

# Thai Students' Experiences with and Strategies for Direct and Inverse Translations

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## Abstract

Understanding translation competence (TC) is vital, as it directly influences the quality of translations and the teaching of translation. However, there is a limited exploration of how TC develops among Thai students. Therefore, using PACTE's TC model as its theoretical framework, this study explores the experiences of 31 Thai undergraduate translators in direct and inverse translations through retrospective semi-structured interviews administered after the translation task. Specifically, we focus on understanding their translation processes, resource utilizations, encountered challenges, and perceived directionality difficulty. Results show that most students followed a three-stage translation process, involving orientation, development, and revision. However, some students exhibited unique behaviors, such as relying heavily on machine translation and skipping critical stages. Google Translate and online grammar checkers emerged as the most valuable resources, particularly in inverse translation. Primary challenges included linguistic difficulties, such as selecting appropriate word choices and structuring sentences, with inverse translation deemed as being more complex than direct translation. The study concludes that while students demonstrated a developing strategic and instrumental competence, further training is needed to enhance their translation competence, particularly in inverse translation, to better prepare them for professional practice.

**Keywords:** translation competence, student translators, direct translation, inverse translation, translation pedagogy

The teaching of translation worldwide has shifted its direction from teacher-oriented to student-oriented approaches and from the source text (ST) and target text (TT) equivalence approach to the translator and the translation process (Colina & Venuti, 2017). This shift has also seen the incorporation of the translation competence approach in syllabuses, training, and practices. Since the degree of translation competence of a translator affects both the translation process and the translation product (Hurtado Albir, 2017), the teaching of translation at the tertiary level is currently geared toward building translation competence in students. Such a goal is primarily to prepare them for the translation profession and minimize the gap between academia and industry (Alshargabi & Abdu Al-Mekhlafi, 2019; Aubakirova, 2016; Venuti, 2017).

Translation competence (TC) was introduced into the Translation Studies field in the mid-1980s, and it has continued to gain widespread interest (Hurtado Albir, 2017). Although prominent academics and research groups, including Campbell (1991), Colina (2015), Hatim and Mason (1990), Kelly (2010), and PACTE (Hurtado Albir, 2017), have proposed multiple definitions for the term, TC is invariably defined as the knowledge and abilities a translator should possess to translate effectively. This general concept of TC is, however, not concrete regarding what TC is exactly composed of.

According to Poonlarp and Leenakitti (2016), there is still a misconception in Thailand about the TC of translators, as the public is likely to believe that “anyone who knows the language can translate” (p. 29). Similarly, PACTE (2008) points out that TC is expert knowledge that is not possessed by everyone who knows multiple languages, although language competence is a pre-requisite skill a translator should acquire. Additionally, Károly (2011) asserts that TC may not develop in parallel with language competence, which means that there is more to translation than having language competence alone. Consequently, many academics and research groups invented TC models for translators, translation trainers, universities, translation students, and related stakeholders to use as a benchmark for the translation profession. Examples of well-known models, based on their invention timeline, include Campbell’s (1998) model for second-language translator education, PACTE’s (2003) TC model,

Göpferich's (2009) TC model, Kiraly's (2013) translator competence model, and EMT's competence framework (Toudic & Krause, 2017).

Of all the TC academics and research groups, PACTE (Process in the Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation) stands out as one of the most prominent in the field, with a longstanding series of studies on translation competence since 1997 (Hurtado Albir, 2017). Its model is widely regarded as comprehensive (Aubakirova, 2016; Jiménez-Crespo, 2013), and it has been validated through a series of experimental studies (Eser, 2014). Over time, PACTE's model has evolved, incorporating a broader and more integrated approach that reflects variations in translation direction, language combinations, and contextual factors. This dynamic model captures the iterative and hierarchical nature of acquiring translation competence, focusing on how these competences develop and interrelate, particularly the strategic and instrumental use and knowledge of translation sub-competences.

Strategic sub-competence, a core element of PACTE's model, refers to the procedural knowledge that guides translators through the translation process. This includes planning, executing, and evaluating translation tasks, addressing problems, selecting appropriate methods, and making strategic decisions to ensure high-quality outcomes. It is essential for managing translation tasks effectively, as it integrates other translation skills and knowledge, enabling translators to adapt to challenges and optimize their approach for accurate and contextually appropriate translations.

On the other hand, instrumental sub-competence involves the use of various tools and resources, both traditional and electronic, to support the translation process. This includes dictionaries, encyclopedias, and modern computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, each of which is crucial for accessing and processing information. In today's digital age, proficiency in using electronic resources is especially significant, as it enhances a translator's ability to quickly obtain, verify, and utilize information, thereby improving the overall quality and efficiency of translations. This sub-competence ensures that translators can effectively gather and apply relevant resources to resolve translation problems and support their translation tasks.

Since the invention of the PACTE model, an increasing number of consecutive studies have been carried out. For example, studies

have explored, and in some cases, compared the TC of professional translators, translator trainers, or language teachers (Hurtado Albir, 2017; PACTE, 2011) and explored the TC of translation students (Cheng, 2017; Károly, 2014; Khoury, 2016; Muñoz-Miquel, 2018). Currently, such research has covered six European language pairs (Hurtado Albir, 2017) and has brought about interesting results that contribute to translation pedagogies.

