

# Exploring Literal Translation as a Source-Text Oriented Translation Strategy from the View of the Thai Target Language<sup>i</sup>

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## Abstract

Literal translation is considered a translation strategy that falls within the scope of source-text oriented translation. Most translation scholars interpret the strategy to mean ways in which translators adhere closely to source-text structures and meanings. Although most researchers in the Thai context classify the literal translation strategy as source-text oriented translation, their definitions remain quite loose; for example, they generally do not explicitly state the extent to which source-text meanings and linguistic structures can be adhered to in translations. The present study attempts to address this gap by investigating how ten scholars have used the term “literal translation strategy” in translations from English into Thai, paying attention to translations at the lexical level. The material includes previous studies in which translation strategies for translations of words and phrases from English into Thai are classified and defined. The concept of translation equivalence is used as a theoretical point of reference. The study employs a structured qualitative synthesis to identify three domains, namely (1) classifications of literal translation strategies, (2) definitions, and (3) applications in Thai translations. It is discovered that translation strategies that fall within the scope of literal translation reflect two main characteristics: adherence to source-text denotative meanings and adherence to source-text linguistic structures. The results show that literal translation strategies referring to denotative meanings of words and phrases can be sub-classified and later defined by taking characteristics of source-text words and phrases into account.

**Keywords:** literal translation, translation strategies, translation of words and phrases, literary translation from English into Thai, source-text oriented translation

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In the past decade, Thai translation scholars have investigated translations from English into Thai and identified translation strategies used to solve the translation problems that arise from the linguistic and cultural differences between the language pair (Inphen, 2020, 2022a; Ninrat, 2019). In his recent article, however, Inphen (2022b) finds that while this previous research succeeds in identifying translation strategies, most of these studies do not further delve into how these strategies can be placed on the continuum of source-text and target-text oriented translation (p. 170). For example, he classifies literal translation as a source-text oriented translation strategy and further posits that the concept of literal translation remains quite broad, since it refers to the ways in which source-text meaning and linguistic structures are closely replicated by the translator while disregarding other social and cultural elements that may affect the translations (pp. 182–183). Following this view, the definition of the concept remains open, because the boundaries of the extent to which source-text meaning and the linguistic structure of the source text are closely followed remain blurry. This includes some unclear boundaries between adherence to source-text lexical meaning and linguistic structures (Inphen, 2024, p. 171). This can be explored further through the conceptual lens of translation equivalence.

In the Thai translation context, literal translation strategies are usually defined as word-for-word translation (Kulthamrong, 2009). It is also used to cover a translation strategy in which source-text linguistic structures are followed strictly in Thai translations and in which source-text linguistic structures are minimally adapted or changed to observe differences in linguistic structure between English and Thai (e.g., the positions of adjectives and nouns in a phrase) (Inphen, 2020; Ninrat, 2019). Furthermore, some translation researchers also consider translations with adherence to source-text denotative meanings to fall within the scope of literal translation strategy (Inphen, 2020; Ninrat, 2019). This shows that literal translation strategies in the Thai environment contain varied characteristics. This is relevant to the present study, since the definitions and the ways in which literal translation strategies are used in the Thai context remain overlapping and unclear.

The diversity of the definitions and classifications of literal translation strategy is considered an important research gap in the Thai translation context. This gap motivates this study to explore literal translation strategies and how they are classified and used in translations from English into Thai, focusing on translations at the lexical level, more systematically and thoroughly. To elaborate, this study is a meta-study investigating how ten scholars have used the term “literal translation strategy” in their works in the Thai translation environment..

## Literature Review

### *Poles of Translation Strategies from the Translation Equivalence Point of View*

Thai translation is rooted in its historical context and has been affected by social and cultural elements from the West (Chittiphalangsri, 2025; Techawongstien, 2016); for example, the first translated fiction from English into Thai influenced the ways Thai writers write fiction (Chittipalangsri, 2014). Further, translation is also tied to social and cultural constraints; for example, Thai translation can be produced in the form of rewriting, reducing cultural specificities of the source texts in translations and reintroducing ideas of the target-text culture that are seen as fit for the target readers (Phanthaphoommee, 2023a, 2023b). Ways in which Thai translations are produced vary and depend on the social and cultural elements to which they are tied (Winnarong, 2024). However, recently, source-text oriented translation seems to be fundamental to translation strategies, since the use of source-text oriented translation strategies is increasing in the Thai literary translation context (Inphen, 2020, 2024; Ninrat, 2019). Despite this, kingship and Buddhist cultural values seem to resist the trend of source-text oriented translation, as Inphen (2024) finds that translators usually replace these terms with Thai target-text versions.

