

Translation of Thai Cultural Terms in English Subtitles
in the Movie, “Love Destiny: The Movie”
การแปลข้อความวัฒนธรรมในบทแปลคำบรรยายใต้ภาพจากภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ
ในภาพยนตร์เรื่อง “บุพเพสันนิวาส 2”

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Receiving Date: 3 May 2024 / Revising Date: 27 June 2024 / Accepting Date: 27 June 2024

Abstract

This research aimed to analyze techniques and methods used in translating with cultural terms in the translation of the script of the movie, “Love Destiny 2”, which was shown in 2022. The movie was based on a retro-romantic comedy film jointly produced by GDH and Broadcast Thai Television Company Limited. The study includes 58 Thai subtitle samples, which were analyzed using eight translation strategies of non-equivalence at the word level proposed by Baker (1992). The research found 58 cultural items translated according to Baker’s strategies. The result of this study revealed that the translator mostly used related words to paraphrase cultural terms in the source text (25.86%), followed by translation by paraphrasing cultural terms using unrelated words (20.69%) and by using more neutral/less expressive words (18.97%), respectively. The translator did not implement all translation strategies suggested by Baker (1992) since the research found no use of translation by using illustration. For further studies, there should be more analysis of translation theories given by other theorists. In addition, further research should be conducted using different movie scripts translated by other translators to understand how translators deal with cultural differences in translation.

Keywords: Translation, Cultural substitution, Movie, Subtitles, Love Destiny 2

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการใช้กลวิธีในการจัดการกับข้อความทางวัฒนธรรมในการแปลบทบรรยายใต้ภาพของภาพยนตร์เรื่อง "บุพเพสันนิวาส 2" ภาพยนตร์ตลก-รักโรแมนติกแนวย้อนยุคสร้างโดยบริษัท จีดีเอช ห้าห้าเก้า จำกัด ร่วมกับบริษัท บรอดคาซท์ ไทย เทเลวิชั่น จำกัด ออกฉายในปีพ.ศ. 2565 การศึกษาครั้งนี้ใช้วิธีการศึกษาเพื่อเปรียบเทียบระหว่างบทบรรยายใต้ภาพภาษาอังกฤษกับบทพูดภาษาไทยของตัวละครตลอดทั้งเรื่อง เพื่อสำรวจกลวิธีการแปลที่ผู้แปลใช้ในการแปลข้อความทางวัฒนธรรม วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยใช้กลวิธีการแปลข้อความในกรณีที่ข้อความในภาษาต้นทางและปลายทางไม่มีคำเทียบเคียงกันได้ของเบเกอร์ (2535) ซึ่งเสนอไว้ 8 กลวิธี ผลการศึกษาพบว่ามีการใช้กลวิธีการแปลบทบรรยายใต้ภาพที่สอดคล้องกับกลวิธีเบเกอร์ 58 ข้อความ โดยพบว่าผู้แปลใช้วิธีการถอดความโดยใช้คำที่เกี่ยวข้องกันมากที่สุด (ร้อยละ 25.86) รองลงมาคือการถอดความโดยใช้คำที่ไม่เกี่ยวข้องกัน (ร้อยละ 20.69) และ การแปลโดยใช้คำที่มีความหมายเป็นกลางมากขึ้น/เบาลง (ร้อยละ 18.97) ตามลำดับ นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่าผู้แปลไม่ได้ใช้กลวิธีครบทั้ง 8 วิธี เนื่องจากไม่พบการแปลโดยการยกตัวอย่างประกอบ ในการศึกษาครั้งต่อไป ผู้วิจัยในอนาคตอาจศึกษาวิธีการแปลที่เสนอโดยทฤษฎีอื่น ๆ หรือศึกษาการแปลบทบรรยายใต้ภาพในภาพยนตร์เรื่องอื่น ๆ เพื่อให้ศึกษาวิธีการจัดการกับความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรมที่พบในการแปล

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1. Introduction

Due to the globalized world and technological advancement, communication is not limited. People living far away can exchange with each other easily in the blink of an eye with the help of digital communication tools. Despite that fact, communication is still limited if communicators share different mother tongues. For instance, Thai people never understand news reports delivered in a foreign language they do not know. That is why translation has been playing a significant role in communication between two communicators who do not share the same mother tongue.

