Int. j. adv. multidisc. res. stud. 2025; 5(4):1773-1776

Received: 10-07-2025
Accepted: 20-08-2025

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Translating the Vietnamese Word "Ai" into Modern Chinese: An Analysis Based on *The Adventures of a Criket*

Ha Thi Minh Trang
MA, Van Lang University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

DOI: https://doi.org/10.62225/2583049X.2025.5.4.4857 Corresponding Author: **Ha Thi Minh Trang [Email:** trang.ha@vlu.edu.vn**]**

Abstract
This paper examines the chaSracteristics of the Vietnamese word "**ai**" from a functional linguistics perspective, focusing on its semantic features. It investigates the usage of "**ai**" in Tô Hoài's *The Adventures of a Cricket* and compares it with its translations into modern Chinese in the corresponding translated work. Employing contrastive analysis and descriptive methods, this study aims to clarify the semantic functions and cultural differences expressed in both languages.

Keywords: Ai, Semantics, Translation, Chines

1. Introduction

In Vietnamese, the word "**ai**" typically functions as an interrogative pronoun used to ask about a person. Additionally, "**ai**" can be used in rhetorical questions to emphasize an absolute meaning. To date, many Vietnamese linguists have researched this word. Nguyễn Đức Dân (1987) [3] argued that "**ai**" is a multi-functional pronoun; depending on the context, it can be either an interrogative or an indefinite pronoun. When "**ai**" is combined with words like "**cũng**" (also), "**chẳng**" (not), or follows a negative word like "**không**" (no) or "**chưa**" (not yet), it loses its interrogative function and takes on an indefinite role. Cao Xuân Hạo (2004) [1] posited that "**ai**" is used to refer to an unspecified person, which is why it's also used to ask questions. Thus, "**ai**" can have different functions depending on its position in a sentence and its illocutionary force. These explanations show that the function of "**ai**" is not limited to questioning.

The classification of "**ai**" has continued to be a focus for researchers. In 2005, Diệp Quang Ban categorized "**ai**" as an interrogative pronoun used to mark interrogative constructions. According to the author, it is a specialized pronoun for generally asking about people. Furthermore, "**ai**" has been noted for its ability to express indefiniteness when acting as an indefinite pronoun. The author suggests that because "**ai**" inherently means "person," it does not require a preceding noun like "ai đó" (someone) or "một ai đó" (a certain someone). Nguyễn Hồng Cổn (2015) [4] affirmed that the main semantic function of "**ai**" is indefinite reference. He clarified its ability to form existential sentences and yes-no questions. He emphasized that the form "**ai**" looks interrogative but no longer has a questioning function when used for reference, which can easily confuse learners of Vietnamese as a foreign language. Nguyễn Vân Phổ (2018) [5] classified "**ai**" as an indefinite pronoun, stating that indefinite pronouns do not have a simple or complex number. "**Ai**" can independently form its own phrase or combine with quantifiers like "**mấy**" (a few) and "**những**" (plural marker).

Thus, through the research of preceding Vietnamese linguists, we see that the semantic functions expressed by "**ai**" include: an interrogative function—used to ask a question—and an indefinite reference function—used to refer to an unspecified individual, group, or whole in a given context or discourse. Building on the achievements of these researchers, this paper surveys the actual use of the word "**ai**" in a real-world context (the novel *The Adventures of a Cricket*) and its translation into modern Chinese in the corresponding translated version, with the aim of clarifying their semantic aspects in both languages. Here is the English translation of the research paper sections you provided, covering the methodology, findings, and conclusion.

2. Research methodology

This paper employs a descriptive method combined with contrastive analysis. We describe the semantic-functional aspects of the word "**ai**" based on data from Tô Hoài's *The Adventures of a Cricket*. We then analyze and evaluate the translation of "**ai**"

into modern Chinese in the corresponding translated work by translator Li Ying. From these findings, we aim to clarify the semantic functions and cultural differences expressed in both languages.

3. Findings

3.1 Characteristics of the word "ai" in vietnamese from a semantic-functional perspective

3.1.1 interrogative function (expressing a question focus)

In this functional dimension, "**ai**" marks a missing piece of information in a sentence and prompts the listener to answer the question, "which person is being referred to?" This requires a specific answer regarding an individual's identity. This is the most important and common function of "**ai**" in Vietnamese, especially in question-and-answer interactions. Its question-focus function is clearly shown through its placement in a sentence and the response it demands. Consider the following examples:

(1) *Ai đứng chóp bu bọn này?* (Who is the leader of this group?) (2) *Đi lang thang thất thểu thì ai ở nhà trông nom phần mộ tổ tiên, ai đèn hương cúng giỗ các cụ?* (If you wander aimlessly, who will stay home to tend to the ancestral tombs, and who will light incense and offer sacrifices to the ancestors?) (3) *Bây giờ các võ sĩ trong thiên hạ đã đông đủ về đây, ai lên đấu với võ sĩ Dế Trũi?* (Now that all the martial artists have gathered here, who will step up to fight the warrior Cricket Trũi?)