The broad conceptual lens of translation equivalence lays a foundation for understanding tendencies in how translation strategies are adopted along the cline of source-text and target-text oriented translation. Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet (1995) divide their proposed translation strategies along a continuum between these opposing poles. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) also propose translation strategies for solving problems related to source-text and target-text non-equivalence. They further classify their translation strategies into two broader categories: source-text oriented (foreignizing) and target-text oriented (domesticating). On the foreignizing side, their translation strategies include loan, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, correspondence, and adaptation. On the domesticating side, their translation strategies include amplification, implicitation, compensation, explicitation, dilution, particularization, and generalization. The listed translation strategies can correspond to Nida's (1964) formal and dynamic equivalence and Pym's (2010) direct and natural equivalence, respectively. In this view, both kinds of equivalence help in positioning translation strategies along the continuum between source-text and target-text oriented translation.

In Thailand, some previous researchers have adopted the polarity of translation equivalence in literary translations from English into Thai. Following the distinction between source-text and target-text oriented translation, Saibua (2007) associates her literal translation strategy with the former and her free translation strategy with the latter. Similarly, Kulthamrong's (2009)

word-for-word translation is also linked to source-text oriented translation strategy, while her meaning-based translation, idiomatic translation, and free translation strategies fall within the target-text oriented side. Further, Pinmanee (2014) identifies the following translation strategies in her book: non-literal translation, translation using descriptive phrases, translation using related words, translation using generic-specific words, and translation using secondary and figurative senses, all of which are classified as target-text oriented. Other scholars' literal translation strategies include Kulthamrong's (2009) word-for-word translation and Ninrat's (2019) and Inphen's (2020) literal translation—a translation strategy in which source-text denotative meanings are adhered to strictly and in which source-text linguistic structures are not modified and/or are slightly modified due to linguistic needs in the Thai translated versions (i.e., rearranging the positions of adjectives and nouns within a phrase or clause). The abundance of these source-text oriented strategies suggests that, within the Thai literary field, literal translation is considered a strategy in which translators aim to adhere closely to the language of the source text.

Although the literal translation strategy is classified as source-text oriented and aligns with the idea of foreignizing translation (Paloposki, 2010; Venuti, 2008) due to adherence to the source language, the application of this strategy in literary translations from English into Thai varies considerably. This variation is also relevant to the characteristics of source-text structures and other items. As stated previously, San Martín (2022) posits that the denotative meaning of terms (e.g., words and phrases) derives from the knowledge that source-text audiences have, which acts as a context for the texts. He further states that, in natural language, a definition of terms (i.e., words and phrases) should contain the necessary and sufficient characteristics (hereinafter NSCs) of the concept denoted by the term. He uses the example of the term chlorine and states that the term should be defined by its necessary and sufficient chemical formula to give its denotative meaning (pp. 1, 5). Since NSCs emphasize characteristics as part of meaning construction, John Taylor's (2008) work on prototypes in cognitive linguistics aligns with this concept. It demonstrates that a word is related to the elements within that word. In his view, prototypes refer to categories consisting of sufficient and necessary features denoting words and phrases (p. 39). Considering that the elements constituting words and phrases vary greatly, however, Taylor (2008) admits that features relevant to defining words and phrases may be varied and overlapping. This shows that classifying words and phrases solely based on meaning features can be challenging and attempting to classify them into a single prototype can be, to some extent, inaccurate. He thus concludes that "(...) many categories lacked clear-cut boundaries" (pp. 40–41). Based on the

concept of NSCs, the concept of prototype can also help define literal translation strategies.

In the Thai translation environment, literal translation strategies contain a broad spectrum of NSCs—from adhering to source-text structures to replacing source-text versions while adhering to the source texts, both strictly and to some extent due to required grammatical shifts. Following San Martín's (2022) concept of defining a term while taking its meaning and context into account, the ways in which literal translation strategies in the Thai environment are used should be defined with necessary and sufficient characteristics (NSCs), both in terms of adherence to source-text linguistic structures and consideration of source-text denotative meanings.

