

# Survey of Vietnamese Students' Mistakes When Using Quantities in Chinese

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## ABSTRACT

The article comes from the writer's actual teaching experience. Through experience, homeworks, and tests, the writer realizes that mistakes in beginners in the early stages (1-2 year) are usually influenced by the mother tongue while mistakes of a person in years 3-4 often arise due to confusion between one formula and another. In this article, we apply mistake analysis and "intermediate language" reasoning to make statistics and classify and analyze the causes of students' mistakes, hoping to help learners to overcome the difficult points in the expression of multiples increased by N times in Chinese. On the other hand, we can provide for the teaching and learning of Chinese by Vietnamese people as well as the teaching and learning of Vietnamese by the fact that the Chinese people have some useful materials.

**Keywords:** Chinese, multiples, mistake, number of increments, original number

## 1 Introduction

The usage and structure of multiples in Vietnamese and Chinese have many similarities and differences. There are similarities in meaning and structure and differences in expression. The similarities make it easy for Vietnamese students learning Chinese to misunderstand the difference between these two languages is not much, so in the learning process, they often apply their mother tongue mechanically to Chinese, leading to mistakes due to differences in usage and expression. Through teaching, we found that the method of expressing Chinese multiples is not a difficult point for Vietnamese students, but it is more complicated than Vietnamese. Therefore, in the process of learning Chinese, it is often difficult to avoid errors in different degrees. We conducted a survey of 50 college students majoring in Chinese at various levels to get accurate data and analyze their mistakes, thereby offering appropriate teaching methods, helping students avoid mistakes.

## 2 Methodology

The article uses survey, statistical and analytical methods. The article uses survey, statistical and analytical methods. Conduct a survey of 50 students through exercises and tests to find out the cause of the mistake, analyze the error, and then come up with an appropriate teaching method

## 3 Concept and classification of words indicating multiples in Chinese

### 3.1 Definition

The word expressing the multiple is the word that says the number of times increased compared to the original number. In Vietnamese, we often use the phrase "increase (by) N times." In Chinese, we often use the amount of words 倍 or 番 as Chinese grammar researchers combine these two words into the group 概数词 (approximate numerals). In this article, we would like to use the term multiple or a word that representing an increase from the original number.

Usage in Chinese and Vietnamese have many similarities and differences, so regarding the mode of expression and meaning, we would like to analyze in detail the following:



### 3.2 Classification of words indicating multiples

In Chinese, there are two quantities of words 倍 and 番, and when they combined with other phrases, it indicates the number of times increased, but the method of expression and the meaning are different.

## 4 Expression of multiples

### 4.1 The usage of 倍

In Vietnamese and Chinese, when comparing two certain objects, we can use multiples to compare, meaning "increase (greater than) N times." Chinese has two noticeable different expressions: one is completely similar to Vietnamese, and the other is the need to add the original number.

#### 4.1.1 The similarity

The method of expressing the same multiples between Vietnamese and Chinese shows the meaning of N times (N 倍) often used with the quantitative phrase “是 N 倍”、“为 N 倍”、“增加到/为、至 N 倍”、“增长到/为、至 N 倍”、“提高到/为、至 N 倍”、“上升到/为、至 N 倍”..... Let's look at some examples below:

(1) 九是三的三倍。(Three times three is nine.)

(2) 去年我们学院的学生是 600 个人, 今年的学生是 1200 个人。那今年的学生是去年的两倍 (或“为去年的两倍”). (The number of students this year is twice (double) the number of students last year.)

(3) 本地粮食产量提高至目前三倍。(Local food production will increase 3 times in the immediate future).

The quantifiers N 倍 in these three examples are increased by the number of words N in front of the quantifiers 倍, including the original number X. This expression is similar to Vietnamese, so it does not cause difficulties for learners.

#### 4.1.2 The differences

Another way of expressing multiples in Chinese is quantifiers N 倍 combined with other phrases like“增加了 N 倍”、“增长了 N 倍”、“提高了 N 倍”、“上升了 N 倍.” In this expression, the number of increments is N + 1. See some examples below.

(4) 我们学校的学生今年是五千四百个人, 可三年前的学生只有一千八百个人。那今年的学生比三年前的学生增加了两倍。(The number of students this year tripled compared to 3 years ago.)