Translation is found to play a significant role as a mean for conveying a message in one language to another when the receiver of the message does not speak or know the language of the original message – the source text. As language is associated with culture, a translator unavoidably deals with cultural differences while translating a work. Many works highly embrace cultural aspects and literary works like movies also do. Nowadays, movies are an entertainment form that gain global popularity. The global movie industry has continuously been growing. Thailand is a country where the movie industry is growing. Thai movies are primarily for Thai audiences; however, many are exported to Southeast Asian and East Asian countries. To ensure international audiences understand the stories of those movies, subtitles in other languages including English are provided. As movies

embrace cultural stuffs, a translator needs to translate cultural terms used in movie scenes in which characters are having a meal, discussing about cultural traditions, etc.

One of the movies that gain popularity from Thai people and is exported to other countries is Love Destiny 2 (Bupphesanniwat 2). The movie depicts the scenes in the Early Rattanakosin era, during the reign of King Rama III, telling a story of Khun Sombat Bodi or Bhop, who keeps dreaming of a woman he loved in another life. He believes in destiny to find her again. Later, he meets Gaysorn, a woman he believes to be her past lover. He plans to reconnect with her, and she falls in love with him again. However, his plans are interrupted by Methas, a mysterious time traveller from 19th century Rattanakosin era. The movie was released on 28 July 2022. Due to its success in Thailand and the popularity of the previous TV drama of the same name and main characters, it was shown in many countries, such as Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore, Australia, and so on. Especially in Vietnam, the movie was the highest grossing Thai movie of all time, earning \$ approximately 2.6 million as of the 14th day of being shown (https://www.gdh559.com/post/LoveDestiny_Vietnam/?t).

In this paper, translation strategies used by the translator of the movie scripts were investigated to discover translation strategies or techniques in translating non-equivalence, cultural terms. The goal of this research is not to evaluate how effectively all cultural items were translated but analyze how they were translated and what strategies were implemented to deal with cultural differences causing translation difficulty to provide guidelines for translators to translate literary works like movies.

2. Objective of the Study

To investigate translation strategies applied to the translation of cultural terms in the English subtitles of the movie, “Love Destiny: The Movie

3. Scope of the Study

This study aimed at investigating translation strategies applied to the translation of cultural terms in the English subtitles of the movie, “Love Destiny: The Movie, produced by GDH and Broadcast Thai Television. The movie was released on 28 July 2022; later, it was streamed on Netflix, an American subscription video on-demand over-the-top streaming service. Starred by Ranee Campen and Thanavat Vattanaputi, this movie is directed by Adisorn Tresirikasem. It is a separate sequel to Love Destiny (Bupphesanniwat), a television drama adapted from the novel of

the same name. This study emphasized only cultural terms which are non-equivalence at the word level. Data were analyzed following the framework of eight strategies for translating non-equivalence at the word level proposed by Baker (1992).

4. Significance of the Study

This study contributes to further research related to translation and cross-cultural translation as it explores how Thai cultural terms were translated into English subtitles. In addition, it allows translators to realize cultural differences and their impact on translation.

5. Literature Review

Translation is a tool that is used for communicating a message from one language to another. A well-known theorist of translation, Newmark (1988) defined translation as “*a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message or statement in another language*”. In fact, it is a tool for rendering of the meaning of a text into another language as intended by the author of such text. Catford (1965) considered translation as the substitution of a text in a source language (SL) with an equivalent text in the target language (TL). Similarly, Nida and Taber (1961) viewed it as a mean for producing the closest natural equivalent, both in meaning and in style, of the source language text into the receiver’s language. The essence of translation that those definitions by different scholars share is translation is a tool used in communication between two communicators from different languages.

Newmark (1988) stated that translation, apart from rendering of the meaning of a text into another language, is used to transmit culture. Keesing (1981) defined culture as learned, accumulated experience and socially transmitted patterns for behavior characteristic of a particular social group. Music, novels, shows, and movies are literary works considered as cultural productions. Of course, they use cultural terms in the text. Wahyudi (2023) defined cultural terms as “*words that have cultural overlap in both the source and target languages*”. We listen to music, read novels, watch shows, and go to the theater, one way or the other. When they are spreaded from one culture to another, translation is the only mean used for expressing ideas and content of those entertainment forms.