In these utterances, each requires a definitive answer about the identity of the person mentioned, such as: "The Spider Lord is the leader of our group," or "The eldest brother stays home to tend to the ancestral tombs and light incense for the ancestors," etc. This clearly shows that "**ai**" in these cases is not a general expression or representative of an indefinite group, but a specific information-seeking expression.

3.1.2 Indefinite Reference Function: Referring to an Unspecified Individual, Group, or Collective in a Context or Discourse

Referring to an Unspecified Individual

When performing this function, "**ai**" refers to an entity of the human type that has not been clearly identified within the discourse or outside of the context. This function often appears in existential sentences, yes-no questions, or affirmative/negative sentences containing an indefinite element. In such contexts, "**ai**" does not require the listener to provide specific information but merely suggests the possible or hypothetical presence of someone. For example:

(4) *Mỏ lão dài hơn người lão và to đến nỗi trông giống như có **ai** nghịch ác đem đóng cả một chiếc cọc tre gộc vào giữa mặt lão.* (His snout was longer than his body and so big that it looked as if some wicked **person** had driven a large bamboo stake right into the middle of his face.) (5) *Năm nay, dân cả vùng, nhân hội hoa may, mở luôn hội thi võ kén **ai** tài giỏi nhất để đứng ra coi sóc việc chung trong vùng.* (This year, the people of the whole area, taking advantage of the flower festival, held a martial arts competition to choose who was the most talented to oversee the common affairs of the region.) (6) *Chúng tôi vào đây, nghe loạn xạ, mà đi một lúc chưa gặp **ai**.* (We came here, heard a commotion, but after walking for a while, hadn't met **anyone**.)

In these utterances, "**ai**" is used to represent an individual whose identity is not specified but who is assumed to exist or have the potential to exist in a given context. These utterances are not questions and do not require a specific answer; instead, "**ai**" is used as a semantic reference expression, helping the speaker convey a meaning with an unspecified referent.

Referring to an Unspecified Group or Part of a Group

"**Ai**" can refer to an unspecified group, meaning a group of people not specifically named in the context or discourse. This function often appears in generalized statements, where "**ai**" represents people in general, without distinguishing individual characteristics. For example:

(7) *Này thử xem: khi chú chui vào tổ, lưng chú phải lồm cồm đụng sát lên tận mặt đất, làm cho **ai** bên vệ cỏ nhìn sang cũng biết chú đương đi đứng chỗ nào trong tổ.* (Now, try this: when you crawl into your burrow, your back pokes up so close to the surface that **anyone** on the grassy bank can tell where you are in your burrow.) (8) *Hồi ấy, tôi đương giữa tuổi thanh xuân, sức lực cường tráng, nhất là thêm cái tính kiêu, tính hợm chẳng coi **ai** ra gì nên cứ càng làm bộ.* (At that time, I was in the prime of my youth, strong and robust, and with an added haughty, arrogant nature, not caring for **anyone**, so I just kept up my airs.) (9) *Con mắt đu đưa tưởng như **ai** xung quanh chỉ còn có việc thán phục nhìn anh ta.* (His eyes swayed as if he imagined that **everyone** around him had nothing to do but admire him.)

In the above utterances, the word "**ai**" does not refer to a specific individual but is used to encompass the entire group of people within the referential scope defined by the context. Specifically, in (7), "**ai**" implies "everyone standing on the grassy bank"; in (8), "**ai**" refers to "the people I met"; and in (9), "**ai**" refers to "the people standing around. This phenomenon reflects the characteristic of indefinite plural reference, where "**ai**" loses its interrogative function and shifts to a role of expressing a reference to an unspecified but assumed real group.

Referring to an Entire Unspecified Collective

"**Ai**" has the ability to take on the function of referring to an entire unspecified collective, meaning it represents a generalized group of people without identifying each individual in the context or discourse. This is an extension of the indefinite function, where the scope of "**ai**"'s reference covers an entire class of objects that can be assumed or implied from the context, but do not need to be specifically listed.

