

An Error Analysis of the Clearly Stated and
Unclearly Stated Time Markers Concerning the Use of
Verbs and Tenses in Translation from Thai into English
by Second-Year English Major Students^{*}

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Abstract

The objectives of this study were divided into two issues: examining if time markers clearly stated in Thai contexts reduce the errors of using wrong tenses when doing translation from Thai into English and investigating the types of errors concerning the use of verbs and tenses made by the English major students in two versions of translation tests. The subjects of this study were 33 second-year English major students of Kasetsart University enrolling in the 2011 academic

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year. The instruments were two versions of Thai into English translation tests: the test version I consists of 20 sentences in Thai without clearly stated time markers and the test version II consists of the same 20 sentences with clearly stated time markers. The results of the study were as followed: first, the results from the tests showed that the mean score of the test version II was higher than that of the test Version I. The existence of clearly stated Thai time markers helped the students use certain English tenses accurately but they did not efficiently help the students use all the tenses proficiently due to the different concept of time between Thai and English. Second, the most problematic aspect concerning the use of verbs with preposition; the simple addition of prepositions to certain verbs was most frequently found in the study and using the wrong prepositions with particular verbs was the second mostly found. The Thai students used English based on their native language structure when translating, the errors namely the use of verb with preposition were resulted. Consequently, it is necessary for translation or EFL instructors to raise the students' awareness of how to use certain verbs correctly and to help them distinguish the differences between the Thai and English structures.

Keywords: error analysis; time markers; Thai - English translation

บทคัดย่อ

จุดประสงค์หลักของงานวิจัยแบ่งออกเป็นสองประเด็นหลักคือ ตรวจสอบว่าคำระบุเวลาที่แสดงไว้อย่างชัดเจนในประโยคภาษาไทย สามารถลดข้อผิดพลาดในการใช้กาลในภาษาอังกฤษเมื่อแปลประโยคภาษาไทยให้เป็นภาษาอังกฤษได้หรือไม่ และศึกษาความผิดพลาดประเภทต่างๆ ในการใช้คำกริยาและกาลของนิสิต

วิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษจากการทำแบบทดสอบการแปลจากไทยเป็นอังกฤษใน 2 รูปแบบ กลุ่มประชากรในงานวิจัยนี้คือนิสิตวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษชั้นปีที่ 2 ของมหาวิทยาลัยเกษตรศาสตร์ ปีการศึกษา 2554 จำนวน 33 คน เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัยคือแบบทดสอบการแปลจากภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ 2 รูปแบบ แบบทดสอบรูปแบบที่หนึ่งประกอบด้วยประโยคภาษาไทยจำนวน 20 ประโยคที่ไม่มีการระบุเวลาแสดงไว้อย่างชัดเจน และแบบทดสอบรูปแบบที่สองประกอบด้วยประโยคภาษาไทย 20 ประโยคเดิมที่มีคำระบุเวลาแสดงไว้อย่างชัดเจน ผลการวิจัยมีดังต่อไปนี้ ลำดับแรก ผลจากแบบทดสอบแสดงให้เห็นว่าคะแนนเฉลี่ยจากแบบทดสอบรูปแบบที่สองสูงกว่าคะแนนเฉลี่ยจากแบบทดสอบรูปแบบที่หนึ่ง คำระบุเวลาที่แสดงไว้อย่างชัดเจนช่วยให้นักศึกษาเลือกใช้บางกาลในภาษาอังกฤษได้อย่างถูกต้อง แต่ไม่สามารถช่วยให้นักศึกษาเลือกใช้กาลทั้งหมดในภาษาอังกฤษได้อย่างถูกต้องได้ เนื่องจากแนวความคิดเชิงเวลาที่แตกต่างกันระหว่างภาษาไทยกับภาษาอังกฤษ ลำดับที่สอง ประเภทของความผิดพลาดที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการใช้คำกริยาและกาลที่พบบ่อยที่สุดคือการใช้คำกริยาร่วมกับคำบุพบท พบความผิดพลาดในการเติมคำบุพบทในคำกริยาที่ไม่จำเป็นต้องตามด้วยคำบุพบทมากที่สุด ความผิดพลาดที่พบมากเป็นอันดับสองคือการใช้คำบุพบทที่ไม่ถูกต้องกับคำกริยาบางคำในภาษาอังกฤษ และเนื่องจากนิสิตใช้ภาษาอังกฤษบนพื้นฐานทางไวยากรณ์ของภาษาไทยในการแปล จึงก่อให้เกิดข้อผิดพลาดที่เกี่ยวข้องกับคำกริยาร่วมกับบุพบท ดังนั้นอาจารย์ผู้สอนวิชาการแปลหรือวิชาภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศควรปลูกฝังให้นักศึกษาเห็นความสำคัญในการใช้คำกริยาบางคำในภาษาอังกฤษให้ถูกต้อง และชี้ให้เห็นถึงความแตกต่างระหว่างภาษาไทยกับภาษาอังกฤษ