### ***Literal Translation from the Source-Text Oriented Translation Point of View***

Through the conceptual lens of translation equivalence, the idea of literal translation is associated with source-text oriented translation (Nida, 1964; Venuti, 2008). Even though the concept of equivalence does not inherently refer to specific translation techniques or strategies that directly deal with source and target texts, it can function as a background framework for positioning strategies. Eugene Nida (1964) states that translators translate source texts into target texts using techniques that fall within two categories: formal and dynamic equivalence. Dynamic equivalence focuses on developing target-text versions that read more naturally than those produced through formal equivalence, which, in turn, focuses on maintaining source-text structures and meanings in the target-text version. Formal equivalence is a strategy translators use to maintain the linguistic structures and meanings of the source text, aiming to make the target-text version resemble the source-text one as much as possible. Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, refers to strategies in which translators modify the target text's linguistic structures to generate translations that are natural, coherent, and have responsive qualities similar to those of the original texts.

The association of literal translation and source-text oriented translation is evident in previous studies that compare similarities and differences between language pairs and propose strategies to solve translation problems (Aixelá, 1996; Davies, 2003; Liang, 2016). Literal translation is defined by scholars in the field as follows. Aixelá's (1996) linguistic (non-cultural) adaptation is defined as a translation strategy in which translators follow the linguistic structures and denotative meanings of the source texts. Davies' (2003) preservation is defined as a translation strategy in which translators retain cultural references using target-text denotative equivalents. Similarly, Liang's (2016) rendition emphasizes a translation strategy in which translators retain source-text elements in translations.

In the present study, the concept of equivalence, especially formal equivalence (Nida, 1964), is relevant. As the name suggests, literal translation is considered to comprise techniques in which translators attempt to preserve source-text meaning and linguistic structures as much as possible. Direct and formal equivalence help illustrate this issue further, for example, by highlighting lexical meaning and linguistic similarities and differences between language pairs.

Based on the discussion above, literal translation can be considered a translation strategy that falls within the scope of source-text oriented translation. It contains two key characteristics: adherence to source-text linguistic structures and adherence to the denotative meanings of the source texts.

First, adherence to the linguistic structures of the source texts means that translators attempt to follow the form of the source texts. For example, Inphen's (2024) literal translation strategy includes A messenger of the Illuminati, which was translated into Thai as ผู้เดินสารแห่งอิลลูมินาติ (back translation: A messenger of the Illuminati) (p. 112). Further, from a source-text oriented point of view, adherence to source-text structures can extend to the use of loanwords and transliterations in translations (Inphen, 2024, p. 104). Second, adherence to the denotative meanings of the source texts refers to ways in which translators replace source-text words and phrases with corresponding target-text versions whose meanings directly refer to the source-text words and phrases (Inphen, 2024, p. 101). However, the term denotative meaning is used with limitation. It primarily refers to dictionary-based definitions that can be understood directly without interpretation based on speakers' attitudes or feelings (Baker, 1992, pp. 12–13).

Considering the aim of the present study, literal translation is defined as a translation strategy used in a broad sense to refer to source-text oriented or foreignizing translation. It includes key characteristics of adherence to the linguistic structures and denotative meanings of source-text words and phrases, as posited earlier (Aixelá, 1996; Davies, 2003; Inphen, 2024; Liang, 2016).

Literal translation strategy can give rise to foreignness in translations since it is source-text oriented in nature (Aixelá, 1996; Inphen, 2024). As posited, literal translation includes adherence to source-text linguistic structures and denotative meanings. Both forms of adherence are, to a large extent, linked to foreignness in translations. For example, foreignness is linked to transliteration through adherence to the sounds of English words and phrases in Thai translations. Similarly, foreignness is also linked to the retention of words and phrases with source-text denotative meanings that make target readers aware that the translated words and phrases do not derive from their own language and culture. For this reason, in this study, foreignness is treated broadly and includes both linguistic structures and cultural elements linked to source-text oriented translation.



The denotative meaning of source texts can vary based on registers of words and phrases in the Thai context, and target readers may perceive foreignness based on these registers. To explain, denotative meaning can include multiple target-text options since Thai words and phrases vary by register, for example, words and phrases used for Buddhist monks and members of the royal household. Different registers can have similar denotative meanings based on dictionaries. For example, the word king can have similar denotative meanings in กษัตริย์ (kasat) (back translation: king) and พระมหากษัตริย์ (phra maha kasat) (back translation: the great king). The former denotes king in a neutral register, while the latter denotes royal usage referring to holiness and greatness, which may sound less foreign to the target audience since kingship is deeply rooted in Thai culture. The terms can thus be differentiated by register. Since this study aims to explore the extent to which literal translation strategies are defined and applied, word registers denoting Buddhist and kingship ideologies can help reclassify strategies, as discussed further in Domain 3.