A prominent feature of this function is that "**ai**" often appears in a structure containing the word "**cũng**" (also) or "**chẳng**" (not) / "**chưa**" (not yet) / "**không**" (no). Consider the following examples:

(10) *Khi tôi to tiếng thì **ai** cũng nhịn, không **ai** đáp lại.* (When I raised my voice, **everyone** kept silent, and **no one** responded.) (11) *Bởi vì quanh quẩn **ai** cũng quen thuộc mình cả.* (Because **everyone** around was familiar with me.)

In these utterances, "**ai**" is an expression referring to the entire collective of people, including all individuals belonging to a broad assumed group—such as "everyone" or "the whole community." Although the specific members of the collective are not identified, the speaker implicitly acknowledges the uniformity of the behavior or state to which the clause refers. When "**ai**" refers to an unspecified but real collective in the speaker's perception or assumption, "**ai**" in this function not only carries indefinite characteristics but also plays a role in expressing universal truths or socialized experiences.

3.1.3 Emphasizing a Complete Denial or Dismissive Attitude

In Vietnamese, when combined with negative adverbs such as "**không**" (no), "**chẳng**" (not), "**chưa**" (not yet), along

with particles like "**cả**" (all) or "**hết**" (completely), "**ai**" can serve the function of expressing a rejection or denial with a strong emphasis or dismissive attitude towards the existence or possibility of a certain person in the mentioned context. For example:

(12) *Không **ai** nghi ngờ gì cả.* (No one suspected anything.)

(13) *Chẳng **ai** có thể ở rốn trên đồng không được.* (No one could possibly live in a nest in the middle of a deserted field.) (14) *Còn chưa **ai** hết lạ lùng thì cụ Châu Chấu cầm trịch lại ra, trịnh trọng giơ loa lên, ba lần, đều đặn, hô vang vang xuống ...* (While **no one** had gotten over their astonishment, old man Grasshopper, the referee, came out again, solemnly raised his megaphone, and called out three times, steadily and sonorously…)

In these utterances, "**ai**" no longer serves as an interrogative or a simple reference pronoun but becomes the focal point of a thorough act of negation. The negative meaning here is not merely a denial of someone's presence but also contains an emotional nuance or a dismissive attitude, intended to emphasize impossibility or complete absence. The tone of the utterance may lean towards revealing a feeling of despair, helplessness, denial of expectation, or mild negative emotions (such as complaining or lamenting).

3.2 Translation into Modern Chinese in Li Ying's Version

The original work contains a total of 80 utterances with the word "**ai**". In the translation into modern Chinese by Li Ying, "**ai**" is translated in various ways, with the most common method being the use of the pronoun "**谁**" [shéi].

Translating "ai" in its Interrogative Function

When translating the interrogative function of "**ai**", the translator uses the pronoun "**谁**" [shéi]. For example:

(15) "**谁**是你们的首领？……" (*Ai đứng chóp bu bọn này?*)

In the example above, "**ai**" is directly translated as "**谁**", retaining its interrogative function—querying a specific subject. This is a relatively direct one-to-one translation, as Chinese also uses "**谁**" in similar questions.

(16) "……要大家都像你这样去流浪，那还有**谁**留下来守着祖先的坟墓，给祖先们祭祀上香？……" (*Đi lang thang thất thểu thì ai ở nhà trông nom phần mộ tổ tiên, ai đèn hương cúng giỗ các cụ?*)

The word "**ai**" in example (16) has a rhetorical, rhetorical-question nature, emphasizing that no one will be left at home to perform the rituals. When translated into Chinese, the translator chose the structure "**还有谁**……" (who else...), which preserves both the interrogative meaning and the rhetorical nuance. Thus, "**ai**" here is not merely a simple question but also implies a tone of complaint, expressed by the phrase "**还有谁**" in Chinese.

(17) "……现在，天下的武士齐聚一堂，还有**谁**敢上擂台来与蝼蛄武士比武吗？" (*Bây giờ các võ sĩ trong thiên hạ đã đông đủ về đây, ai lên đấu với võ sĩ Dế Trũi?*)

"**Ai**" in example (17) is translated by the author as "**还有谁敢**……" (who else dares...), which has a challenging and rhetorical nature, not a simple neutral question. Therefore, in the Chinese translated text, the translator emphasized the challenging implication of the utterance.

Translating "ai" in its Indefinite Reference Function

When translating the word "**ai**" in its function of referring to an unspecified object, "**ai**" can be omitted, or it can be explicitly explained as an object or that no such object exists.