(5) 十年没见, 她现在身材增加了一倍。(I haven't seen her in ten years. Now, she's twice as tall as she was 10 years ago )

(6) 那里自然矿产的供应量增长了三倍。(The supply of natural materials in that place has increased 4 times)

In these three examples, the increment is  $N + 1$ . This method does not have any similarities with Vietnamese. Due to not knowing the formula and usage, most students are influenced by their mother tongue and leading to incorrect use of (4) (\* the number of students this year doubled compared to 3 years ago ; (6) (\*the supply of natural materials there has tripled)

#### 4.1.3 Method of expressing a decrease/smaller multiple

In Vietnamese, we can use increasing or decreasing multiples, but in Chinese, this expression is limited. For example:

(7) After entering the market, car prices have doubled/halved.

In this sentence, when translating into Chinese, the expression in percent or fraction must be used as “入世后，汽车的价格下降了一半”(halved) or “下降了百分之五十” (Decreased 50%). Because Chinese does not use multiples to represent decreasing numbers, most students do not understand this, so the errors in translation become “\*入世后，汽车的价格下降了一倍。”

Similarly, in Vietnamese we can say:

(8) My weight is a quarter of my father's.(A)

We also can say : My weight is four times smaller than the weight of my father (B). But in Chinese, it can only be expressed in the way A “我的体重是我爸爸的四分之一。” If students do not understand this point, it may lead to translation errors as follows: “\*我的体重比我爸爸的小四倍”

## 4.2 The usage of 番

To show multiples, usually the Chinese use the quantifier 倍. There are a few differences in the usage of the quantifier 番 :

(9) 随着经济的发展，买汽车的人数可能翻一番。(With economic growth, the number of people who can buy a car has doubled.)

During the survey of the Chinese-Vietnamese translation exercise, we found that sentences (5) and sentences (9) had no errors, which is understandable because in Vietnamese there is no expression “\* increases by 1 times”, but when translated into Chinese, they misinterpreted it as (5) “\*十年没见，她现在身材增加了两倍. (I haven't seen her in ten years, she's twice as tall now as she was 10 years ago ) and (9) “\*随着经济的发展，买汽车的人数可能翻两番. (According to economic development, the number of people who can buy a car doubles). This is because they do not understand how to use and apply their mother tongue completely in the compilation process, thus leading to errors. In fact, errors due to multiples of 番 can be considered very common. Let's take a look at some examples:

(10) 这样发展下去，五年后总产量会翻两番。(According to this development, in 5 years total production will increase 4 times)

(11) 这个国家的人口每隔 100 年翻三番 (The population of this country has increased by 8 times every 100 years )

In Chinese, it combines with the word number N to form a word count structure, and this word count

structure is only combined with the verb .

In example (9), the number of increments is 2 , ( $2^N$  where N equals 1, i.e.  $2 \times 1$  equals 2 times; in sentence (10) the number of increments is 4, ( $2^N$  with N equal to 2, ie  $2 \times 2 = 4$ ); in sentence (10) the number of increments is 8, ( $2^N$  with N equal to 3, which means  $2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$ ).

Thus, it can be seen that the expression of multiples of is very special, that is, a multiple of N, so learners must master it in order to not make mistakes when compiling and interpreting.

## 5 Statistics of students' mistakes and causes of mistakes

As mentioned above, this article is mainly based on the teaching experience and results of translation exercises of 4th-year students in the Vietnamese-Chinese newspaper translation course, for which the writer observed and administered a survey. The survey consists of 30 sentences translated from Vietnamese to Chinese and from Chinese to Vietnamese. In each sentence, there is a multiple factor. The writer selected 50 students at various levels of the Chinese language major, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Foreign Languages and Informatics, Ho Chi Minh City for the academic year 2020-2021, including 15 students in 2nd year, 15 students in 3rd year, 20 students in 4th year students. Through statistics, the writer draws the following conclusions: There is almost no difference between 2nd and 3rd year students in the mistakes of multiple translation methods in Chinese. This proves that the students have hardly learned how to express multiples, so the mistake often made is due to the influence of their mother tongue, so they completely apply the translation from Vietnamese to Chinese.