Movies are an example of cultural production that entertains people. If a movie is popular, it may be exported to other countries. That is, its scripts must be translated to the language of the country where it is showed. Thailand is one of the countries of which the movie industry annually grows; many Thai movies are exported to be shown in international countries. Love Destiny: The Movie is one of the Thai highest-grossing movies of all time in Thailand and in other countries,

especially in Vietnam. This movie mainly depicted Siam (the former name of Thailand) during the reign of King Rama III, so its characters frequently used ancient and cultural terms in their conversations. Since this movie was shown to international audiences, subtitles in their languages are essential. Borell (2000) stated that subtitles are textual versions of the dialogue in movies and/or television programs that enhance audiences' understanding of the story. Normally displayed at the bottom of the screen, they are translated into the audience's languages and, of course, English to assist those with hearing impairment or those unable to understand the original language used in aural conversation.

To fulfill the objective of this research, cross-cultural translation was the first priority in literature review to analyze what strategies were applied to translation of cultural terms in the English subtitles of the movie. Miangah (2004) indicated that cultural differences exist between a source language and a target language, so translated texts are tailor-made for target readers in a culture different from that of the writer of a text. Thus, translations need to be "culturally competent and appropriate". Lacking knowledge and awareness of cultural differences, a translator may find translation of cultural terms difficult resulting in inability to convey cultural points and implications existing in the foreign texts.

Cultural-Specific Concepts VS Non-Equivalence at Word Level

Non-equivalence at word level, hence, is a common translation problem for translators. Baker (1992) defined non-equivalence at the word level that "*the target language has no direct equivalent for a word which occurs in the source text*". Accordingly, Baker (1992) considered cultural-specific concepts as one of the most common problems of non-equivalence at word level. Often, the source language word may embrace a concept totally unknown in the culture of the target language; sometimes, cultural terms in the source language have no equivalent terms in the target text.

Baker (1992), then, proposed eight strategies for translating non-equivalence at the word level as follows:

1) Translation by more general words

This strategy is implemented to deal with a variety of non-equivalence types. It is used to deal with specific terms that are not available in the target text. The key is to use a more general term or superordinate to replace a specific term. For example, "กล้วยน้ำว้า" which is a species of Thai banana is translated to "a banana" which is a more general term. This example is given by the researcher. Since this banana species is not available in English-speaking countries and using a

loanword or transliteration, “Namwa banana,” is not a good solution, translating it into “banana” which is more general is one of the solutions.

2) Translation by more neutral/ less expressive words

Through this strategy, a more neutral or less expressive word in the target language is used when a translator encounters a word with a similar or nearly similar surface meaning (propositional meaning) which has a considerably distinct emotive meaning. The key of this strategy is the word in the source text is replaced with a word carrying less expressive meaning.

Example:

Source text: น้อง ไปถีบเบาะที่เค้าเล่นทำไมล่ะครับ

Target text: Sweetie, why did you kick her seat?

(Ngampradit and Boonmoh, 2012:209)

“ถีบ” is translated to “kick” in the example above. In comparison, “kick” sounds less expressive than “ถีบ”, which means to bend a knee and attack with a powerful kick. If a translator finds no equivalent items in the target language, substituting it with a near equivalent word, which is less expressive, can be a solution.

3) Translation by cultural substitution

This strategy aims at dealing with a problematic culture-specific item or expression. A translator replaces a cultural item in the source language with a term in the culture of the target language, considering its impact on the target reader. This strategy makes the translated text more natural, understandable, and sound familiar to the target reader. For example, “หมึกแดง” (a well-known Thai chef) is translated to “Martha Stewart” who is also an internationally well-known chef (Ngampradit and Boonmoh, 2012:209).

4) Translation using loan words or loan words plus explanation

This strategy also aims at dealing with culture-specific items, modern concepts, and buzzwords. Using a loan word with an explanation is very useful when a word in the source language appears several times in the text. A loan word can be solely used if it is a well-known term. A translator may add an explanation to the loan word to provide information to the target reader.

Example:

Source text: ปัจจุบันใครเดินทางไปถึงยอดดอยไม่ควรลืมไหว้พระสตุ๊ป

Target text: Today, when visitors go there, they should remember to pay respect to this stupa...

