit references such as ‘the Vietnam War’ reframes the narrative within a global, humanist discourse.

Overall, TT1 maintains the fragmented inner experience of trauma, while TT2 domesticates it into a Western style of personal confession and emotional release. This shift – from haunting silent suffering to a clearly articulated narrative – exemplifies how translation mediates between staying true to the original culture and making the text ideologically accessible to new readers.

4.4.2.3. War Collective Memories

4.4.2.3.1. Analysis of Representative Excerpts

The theme of war collective memories foregrounds the interconnection between personal recollection and collective remembrance. It includes sub-clusters such as (1) corporeal memory of war (excerpts 46-48), (2) collective suffering (excerpts 49-50), (3) paradoxes of victory and futility (excerpts 51-52), (4) post-war disillusionment (excerpts 53-55), and (5) nostalgia and post-war grief (excerpts 56-57). These sub-clusters reveal how memory operates as both a linguistic and ideological resource for framing shared experiences of war, and how translators negotiate temporal ambiguity, generational identity, and emotional resonance in rendering such memories.

4.4.2.3.2. Translatorial Representation of War Collective Memories

The theme of war collective memories in *Nỗi Buồn Chiến Tranh* fuses remembrances, loss, and historical reflection to portray Vietnam’s shared wartime consciousness. In the Vietnamese source text, Bảo Ninh constructs memory as both experiential and ideological, blending individual recollection with collective suffering. Through Material and Relational clauses like ‘đời sống mục ra’ or ‘ngủ giấc ngàn năm’, human decay and temporal erosion are rendered as natural continuities. The use of passive and impersonal structures suppresses individual agency, turning memory into a communal endurance rather than personal heroism.

In Phan Thanh Hào's translation (TT1), this existential tone is retained but softened. Lexical modulation and simplification – such as translating 'hy sinh' as 'was killed' – reduces moral intensity while preserving structural fidelity. Hào's restraint reflects an adequacy-oriented approach that balances readability with the source's solemn tone, maintaining a quiet moral dignity aligned with Vietnamese memorial aesthetics.

By contrast, Frank Palmos's version (TT2) reframes collective memory as personalized history. Additions and reordering introduce deictic and temporal markers ('he had seen...', 'It was the morning of 30 April'), transforming collective remembrance into individual testimony. The impersonal landscape becomes vividly cinematic, aligning the narrative with Western conventions of war realism.

Across translations, memory shifts from collective endurance (ST) to restrained commemoration (TT1) and personalized reflection (TT2). This progression shows how translation mediates between Vietnam's ethics of silent remembrance and Western expectations of explicit testimony, turning national memory into shared human experience.

4.4.2.4. Geopolitical Conflict

4.4.2.4.1. Analysis of Representative Excerpts

This consists of two main clusters: battle and enemy representation, and ideological framing and political commentary. These clusters are specified into such sub-themes as (1) construction of combatants and enemy identification (excerpts 58-62), (2) macro-political contexts and ideologies (excerpts 63-65), (3) ideological and moral narrative of war (excerpts 66-67), (4) fractured national identity and humanization of the enemy (excerpts 68-70), (5) political disillusionment and ideological fatigue (excerpts 71-72), the analysis explores how political identities, military labels, and evaluative terms are translated, omitted, or reframed, thereby shifting the ideological positioning of the text between domestic and international readerships.

4.4.2.4.2. Translational Representation of Geopolitical Conflict

The theme of geopolitical conflict in *Nỗi Buồn Chiến Tranh* reveals how Bảo Ninh's language constructs both national duty and moral exhaustion. Through Material and Relational processes such as 'chống cự hăng' and 'sống mái với nhau', the source text presents war as reciprocal violence rooted in socialist ideology balancing collective heroism with human suffering. References to real locations like Kontum and Phước An anchor this conflict in national space, while impersonal grammar blurs the line between victory and futility.