คำสำคัญ: การวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาด; คำระบุเวลา; การแปลจากภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ

Statement of the Problem

Presently, English is an international language and is also used for exchanging knowledge and technology by many countries. English is also taught in Thailand as a foreign language. Thai students are normally required to study English in primary and secondary schools for 12 years and may continue learning it at least 2 or 4 years at the university level. However, many Thai students still have problems in using English especially tenses. This is due to the fact that the concept of time is not directly expressed by tense in Thai. Thai has neither verb inflections nor auxiliaries to convey the time concept because the present, past or future times are expressed by the combination of time phrases, time markers, aspects markers and some types of verbs (Kanchanawan, 1978). Consequently, many Thai students still make errors in using tenses and other grammatical elements when writing English sentences or passages.

There are a number of studies conducted to examine Thai students' English competence and the problem concerning grammar and tense usage is found to be the dominant problem.

Lukanavanich (1988) analyzed the written errors of first-year English major students in Bangkok University. Two hundred fifty-six first-year students were asked to write an essay within an hour. The result of the study revealed that the most frequent errors are grammatical and structural errors concerning tense.

Additionally, Pholthee (2008) examined errors found in Thai students' academic writing in terms of verbs, tenses and aspects. It was found that wrong word choice, unnecessary insertion of verbs and using

wrong tenses were frequently found in the students' writing tasks respectively.

Apparently, the English grammar especially tense seems to be one of the most problematic elements for a number of Thai students. The difference between Thai and English causes difficulties for Thai students to use appropriate English tenses since they tend to rely so much on the first language when producing English which subsequently results in errors (Tawilapakul, 2001). It is believed that the similarity and difference between a native language and a target language affects the difficulty in acquiring and producing the second language (Lado, 1957). This concept associates with the contrastive analysis hypothesis (CAH) stating that where two languages are similar, positive transfer from the native language would occur but where they are different, negative transfer or mother tongue interference would result in making errors.

Moreover, in the view of Corder (1974), the errors can be studied through error analysis, the study of expressive errors both in spoken or written forms. Therefore, it is interesting to test if the existence of time markers clearly stated in the Thai language would reduce the difficulty in the use of tense by Thai students and subsequently reduce the errors concerning tense when doing translation tasks from Thai into English.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine if time markers clearly stated in Thai contexts reduce the errors of using wrong tenses when doing translation from Thai into English or not.

2. To investigate the types of errors concerning the use of verbs and tenses made by the English major students in two versions of translation: The version I without clearly stated time markers and the version II with clearly stated time markers.

Previous Research

The following reveals some research that has been conducted which is relevant to the main topics of the study.

Tawilapakul (2001) investigated the impact of using time markers in Thai, causes of errors in the use of English tenses and how different levels of English proficiency impacted on students when using tenses. The subjects were seventy-five first-year Thai university students of the Southeast Asian Studies program. The finding showed that the time markers mostly resulted with a negative transfer and the causes of errors were overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules and false concept hypothesized. Moreover, the student English proficiency had the impact on the use of tenses; the result showed that the students in the class who had the highest proficiency got the highest scores.