While the incorporation of the TC approach into European translation pedagogies is noticeable—as evidenced by the invention of TC models and the publication of numerous TC studies in this context, the TC approach has received less attention in Thailand, as observed, for example, by Insai (2016). Insai argues that the major aim of English degree programs at the undergraduate level in Thailand is not to train English majors to become professional translators but to suggest a translator position as a potential career after their graduation. Coupled with this, Kazuharu (2017) asserts that most research topics on translation at the master's degree level in Thailand are extensively based on linguistic aspects (e.g., contrastive and comparative studies and problem-based studies), whereas the development of translators is rarely explored. Additionally, although several studies at the doctoral degree level, including ones by Insai (2016) and Riabroi (2016), are concerned with TC, the number of TC studies is somewhat limited, particularly when it comes to the TC development of undergraduates. All of these facts suggest that the professional aspect of translation is less explored in Thailand's pedagogical context, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Overall, the TC of a translator affects both the translation process and the translation product (Hurtado Albir, 2017), yet the TC of Thai undergraduate students is an underexplored area. Moreover, since the results of experimental research by PACTE were mainly quantitative (Kuznik & Olalla-Soler, 2018), and TC's functions are different in direct and inverse translations (Hurtado Albir, 2017), we explore Thai student translators' experiences in direct and inverse translation through retrospective semi-structured interviews following the completion of several translation tasks. Subsequently, we provide new insights into the area of TC from the perspectives of 31 Thai students learning to translate Thai to English and vice versa. Utilizing PACTE's TC model

as our framework, we use the following research questions to anchor our explorations:

1. What stages of the translation process do Thai undergraduates use when translating Thai to English and vice versa?
2. What three translation resources do these students see as most useful for direct and inverse translations?
3. What are the three most frequent translation problems encountered by the students and how do they typically solve them?
4. Which translation directionality is more difficult for these student translators and why?

## **Literature Review**

### ***PACTE's Translation Competence Model***

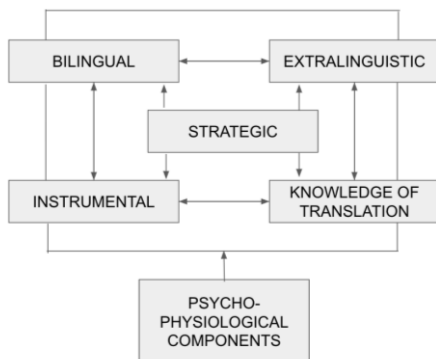
The PACTE research group, founded in 1997 at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, has played a pivotal role in advancing the concept of Translation Competence (TC). Unlike earlier models that focused on specific aspects of translation without empirical backing, PACTE's approach is both holistic and dynamic, developed through a series of rigorous experiments. The group's initial TC model, introduced in 1998, sought to define the system of knowledge and skills necessary for professional translation, emphasizing that translation competence is distinct from bilingual competence. This early model identified several sub-competences, with transfer competence at its center, integrating the various skills required for effective translation.

As PACTE continued its research, the TC model evolved, leading to a significant revision in 2003. In this updated model, strategic sub-competence replaced transfer competence as the core element, reflecting a more integrated and comprehensive understanding of the translation process. The revised model emphasized that TC is primarily procedural knowledge, where the ability to strategically manage and solve translation problems is important. This shift underscored the importance of strategic thinking in translation, aligning the model more closely with the complexities of real-world and professional translation tasks.

The revised model in 2003 identified five key sub-competences: (1) Strategic sub-competence, which involves procedural knowledge to ensure the efficiency of the translation process, including planning, evaluating, activating, and problem-solving across all sub-competences; (2) bilingual sub-competence, which includes the linguistic knowledge necessary for effective communication in two languages; (3) extra-linguistic sub-competence, encompassing declarative knowledge about the world, including bicultural and subject-specific information; (4) knowledge of translation, which covers an understanding of translation processes and professional practices; and (5) instrumental sub-competence, focusing on the procedural knowledge needed to utilize various documentation sources and translation technologies effectively.

**Figure 1**

*The Translation Competence Model by PACTE (2003)*



Among these sub-competences, strategic and instrumental sub-competences are particularly critical. Strategic sub-competence is essential, as it controls and coordinates the translation process, ensuring coherence and quality by integrating and compensating for deficiencies in other sub-competences. Meanwhile, instrumental sub-competence is crucial in modern translation practices, where the effective use of translation tools and resources, such as dictionaries, electronic corpora, and search engines, is indispensable. Given the importance of these two sub-

competencies, it is crucial to investigate how student translators perform in terms of problem-solving skills and the use of electronic resources. By assessing their current proficiency and comparing it to a benchmark set by professional translators, we can identify areas that require further development and understand the extent of the gap that needs to be bridged to enhance their translation competence.

### ***Direct Translation VS Inverse Translation***

The terms *direct translation* and *inverse translation* are specific to the field of TC and are concerned with the directionality of translation tasks. According to Hurtado Albir (2017), direct translation refers to translating from a foreign language into a native language, while inverse translation refers to translating from a native language into a foreign language. In most cases, direction translation is viewed as a natural order or normal direction; however, to respond to market demands, a translator should be able to translate effectively in both directions (Hatim, 2014). The relative significance of translators' skills in direct translation and inverse translation is also addressed by the United Nations. As an international organization, its translators are expected to translate into and out of their main languages with accuracy, readability, and the use of correct terminology (2023, November 24).

