

An Analysis of Factors Having Impacts on Translation from the Thai Language (L1) to the English Language (L2) in the Group of First-Year Students Studying English for Communication Programme at Thaksin University

Nitikorn Thammakhan

Liberal Arts Teaching, Faculty of Education, Thaksin University, Thailand

E-mail: nitikorn954@gmail.com

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Abstract

For the first-year students enrolled in the English for Communication Programme at Thaksin University, translating from Thai to English presents significant challenges in today's contexts. Most of the students frequently encounter various difficulties and obstacles in the translation processes. Consequently, this scholarly article investigates the translation challenges experienced by the first-year students studying English for Communication Programme at Thaksin University. The apparent objective of this academic article aims to analyze factors having impacts on translation from the Thai language (L1) to the English language (L2) in the group of first-year students studying English for Communication Programme. The academic article is composed of five sections: (1) an introduction; (2) an introduction to the Thai language (L1) and the English language (L2); (3) the differences and errors commonly found in syntax between the Thai language (L1) and the English language (L2); (4) translation problems and translation ambiguity; and (5) a conclusion. While translation problems are inevitable due to the complexities of Thai and English as well as cultural differences, they can be alleviated through skilled translation practices, technological advancements, cultural sensitivity, and effective collaboration between instructors and learners.

Keywords: translation problems; general university students; English for Communication

Introduction

In earlier times, English as a foreign language (EFL) held substantial significance and was warmly embraced by non-native speakers, especially in regions like Thailand where English was not prevalent. It served as a crucial tool for individuals seeking to acquire English proficiency in environments where its usage was not widespread. Particularly in Thailand, EFL played a vital role in facilitating language acquisition and promoting cross-cultural communication. Its widespread adoption underscored its importance as a means of connecting people across linguistic barriers, fostering international understanding, and enhancing opportunities for global interaction. Afterwards, the English language consistently had its vital role. It continued to play a crucial role in various aspects of communication and interaction in a large number of countries throughout the world. Since then, the English language has been used for communication in order that it can bridge the cultures of various groups of people all over the world. Kitao (2000) confirms that English is used not only for communication between native speakers and non-native speakers of English, but also between non-native speakers, and it is the most widely used language in the world, and it will be used by more and more people in the future. Furthermore, the English language has long held a relevant place in the Thai education system's effort to support the modernization movement, especially in various societies, economies, politics, education systems, as well as traditions. People from different regions of the world also communicate through diverse communication channels, such as books, letters, telephones, films, and the Internet. Consequently, English is generally regarded as the most considerable language, and it is also referred to as the universal language.

For this reason, in order to accomplish the aim of communication for people with different backgrounds, translation is such a significant part of the English language. Munday (2001) states that in a large number of countries today where English is used as a primary medium of communication, this field is generally recognized as translation studies. As a general rule, translation is the communication of the meaning of a source-language text by means of an equivalent target-language text. Translation is also ultimately a human activity that enables human beings to exchange ideas and thoughts. It is expressed in different tongues, though. Translation helps bridge cultural gaps and promotes mutual comprehension and awareness among people around the world. Saibua (2007) states that translation is the approach of conveying meanings and the forms of presenting meanings; moreover, translation is like the primary medium that plays a role in conveying information and knowledge between people who speak different languages. Nida (1964) also explains

that translation is the production of a receptor language in the closest natural equivalent to the message of a source language both in meaning and in style. Besides, Newmark (1981) defines translation as a craft that attempts to substitute a written message and statement in one language by the same written message and statement in another language. This scholar also states that there are three fundamental translation processes: (1) the interpretation and analysis of the original text, (2) the translation procedures, and (3) the reformation of the text in relation to the writer's intention, the reader's expectation, and the standards of the target language.