(18) 他那又粗又黑的嘴巴比身体还长，看起来和靓丽的外表一点都不协调。(*Mỏ lão dài hơn người lão và to đến nỗi trông giống như có **ai** nghịch ác đem đóng cả một chiếc cọc tre gộc vào giữa mặt lão.*)

In the example above, "**ai**" functions as an unspecified object, leaning towards a comparative-hypothetical style, creating an image of "as if someone had intentionally done it." In the translation, the translator completely omitted the element "**ai**", replacing it with a direct description ("**嘴巴…看起来…不协调**" - the snout... looks... out of place). Thus, the word "**ai**" in this case was translated by hiding it, to make the sentence more concise and reduce the "personified hypothetical" nature of the original text.

(19) 所以今年，这里的居民们打算在这次比武大会上推选出一位优秀的勇士成为守护这片地方的领袖。(*Năm nay, dân cả vùng, nhân hội hoa may, mở luôn hội thi võ kén **ai** tài giỏi nhất để đứng ra coi sóc việc chung trong vùng.*)

In the original text, "**ai**" refers to an unspecified person to be chosen, carrying an indirect interrogative and indefinite nuance (to see who is the most talented). The utterance in the translated text shifts to a more definitive structure: "**推选出一位优秀的勇士**" (to select an excellent warrior). Thus, the translator shifted "**ai**" from indefinite to definite by generalizing it, removing the interrogative nuance to emphasize the outcome of the selection.

(20) 我们向前走想要凑热闹，但是，已经到了好一会儿，没有任何动物出来欢迎我们。(*Chúng tôi vào đây, nghe loạn xạ, mà đi một lúc chưa gặp **ai**.*)

In the original text, "**ai**" refers indefinitely to someone, an unspecified person. In the translation, "**ai**" is specified as "**任何动物**" (any animal), which fits the context of a story about animals. This is a way of translating from a vague indefinite to a limited indefinite.

Translating "ai" in its Function of Referring to a Group of Objects

(21) 你看，每次你进洞里，你的洞穴这么浅，身子进来了，屁股都还露在地面上，**无论是谁**，一眼就会发现你的藏身之地。(*Này thử xem: khi chú chui vào tổ, lưng chú phải lồm cồm đụng sát lên tận mặt đất, làm cho **ai** bên vệ cỏ nhìn sang cũng biết chú đương đi đứng chỗ nào trong tổ.*)

In the original text, "**ai**" has an indefinite meaning, emphasizing that anyone on the grassy bank can see and discover the location; it is combined with "**cũng**" to create a general nature. The translation uses "**无论是谁**" (no matter who), which expresses the subject clearly and comprehensively. Thus, the translator shifted "**ai**" from an indefinite pronoun with a rustic nuance to a more formal, generalized structure.

(22) 此时，我正年富力强，还多了一股傲气，**谁也**看不起，因此总是一副不可一世的样子。(*Hồi ấy, tôi đương giữa tuổi thanh xuân, sức lực cường tráng, nhất là thêm cái tính kiêu, tính hợm chẳng coi **ai** ra gì nên cứ càng làm bộ.*)

In the original sentence, "**ai**" is used for complete negation: "**chẳng coi ai ra gì**" (not caring for anyone) with a disdainful nuance. The Chinese translation shifts to the standard structure "**谁也看不起**" (also not caring for anyone), which retains both the absolute negative meaning and the disdainful nuance. This is a case of an almost direct equivalent translation, with no change in the level of nuance.

(23) ……转来转去的双眼，像是在不住地窥探周围的动物们，认为**大家**只钦佩他一个似的。(*Con mắt đu đưa tưởng như **ai** xung quanh chỉ còn có việc thán phục nhìn anh ta.*)

In the original sentence, "**ai**" refers indefinitely to a group of objects but carries a subjective, imaginary nuance: the character fantasizes that everyone around him only admires him. Li Ying uses the word "**大家**" (everyone) instead of "**谁**" (who), making the meaning more definite and objective. Thus, the translator removed the vague, subjective part of "**ai**" and replaced it with a generalization, making the sentence less of a personal delusion compared to the original.

Translating "ai" in its Function of Referring to an Entire Collective

(24) 当我大喊大叫时，我的**邻居们**都默不作声，**没有**人敢回应我。(*Khi tôi to tiếng thì **ai** cũng nhịn, không **ai** đáp lại.*)

In the example above, the phrase "**ai cũng nhịn**" has a complete indefinite meaning (anyone); the phrase "**không ai đáp lại**" has an absolute negative meaning (no one). The translation uses "**邻居们**" (all the neighbors) and "**没有人**" (no one), which means "**ai**" is translated into a specific collective form. The general, complete nuance is preserved, but the vagueness and indefiniteness of "**ai**" in Vietnamese are lost.