Despite the equal significance of the two directions, translating texts in each direction is always challenging, as according to Hurtado Albir (2017), TC functions dissimilarly in direct translation and inverse translation. In other words, the way a translator handles translation tasks in each direction may be different. Muñoz-Miquel (2018), for example, in her TC study on medical translators who performed English to Spanish translation in Spain, states that her results might be different if other language pairs are to be examined. This implies that TC may not function in the same way for different language pairs.

The observation by Muñoz-Miquel (2018) appears to be true in an experimental study by PACTE (Hurtado Albir, 2017). In this study, the TC of translation teachers and professional translators were compared, and both groups considered inverse translation to be more

difficult than direct translation. The translator group, in particular, used a larger number and wider variety of translation resources in inverse translation and spent more time on inverse translation (Hurtado Albir, 2017). Although these results do not conclusively prove that inverse translation is more difficult than direct translation, they point to the more complicated nature of inverse translation as compared to direct translation, which, according to Hatim (2014), is of a natural order. The complicated nature of inverse translation is also emphasized in the Thai context by Wongranu (2017), who indicated that many Thai students oftentimes struggle to translate Thai texts into English, as evidenced by frequent syntactic errors, semantic errors, and miscellaneous errors, including misspellings and unnatural translation. Given the contrastive nature of direct translation and inverse translation, it is crucial that the two directions be the focus of this study and that student translators' TC in each direction is explored.

## **Method**

This study employed a qualitative research approach, following Creswell's (2012) framework, to explore student translators' experiences with direct and inverse translation tasks. This approach allowed for detailed reflections on the translation process, including problem-solving and resource utilization, immediately after participants completed translation tasks and post-translation questionnaires. Immediate retrospection, as advocated by Göpferich and Jääskeläinen (2009) and Raído (2014), was crucial for capturing accurate reflections and minimizing memory distortion. This method aimed to offer valuable insights into participants' translation challenges and their understanding of translation competence according to the PACTE model.

## ***Research Instrument***

To permit participants to freely share their detailed experiences, Creswell (2012) suggests that the interview be employed as the research instrument. This study, therefore, employed a one-on-one semi-structured interview format to collect data about translation experiences from



participants. Despite its time-consuming and costly nature, this type of interview is suitable for participants who are willing to express their views comfortably (Creswell, 2012). Before the interview process, 11 interview questions were validated by three experts, who are experienced translation teachers and professional translators.

### ***Research Context and Participants***

This study centers on Thailand, where translation is typically taught as part of English degree programs. To best understand this central phenomenon, purposeful sampling was conducted to select the research site (Creswell, 2012), which was a Thai university that provides an English program. We subsequently contacted the university's president for permission to collect data.

Participants were selected based on specific criteria pertinent to the study: They must be native Thai speakers, fourth-year undergraduate students enrolled in an English language program, have no professional translation experience, and have completed at least two translation courses focusing on English–Thai and Thai–English translation. Following the approval for data collection, a lecturer from the English program was contacted to assist with recruiting volunteers. As a result, 31 English majors who met the criteria volunteered for the study. To maintain confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonyms ranging from P1 to P31.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

The main data collection method involved semi-structured interviews conducted in Thai, which were later translated into English by the researchers. Prior to the interviews, participants completed two translation tasks: a direct translation from English to Thai and an inverse translation from Thai to English. These tasks were performed on a computer with screen recording via Camtasia. Participants were given ample time to complete the tasks and were permitted to use any resources available during the translation process.

The direct translation task involved translating a 214-word English source text (ST) titled “The British Museum,” which included

a range of rich points such as linguistic issues with lexis and morphosyntax, textual challenges (e.g., coherence), genre differences, extra-linguistic problems related to cultural and subject-domain knowledge, difficulties in understanding intertextuality and speech acts, and issues concerning the translation brief and target-text reader. For the inverse translation task, participants translated a 219-word Thai text titled “มิวเซียมสยาม” (Museum Siam: Discovery Museum). This task was comparable in genre and difficulty to the direct translation task, ensuring consistency in the type and complexity of rich points. Both tasks were designed to reflect similar translation challenges, enabling a thorough evaluation of the participants’ problem-solving skills and translation competence, in line with PACTE’s framework for addressing rich points in translation.

After the translation tasks, each participant was interviewed for about 30 minutes. The interview comprised 11 questions that can be categorized into five themes: the translation process, the roles of translation resources, translation problems, and solutions, the complexity between direct translation and inverse translation, as well as TC improvement. After the interview, the data was analyzed using the thematic approach, which requires extensive discussion about major themes (Creswell, 2012). As a result, during the coding process, only data that provided evidence for the five themes was considered, while unrelated data that did not support the themes was disregarded (Creswell, 2012).