Wongranu (2017), on the contrary, identified syntactic, semantic, and various other errors as the most common issues in translation. The study also revealed that translation errors frequently occurred due to students' anxiety, carelessness, and lack of self-confidence. These findings offer valuable insights for instructors of translation courses, suggesting that fostering greater student confidence could substantially enhance their translation skills and overall competency. As a result, a language is not equivalent to another language, and problems naturally arise. Furthermore, a translator has to take plenty of elements into account when the translator translates any type of text. In other words, translators always risk inappropriate spillover of source-language idiom and usage into target-language translation. Translation is regarded as a systematic study of theories now that the main objective of translation is to reproduce a text. According to Nida and Taber's (1969) statement, they mention the primary purpose, which should be to reproduce a message, which requires many grammatical adjustments as well as lexical ones. In addition, Eppert (1983) says that language transferring will occur only in places where different native language backgrounds yield significantly different learning patterns. As a matter of fact, every language has its own conception, which is similar to Baker (1992) saying that every language has its own concept and its own use; therefore, there must always be some non-equivalence between languages.

Additionally, translation extends beyond solely substituting words from one language to another; it encompasses conveying the intended meaning or concept that the translator seeks to impart. Consequently, it is imperative that aspiring translators receive meticulous training to ensure the development of effective and proficient translation skills (Cúc, 2018). Also, translation frequently faces the challenge of non-equivalence, where exact matches between languages are scarce. As a consequence, translators attempt to identify the nearest equivalent expressions or idioms in the target language to convey the intended meaning effectively. Popescu (2013) analyzed translation errors made by Romanian

students using the corpus. Three types of translation errors were reported, including linguistic errors, comprehension errors, and translation errors containing mostly morphological and collocational errors. The research study also reported that students lacked competency in collocational translation, which can be improved. Moreover, students were assigned to do the translation task in the next step. Nevertheless, the results were still not satisfying since students were fretful, careless, and less self-confident. Furthermore, Lawan (1998) studied the relationship of the students' ability in translating from Thai texts to English texts by investigating the type and frequency of translation errors. This researcher found that there were various translation problems at both word and sentence levels, including grammatical parts, for instance, subject and verb agreement, tenses, articles, pronouns, word choices, or even wrong spellings. Wimolchalao (1992) also claims that Thai university students have two primary translation problems. The first problem is that they do not understand the source text, and the other problem is that they are unable to reproduce a good text.

Consequently, it is extremely interesting to analyze factors having impacts on translation from the Thai language (L1) to the English language (L2) in the group of first-year students studying English for Communication Programme in order to identify common linguistic challenges, enhance pedagogical approaches, as well as foster better cross-cultural communication skills.

The introduction to the Thai language (L1)

The Thai language, also known as Siamese or Central Thai, is the national and official language of Thailand; moreover, the Thai language is also a fascinating and rich language. With over 70 million speakers worldwide, Thai is not only the primary language in Thailand but also holds significance among Thai communities globally.

Historically, the Thai language has undergone significant evolution. Its roots can be traced back to the ancient Tai-speaking peoples who migrated from southern China to mainland Southeast Asia around the 10th century AD. Over time, as these Tai groups settled in various regions of present-day Thailand, their languages merged and evolved into what is now known as Thai.

At present, the modern Thai language is characterized by its unique script. Thai script consists of 44 consonant symbols and 15 vowel symbols. It is written from left to right, without spaces between words. Thai is a tonal language, meaning that the pitch or tone in which a word is pronounced can change its meaning. There are five primary tones

in Thai, each of which alters the meaning of a word. Mastering tones is essential for effective communication in Thai. As the official language of Thailand, Thai plays a crucial role in various aspects of Thai society, including government, education, media, and commerce. It is taught in schools throughout the country and is used in official documents, newspapers, television, and radio broadcasts. In spite of its official status, Thailand is a linguistically diverse country, with numerous minority languages spoken by ethnic groups, including miscellaneous Thai dialects spoken by people living in various regions of Thailand. On the contrary, Thai remains the outstanding language of communication and serves as a unifying force among the country's diverse population.

The introduction to the English language (L2)

English, as a second language (L2), is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, serving as a global lingua franca for communication across borders, cultures, traditions, as well as industries. For many, it is not only a means of communication but also a gateway to assorted opportunities in education, business, and international relations. As a second language (L2), the English language holds significant importance for non-native speakers seeking ways to take part in the global community.