(Aumnuch, 2004:15)

In this example, สถูป is translated into English by using a loan word, stupa.

Example:

Source text: ส้มขยยา

Target text: Sangkaya, a kind of Thai dessert made from egg yolk, coconut milk, and sugar

In this example, ส้มขยยา is transliterated to “Sangkaya” and more information about what it is, “a kind of Thai dessert made from egg yolk, coconut milk, and sugar” is provided.

5) Translation by paraphrase using related words

Through this strategy, a source language word is lexicalized in the target language but in a different form. Some culture-specific terms need to be paraphrased to provide a clearer meaning and prevent confusion that may occur. A translator has two choices when paraphrasing: using a related word and a non-related word. A translator selects a word in the target language that shares the same meaning or concept of the word in the source language.

Example:

Source text: สถาปัตยกรรมงดงามอย่างยิ่งหาที่เปรียบมิได้ (Back translation: The architecture is incomparably beautiful.)

Target text: incomparable sophistication of architecture

The translator uses “sophistication” to convey the word “งดงาม” that the architecture is complex and cleverly designed. Actually, “งดงาม” means “beautiful” but if the translator had selected “beautiful”, the meaning of the whole phrase would have been too straightforward.

6) Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words

An unrelated word can be used when the concept in the source item is not lexicalized in the target language. When the meaning of the source language word is complex in the target language, a translator may modify a superordinate by using a non-related word which makes the meaning of the source language word clearer.

Example:

Source text: ควบคุมสังคม (Back translation: control the society)

Target text: enhancing the community

(Mungchomklang, 2009)

“ควบคุมสังคม” is translated to “enhancing the community”. The translator selected “enhancing the community” which are unrelated words to convey the concept of the source language texts, allowing the target reader to visualize the picture of improving of the community.

7) Translation by omission

This strategy aims at omitting a word or expression in the target text. Baker (1992) suggested omitting a lexical item due to grammatical or semantic patterns in the target language. A translator may not translate a word in the source language if its meaning conveyed by a particular item or expression is optional to mention, and omitting it does not result in misunderstanding or confusion of the target text. Using this strategy, a translator can limit the number of words, avoiding lengthy explanations.

Example:

Source text: Wash your hands before eating.

Target text: ล้างมือก่อนรับประทานอาหาร (Back translation: wash hands before eating food)

In the target text, “your” is omitted since it sounds unnatural in the target text. In the target language, possessive pronouns are omitted.

8) Translation by using illustration

This strategy is used when the equivalent item in the target language does not cover some aspects of the source language item. An illustration helps increase the target readers’ understanding of a problematic item.

Example:

Source text: Chain hotels

Target text: โรงแรมที่มีสาขาทั่วโลก เช่น Hyatt, Marriott และ Hilton เป็นต้น (Back translation: Hotels with global branches, such as Hyatt, Marriott, and Hilton, etc.)

In this example, “เช่น Hyatt, Marriott และ Hilton” (such as Hyatt, Marriott, and Hilton, etc.) is provided to enhance the target readers’ comprehension.

In conclusion, Baker’s strategies can be applied to the analysis of cultural translation.

6. Methodology

6.1 Data Collection

The main source of data was the movie, “Love Destiny: The Movie,” available on Netflix. Data were English subtitles appearing throughout the movie. The research investigated translation strategies that were applied to the translation of the characters’ dialogues into English subtitles.

6.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted to investigate translation strategies used to deal with cultural terms. The Thai scripts and English subtitles were paired and analyzed to discover translation strategies. Data analysis was based on the theoretical framework of translation of non-equivalence at word level proposed by Baker (1992). An analysis based on this framework can give a clearer picture of how cultural terms as non-equivalence at word level were dealt with.

7. Results

7.1 Frequency of Translation Strategies

The result revealed that there were a total of 58 Thai cultural terms. Table 7.1.1 displays the frequency of each translation strategy found to be used in translating cultural terms in the movie.

