

## An Analysis of the Vietnamese Word 'Nào' and its Rendering in Modern Chinese (Based on the Novel the Adventures of A Cricket)

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper presents the characteristics of the Vietnamese word “nào” from a functional-pragmatic perspective. It examines the use of this word in Tô Hoài's *The Adventures of a Cricket* and compares it with its translation into modern Chinese in the corresponding translated work. Using a contrastive and descriptive analysis, the study aims to clarify the pragmatic functions and cultural differences of the word “nào” as expressed in both Vietnamese and Chinese.

**KEYWORDS:** “nào”, pragmatics, translation, Chinese

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In Vietnamese, the word “nào” plays an important role not only as an interrogative pronoun but also as an indefinite pronoun, an intensifier, or a marker for invitations. Overall, “nào” has several different functions: as an interrogative pronoun to ask about choice or classification; as an indefinite pronoun to express indefiniteness; and as an exclamation to initiate an invitation or conclude a sentence. For example:

- (1) Bạn chọn món nào? (Which dish do you choose?)
- (2) Bạn đến lúc nào thì làm lúc ấy. (You'll do the work whenever you arrive.)
- (3) Nào, chúng ta bắt đầu nhé! (Well, let's begin!)
- (4) Chúng ta bắt đầu đi thôi nào! (Let's get started now!)

In Vietnamese grammar studies, authors classify “nào” as an interrogative or indefinite pronoun. Diệp Quang Ban and Hoàng Văn Thung (1991) emphasized its role as an interrogative pronoun, arguing that questions using “nào” can encompass those using “đâu.” They noted that when “nào” appears after a unit noun or a mass noun, it implies a choice within a specified scope. Generally, according to these two authors, the interrogative focus of “nào” is more prominent. Nguyễn Văn Phở (2018) suggested that “nào” is used to refer to unspecified things or situations, which is why it can also be used for questions. He classified “nào” as an indefinite pronoun, emphasizing its indefinite reference function over its interrogative focus. Nguyễn Đức Dân (2018) considered “nào” to be an indefinite word that often appears in sentences of rebuttal to express a complete negation. This is a common feature of indefinite words like **ai**, **gì**, **nào**, **đâu**, etc.

Although there have been many studies analyzing “nào” from a lexical perspective, in-depth research on its pragmatic functions in modern literary texts remains limited. In particular, the translation of “nào” into modern Chinese has not been systematically explored, and specific contrastive analyses of its pragmatics are lacking. This gap not only poses challenges for translators but also affects the teaching and learning of Vietnamese as a foreign language. Therefore, this study aims to clarify the functions, pragmatic nuances, and translation methods of “nào” in *The Adventures of a Cricket*, contributing to the field of contrastive linguistics and translation studies.

### 2. METHODOLOGY

The subject of this study is the word “nào” in Vietnamese and its translation into modern Chinese, based on the source text from Tô Hoài's *The Adventures of a Cricket* and the corresponding modern Chinese translation by Li Ying. A descriptive method is used to analyze the semantic and pragmatic functions of “nào” within specific contexts. The occurrences of “nào” in the original text will be classified according to their specific role in the utterance. Simultaneously, a contrastive translation approach will be used to clarify the similarities and differences in nuance and expression between the two languages.

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### 3. Functional Characteristics of “Nào” in Vietnamese

#### 3.1. Information-Seeking Function (Interrogative Function)

As an interrogative pronoun, “nào” serves to elicit unknown information, especially in questions of choice or part-of-whole questions. Here, “nào” acts as a **selective operator** within a pre-established set. Excerpt (1)

Just as the voice stopped, a voice from outside the burrow asked: “Is that Brother Mèn's voice?”

I quickly called back: “Who is it? It's me! It's me! Mèn is here!”