Phan Thanh Hào's translation (TT1) keeps this structure but tones down ideological polarization. Pejorative collectives such as 'tụi Mỹ', 'bọn ngụy' become neutral terms like 'the Americans' or 'the Saigonese police', showing a moderating strategy that preserves accuracy but reduces political tension. By explicating references and retaining the collective moral tone, TT1 reflects a balance between faithfulness and accessibility – what Lefevere describes as rewriting under poetic and ethical constraints.

Frank Palmos's version (TT2) reshapes ideology through strong domestication and amplification. Expressions like 'quân ta' become 'NVA regulars' or 'northern forces', turning moral conflict into military reportage. Added Cold War references such as 'Polpot's allies', 'the Chinese' historicise Vietnam's struggle within global politics.

Overall, TT1 conveys moral reconciliation and national empathy, while TT2 reframes the same conflict as factual, apolitical history. The shift from ideological assertion to geopolitical neutrality exemplifies how translation mediates between national discourse and Western literary expectations, transforming moral testimony into transnational historiography.

4.5. Concluding remarks

This chapter examines how *Nỗi Buồn Chiến Tranh* and its two English versions reconstruct Vietnamese war reality through linguistic and ideological shifts under Toury's norms. Phan Thanh Hảo's translation preserves the source text's density and psychological realism, reflecting adequacy and cultural fidelity, while Frank Palmos's version simplifies structure and tone for Western readability, showing acceptability. Their differing institutional contexts – Vietnam's state publishing versus Western commercial patronage – shape contrasting strategies. Hảo's version maintains structural and tonal faithfulness, thereby reflecting foreignizing strategy; Palmos rewrites and domesticates the text for global audiences. Across four themes – physical brutality, psychological trauma, collective memory, and geopolitical conflict – the translations shift from moral restraint to visualisation and from collective endurance to individual testimony, from ideological assertion to political neutrality. These illustrate that translation is cultural mediation between Vietnamese ethics and global literary expectations.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

This chapter concludes the study by synthesizing key findings by answering the research questions. The chapter also discusses the contribution of the study to related disciplines, practical and theoretical implications before acknowledging the study's limitations and suggesting directions for future research.

5.2. Summary of Key Findings by Research Questions

5.2.1. RQ1 – Linguistic Construction of War Reality in the Source Text

The analysis shows that *Nỗi Buồn Chiến Tranh* constructs war reality primarily through Material processes (65%), portraying war as relentless physical action and destruction rather than abstract reflection. The dominance of action verbs and absence of dialogue highlight isolation, trauma, and the incommunicability of war. Behavioral and Mental processes depict sensory and emotional breakdowns, while Relational clauses express moral ambiguity and futility. This is also reflected in the fact that the themes of 'physical brutality' and 'psychological trauma' – two of the four themes representing 'war reality' that this thesis focuses on – are the most prominent in the data corpus.

Bảo Ninh fuses human, environmental, and mechanical forces into a continuum of violence, erasing agency to present war as a natural catastrophe. His dense, sensory language, e.g. 'máu', 'lửa', 'Kính! Kính! Kính!', creates experiential realism rather than ideology. Naming of war participants, e.g. 'quân ta', 'địch', 'tội Mỹ', shifts between empathy and distance, dissolving political binaries. Overall, Bảo Ninh's linguistic construction transforms war into an existential condition of suffering, memory, and endurance – an experiential of individuals rather than ideological portrayal of Vietnam's collective trauma.

5.2.2. RQ2 – Linguistic Shifts and Translation Strategies

The comparative analysis reveals distinct translational orientations in reconstructing or reproducing the war reality in *The Sorrow of War*. Phan Thanh Hào's translation (TT1) closely mirrors the source text's transitivity structure, preserving its Material and Behavioral processes and maintaining moral ambiguity (implication). Her strategy reflects adequacy, or foreignization, marked by literal rendering, moderated tone, and lexical neutrality. Ideological terms such as 'bọn ngụy' and 'tội Mỹ' are softened into neutral forms (the enemy, the Americans), reflecting moral universality and readability.