## **Results**

### ***The Translation Process***

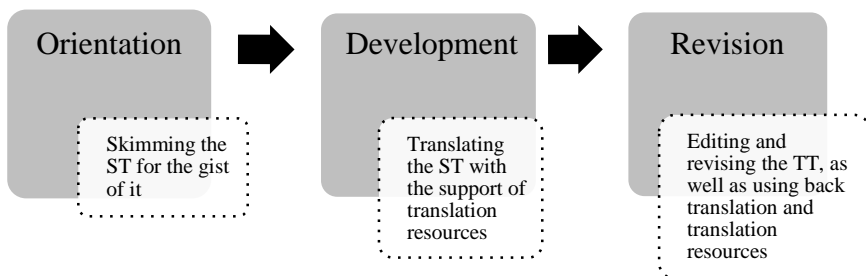
This section addresses the first research question: What stages of the translation process do Thai student undergraduates use when translating Thai to English and vice versa? According to the interview results, the majority of participants undertook three stages in the translation process, including orientation, development, and revision, in direct and inverse translations. The orientation stage involved skimming the ST for the gist of it; the development stage involved translating the ST with the support of translation resources; and the revision stage involved editing and revising the translated text (TT), with some participants also using

back translation and translation resources, particularly in inverse translation.

The translation process of student translators in direct and inverse translations is portrayed in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*The Translation Process of Student Translators*



Although the results revealed that most participants undertook the same stages of the translation process in direct and inverse translations, some exhibited unique characteristics. For direct translation, nine of them reported completing certain stages of the translation process. Of these, seven participants did not spend time reading the ST before they translated it; instead, they started translating the ST immediately after being assigned the translation task. In addition, two out of these nine participants did back translation, or translating the TT back into the ST, as a strategy to ensure equivalence. Surprisingly, one of these nine participants did not spend time revising the TT, whereas another one neither read the ST at the orientation stage nor revised the TT at the revision stage. The following quotes from several participants provide support for these results.

One participant who did not undertake the orientation stage recalled his or her translation process as follows:

I used Google Translate (GT) to translate the ST. Then I analyzed its translation output to examine whether it corresponded to the ST. Sometimes, I used a printed dictionary to check the Thai equivalents of some words and whether they suited the context. After I fine-tuned the TT, I translated it back into English to see if it corresponded to the ST. (P22)

Another participant who only undertook the development stage recalled his or her translation process as follows:

I used GT to translate the ST. After that, I rearranged my translation in a note program while using Google and accessing websites to facilitate the process. (P7)

Another participant who did not revise his or her TT gave a reason to support his or her decision.

I didn't revise my TT because I had already done it at the development stage, when I compared the translation outputs given by two machine translation (MT) programs. (P20)

Another participant explained his or her use of back translation in the translation process of direct translation in the following quote.

I checked the TT to see if there were any unsuitable words and then adjusted them. I also did back translation to see if its overall meaning matched the ST.” (P12)

For inverse translation, most participants undertook the three stages as in the direct translation process, with the support of translation resources, particularly online grammar checkers at the revision stage. One participant reflected on his/her translation process for inverse translation as follows:

I used the same steps as I did in the direct translation process. During the revision stage, however, I used a grammar checker program to edit my TT to ensure it was accurate, or if it needed further adjustment. (P14)

For inverse translation, unique characteristics included using two machine translation (MT) programs to facilitate the translation process (two participants), using back translation as a translation quality assessment strategy to ensure equivalence between the TT and the ST (six participants), and completing certain stages of the translation process (seven participants). The following quotes support these results:

For inverse translation, I read the ST, then divided it into sentences, and translated them by using two MT programs to compare their translation outputs. After that, I revised parts of the outputs I selected for my TT for accuracy. (P20)

I translated the TT back into Thai to see if it had the same meaning as in the ST. (P10)

At the end of the development stage, I only reread my TT to ensure the English sentence structures were used accurately and that the TT conveyed the message the way I wanted.” (P1)

Overall, most participants completed three stages of the translation process for direct and inverse translations with the support of translation resources. Of all the participants, some demonstrated unique translation characteristics only when they completed certain stages of the translation process, used two MT programs to assist them in the translation process, or adopted back translation as a translation quality assessment strategy.

### ***The Roles of Translation Resources***

This section addresses the second research question: What three translation resources do these students see as most useful for direct and inverse translations? According to the interview results, most participants stated that the three most useful translation resources for direct translation were Google Translate (GT), Google, and online bilingual and monolingual dictionaries, which received equal votes in third place. For inverse translation, the three most useful translation resources for most participants were GT, Google, and online grammar checkers. The reasons for using these translation resources are displayed in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1***Most Useful Resources for Direct Translation*

Resources	Reasons for using them
GT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To translate each sentence</li> <li>- To translate the entire ST</li> <li>- To translate words</li> </ul>
Google	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To find the meanings of words/Thai equivalents</li> <li>- To find further definitions of words after GT had translated them</li> <li>- To access websites for information</li> <li>- To find the meanings of proper nouns</li> <li>- To search for background information related to the task</li> </ul>
Online bilingual dictionaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To find definitions/Thai equivalents of unfamiliar words</li> <li>- To search for synonyms</li> <li>- To double-check some translated words</li> </ul>
Online monolingual dictionaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To double-check the meanings of words after using GT</li> <li>- To find the meanings of words and study example sentences</li> <li>- To find English definitions of words, parts of speech, and phrases</li> </ul>

**Table 2***Most Useful Resources for Inverse Translation*

Resources	Reasons for using them
GT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To translate each sentence</li> <li>- To translate the entire ST</li> <li>- To translate words and parts of the ST</li> </ul>
Google	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To find the meanings of words/ English equivalents</li> <li>- To find the meanings/equivalents of proper nouns</li> <li>- To search for background information related to the translation task</li> </ul>
Online grammar checkers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To check the accuracy of English grammar and words in the TT</li> </ul>

According to Tables 1 and 2, most participants agreed on the usefulness of GT and Google in direct and inverse translations. Although other MT programs were also used by several participants, GT was used for wider purposes, including translating the ST at the word, sentence, and entire text levels. Google, as the second-most useful translation resource, was used to search for definitions, TL equivalents of SL words, as well as background information related to the translation tasks in both direct and inverse translation. The following quotes confirm the popularity of the two resources among participants.