The voice from outside boomed back louder: “Oh! Oh! Brother Mèn? It's Trũi! It's me, Trũi! Where are you? Where are you? Which place are you in?” (Tô Hoài, 2017, p.113)

In this excerpt, the dialogue takes place as the character Trũi looks for Dế Mèn. After confirming the right person, Trũi repeatedly exclaims: “*Anh đâu? Anh đâu? Anh ở chỗ nào?*” (Where are you? Where are you? Which place are you in?). Here, “nào” serves as an interrogative pronoun to ask about location. It is used to emphasize the uncertainty in pinpointing Dế Mèn's exact location—a location already delimited to “inside the burrow.”

Excerpt (2)

*Upon hearing the singing from underground, Sister Cốc, not understanding what it was, flapped her wings in surprise, wanting to fly away. After calming down, she rolled her eyes and raised her wings, as if ready to fight. She cautiously approached my burrow entrance and asked: “Which brat is mocking me? Which brat is mocking me?”* (Tô Hoài, 2017, p.15)

In the context above, the use of “nào” is tied to a specific communication situation: Sister Cốc hears a mocking song from underground but doesn't know who the culprit is. Unable to identify the subject, she is forced to use the interrogative pronoun “nào” in “*Đứa nào cạnh khoé gì tao thế?*” (Which brat is mocking me?). Here, “nào” doesn't have a selective nuance but is used to query an unknown individual, both to express anger and to find the offender.

#### 3.2. Indefinite Referential Function

As an indefinite pronoun, “nào” serves an indefinite referential function, helping to establish an unspecified entity within a referential scope.

Excerpt (3)

I have lived independently since I was little. That's a long-standing custom among our cricket family.

Besides, my mother often told us: “It must be this way, so you'll learn to find food on your own. Children who just lazily live off their parents will only become dependent, which is very bad, and they won't amount to anything in life.” Because of that, with any litter, after giving birth, my mother would immediately think about arranging for her children to live on their own. (Tô Hoài, 2017, p.7)

In the context above, the speaker recounts a long-standing custom of the crickets: the young must live independently right after birth. Therefore, “nào” in the noun phrase “*lúa sinh nào*” (any litter born) does not have an interrogative or a specific indefinite nuance. Instead, it acts as a comprehensive, repetitive marker, equivalent to “any litter” or “every litter.” This usage emphasizes the **universal and rule-like nature** of the custom—there are no exceptions. Thus, the presence of “nào” here is linked to the need to express the **all-encompassing** nature of a habit that has been repeated through many generations, without referring to a specific one.

Excerpt (4)

*One day, I went over to his place and saw how messy and chaotic it was. I said: “Why do you live so carelessly! What a flimsy house. What if **someone** came to cause trouble, you'd be a goner! Now, listen: when you crawl into your burrow, your back pokes up so close to the surface that anyone on the grassy bank can see where you are. What if a Kestrel saw you, thought you were prey, and pecked you? It would surely hit you right in the back, and you'd be finished! Oh, my friend! You may be grown but you are not wise.”* (Tô Hoài, 2017, p.11)

In this excerpt, “nào” appears in the sentence “*Ngộ có kẻ nào đến phá thì thật chú chết ngay đuôi!*” (What if some **rascal** came to cause trouble, you'd be a goner!). The context is Dế Mèn's scolding of Dế Choắt. Here, “nào” is used with the indefinite reference function to refer to a hypothetical subject—some **unspecified person**. This indefinite nuance makes the warning more potent, as the danger could come from anyone, at any time. Using “nào” instead of a specific designation enhances the sense of unease and highlights the **potential, unspecified nature** of the threat.

#### 3.3. Negative Function

“Nào” has the function of **absolute negation** or of **questioning the existence** of a previously mentioned action, thing, or characteristic. In such cases, “nào” doesn't just negate but can also perform the speech act of rebuttal, clarification, or counter-argument, often with a highly dialogic tone.

Excerpt (5)

*In that dark, terrifying cave, singing was still a daily chore. **No one** cared if I sang well or poorly; the old man just wanted me to open my mouth. I could scream, sing, or yell, as long as the noise proved the cave had an owner.* (Tô Hoài, 2017, pp.111-112)

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In this excerpt, “**nào**” appears at the beginning of the clause “*Nào ai cần đâu tôi hát hay hát dở*” (No one needs me to sing well or poorly), in a context where Dế Mèn is forced to make sounds in the dark cave, not to perform but just to prove someone's presence. Here, “**nào**” serves a function of **emphatic and total negation**: no one truly cares, there is absolutely no real need for the singing quality. Using “**nào**” instead of just saying “*ai cần đâu*” (who needs it) increases the expressiveness, giving the sentence a nuance of **resentment and indignation**.