Posen (2010) collected and identified errors made by 60 third-year English major students in a public university in Taiwan in the translation tasks submitted via online platform. Once the errors were identified by the error analysis approach, the errors were described in detail and put into categories. The results indicated that all the translation errors could be divided into 3 categories: language errors (Tenses and subject-verb agreement), rendition errors (Word choices and misuse of

preposition) and miscellaneous errors. It was also revealed that the language errors were found more frequently than the rendition errors. The sources of errors were from interlingual errors due to the negative language transfer from Chinese language structure.

Data Collection

Subjects: 33 Second-year English major students studying in the Department of Foreign languages, faculty of humanities, Kasetsart University enrolling in the 2011 academic year.

Instrument: (1) The translation version I consists of 20 sentences in Thai without clearly stated time markers. (2) The translation version II consists of 20 sentences in Thai with clearly stated time markers to indicate English tense implications. All the sentences in both versions contain situations which happen at different points of time. These activities and situations focus on 10 different English tenses: present simple, present continuous, present perfect, present perfect continuous, past simple, past continuous, past perfect, past perfect continuous, future simple and future continuous. Each sentence had one focused verb which did not contain any clearly stated Thai time marker in version I but contained the clearly stated Thai time marker in version II. Totally, there were 20 focused verbs in each test. The data collection took place on 18th January 2012. All The 33 subjects were given the translation tests version I and II to complete. They were assigned to complete the version I for an hour and then the version II for another one hour. After, the 2 hours, all the tests were collected.

Data Analysis

In this study, the quantitative approach was applied to fulfill the research objectives regarding the total scores of translation tests version I and II. The independent samples t-test was used to test the significant difference between the mean scores of both versions. The quantitative approach was also used to investigate the quantity of errors and identify the types of errors in both versions. Moreover, both contrastive analysis and error analysis are applied as a framework in this study.

The contrastive analysis hypothesis is used to test if the difference of time and tense between English and Thai, which is diminished through the use of time markers, would reduce errors concerning tenses. Additionally, the types of the errors concerning the use of verbs and tenses are studied through the use of error analysis proposed by Corder (1974) and Ellis (2005), there are four main steps in conducting an error analysis: 1) Collecting of a sample of learner language; 2) Identification of errors; 3) Description of errors and 4) Explanation of errors.

The Process of Examining the Impact of the Time Markers

1. The verbs in the translated sentences in both versions were checked based on the original sentences in English. Each sentence had one focused verb which did not contain any clearly stated Thai time marker in version I but contained the clearly stated Thai time marker in version II. Totally, there were 20 focused verbs in each test.

One Mark would be given to the translated verb which was in the same English tense as the original one. Each sentence had one focused verb which did not contain any clearly stated Thai time marker in

version I but contained the clearly stated Thai time marker in version II. Totally, there were 20 focused verbs in each test; therefore, the total score was 20.

2. The marks for correct tenses in the version I and the version II were separately counted and ranked according the number of correct usage to investigate which tense was used most accurately in each version. The results are then put in the form of percentage.

3. The total marks in each version were calculated and transformed to mean scores. The mean score from version I was then compared with that of version II to examine the impact of the clearly stated and unclearly stated time markers. In this process, an independent samples t-test was used to examine if a statistically significant difference existed between the mean score of version I and that of version II.

The Process of Investigating the Types of Errors

1. All the verbs including finite and non-finite verbs in the sentences in both versions were checked for errors based on the original English sentences.

2. The errors were then categorized according to their types which was surface structure taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) which are 1) Omission; 2) Addition; 3) Misformation and 4) Misordering.

3. The errors in each category were counted and calculated as percentage.

4. The types of error were ranked according to their frequency to examine which type was found most in the study. The results were shown in tables.