For the origins and evolution, the English language has a rich and diverse history that traces back to the Anglo-Saxon period in early medieval England. Influenced by various languages such as Latin, French, and Germanic dialects, English has evolved over centuries through trade and cultural exchanges.

For global significance, English nowadays holds a prominent position as a global language, with an estimated 1.5 billion speakers worldwide. The English language is the official language in countries, such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and many others. Additionally, English is widely used as a second language in countries where it is not the primary language, further emphasizing its global importance. For non-native speakers, mastering English as a second language normally requires dedication, practice, and exposure to authentic language use. Various resources, including textbooks, online courses, language exchange programs, and immersion experiences, are available to support language learners in their journey. Proficiency in English offers countless advantages, both professionally and personally. It facilitates communication in international settings, enhances career prospects, and provides access to a wealth of information and cultural resources. In today's interconnected world, proficiency

in English as a second language is increasingly valuable. Whether for academic, professional, or personal purposes, learning English opens doors to new opportunities and connections across borders, making it a truly global language.

The differences and errors commonly found in syntax between the Thai language (L1) and the English language (L2)

To effectively communicate an idea, it is very crucial to have the right parts of speech and grammatical categories in a language. A sentence becomes grammatically accurate when it employs the appropriate parts of speech and accurate grammatical categories. On the other hand, the Thai language (L1) and the English language (L2) are certainly different in syntax, now that the Thai language and the English language belong to different language families and have distinct syntaxes. Prasitratasin (2002) categorizes the differences and errors commonly found between English and Thai constructions into two primary categories: (1) parts of speech, and (2) grammatical categories.

1. Noun

In the group of first-year students studying English for Communication Programme at Thaksin University, when comparing the Thai language and the English language, important linguistic features or markers found in English are found to have no relevance in the Thai language.

1.1 Quantity

A number is a grammatical concept that indicates whether a noun refers to one or more than one thing. It is a way to show if a noun is singular or plural. For instance, "computer" and "computers" represent the singular and plural versions of the word "computer." Thereby, when we use the word "computer," we need to specify whether it is one computer or more than one, and this is typically done by changing the form of the word itself. Singular countable nouns take the indefinite article "a(n)," while non-countable and plural countable nouns typically do not require an article or may use "some" (or "any" in non-emphatic situations).

In Thai, there is no distinction between singular and plural noun forms. This can create challenges when translating to English, particularly because learners may overlook adding the plural "-s" when necessary. To illustrate, instead of saying "I sold a lot of bananas yesterday.," Thai students would say "I sold a lot of bananas yesterday."

1.2 Person

A noun or pronoun in a sentence can represent different perspectives: the first person (I or we, including the speaker and others), the second person (you), or the third person (they), which refers to other individuals or objects. Furthermore, when referring to the third person singular (he/she/it) in English, a verb often receives the "-s" suffix. For instance, "He works at Thaksin University." On the other hand, since Thai lacks this "-s" form for the third-person singular present tense, the verb "work" remains unchanged, as in "เขาทำงานที่มหาวิทยาลัยทักษิณ." This poses a challenge when translating Thai to English, since learners may forget to include the "-s" suffix, resulting in phrases, for example, "He works at Thaksin University."

2. Verb

As a general rule, English verbs are considerably more complicated than Thai verbs because they encompass a multitude of grammatical aspects. Therefore, the group of first-year students studying English for Communication Programme at Thaksin University generally have translation problems and errors when translating any type of text. They are as follows:

2.1 General Tense

In Thai, time is conveyed through temporal expressions and contextual clues, while English relies on verb inflections to express its twelve tenses. For example, in the sentence "พวกเขาเพิ่งจะมาถึงที่นี่" ("They have just arrived here."), the word "เพิ่งจะ" indicates the present perfect tense. The challenge arises for students learning English because they may struggle to determine which tense to use due to differences in the languages' structures.

2.2 Passive Voice

Passive voice errors are common among English language learners globally, including Thai university students. It is comparatively common for Thai students learning English as a foreign language or as a second language to make mistakes with grammar structures, specifically the passive voice. There are some common mistakes that Thai university students might make when using passive voice:

2.2.1 Incorrect formation of the passive voice

This mistake occurs when Thai learners might struggle with forming passive voice sentences correctly. This includes using the wrong auxiliary verbs (e.g., "is" "are" "was" "were" and "be") or using them in the wrong tense.