Excerpt (6)

*I almost burst out laughing. It was just a joke, but **how could I** possibly know where that old man “struck by heaven, cursed by saint” was! I was still holding my mouth to keep from laughing, but Trũi was so amused he couldn't keep up his part of the act, and suddenly blurted out a phrase: (...) (Tô Hoài, 2017, p.64)*

In this excerpt, “**nào**” appears in the sentence “*Giỡn chơi thế chứ nào tôi biết cái lão Trời 'trời đánh thánh vật' ấy ở mô tê!*” (It's a joke, but **how could I** know where that old “heaven-struck, saint-cursed” guy is!). The context is when Dế Mèn and Dế Trũi witness a humorous situation and almost burst into laughter but try to hold it in. The use of “**nào**” here doesn't have a selective or interrogative meaning but is a **modal particle for emphatic negation**, equivalent to “*tôi đâu có biết...*” (I don't possibly know...). Adding “**nào**” expresses a decisive denial but with a hint of humor and surprise.

### 3.4. Emphatic and Cohesive Function

“**Nào**” also has the function of enhancing the informational focus, expressing emphasis in an utterance. When it appears repeatedly before nouns or verbs, “**nào**” takes on a cohesive function. This function highlights the **simultaneous, rapid, or large quantity** of events or objects.

Excerpt (7)

*If no one would give in, they'd have to fight. That Finch is as small as a baby's fist, its legs are as thin as toothpicks, and its beak is as limp as a noodle. As for my brother, with his **sharp teeth**, and his **dangerous curved claws**, he just needs to move forward and smack it, and he'll break its face. But still, he was so clumsy that my brother lost. (Tô Hoài, 2017, p.44)*

In this excerpt, “**nào**” appears in the phrase: “*nào răng sắc, nào càng có ngành vênh rất hiểm*” (with **sharp teeth**, with **dangerous curved claws**). The context shows the character comparing his brother's strength to the Finch's to emphasize his brother's superiority. “**Nào**” here is not interrogative but acts as a **listing word**, emphasizing: it both inventories the advantageous features and creates a rapid rhythm, enhancing the imagery of the narration. This makes the text more vivid and emotional, while also clearly showing the narrator's bias and pride toward his “brother.”

### 3.5. Directive Function (Action-Prompting Function)

As an interjection, “**nào**” appears as a signal to activate a linguistic or physical action, often in contexts of **commands, invitations, urges, or challenges**.

Excerpt (8)

Xiển Tóc (a kind of cricket) slowly looked up and drowsily asked: “What are you so afraid of?”

Xiển Tóc also looked around, bewildered. Suddenly, he saw me, focused his eyes, and exclaimed: “Ah, Dế Mèn! Where are you going? Come down now! Is that really Dế Mèn?”

Being a playboy who stayed up late, Xiển Tóc's eyes were somewhat blurry, and he still couldn't see me clearly. (Tô Hoài, 2017, p.96)

In this excerpt, “**nào**” appears in Xiển Tóc's line: “*Xuống đây **đây** nào!*” (Come down **now!**). The context shows Xiển Tóc recognizing Dế Mèn and happily calling for his friend to come down. “**Nào**” here serves as a modal particle with an **urging, encouraging** quality. It makes the sentence feel intimate and natural, like a gentle urging mixed with joy, rather than a dry command.

### 3.6. Rebuttal and Mitigation Function

“**Nào**” appears in fixed phrases like “*nào có*” (is there any), “*nào phải*” (is it), “*đời nào*” (no way), with the function of **rebutting or refuting an argument**. In these contexts, “**nào**” performs an act of refutation or information correction, often associated with modal attitudes like surprise, indignation, or disagreement.