Table 7.1.1 Frequency of translation strategies

| Translation strategies | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| 1) Translation by paraphrasing using related words | 15 | 25.86 |
| 2) Translation by paraphrasing using unrelated words | 12 | 20.69 |
| 3) Translation by using more neutral/less expressive words | 11 | 18.97 |
| 4) Translation by using more general words | 10 | 17.24 |
| 5) Translation by omission | 4 | 6.90 |
| 6) Translation by using loan words | 3 | 5.17 |
| 7) Translation by cultural substitution | 3 | 5.17 |
| 8) Translation by using illustration | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 23 | 100 |

Table 7.1.1 presents Baker (1992)'s eight translation strategies. It is noticeable that translation by paraphrasing using related words displays the highest frequency (25.86%), followed by translation by paraphrasing using unrelated words (20.69%), translation by using more general words (18.97%), translation by using more neutral/less expressive words (17.24%), and translation by omission (6.90%), and translation by using loan words and by cultural substitution (5.17% each), respectively. Translation by using illustration was not found. To visualize how cultural terms were translated, the following examples are illustrated in the order of frequency.

1) Translation by paraphrasing using related words

Source text: มีเหตุไม่ชอบมาพากลเกี่ยวกับเรือกลไฟ

Target text: There’s something suspicious about the steamboat.

“ไม่ชอบมาพากล” is a Thai expression that means cannot be translated directly word-for-word into English. Instead, the word “suspicious” is used to substitute it as it conveys the same meaning. The word “suspicious” conveys the idea that there is something questionable or possibly wrong about something. Obviously, the translator did not use an English expression but the word “suspicious”, a related word that can convey the meaning intended by the character.

2) Translation by paraphrasing using unrelated words

Source text: ขุนช้างหรือขุนแผนเล่า

Target text: Is he Mis-Chief or Handker-Chief?

In this scene, Bhop tries to get to know Gaysorn at their first meeting at an outdoor theatre, annoying her by asking a lot of questions about personal information. “Pi”, Gaysorn’s helper wants him to stay away from her mistress, so she lets him know that Gaysorn has a fiancé with a “Khun” title. Bhop, then, asks “ขุนช้างหรือขุนแผนเล่า”, meaning to annoy her. “ขุนช้าง” (Khun Chang) and “ขุนแผน” (Khun Phaen) are two male characters in a Thai literature masterpiece. Khun (ขุน) is a title or rank of the ancient Thai civil nobility. In the target language, “Khun” was translated as “Chief” which is not a rank but a lexical unit in “Mis-Chief or Handker-Chief”. Therefore, the target text was paraphrased using an unrelated word.

3) Translation by using more neutral/less expressive words

Source text: คุณพี่จะยังอยากออกเรือนกับฉันหรือไม่เจ้าคะ

Target text: Would you still want to marry me?

Type of translation: Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word

In Thai culture, after marriage, a child of the family – mostly daughter – needs to move out and live with her spouse’s family. “ออกเรือน” is an old-fashioned word that means to marry and move out to live with a spouse or his/her family. In the target text, “marry” which is a more neutral word is used.

4) Translation by using more general words

Source text: ท่านใช้ดอกกรั๊กแทนปุ่มเลิฟในไอจีอ้อ

Target text: You used flowers like the ‘heart’ button in IG?

“ดอกรั๊ก” in English is ‘Crown flower’ because it looks like a crown. It is an indigenous flower plant in Thailand. Thai Buddhists use this flower to make worship garlands, paying their respects to Buddha. In the target text, “flowers” which is a more general word was used to substitute “ดอกรั๊ก” which is a specific flower species.

5) Translation by omission

Source text: ตอมเป็นแมงหวี่แมงวันเลย

Target text: He hovers around just like a fly.

In the source text, “แมงหวี่” (fruit fly) and “แมงวัน” (fly) are insects that Thai people use to compare to a situation in which something or someone is surrounded by a crowd of people due to its or his/her attractiveness. These two insects always appear together when used by Thai speakers. However, in the target text, only one of them, “แมงวัน,” was translated as a fly, and the word ‘fruit fly’ was omitted.

6) Translation by using loan words

Source text: คนเมืองแกลงชอบเจ้าได้ยังไง

Target text: How can the people of Klang like you?

“Klang” was a city in the East of Thailand which is nowadays a district in Rayong Province. The translator transliterated the name of the city since it is a proper name.