2.2.2 Overuse of the passive voice

Thai students might overuse passive voice constructions where active voice would be more appropriate. This can lead to awkward or unclear sentences.

2.2.3 Confusion with subject-verb agreement

Thai learners might have difficulty maintaining subject-verb agreement when using passive voice constructions, particularly with plural subjects.

2.2.4 Omission of prepositions

Thai learners might omit prepositions that are necessary for forming passive voice constructions correctly, leading to grammatically incorrect sentences.

3. Adjective

When the group of first-year students studying English for Communication Programme at Thaksin University use adjectives, there are several common mistakes that they may make, especially when learning English as a foreign language or a second language. Here are some of those mistakes:

3.1 Word order

In Thai, the adjective typically follows the noun it modifies, while in English, it is the opposite. For example, in Thai, one might say "dog black" to mean "black dog." This difference in word order can result in confusion and errors in English sentences.

3.2 Comparatives and Superlatives

Thai does not have explicit comparative and superlative forms for adjectives like English does (-er and -est endings, or "more" and "most"). Thai university students may overuse "more" or "most" when they should use the comparative or superlative forms of adjectives.

4. Adverb

Normally, common mistakes are found among the group of first-year students studying English for Communication Programme at Thaksin University when using adverbs include:

4.1 Incorrect placement

Adverbs are often misplaced within a sentence, especially when they modify verbs. Students may place them incorrectly before or after the verb they are supposed to modify.

4.2 Misuse of comparative and superlative forms

Thai university students may struggle with forming the comparative and superlative forms of adverbs. They might mistakenly add "-er" or "-est" endings to adverbs instead of using "more" and "most" for longer adverbs.

4.3 Confusing adverbs with adjectives

From time to time, Thai university students confuse adverbs with adjectives. While adjectives modify nouns, adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. This confusion can contribute to incorrect usage in sentences.

4.4 Incorrect spelling

Spelling errors are very common, particularly with irregular adverbs or adverbs that have similar-sounding counterparts. For instance, "quietly" might be misspelled as "quitely".

In summary, comprehending these distinctions can aid individuals' studying either English or Thai as a second language in overcoming the hurdles they encounter. Prasitratasin's classification offers a structured approach for recognizing and tackling particular complexities inherent in language acquisition and instruction.

Translation problems and translation ambiguity

Natural languages are well-known for their inherent ambiguity across different aspects. Lyons (1995) explains that a single word can semantically have more than one meaning; therefore, translation problems and translation ambiguity generally arise when a word in one language can be translated in more than one way into another language. This cross-language phenomenon comes from a great number of sources of within-language ambiguity, including lexical ambiguity, polysemy, as well as near-synonymy.

As a matter of fact, translation problems and translation ambiguity occur on account of various factors inherent in language and cultural differences. Here are some common issues:

Baker (1992) classifies translation problems into eleven genres covering all the linguistic, semantic, and cultural aspects. These translation problems are some common categories of problems of non-equivalence at word level. Furthermore, the researcher would like to present a range of well-analyzed examples, categorized according to Baker's (1992) framework, illustrating the factors influencing translation from the Thai language (L1) to the English language (L2) in the group of first-year students enrolled in the English for Communication program.

1. Cultural-specific concepts

Cultural-specific concepts are unknown or barely comprehended in target cultures, specifically the concept of religious beliefs, social customs, and types of food.

Example:	Source language:	นอนบนเตียง
	Back translation:	to sleep on bed
	Target language:	to sleep in bed

According to the instance above, some Thai university students learning English as a foreign language and a second language normally use "on," which is absolutely wrong, instead of "in." On the contrary, the instance above shows that the understanding of the cultural concept can greatly help Thai university students to use the correct translation.

2. The source language concept is not lexicalized in the target language.

The source language concept is known in the target language. On the other hand, there is no equivalent word to express it.