Excerpt (9)

Choắt couldn't get up anymore, lying there faintly. Seeing this, I knelt down in a panic, lifted Choắt's head, and lamented: “I never knew things would turn out like this! I regret it so much. I regret it so much. If you die, it's only because of my arrogant, foolish mistake. What can I do now?”

I didn't expect Dế Choắt to say such a thing to me:

“Don't worry, I'm already too weak, so I'm fine with dying. But before I close my eyes, I want to advise you: a life of recklessness and violence, having a brain but not knowing how to think, will sooner or later bring disaster upon yourself.” (Tô Hoài, 2017, p.16)

In this excerpt, “**nào**” appears in the sentence “*Nào tôi đâu biết cơ sự lại ra nông nổi này!*” (**I never knew** things would turn out like this!). The context is Dế Mèn's panic, sorrow, and regret upon witnessing Dế Choắt's impending death. “**Nào**” starts the lament

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like an emotional cry, suggesting **surprise, shock, and self-reproach**: he truly did not expect such a tragic outcome. The presence of “**nào**” here is directly influenced by the tragic context and introspective psychology, turning it into a means of expressing intense emotion, no longer a simple interrogative or selective word.

### 4. Translation into Modern Chinese in Li Ying's Version

In *The Adventures of a Cricket*, the author uses the word “**nào**” a total of 98 times. In the modern Chinese translation, only one instance of “**nào**” is completely omitted. The other cases are handled by translator Li Ying using various strategies.

#### 4.1. Translating “**nào**” in its Information-Seeking Function

In Excerpt (1), the element “**nào**” in the structure “*chỗ nào*” (which place) not only clarifies the information needed but also creates a warm, natural nuance. Modern Chinese does not have a direct word equivalent to “**nào**” in this function, so the use of “**啊**” at the end of the sentence becomes a compensatory method, making the question feel friendly and soft, reducing the stiffness of a purely informational question. If “**啊**” is omitted, the sentence “你在什么地方?” (Where are you?) is still semantically correct but leans towards a formal tone, unable to express the friendly concern of the original Vietnamese. Therefore, considering both the semantic and pragmatic aspects, the translation using “**啊**” achieves the highest level of equivalence.

In Excerpt (2), the Vietnamese sentence “*Đứa nào cạnh khoẻ gì tao thế?*” is translated as “哪个家伙敢在我面前唱这种无聊的歌? 哪个家伙, 站出来!” (Which guy dares to sing this boring song in front of me? Which guy, step out!). There's a clear difference in the pragmatic nuance. In the original text, “**nào**” is part of an interrogative structure, expressing a direct question while still maintaining a vague nuance: the character (Sister Cốc) doesn't know exactly who sang to mock her, so she asks “*đứa nào...*”. In the Chinese translation, the translator has concretized the interrogative nuance into a shout with an implied certainty: “哪个家伙敢在我面前唱这种无聊的歌?” (Which guy dares to sing this boring song in front of me?), followed by a direct challenge, “站出来!” (Step out!). Thus, the vague interrogative question in Vietnamese has been transformed into an utterance with a higher degree of certainty and provocation in Chinese. Semantically, the translation correctly conveys the anger and the act of querying, but pragmatically, the nuance has shifted from a questioning doubt (and searching for the mocker) to public shouting and challenging.

#### 4.2. Translating “**nào**” in its Indefinite Reference Function

In Excerpt (3), “**nào**” has a generalizing meaning, referring to any litter without exception, emphasizing its universality. In the Chinese translation, “所以只要孩儿生下来, 妈妈就想着怎么安排好地方, 给孩儿们出去自己居住” (So as soon as the children are born, the mother thinks about how to arrange a good place for them to go and live on their own), the translator used the structure “只要...就...” (as long as...then...) to express a condition-consequence relationship, meaning “as soon as A happens, then B happens.” Pragmatically, both sentences convey that this is an unchangeable rule, but there is a small difference. The Vietnamese original emphasizes a **non-discriminatory repetition**, implying a rule that applies to every case, while the Chinese translation leans towards expressing a **conditional relationship**, like stating a principle of “if A, then B.” This causes the all-encompassing nuance of “**nào**” in Vietnamese to be somewhat diminished when translated into Chinese. Therefore, while semantically equivalent, the pragmatic nuance of generality is transformed into a conditional relationship, leading to a slight shift in expressive tone.