(25) 身边**所有人都**已经熟知我的脾气。(*Bởi vì quanh quẩn **ai** cũng quen thuộc mình cả.*)

In this example, the translator translates "**ai**" as "**所有人**" (everyone), which is a clear affirmation. Thus, in the original, "**ai**" has a natural, general nuance, while the translation has specified the object, emphasizing the collective nature.

Emphasizing a Complete Denial or Dismissive Attitude

(26) ……**谁也没有**注意到我的反常…… (*Không **ai** nghi ngờ gì cả.*)

In example (26), the phrase "**không ai**" carries an absolute negative meaning, not a single individual. The translator renders it as "**谁也没有**" (not a single one), which preserves the meaning of complete negation. However, there is a slight change: Vietnamese emphasizes the nuance of "**nghi ngờ**" (suspecting), while the translation uses "**注意到**" (paying attention to), which emphasizes perception/behavior.

(27) **没有**人能够忍受这寒风刺骨的天气，必须寻找一处用来避寒的居所。(*Chẳng **ai** có thể ở rốn trên đồng không được.*)

In example (27), the phrase "**chẳng ai**" has a complete denial meaning, that no one could. The translator renders it as "**没有人能够忍受…**" (no one can endure...), so the complete negative meaning is preserved. However, Vietnamese focuses on "**ở rốn trên đồng không**" (living in a nest in a deserted field - a specific, imagistic space), while the translation expresses "**这寒风刺骨的天气**" (this bone-chillingly cold weather). Thus, the translator changed the image to suit the reception context in Chinese, making the sentence easier to understand but reducing the figurative nature of the space "**đồng không**."

(28) 裁判员蚂蚱则在熙熙攘攘的嘈杂声中，又站在了擂台上，并且郑重地举起喇叭，咳了三声…… (*Còn **chưa ai** hết lạ lùng thì cụ Châu Chấu cầm trịch lại ra, trịnh trọng giơ loa lên, ba lần, đều đặn, hô vang vang xuống ...*)

In the example above, the phrase "**chưa ai hết lạ lùng**" (no one had gotten over their astonishment) refers to the crowd still being surprised. In the translation, this detail is omitted, with no trace of the word "**ai**". This shows that the translator chose to omit it to make the sentence more concise and focus on the action of "old man Grasshopper." However, this omission reduces the nuance describing the atmosphere of the still-surprised crowd, making the translation less vivid than the original.

4. Conclusion

We can see that the semantic aspects of "**ai**" are clearly expressed throughout *The Adventures of a Cricket*. When translated into modern Chinese, the translator generally preserved the basic meaning of "**ai**" in its interrogative, negative, and indefinite roles. However, the indefinite nuance of "**ai**" was often translated into more definite structures, leading to a loss of the flexibility found in the original language. In some cases, it was omitted entirely, causing the semantic meaning to lose a layer of subtlety compared to Vietnamese.

From a cultural perspective, the difference comes from expressive habits: Vietnamese tends to use "**ai**" to convey openness, emphasizing indefiniteness and lack of specificity; Chinese, on the other hand, tends towards specification, avoiding ambiguity. As a result, the translator often "concretizes" or "omits" to make the translated text feel more natural to Chinese readers, but at the cost of the original's figurative nuance.

Thus, when compared to Vietnamese, "**ai**" in the modern Chinese translation achieves a superficial semantic equivalence, but a lower level of cultural and nuanced equivalence due to the translation's tendency towards specification and simplification.

5. References

1. Cao XH. Tiếng Việt - Sơ thảo ngữ pháp chức năng [Vietnamese - A Draft of Functional Grammar]. Education Publishing House, 2004.
2. Diệp QB. Ngữ pháp tiếng Việt [Vietnamese Grammar]. Education Publishing House, 2005.
3. Nguyễn DD. Lôgich, ngữ nghĩa và cú pháp [Logic, Semantics, and Syntax]. Hanoi National University Publishing House, 1987.
4. Nguyễn HC. Cú pháp, ngữ nghĩa và ngữ dụng của đại từ phiếm định trong tiếng Việt [Syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of indefinite pronouns in Vietnamese]. Đông Nam Á Nghiên cứu [Southeast Asian Studies]. 2015; 25(2):188-201. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308020844
5. Nguyễn VP. Ngữ pháp tiếng Việt - Ngữ đoạn và từ loại [Vietnamese Grammar - Phrases and Word Classes]. National University Publishing House, 2018.
6. Tô H. Dế Mèn phiêu lưu ký [The Adventures of a Cricket]. Kim Dong Publishing House, 2017. ISBN: 9786042030540.
7. Li Y. 蟋蟀冒险记 [The Adventures of a Cricket]. Tuan Jie Publishing House, China, 2018. ISBN: 9787512655959