Example:	Source language:	อาหารเรียกน้ำย่อย
	Back translation:	food calling digesting water
	Target language:	appetizer or starter

As illustrated in the above example, the Thai language lacks a precise term akin to "appetizer or starter." In contrast, the underlying concept is well comprehended. A pragmatic remedy to this linguistic gap entails furnishing relevant lexical alternatives.

3. Semantic complexity of the source language

From time to time, it is comparatively difficult to give an equivalent word from the source language in the target language, now that a word in the source language may be semantically complicated. Instead of expressing in a single word, a phrase or a sentence is needed to give accurate translation.

Example:	Source language:	อิจฉาดาร้อน
	Back translation:	envious of hot eyes
	Target language:	feeling envious of someone who is better than you

The Thai expression provided in the above instance proves too intricate for succinct translation while preserving the nuanced essence of the source language. Instead, a rephrased rendition becomes imperative to accurately communicate the intended significance.

4. Different distinctions in meanings between the source and target languages

As a general rule, there are a great number of distinctions in meanings between the source language and the target language. At times, the target language has more or less distinctions in meanings than the source language.

Example:	Source language:	อาบน้ำ
	Back translation:	wash the body

Target language: take (have) a bath or take (have) a shower

In the preceding illustration, it becomes evident that the English language delineates between the acts of bathing and showering, whereas the Thai term "อาบน้ำ" (translated as "wash the body") lacks such differentiation. This Thai expression serves as a broad descriptor encompassing various methods of cleansing one's body. Consequently, Thai university students or inexperienced translators must be attentive to these nuances in meaning to ensure the dissemination of accurate information.

5. Lack of a general word in the target language

In the target language, there might not be a comprehensive counterpart to a word in the source language. Rather, there exists only a specialized term, which could carry varying connotations compared to the original language.

Example: Source language: การทำแท้ง
Back translation: intentional or unintentional ending of a pregnancy
Target language: miscarriage or abortion

In the example provided, the Thai language employs a single overarching term to describe the spontaneous or intentional premature expulsion of a fetus from the womb. However, English distinguishes between "an abortion" and "a miscarriage," with the former specifically denoting a termination of pregnancy driven by the mother's intention, whereas the latter refers to an unintentional loss of the fetus.

6. Lack of specific words in the target language

From time to time, the target language lacks a specific word to refer to a word in the source language. The English language has miscellaneous hyponyms. On the other hand, there is no equivalent word in some other languages.

Example: Source language: กินข้าว
Back translation: eat rice
Target language: have or eat breakfast/brunch/lunch/dinner
/supper

From the instance above, the Thai language lacks specific words to refer to having a meal in the morning, at noon, in the evening, etc. As a consequence, some university students or novice translators translate this specific phrase from "have or eat breakfast/brunch/lunch/dinner/supper" to "eat rice" sometimes. Rather, a word "กินข้าว" (back translation: eat rice) is used to refer to an action of having a meal. On the contrary,

English instructors had better explain the lack of specific words in the target language to their Thai university students or novice translators more vividly.

A language can manifest distinct characteristics when viewed through either physical or interpersonal lenses. From a physical standpoint, it pertains to the complicated interplay among individuals, objects, and environments.

Example:	Source language:	ฉัน/เค้า/ข้า/กู/หนู/เรา/ผม/ดิฉัน/ข้าพเจ้า/ข้าพระพุทธเจ้า
	Back translation:	I
	Target language:	I

The preceding instance illustrates the rich lexicon of the Thai language, which encompasses numerous terms for expressing the self as "I." In spite of their synonymous essence, these pronouns are strategically employed across various situations, reflecting differences in formality levels.

8. Differences in expressive meanings

The semantic content of a word in both the source and target languages may have the same propositional meaning; nevertheless, their expressive connotations can differ. Translators frequently introduce evaluative elements, like modifiers or adverbs, to approximate the expressive nuances of the source language, striving for equivalence or close approximation in the target language.

Example:	Source language:	สำคัญ
	Back translation:	important
	Target language:	primary (main, major), significant (important), Essential (necessary, obligatory, compulsory)

In the provided illustration, a multitude of English terms are employed to convey the essence of the Thai word "สำคัญ" (with a back translation denoting "important").