For direct translation, I used GT to translate the entire ST. However, I refined the TT by looking for grammatical errors. In case I didn't know how to correct them, I relied on the translation given by GT. (*P4*)

It's just faster to use GT for inverse translation. After GT gave the translation of each sentence, I pasted it onto my Word document. Then I examined if the whole translation was grammatically accurate, or if it needed further adjustment. In case any words were inaccurately translated, I corrected them. Instead of looking up the equivalents of words, one by one, GT helped me translate the whole sentence, so it saved my time. (*P1*)

For direct translation, I used Google to search for the meanings of words. By using it, I found various equivalents through articles on websites that I could choose for the context of the TL. (*P15*)

For inverse translation, I used Google to look up some words in addition to using GT. I compared the Thai equivalents I found from Google and their GT versions. I used Google because sometimes GT's translated words don't 100% suit the context. (*P31*)

However, while both bilingual and monolingual dictionaries were used in the direct translation process, most participants did not see them as one of the three most useful translation resources in the inverse translation process. Online grammar checkers, on the other hand, played a significant role in inverse translation by securing the quality of the TT of participants. The following quotes reflect participants' trust in this resource type.

During the revision stage, I used Grammarly to edit my TT to ensure it was accurate or if it needed further adjustment. (P14)

I used Grammarly to edit my TT in inverse translation and corrected every error pointed out by the program. (P27)

Overall, most participants used translation resources to assist them in the translation process at varying levels of the text and for various purposes, hence indicating their recognition of the availability and functions of each resource. It is also noticeable that all three of the most useful resources for them are electronic ones. When asked about the importance of electronic and printed resources for translation, 30 participants asserted that electronic resources are more important for direct translation than paper ones, and every one of them further emphasized the importance of electronic resources for inverse translation. Some of the reasons for using electronic resources included the convenience they provide for users, as well as their reliability, fast generation, and portability, as shown in the following quotes:

I'm not used to using printed resources for direct translation. It's more convenient to use electronic ones. (P27)

I think electronic resources are more useful for inverse translation; it only takes a few seconds to obtain information utilizing them. (P2)

Based on the interview results, when given choices, electronic resources are more popular among student translators than paper ones in both translation processes.

### ***Translation Problems and Solutions***

This section addresses the third research question: What are the three most frequent translation problems encountered by these students and how do they typically solve them? According to the interview results, major translation problems included not knowing the meanings of English words and their Thai equivalents, difficulty in selecting word choices for the TT, and difficulty in arranging sentences. In inverse translation, major translation problems included not knowing the meanings of Thai words and their English equivalents, their English



grammar incompetence, and difficulty in translating Thai proper nouns into English. The following tables list the translation problems and strategies used by the participants to solve the problems.

**Table 3**

*Major Problems with Direct Translation*

Problem	Strategies for solving the problems
Not knowing the meanings of words or Thai equivalents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using Google to search for equivalents, for example through websites</li> <li>- Using Google and/or online monolingual dictionaries</li> <li>- Using GT to translate words</li> </ul>
Difficulty in selecting word choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using Google to find alternative words and using one's intuition to determine the most suitable words for the context</li> <li>- Using one's intuition to determine the most suitable words for the context and ensure the TT is comprehensible to readers</li> <li>- Fine-tuning the TT to ensure the target readers understand the content of it</li> </ul>
Difficulty in arranging sentences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rereading the TT and revising it for accuracy and naturalness</li> <li>- Searching for parallel texts to see how the ST should be translated and using experience obtained from the translation class</li> <li>- Using GT to do the back translation to examine if the text translated by GT corresponded to the ST</li> <li>- Relying on one's sense to adjust the TT</li> </ul>

According to Table 3, some of the strategies used by the participants to solve all three problem types involved the use of translation resources, such as Google, online dictionaries, and GT. In addition to using translation resources, they sometimes relied on their sense, intuition, and classroom translation experience for selecting suitable word choices and refining the TT. Their use of translation strategies for each translation problem is reflected in the following quotes:

When I came across unknown words, I used Google to search for their meanings. I considered the information suggested by Google, for example, by looking into the first three sources suggested by it. (P16)

Sometimes, I was unsure whether the words I chose for my translation were good enough and about the use of pronouns “พี่” and “น้อง” in my translation. To tackle the problem, I used Google to search for more synonyms of certain words and selected the ones that I thought best suited the context. (P30)

If I was unsure whether my translation was grammatically correct, I used GT to do the back translation to examine if it corresponded to the ST. (P18)

I found it difficult to arrange sentences to be comprehensible in the TT. To handle this issue, I adjusted some sentences translated by GT based on my sense but kept some unchanged. (P19)

While almost every translation problem, including the major ones, that the participants encountered was mainly linguistic, a non-linguistic problem concerning the time limit was addressed by one participant. Together with linguistic problems, this non-linguistic problem reflects the lives of professional translators, who oftentimes work to meet deadlines. To solve the problem, the participant recalled devising a good plan through time management to make sure that the tasks could be completed in time and with a careful revision of the draft.