In Excerpt (4), “**nào**” carries an indefinite nuance, implying anyone, any rascals, with the intention of causing trouble. This expression is both hypothetical and suggests a potential, lurking threat. In the Chinese translation, “*要是*有坏人过来找你麻烦, 你都无路可逃!” (If a bad person comes to find trouble, you'll have nowhere to escape!), the translator used “坏人” (bad person) instead of “*kẻ nào*” (any rascal), making the subject more specific and carrying a clear moral judgment. Semantically, both sentences emphasize the potential danger if someone attacks. However, pragmatically, the Vietnamese original uses “*kẻ nào*” with a high degree of indefiniteness, increasing the generality of the warning (it could be anyone). In contrast, the Chinese translation narrows the scope by labeling them as “坏人,” linking the risk to a specific group and reducing the vagueness and universality of the warning.

#### 4.3. Translating “**nào**” in its Negative Function

In the Vietnamese sentence “*Nào ai cần đâu tôi hát hay hát dở...*,” “**nào**” appears at the beginning of the sentence with the function of emphatic negation, carrying an exclamatory nuance. This usage is colloquial and reveals a dismissive, almost sorrowful, attitude, creating a natural and vivid tone for the narration. In the Chinese translation, “*说实在的, 翠鸟根本不在乎我唱得是否动听, 只要求我开口而已...*” (To be honest, the kingfisher doesn't care if I sing well or not, just wants me to open my mouth...), the translator chose the phrase “说实在的” (to be honest) to begin, retaining the meaning of emphasis but changing the expressive method: from

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a friendly, exclamatory particle to a more standard, explanatory phrase in Chinese. Semantically, both sentences convey the same message: the singing quality doesn't matter, only the sound does. However, pragmatically, the Vietnamese original is more colloquial and intimate, while the Chinese translation is more rational and objective, fitting the usual style of Chinese prose.

In Excerpt (6), “*nào*” carries a strong negative nuance, emphasizing a lack of knowledge while also suggesting annoyance. This is a very characteristic colloquial expression that creates an intimate, lively, and even humorous tone. In the Chinese translation, “真是开玩笑, 我怎么可能认识那个‘天神’侄子” (What a joke, how could I possibly know that 'god's nephew' guy), the translator used “真是开玩笑” (what a joke) to express the meaning of “*Giờn chơi thế chứ*” and “我怎么可能认识” (how could I possibly know) to replace “*nào tôi biết*,” emphasizing the negation. Semantically, the two sentences are quite equivalent: both deny the character's ability to know the “heaven” character. However, pragmatically, the Vietnamese original is rich in exclamatory and folksy colloquial nuances, tied to the character's mocking tone, while the Chinese translation is more rational and softer, less expressive of playful emotions. Thus, the equivalence is achieved in terms of basic meaning, but the pragmatic equivalence is not entirely complete due to differences in expressive style and colloquialisms between the two languages.

### 4.4. Translating “*nào*” in its Emphatic and Cohesive Function

In Excerpt (7), “*nào*” is used repeatedly to list and emphasize the superior advantages of “my brother” in the confrontation. This usage is highly colloquial, creating a rapid rhythm and both a comparative and an assertive attitude. In the Chinese translation, “说实在的, 那只莺鸟并不是很强劲的对手, 他个头很小, 嘴又细; 而我的二哥有锋利的牙齿, 更有罕见翘起的倒钩, 按说可以很轻易地打败莺鸟” (To be honest, that finch is not a very strong opponent, its size is small and its beak is thin; but my second brother has sharp teeth, and even more, rare curved barbs, so he can easily defeat the finch), the translator omitted the repetitive emphatic structure of “*nào... nào...*”, replacing it with a direct listing: “有锋利的牙齿, 更有罕见翘起的倒钩” (has sharp teeth, and even more, rare curved barbs). Semantically, the translation retains the main content: comparing the Finch's weakness with the brother's strength. However, pragmatically, the translation loses the strong colloquial nuance and, specifically, the sense of “escalation” in the original Vietnamese argument. This is because modern Chinese often favors a more direct and concise approach for listing features, while Vietnamese uses “*nào... nào...*” as a rhetorical device to create a vivid rhythm.