Reliability and Validity

Since the instrument used in this study deals with the Thai into English translation and the Thai time markers, all the translated sentences in this study were verified by the advisor and other two experts who teach translation in the university level to ensure the most valid and suitable translated sentences. Additionally, to establish the reliability of categorizing the errors in the present study, the translation tests and all the errors in each category were rechecked by two native English speakers. The errors that at least two checkers agreed on were used in the study otherwise they were deleted. The reliability of checking and categorizing the errors in this study was 90.76 percent.

Findings

The findings of the impact of clearly stated and unclearly stated time markers in Thai into English translation version I and II were shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Marks of the Accurate Uses of Tenses in the Translation Version I and II

Tense	Marks of Accurate Uses (Version I)	Marks of Accurate Uses (Version II)	Total Marks
Present Simple	62 (*93.93%)	63 (95.45%)	66
Past Simple	58 (87.87%)	62 (93.93%)	66
Past Continuous	20 (30.30%)	44 (66.66%)	66
Future Simple	8 (12.12%)	48 (72.72%)	66
Past Perfect	5 (7.57%)	11 (16.66%)	66
Past Perfect Continuous	3 (4.54%)	12 (18.18%)	66
Present Perfect	2 (3.03%)	16 (24.24%)	66

Table 1 (Continued)

Tense	Marks of Accurate Uses (Version I)	Marks of Accurate Uses (Version II)	Total Marks
Present Continuous	1 (1.51%)	45 (68.18%)	66
Present Perfect Continuous	0 (0%)	20 (30.30%)	66
Future Continuous	0 (0%)	6 (9.09%)	66
Total	159	327	660

*Percentage is presented in parentheses

From Table 1, in the test version I, most students were able to use present simple tense (93.93%), past simple tense (87.87%) and past continuous tense (30.30%) respectively. However, the students still had difficulty using the other tenses. especially present continuous (1.51%), present perfect continuous (0%) and future continuous (0%). Moreover, when the students translated the sentences with clearly stated time markers, the number of accurate uses of tenses significantly increased especially that of the future simple tense which approximately increased to 72.72%, present continuous tense 68.18%, past continuous tense 66.66% and present perfect continuous tense 30.30% respectively.

Table 2 The t-Value of the Mean Scores of the Tests Version I and II

	N	Mean	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig.1 tailed
Version I	33	4.82				
			-5.09	-12.73*	64	0.000
Version II	33	9.91				

H0: $\mu_1 = \mu_2$

H1: $\mu_1 < \mu_2$

Table 2 gives the statistics of the mean score of each translation version as well as the results of the independent samples t-test based on unequal variances. The total score of the test in each version was 20. In this present study, 33 students were tested (N) in each translation version. The mean score in version I (4.82) and that of the version II (9.91) derived from the total score of each version (159 in version I and 327 in version II) divided by the number of the students (33).

The *t* value in this study is -12.73 which is significant at the 0.000 level with 64 degrees of freedom. The statistical data in the table shows that there is a significant difference between the mean score of the translation test version I and that of version II. It accordingly means that the null hypothesis is rejected with the zero chance out of 100 that the obtained sample difference could occur by sampling error.

Table 3 The Rank of the Errors in Version I and II Based on the Frequency

No.	Types of Errors	Frequency (Version I)	Frequency (Version II)	Total	%
1.	Simple addition of prepositions	50	46	96	16.41
2.	Verb-preposition errors	45	41	86	14.70
3.	Subject-verb agreement	41	32	73	12.47

The frequency of English errors concerning the use of verbs and tenses found in the translation tests is shown in Table 3. The most frequent errors found in the translation tests were the simple addition of prepositions (16.41%). The second and the third most frequent errors in this study were verb-preposition errors (14.70%) and subject-verb agreement errors (12.47%).