While most translation problems encountered by the students were primarily linguistic, one participant also faced a non-linguistic issue related to time constraints. This non-linguistic problem, along with the linguistic ones, mirrors the challenges faced by professional translators who often work under tight deadlines. To address the time constraint, the participant implemented a strategic plan focusing on time management to ensure that the tasks were completed on schedule: “I was worried that I might not complete the task in time, so I had to be sure to make a good plan for this task.” (P5)

Table 4, below, shows the major problems that students reported encountering when doing the inverse translation task.

**Table 4***Major Problems with Inverse Translations*

<b>Problems</b>	<b>Strategies for solving the problems</b>
Not knowing the meanings of words or English equivalents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using Google to search for equivalents, for example through websites or Facebook</li> <li>- Using GT to translate words</li> <li>- Using Google and/or online monolingual dictionaries</li> </ul>
Incompetent use of English sentence structures or English grammar incompetence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using a grammar checker/Grammarly to check the TT</li> <li>- Using GT &amp; Revising the TT</li> <li>- Using Grammarly &amp; Google</li> <li>- Using GT alone</li> <li>- Revising the TT based on one's knowledge of English grammar</li> </ul>
Difficulty in translating proper nouns, e.g., places and names of people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using Google to access websites to search for their equivalents/ information</li> <li>- Using GT to translate certain words again after the entire ST had been translated</li> <li>- Using Wikipedia to search for their English equivalents</li> </ul>

According to Table 4, most participants relied heavily on electronic resources to solve major translation problems in inverse translation. While Google, GT, online dictionaries, Wikipedia, websites, and social media platforms, such as Facebook, were used to solve problems at the word level, grammar checker programs, such as Grammarly, assisted the participants in solving problems at the sentence and discourse levels. The following quotes confirm the participants' confidence in these resources.

In case I could not find English equivalents of some Thai words, such as “นิทรรศการถาวร”, I used Google because I'm confident that printed dictionaries don't have the information I want. (P5)

I used Grammarly to check the grammar accuracy of the TT as it can easily detect errors in it. Then I corrected the errors following its suggestions. (P24)

To translate some proper nouns, I used Google to access websites to find their English equivalents. (P7)

Based on the interview results, it is apparent that most participants adopted various strategies to solve major problems in direct and inverse translations, most of which involved their use of electronic translation resources.

### ***The Complexity of Direct Translation and Inverse Translation***

This section addresses the final research question: Which translation direction is more difficult for student translators and why? According to interview results, only six students viewed direct translation as a more difficult process than inverse translation, while the rest of them considered inverse translation to be more difficult. The following table presents three major reasons for their opinions.

**Table 5**

*Three most Frequent Reasons for Difficulties with Direct and Inverse Translations*

Direct translation	Inverse translation
Difficulty in selecting suitable word choices for the TT	Lacking confidence in using English grammar
Difficulty in finding the Thai equivalents of English words	Difficulty in translating Thai sentences into English ones
Difficulty in using Thai sentence structures	Difficulty in finding the English equivalents of Thai words

Some of the participants explained these reasons as follows:

I have difficulty selecting the right words for the context. To me, many Thai words describe the same thing in English, and I am just not sure which words to choose from to use in my TT I understand the ST but have a problem with the word choices. (P2)

I think some Thai equivalents didn't suit the context, and I just couldn't translate them literally. (P9)

I find the Thai language full of wordplay, and to describe something, it seems we need to elaborate more on it, unlike the English language. As a result, after GT had translated the ST, I had to adjust the TT so that it became more concise. (P23)

On the contrary, most participants argued that inverse translation was more difficult and gave reasons for their views. Some of these participants explained their reasons as follows:

I am unfamiliar with English grammar and found it difficult to arrange English sentences in the TT. Although I did back translation to recheck the TT, I was still unsure whether it conveyed the same message as the ST. (P21)

Thai sentences are all connected. In other words, it is not easy to tell where a sentence starts and ends. On the contrary, for direct translation, the English sentence patterns are clearer, and I just translated each sentence, one by one. There are cultural differences between the structures of the two languages. (P14)

I find it complicated to find the English equivalents of Thai words for my translation. My translation has to convey the original message of the ST, while at the same time attracting the readers' attention as if they were in the museum. I have to make them enjoy the naturalness of my translation. (P6)

Based on the interview results, the level of difficulty regarding direct or inverse translations was mainly concerned with linguistic areas at the word and sentence levels, thereby pointing to a potential gap in the students' linguistic competencies. However, in addition to linguistic reasons, a non-linguistic reason for the difficulty of inverse translation

was also discovered when a participant reported his or her lack of confidence in meeting readers' expectations and another participant expressed his/her concern over the quality of his/her translation. The following quotes revealed the reasons behind their difficulties with inverse translation:

Because English isn't my native language, I'm unsure whether my translation would meet the reader's expectations. In inverse translation, I spent more time fine-tuning my translation and selecting suitable words for it. (P7)

Because we don't use English in everyday life and isn't our Expertise, we can't tell if our translation is 100% correct. However, Thai is our native language, and we know how to select suitable words for our translation, so direct translation is easier for us. (P10)

## **Discussion**

This qualitative study explored student translators' experiences in direct translation and inverse translation in Thailand's context in four areas, including the translation process, the roles of translation resources, translation problems, and solutions, and the complexity between direct translation and inverse translation. The results of the study led to discussions on the issues presented in the following sections.