7) Translation by cultural substitution

Source text: ฉันชื่อขลุ่ย พี่สาวฉันชื่อปี่

Target text: My name is Viola. My sister’s name is Fiddle.

In the example, “ขลุ่ย” and “ปี่” are Thai musical instruments that look very similar. However, they were translated as “Viola” and “Fiddle,” which are Western musical instruments that look similar as well. Since the Thai musical instruments are unfamiliar to international audiences, substituting them with those western instruments can enhance the target audiences’ understanding. In this situation, Gaysorn is upset since Bhop has complained her about her noisy talk with her handmaiden, so she does not want him to know her, giving her name wrongly using the names of the Thai musical instruments.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

This research was carried out to explore translation strategies used to translate cultural terms in the movie, "Love Destiny: the Movie," produced by GDH and Broadcast Thai Television Company Limited. Data analysis followed the framework of translation strategies of non-equivalence at word level proposed by Baker (1992).

The results found fifty-eight cultural terms, and the highest and the second highest frequencies were displayed by translation by paraphrasing using related words and translation by paraphrasing using unrelated words, followed by translation by using more neutral/less expressive words, respectively. Translation by using illustration was not found at all. According to the result based on translation of non-equivalence at word level proposed by Baker (1992), the reason why translation by paraphrasing was mostly used may be due to the fact that most characters exchange verbally in general topics. The movie tells a story in the Early Rattanakosin era with plenty of old-fashioned cultural words paraphrased using related and unrelated words. For example, in the example, 'suspicious,' was translated from a Thai expression 'ไม่ชอบมาพากล.' It is noticeable that Thai people still use this expression in the present days, and the target text shares the concept and meaning of this expression. Another example is the use of the unrelated words, "mischief" and "handkerchief" in place of "ขุนช้าง" (Khun Chang) and "ขุนแผน" (Khun Phaen), respectively. This result is consistent with Anh (2018) identifying that paraphrase is a strategy that must be implemented since it can make the meaning of culture-specific terms clear and prevent confusion. Likewise, Ngampradit and Boonmoh (2012) stated that an understanding bridge for cultural words could be built by using translation strategies.

Another finding which surprised the researcher was the least use of loan words and cultural substitution in translating cultural terms. Before conducting this study, the researcher anticipated that cultural substitution would be in the top three of the findings since this movie embraces a lot of Thai cultural aspects. It is possible that non-equivalence at word level can be resolved by using more than one strategy, depending upon translators' decision and translation contexts. This possibility is supported by Baker (1992) identifying that the translator's decision to use this strategy largely depends on factors, such as how much 'licence' he is given, purposes of translation, and translation effects to community. The other finding was that translation by illustration was not found at all. It is probably due to the limitation of subtitling. Since the number of words per line is limited in subtitling, use of illustrations which contain descriptions or explanation of something is impossible.

Nowadays, we live in the digital era where communication is fast due to the help of digital technology. Cross-cultural translation then is not deniable. Translators always encounter cultural

terms in their translation. Some of them may have equivalent items in the target language, but some may not. Therefore, translation strategies can be employed to deal with non-equivalence in the target language. The aim of translation is to render the meaning of a text into another language as intended by the author of such text. When a cultural term cannot be rendered to the target language word, its concept, at least, must be understandable in the target language.

It can be concluded that translation techniques used in the English subtitles of “Love Destiny: The Movie” could make the meaning of the target texts clear and understandable. Furthermore, the target text sounded the most familiar and natural to enhance the understanding of the target audience, meeting the cultural context of the target audience. This study emphasized Baker’s strategies which could effectively be applied to the analysis of translation of cultural items in the movie.

6. Recommendations

1. Further studies may investigate translation of cultural items in Thai movies during the past decade to discover strategies used by previous translators.
2. It is possible for further studies to explore viewers’ satisfaction toward translated subtitles after using the strategies.
3. Further studies may analyze translation strategies suggested by other translation theorists.

7. Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to extend our gratitude to Asst. Prof. Dr. Piyasuda Mawai, and members of the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rangsit University who encouraged and supported the publication of this article. My deepest thanks also go to Dr. Nakonthep Tipayasuparat for his guidance. Finally, the researcher is grateful for support from teachers at English Language Department, College of Liberal Arts, Rangsit University.

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