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The results from the students' translation tests version I and II show that the mean score of the translation test with time markers was statistically higher than that of the translation test without the time markers. It was found that the existence the Thai time markers which convey similar meanings to the English ones had a positive impact for the participants. This is in accordance with Odlin (1989) who stated that the foreign elements which are similar to the learner's native language will result in positive transfer. For example, the overall scores for the present continuous increased from 1.51% in version I to 68.18% in version II due to the existence of the time marker "กำลัง" [kam-lang]. This is due to the fact that the time marker indicates the process of doing something in both Thai and English. Even so, despite the existence of the Thai time markers, it was found that the students still had difficulties using 5 tenses which have the lowest scores in both versions. The tenses were present perfect continuous, present perfect, past perfect continuous, past perfect and future continuous. The reason why some tenses are still problematic for the Thai students was due to the fact that certain English tenses could not be clearly expressed by Thai time markers since there are no such distinct concepts of time in Thai.

Additionally, the most problematic aspect concerning the use of verbs for the students was the use of verb with preposition. The simple addition of prepositions to certain verbs was most frequently found in the study and using the wrong prepositions with particular verbs was the second mostly found. In this present study, the mother tongue

interference or interlingual errors seemed to be the possible major source of errors. With regard to Selinker (1972), during the learning process, L2 learners tend to learn the target language with basic knowledge from their native language. Simultaneously, they also attempt to adjust their mental learning system to understand the different grammatical rules of the target language in order to develop the communicative skill. However, since the learners develop their second language knowledge based on their basic native language, there may be the characteristics of the learner's native language interference in the target language. Consequently, it is common for the Thai students to use English based on their native language structure.

The simple addition of prepositions was the most frequently found errors in this study because Thai and English have different structures of verb and preposition and when the Thai students did the Thai into English translations, they inappropriately applied the Thai structure to translating certain Thai verbs into English; they added the prepositions, which were required to follow the verbs in Thai but not necessarily in English. For example, the word *fight*, which means to try hard to stop, deal with or oppose something bad, does not come with any preposition. However, the Thai learners tended to add the preposition *with* to the verb since in Thai the word “ต่อสู้” [tor-su] (fight) always comes with the preposition “กับ” [kab] (with).

In addition, the result shows that the verb preposition error was the second frequently found in the study. The students also had difficulties using the accurate preposition with some specific verbs. The participants in this study seemed to have insufficient knowledge or

experience of how to use some English verbs which have to be followed by specific prepositions. For example, when translating the Thai verb “ตั้งข้อหา” [tang-kor-ha] (accuse, charge), many students tended to use the word *accuse* with the relative pronoun *that* followed by subordinate clause although the word is required to use with the specific preposition which is *of*. The possible reason is since the Thai word “ตั้งข้อหา” always comes with the relative pronoun “ว่า” [wa] (that), so the students might combine the Thai structure with the English one. Still, the errors concerning verb and preposition could be resulted from the intralingual aspect as well. According to Richards (1971), the failure to observe restrictions in the use of verb and preposition derived from analogy. Some learners rationalized a different usage of prepositions from their previous experience of English. Some learners who have encountered a particular preposition with one type of verb will attempt to use the same preposition with similar verbs. Besides the simple addition of prepositions and the error concerning verb preposition errors, the interlingual error is the possible major source of subject-verb agreement errors in the study. The students tended to use verbs that did not agree in terms of number with their subjects. This is due to the fact that one of the differences of grammatical elements between Thai and English was subject-verb agreement. This difference has confused Thai learners when using English and the interlingual error was the most possible source of this type of error since Thai words do not change the form according to the number, tense or gender (Pholthee, 2008). Hence, the Thai learners are not aware of using correct form of verbs to agree with the subjects.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of the study showed that the existence of clearly stated Thai time markers helped the students use certain English tenses accurately but they did not efficiently help the students use all the tenses proficiently due to the different concept of time between Thai and English. Moreover, since the Thai students used English based on their native language structure when translating, the errors namely the use of verb with preposition were resulted. However, since the present study concerns only the use of verbs and tenses at the sentence level, it will be beneficial that the study of the same topic in a broader level is conducted; this present study only focused on the impact of Thai time markers on the use of verbs and tenses so the main focus is only on the Thai time markers. Thus, there should be the study of the impact of other kinds of markers such as Thai preposition or plural markers.

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