### ***Student Translators' Knowledge of Translation Principles***

In this study, most participants exhibited knowledge of translation principles as they completed three translation stages in the direct and inverse translation processes: orientation, development, and revision, all of which are part of what PACTE (2003) calls the knowledge of translation sub-competence, which is one of the three core sub-competences that exist among professional translators. This tendency to use the three translation stages is influenced by their classroom training and the application of their knowledge of translation principles to handle translation tasks. Thus, the results of this study on the English-Thai and Thai-English language pairs are in line with Insai's (2016) results on the English-Thai language pair, Reich's (2013) results

on the English-Spanish and Spanish-English language pairs, Riabroi's (2016) results on the Thai-English language pair, and Wijaya's (2019) results on the Indonesian-English language pair, revealing student translators' translation stages are shaped by translation training. That is, most student translators tend to take time to read the ST (if it is not long) at the orientation stage before advancing to the development stage to craft their TTs, followed by revising their TTs at the revision stage. Although undertaking the same translation stages as professional translators may not point to the quality of their TTs, these mainstream characteristics of student translators imply that they are aware of what it takes to complete a translation task, which is a sign of TC development.

Despite their mainstream characteristics, several student translators exhibited unique characteristics in direct and inverse translations as they disregarded the orientation and/or revision stages and relied heavily on MT to craft and revise their TTs. These unique characteristics do not seem to comply with what the professional translators in Reich's (2013) study did. That is, in Reich's study, the professional translators only skipped the orientation stage in the case of long STs to save reading time and translated them immediately, consulting various translation resources during the development stage, followed by revising their TTs, either by themselves with the support of technological resources or in consultation with colleagues.

These unique characteristics of some student translators in the present study also contradict professional translators' characteristics regarding time distribution at each stage of the translation process, as evidenced in one of PACTE's studies (Hurtado Albir, 2017). More precisely, in their study, most professional translators tended to take all three stages of the translation process, with varying time distribution at each stage and directionality, whereas, in this current study, some student translators intentionally disregarded the orientation stage because they planned to use MT as the only resource to translate the ST and do back translation to measure translation quality. Moreover, some simply ignored the revision stage because they trusted the efficacy of the MT used during the development stage to translate and craft

their TTs. These unique characteristics, as a result, imply that some student translators still lack the knowledge of translation sub-competence regarding the crucial roles of each stage of the translation process and mistake MT as the only life-saving tool in the translation process. To ensure that student translators are well-prepared for the translation profession, translation training should emphasize the importance of the translation stages and familiarize them with various translation resources to strengthen their skills in using them.

### ***Student Translators' Preferences for Electronic Translation Resources and Their Skills in Using them***

The results of this study revealed that when given choices, most student translators preferred using electronic resources over paper ones in the translation process, regardless of directionality. Hence, the results of this study coincide with those of Insai's (2016) study on direct translation, Reich's (2013) study on direct and inverse translations, Riabroi's (2016) study on inverse translation, and Sycz-Opoń's (2019) study on direct translation, as most student translators consulted electronic translation resources in the translation process.

This tendency toward using electronic resources among student translators, consequently, provides the opportunity for translation teachers to incorporate more translation resource training into existing courses or design specific courses on translation technology. Such approaches could improve student translators' instrumental sub-competence, which according to PACTE (2003) is the procedural knowledge about the use of documentation sources, a substantial part of the translation process in the translation profession (Hvelplund, 2019; Kuznik & Olalla-Soler, 2018). Special attention, however, should also be paid to student translators' selection of the right resources for different purposes in the translation process. While most student translators in this study exhibited signs of instrumental sub-competence, for example, as seen in their use of online grammar checkers to check the grammatical accuracy of their TTs at the revision stage of the inverse translation process, their excessive use of MT appears to be



a common practice for direct and inverse translations. This practice involved translating parts of the ST, the entire ST, or even single words.

However, just because free MT programs, including GT, are easy to access and use, student translators should not assume that MT is highly effective. Instead, they need to acquire MT literacy to use it responsibly, that is, to know when and how to use it (Bowker, 2023). The role of a translation teacher, therefore, is to enhance their students' instrumental sub-competence in terms of quantity and quality. To be more precise, they should guide their students to a variety of translation resources commonly used in the translation profession, while also ensuring their students can evaluate the quality of each resource before using them to serve various purposes in the translation process.

### ***Student Translators' Problem-Solving Skills***

Student translators in this study encountered numerous translation problems, most of which were linguistic ones, and mainly used electronic translation resources, such as Google as a search engine, GT, monolingual dictionaries, websites, and grammar checkers, to solve their problems. It can, thus, be stated that they exhibited signs of what PACTE (2003) calls strategic sub-competence, which is concerned with the efficacy of the translation process, the identification of translation problems and solutions, and the activation of related sub-competencies. In other words, their strategic sub-competence prompted them to analyze translation problems before activating their instrumental sub-competence, and then to reach out to certain resources for specific translation problems. Specifically, for inverse translation, grammar checkers, such as Grammarly, were used at the revision stage to ensure the English grammatical accuracy in their TTs, thereby indicating that they were aware of translation quality enhancement for inverse translation. These results corresponded to those of Kuznik and Olalla-Soler's (2018) and Reich's (2013) studies, as most student translators used instrumental sub-competence to gain linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge, and to employ strategies to solve translation problems.