For the 4th year students, there is a bit more progress. They are less affected by their mother tongue, but they often become confused between 增加了 N 倍 and 增加到 N 倍 ; especially the percentage of students who confuse the formula of quantifiers 番 is quite serious, in particular, they often get the formula wrong 翻 N 番 it should be calculated as  $2^N$  , but they calculate it as  $2^{+N}$  , so increasing by 4 times will translate wrongly as 2 times; If it is increased by 8 times, it will be wrong to calculate 6 times, below are the survey results

**Table 1: Statistical table of error rate of students in Chinese - Vietnamese translation**

Phrase of quantities words	翻 一 番	翻两番	翻三番	翻四番	增加了 一倍	增加了 两倍	增加了 三倍	增加了 四倍
Numbers of wrong question	0/50	20/50	30/50	38/50	4/50	14/50	19/50	22/50
Percentages wrong	0%	40%	60%	76%	8%	28%	38%	44%

**Table 2: Statistical table of error rate of students in Vietnamese - Chinese translation**

Phrase of quantities words	Increasing Double	Increasing by 3	Increasing by 4	Decreased by half.	Decreased by 3
Numbers of wrong question	12/50	21/50	28/50	35/50	35/50
Percentages wrong	24%	42%	56%	70%	70%

According to the statistics, students' mistakes when translating Vietnamese - Chinese are more serious than mistakes when translating Chinese - Vietnamese. The reason is that they often get confused between 增加了 N 倍 and 增加到 N 倍. In this case, they often avoid using 番 because they do not know how to use it or use it but confuse the calculation: some students translate "double" into “翻两番”; “Increase 8” to “翻 8 番”; some students even translate it as “翻 7 番” by mistake with the usage of “增加了 N 倍”.

Besides, because they do not know how to use it, the majority (including 4th year students) still mechanically translate the comparative sentence "decrease by half" according to the multiple formula. However, the Chinese do not use the multiple formula to represent decreasing numbers (see examples (7); (8). According to the statistics table, it can be seen that the percentage of students who make mistakes in this sentence form is in the majority.

## 6 Suggestion

According to the results of the statistics table, the mistakes of students when translating multiples in Vietnamese-Chinese translation are usually in the following range:

- Due to the mechanical application of the mother tongue, assuming that the use of multiples in Chinese is the same as in Vietnamese, this error often falls on students who are just learning in the early stages and may not have learned how to use multiples in the first stage.
- Due to the confusion between 增加了 N 倍 and 增加到 N 倍, this error mainly falls on 2nd and 3rd year students. Because they have not paid attention to the sentence structures, they often make mistakes.
- Mistranslated sentences compare multiples with qualification 番 because they do not understand or are confused “翻 N 番”, as in examples (9); (10);(11).
- Especially serious is the way of translation “\*我的体重比我爸爸的小四倍”, this mistake is also made by the 4th year students, which proves that they do not fully understand the usage of multiples.
- In addition, there is another reason why students translate incorrectly is when applying structures 增加了 N 倍 with increments of  $N + 1$ ; So, when translating into Chinese, I have to reverse the formula to  $N-1$ , but most of the students are not flexible enough to convert, so they still translate it wrong.

From the error analysis as above, we try to make recommendations in teaching how to use multiples in

Chinese, with the aim of helping students to use them more proficiently without making mistakes so that the translation can be more smoothly.

- f) The teacher should takes time to explain, give formulas, and exercises for students to practice proficiently in the comparison sentences using multiples with words 倍 and 番, to help students understand and able to use the method of translating this type of sentence. Here is the formula suggested by the writer:

**Table 3: Structures and and meaning of multiples with word count 倍**

Phrase of quantities words	增加到 N 倍	增加了 N 倍
Vietnamese meaning	The increment is N	The increment is N + 1

**Table 4: Structures and and meaning of multiples with word count 番**

Phrase of quantities words	翻一番	翻两番	翻三番	翻四番
Vietnamese meaning	Increasing double	Increasing by 4	Increasing by 8	Increasing by 16
formula	$2^1$	$2^2$	$2^3$	$2^4$

- g) When majoring in translation, interpreting, and commercial translation, there will certainly be translations of sentences compared with multiples. The teachers should summarize formulas and design translation exercises that help students consolidate and proficiently practice using formulas. Therefore, when they graduate from school, they will have more advantages in the field of translation.

## 7 Summary

Through the survey, it can be seen that the students of the Foreign Languages majoring in Chinese at the University of Foreign Languages and Informatics Technology of Ho Chi Minh City have not yet proficiently and skillfully used multiples in Chinese. Based on the survey results, the writer has made statistics of mistakes and given the causes of students' mistakes, thereby giving formulas and recommendations for appropriate teaching methods. Besides that, the writer hopes to help students understand and apply them correctly to translate articles related to multiples in Chinese.

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