9. Differences in forms

As a general rule, certain forms found in the source language lack direct equivalents in the target language. For instance, English exhibits prefixes like -un, -in, -im (e.g., unseen, impossible, independent) and suffixes such as -able, -ish, -ment (i.e., believable, boyish, management), whereas these specific forms do not exist in Thai.

10. Differences in frequency and purpose of using specific forms

In English, English grammar features various modifications in verb and noun structures to convey tense, including distinctions between singular and plural nouns and active and passive voices, among others. Conversely, the Thai language lacks these specific grammatical nuances. Challenges often arise when Thai university students or

inexperienced translators are guided by the structures of their native language, leading to difficulties in accurately conveying the intended meaning in English texts.

Example:	Source language:	ฉันทำการบ้านอยู่ตอนนี้
	Back translation:	I do homework now.
	Target language:	I am doing homework now/right now/at the moment.

Based on the preceding example, the verb tense holds significant significance in English grammar, whereas the concept of verb tense is nonexistent in the Thai language.

11. Differences in the use of loan words in the source text

As a matter of fact, loan words are employed during translation when a direct counterpart is absent in the target language. On the contrary, it is not consistently feasible to locate a borrowed term with identical connotations in the target language. As a result, translation complications frequently arise on account of this disparity in lexical equivalence.

Example:	Source language:	หนังตะลุง
	Back translation:	Movie Talung or Film Talung
	Target language:	Nang Talung, the shadow play

In the provided instance, there is no English equivalence for “หนังตะลุง” (back translation: movie Talung or film Talung). Consequently, recourse to a loanword becomes necessary. On the other hand, the adequacy of this borrowing may diminish in the absence of further explication or paraphrasing.

Conclusion

In summary, translation difficulties arise when a term or concept lacks a precise equivalent in the target language. Scholars and translators agree that these challenges are the result of an intricate interplay of linguistic, semantic, and cultural factors. Furthermore, translation issues and ambiguities frequently occur in the absence of direct lexical correspondences, now that behavioral theories have long contended that the first language (L1) has the most significant impact on second language acquisition. On the other hand, a wealth of research has demonstrated that intralingual errors, arising from insufficient knowledge of the target language, are the principal barriers to acquiring a second language, particularly in terms of linguistic proficiency. This evidence suggests that the primary challenge may lie in the instructional methods employed. Since the group of first-year students enrolled in the English for Communication program lack daily immersion in L2 environments and primarily encounter English within the classroom, there may be a need

to rethink teaching strategies. For instance, integrating English signage and instituting regular English-speaking hours could enhance language exposure. Additionally, providing schools nationwide with foreign teachers at no extra cost would offer students valuable opportunities to engage with native speakers, and they had better be encouraged to use appropriate strategies to ensure that their translations of well-crafted texts and sentences are both accurate and effective. Despite the group of first-year students enrolled in the English for Communication programme having studied English for over a decade, they continue to make notable intralingual errors, reflecting a deficiency in their grammatical proficiency. Contributing factors to the challenges faced by Thai learners in acquiring a second language include their learning environment, limited opportunities for practical language use, and restricted access to relevant L2 materials. Although English is taught as a second language in Thai schools, it remains a foreign language in Thailand due to its minimal use in daily communication among the populace. Despite its inclusion in both primary and secondary curricula, few Thais achieve fluency in English.

The persistent difficulties encountered by the group of first-year students enrolled in the English for Communication program, even after extensive study, suggest the need for a paradigm shift in pedagogical approaches—from traditional grammar-based instruction to more communicative methods. It is pointed out that language acquisition is significantly hindered unless learners are immersed in a language-rich environment. While classroom instruction has the potential to enhance linguistic skills, exposure to authentic language use with native speakers is crucial for effective language attainment. Unfortunately, both the prevailing learning environments and instructional methodologies in Thailand appear to be inadequate for fostering English proficiency. This persistent inadequacy may be attributed to decades of ineffective teaching practices rather than solely to L1 interference. Thus, it is evident that for the group of first-year students enrolled in the English for Communication program to better assimilate academic knowledge and achieve proficiency in English, it is essential to integrate opportunities for practical language use into their everyday experiences.

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