### 4.5. Translating “*nào*” in its Directive Function

In Excerpt (8), “*nào*” carries an intimate, encouraging nuance, like a gentle urging. This is a very natural colloquial expression that helps create a friendly and close atmosphere in communication. In the Chinese translation, “喊, 是你, 蟋蟀! 太惊喜了, 来, 过来, 到我身边来。” (Ah, it's you, Cricket! What a surprise, come, come here, come to me.), the translator conveyed the feeling of joy and surprise through exclamations like “太惊喜了” (what a surprise), and replaced the call “*xuống đây đã nào*” (come down now) with a series of direct, friendly commands: “来, 过来, 到我身边来” (Come, come here, come to me). Semantically, the translation still conveys the message of joy and an invitation to come closer. However, pragmatically, the word “*nào*” in Vietnamese creates a soft nuance, implying “gentle but friendly urging,” while the Chinese uses a series of verbs that are more direct, reducing the flexibility and deference of the original text. This difference stems from cultural communication habits: Vietnamese prefers using modal particles to express emotion and intimacy, while modern Chinese leans towards using verbs and specific exclamations to express them.

### 4.6. Translating “*nào*” in its Rebuttal and Mitigation Function

In Excerpt (9), “*nào*” has a modal function, expressing a negation combined with a feeling of shock and regret. The speaker wants to emphasize that they absolutely did not foresee the consequences, and therefore the statement contains a sense of self-reproach mixed with an excuse. When translated into Chinese as “我真没想到事态发展得这么严重!” (I really didn't expect the situation to develop so seriously!), the translator preserved the core meaning: expressing surprise and regret at the serious situation. However, pragmatically, the translation focuses on emphasizing the “didn't expect” part, while the original, in addition to surprise, also suggests a layer of self-justification (“*nào tôi đâu biết*” = I absolutely did not know, it was not intentional). It is the word “*nào*” in Vietnamese that helps make the sentence so expressively rich and gives it a slightly defensive tone. The Chinese translation, while accurate in content and emotion, does not fully recreate this subtle self-justifying aspect. The difference reflects the expressive styles: Vietnamese often relies on modal particles to convey nuances of mood, while modern Chinese uses direct grammatical structures (“真没想到”) to highlight psychological states.

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## 5. CONCLUSION

It can be seen that “**nào**” is a multi-layered functional unit in Vietnamese, capable of performing numerous speech acts: from asking for information, negating, asserting, and inviting, to rebutting. This multi-functionality shows that “**nào**” is not only a syntactic-semantic phenomenon but also a strategic tool in communication, flexibly reflecting the speaker's purpose and attitude. Translating “**nào**” into modern Chinese requires the translator to have a deep understanding of the context, culture, and communicative purpose to choose an appropriate equivalent, as there is often no single direct corresponding word. Context is the key factor in determining the specific meaning and function of “**nào**” in each case, guiding the translator to the most suitable translation for Chinese-language expression habits.

In the current translation, translator Li Ying often chooses available grammatical means or lexical items such as 什么, 哪里, 要是, and 真没想到 to convey the meaning, thereby preserving the basic content and main emotion. However, the richness of modal nuances and the flexibility of “**nào**” in specific contexts are sometimes not fully preserved, because modern Chinese uses modal particles less flexibly than Vietnamese and leans towards clear, direct structures. This shows that the pragmatic equivalence between the two languages is only relative, ensuring mutual understanding but revealing subtle differences in communication culture and expressive style. It is this difference that is a noteworthy point in contrastive studies of Vietnamese and Chinese, while also affirming the unique value of “**nào**” within the Vietnamese language system.

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