While most student translators demonstrated signs of strategic sub-competence development, some developed individual patterns of strategies, including using back translation and intuition, to compensate for apparent gaps in linguistic competencies. For instance, in the direct translation process, they used GT to translate Thai sentences back into English to ensure that they were equivalent to the English ones. Although the use of GT reflected their recognition of its potential in comparing the input and output, back translation should not be an acceptable practice for translation quality assessment in the translation profession (Behr, 2017; Son, 2018). This is because translation is not simply about transferring words but is also about transferring ideas (Bowker, 2023). As a result, MT is unlikely to be an effective tool in determining the quality of translation.

To assess the quality of translation in pedagogical settings, Di Mango (2018) suggests that the functional paradigm (i.e., a holistic evaluation) be adopted, as it focuses on whether the TT achieves its intended function rather than equivalence between the ST and TT. Furthermore, the fact that some student translators relied on their intuition for word choices and sentence arrangement in their TTs pointed to their insufficient linguistic competence and knowledge of translation resources. These results contradict Reich's (2013), as in her study, student translators consulted translation resources to finalize their translation choices instead of trusting their intuition and linguistic competence. The different results between the two studies, therefore, suggest that more should be done in translation training to strengthen the strategic sub-competence of student translators and reinforce their psycho-physiological components (PACTE, 2003) as well as professional judgment (Huertas Barros & Vine, 2019).

In addition to the linguistic problems pointed out by most student translators in this study, one student translator raised a non-linguistic issue about the translation time limit, which indeed reflects what it is like to be a professional translator who works under pressure to meet the deadline (Courtney & Phelan, 2019; Do, 2020; Foedisch, 2017). The fact that this student translator was aware of this issue

and planned his or her translation process carefully provides an opportunity for translation teachers to simulate the professional translation environment in the translation class, where students are engaged in individual and group translation activities under time limits.

### ***Student Translators' Direct and Inverse Translation Competencies***

Although translation clients generally assume that translators use the same competence for direct and inverse translation (Mraček, 2018), not all translators are confident when working with inverse translation (Bowker, 2023). This correlates with the beliefs of one student translator in this study, who was concerned about failing to meet the reader's expectations due to his/her linguistic incompetence. The higher degree of difficulty of inverse translation than direct translation has been pointed out in previous studies on diverse language pairs, for example, Hurtado Albir (2017), Mraček (2018), Muñoz-Miquel (2018), and Wongranu (2017). The same appears to be true for the English-Thai and Thai-English language pairs in this study, as most student translators experienced greater difficulty in inverse translation, particularly at varying linguistic levels. The student translators' reflection on their TC in inverse translation, consequently, points to an apparent gap in their English linguistic competence and confirms the differences between direct and inverse translations. To respond to the market's needs, it is, therefore, essential that student translators be provided with opportunities to develop their competencies in both directionalities. This can be conducted through stand-alone courses and training for each directionality, coupled with practices for various text types. Moreover, training them to use translation resources effectively will help develop their instrumental sub-competence, which, according to Kuznik and Olalla-Soler (2018), is used to gain linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge, as well as effective use of translation strategies. In addition, training student translators to use many resources and searches, in combination with a wider variety of searches in the translation process, is likely to contribute to better results in inverse translation, as evidenced in a quantitative study by PACTE (Hurtado Albir, 2017).

## Conclusion

This qualitative study explored student translators' experiences in direct and inverse translations and discovered areas of similarities and discrepancies regarding the translation process, translation resources, translation strategies, and directionality. First, our results address a popular misconception among the public that individuals proficient in two or more languages can translate, as the results of this study suggest the opposite. Although bilingual sub-competence is the fundamental characteristic of a translator, a competent translator requires more than just that to deliver quality translation. For this reason, the incorporation of a TC-based approach into translation pedagogy is highly needed to equip student translators with essential sub-competences, such as knowledge of translation, instrumental sub-competence, and strategic sub-competence, for the translation industry.

Regarding research implications, not only do the results of this study provide further insights into the TC of student translators in wider language pairs, specifically the Thai and English ones, but they also uncover some of the qualitative aspects of TC, which are less explored in many TC studies, including those of PACTE that are mainly quantitative. To obtain a comprehensive picture of student translators' TC, a mixed-method design should be adopted in future studies, permitting researchers to triangulate quantitative and qualitative data. In addition, PACTE's TC model can also be used as a reference standard for future studies to further explore the TC of student translators in Thailand and beyond.

Despite the research implications, this study has several limitations. Although this study uncovered student translators' experiences in direct and inverse translations, the small group of participants is not representative of the student translator population in Thailand. In other words, the results of the study cannot be generalized to a broader context. Another limitation is the time constraints that made the researchers unable to collect more data from the participants to better understand their TC as it develops over time. To overcome these limitations, we would like to suggest the inclusion of more participants and the implementation of a longitudinal study in future TC studies.

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