In contrast, Frank Palmos's version (TT2) exhibits acceptability-oriented rewriting, reshaping transitivity and expanding lexical fields, which is symmetrical to translation strategy of domestication. Agency shifts from collective to individual (often Kien), transforming collective trauma into personal narration. Lexical additions ('Vietnam War', 'ARVN', 'southern forces') historicize the text for Western readers, while omissions of local references and graphic intensification of violence domesticate the narrative into Western realism.

Overall, TT1 retains Bảo Ninh's fragmented moral realism, while TT2 reinterprets it through linear, individualized, and geopolitical framing influenced by domestication orientation. These contrasting strategies exemplify translation as cultural negotiation – balancing fidelity, ideology, and market-oriented accessibility in mediating Vietnamese war experience.

5.2.3. RQ3 – Translational Orientation and Ideological Implications

The analysis confirms that the two English versions of *The Sorrow of War* reflect divergent translational orientations and ideological rewritings. Phan Thanh Hào's translation (TT1) demonstrates an adequacy-oriented approach or foreignization orientation, preserving the source text's linguistic density, cultural markers, and moral ambiguity. Her fidelity to Material and Behavioral processes and the retention of culturally embedded lexemes maintain the collective ethics and emotional constraint of Vietnamese war memory. The modest paratext and institutional context of the Women's Publishing House reinforce translation as national representation and cultural diplomacy.

Frank Palmos's version (TT2), in contrast, shows an acceptability-oriented rewriting aligned with Western literary and market norms, thereby orientating toward domestication. Through linguistic simplification, explicit geopolitical labeling, and narrative restructuring, Palmos reframes the text as a universal anti-war narrative and psychological testimony. Ideological domestication replaces collective endurance with individual trauma, transforming the Vietnamese moral narrative into Western humanist realism.

Together, these orientations reveal translation as cultural rewriting – where adequacy sustains authenticity, and acceptability enables globalization, demonstrating how war reality shifts from national memory to transnational discourse.

5.3. Contribution to Translation and Discourse Studies

This study contributes to translation and discourse studies by integrating Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), and Lefevere's rewriting theory to examine literary translation as both linguistic reconstruction and ideological negotiation. The model demonstrates how translation operates simultaneously as a linguistic act, cultural mediation, and site of power relations.

Through Halliday's transitivity system, the study reveals that shifts in process types, agency, and circumstance are not merely grammatical but reconfigure how war, trauma, and emotion are represented. The comparative analysis across *The Sorrow of War* and its two English versions show how translation can transform experiential fields – preserving collective realism (TT1) or reinterpreting it through individualized consciousness (TT2).

Applying Toury's norm framework situates these shifts within socio-cultural constraints: Hào's adequacy reflects Vietnam's cultural diplomacy, while Palmos's acceptability aligns with Western market expectations. Lefevere's rewriting theory further clarifies how ideological and poetic patronage shape representational choices.

Methodologically, the study proposes a replicable corpus-based, thematically coded model linking linguistic micro-analysis with discourse-level interpretation. Overall, it advances understanding of translation as cross-cultural discourse reconstruction, showing how linguistic form mediates war memory, ideology, and moral perception across cultures.

5.4. Practical and Theoretical Implications

The study offers key theoretical and practical insights into translation as a dynamic process of linguistic, ideological, and cultural negotiation. It shows that translating *The Sorrow of War* cannot be reduced to binaries such as adequacy versus acceptability; rather, translators move fluidly along this continuum depending on textual and contextual pressures. Hào's translation balances

fidelity and readability, while Palmos's adaptation blends accessibility with traces of authenticity, demonstrating that translation norms are adaptive, not oppositional.

Theoretically, the findings refine Toury's model by highlighting its flexibility and affirm Lefevere's view that poetic and ideological constraints intersect – where stylistic adjustments also serve ideological repositioning. Practically, the study underscores that translating war narratives involves ethical mediation: translators must balance cultural authenticity with communicative clarity while remaining aware of how linguistic choices reshape moral and emotional perspectives.

For Vietnamese literature, the two English versions illustrate how translation both disseminates and redefines national memory. Hảo's version conveys collective trauma and reconciliation, while Palmos reframes it as universal human suffering. Ultimately, translation emerges as a discursive and ethical act through which Vietnam's war experience is continually rewritten within global literary circulation.

5.5. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study, while providing an empirically grounded account of how *The Sorrow of War* and its two English versions reconstruct Vietnamese war reality, faces several limitations regarding corpus scope, methodological range, and analytical depth. The selected excerpts focused on core depictions of war, ensuring thematic coherence but excluding other narrative dimensions such as love or post-war life. Future research could expand the corpus to capture these broader contexts.

Methodologically, the study prioritized the experiential metafunction of SFL, leaving the interpersonal and textual metafunctions underexplored. Subsequent research could integrate these dimensions to reveal how translators reshape stance, cohesion, and thematic flow. Moreover, the study did not investigate reader reception; audience-based studies could assess how international readers interpret the translations' ideological and emotional effects.

Future comparative research could apply this analytical model to other translated Vietnamese war novels to trace recurring linguistic and ideological trends. Despite its limitations, the study establishes a solid foundation for interdisciplinary translation research linking linguistic precision, discourse analysis, and cultural mediation.

5.6. Closing Reflection

Addressing the overarching research question, this study concludes that translation functions as a form of linguistic and ideological rewriting. Shifts in transitivity and lexical choices across *The Sorrow of War* and its English versions systematically reshape how war reality is experienced and interpreted.

Phan Thanh Hảo's translation preserves Bảo Ninh's experiential density and moral ambiguity, maintaining the Vietnamese perspective of collective endurance and existential suffering. Frank Palmos's version, by contrast, reconfigures these meanings through simplification, clarification, and explicit narration, adapting the text to Western conventions of psychological realism and accessibility.

Under Lefevere's theory of rewriting, these differences reveal how ideology and cultural positioning shape translation. Each translator negotiates between fidelity to Vietnamese experience and acceptability within new literary and ideological systems. The two English versions, therefore, produce distinct moral and emotional readings of war – Hảo's collective sorrow and Palmos's individualized trauma.

The study concludes that translation acts as a bridge of cultural memory, turning Vietnam's collective war sorrow into a universal human experience accessible to readers worldwide.

Concluding Statement

The thesis has explored how *The Sorrow of War* and its two English translations reconstruct Vietnamese war reality through linguistic and ideological shifts that mediate memory, culture, and identity. By combining Systemic Functional Linguistics, Descriptive Translation Studies, and Lefevere's theory of rewriting, complemented by Venuti's domestication and foreignization orientations, it reveals translation as a form of cultural negotiation rather than mere linguistic transfer. Ultimately, the study affirms that the reconstruction of war reality in translation is not replication but re-interpretation, where language becomes a site of ideological mediation and cultural memory reconstruction.

THESIS-RELATED PUBLICATIONS

1. **Vu Thi Thu Thuy** (2023). Explication of Cohesive Devices in Two Vietnamese Translations of 'Pride and Prejudice'. *2023 International Graduate Research Symposium* 648-659. University of Language and International Studies, VNU: Vietnam National University Press, Hanoi.
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4. **Vu Thi Thu Thuy** (2025). Translating War Trauma: A Systemic Functional Analysis of Bảo Ninh's *The Sorrow of War*. *Proceedings of 2025 International Graduate Research Symposium*. University of Languages and International Studies, VNU: Vietnam National University Press, Hanoi.
5. Nguyen Thi Minh Tam, Truong Thi Anh, Nguyen Thi Thu Ha, Pham Thi Hanh, Vu Minh Huyen, Nguyen Thi Thuy Linh, Nguyen Tuan Minh, Doan Thi Nuong, **Vu Thi Thu Thuy** (2025). Linguistic Theories in Translation Studies in *English Linguistics – Language and Life*. 119-144. University of Languages and International Studies, VNU: Vietnam National University Press, Hanoi.