## **Material and Methods**

The materials comprise ten studies of literary translations from English into Thai. The concept and application of literal translation strategies vary from one study to another. This research focuses on studies that deal with translations of words and phrases into Thai, in order to explore translation strategies at the lexical level.

The ten studies were chosen through keyword searches conducted in the online library database of the author's affiliation (a government university in Bangkok, Thailand), which provides access to international and national research databases. The following keywords were used: literal translation, translation strategies, translation of words and phrases, literary translation from English into Thai, and source-text oriented translation. After that, the selection of the literature followed these criteria.

First, the previous studies chosen for analysis must (1) include translations of words and phrases in literary works, (2) have been conducted after 1999 (since the trend in source-text oriented translation has emerged after 2000 [Ninrat, 2019]), and (3) contain translation strategies from English into Thai. At this stage, literature with detailed translation strategies of English into Thai was chosen purposively, following the purposive sampling method (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013). The number of selected studies was determined based on the translation strategies available in them. Each study contains one to two translation strategies classified as literal translation strategies, as listed in Table 2. For the feasibility of the research project, ten studies that meet these criteria, producing twelve translation strategies, were selected.

As mentioned, this research is exploratory. The data exclude translations from English into Thai in other text genres, such as legal, commercial, and academic texts. It is also acknowledged that the data come from a university network that may not cover all available studies. Despite these limitations, literary translations were chosen as the data for the present research since they are widely studied in the Thai context and are viewed as covering the aspects the research intends to examine. From an exploratory design point of view, the ten studies contain translation strategies in which key characteristics of literal translation—adherence to source-text denotative meaning and linguistic structures—are present. Further, considering that the study is qualitative in examining the extent to which literal translation is used as a strategy, the ten studies can illustrate such extent, without requiring a quantitative aspect of the data. Table 1 below details the selected studies and their respective codes.

**Table 1**  
*Details of the Previous Studies and Codes*

| No. | Title  | Author(s)/Year          | Code |
|-----|--|-------------------------|------|
| 1   | The Translation of Salman Rushdie's <i>Magical Realism Midnight's Children</i>   | Jaritngam (2017)        | JAR  |
| 2   | An Analytical Study of Translation Editing and Translation Process of the Children's Literature <i>"The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe"</i> | Khruachot (2020)        | KHR  |
| 3   | A Translation of <i>"White Girl Problems"</i> by Babe Walker with an Analysis through Pragmatic Aspects                                      | Kittidussadeekul (2015) | KIT  |
| 4   | The Strategies in Translating English Metaphors into Thai: A Case Study of the American Novel <i>Percy Jackson</i>                           | Mata (2016)             | MAT  |
| 5   | Translation of Taboo Words in <i>The Catcher in The Rye</i> Translated by Kamrawee-Baitoey   | Nedjaroen (2014)        | NED  |
| 6   | The Translation of Allusion in Crime Fiction Novels from English into Thai between 1960 and 2015   | Ninrat (2019)           | NIN  |
| 7   | Idioms and Comparative Statements: The Translation Strategies in <i>"Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone"</i>                              | Sae Ong et al. (2017)   | SAE  |
| 8   | A Dominant Global Translation Strategy in Thai Translated Novels: The Translations of Religious Markers in Dan Brown's Thriller Novels       | Inphen (2020)           | INP  |
| 9   | English-Thai Translation Strategies of Similes and Metaphors in <i>the Merchant of Venice</i>  | Suksalee (2018)         | SUK  |
| 10  | Translation Strategies of Compound Nouns from English to Thai in <i>"Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone"</i>                           | Thappang (2012)         | THA  |

The studies detailed in Table 1 examine translations of words and phrases in literary translation from English into Thai over a period of eight years, from



2012 to 2020. These studies explore translation strategies for words and phrases, including culture-specific items (Inphen, 2020; Ninrat, 2019), compound nouns (Thappang, 2012), similes, metaphors, and idioms (Mata, 2016; Sae Ong et al., 2017; Suksalee, 2018), taboo words (Nedjaroen, 2014), and other words and phrases in fiction (Jaritngam, 2017; Khruachot, 2020; Kittidussadeekul, 2015). While Kittidussadeekul's (2015) study primarily focuses on the pragmatic aspects of fiction translation, it also identifies translation strategies for words and phrases that meet the selection criteria of the present study. To conclude, the selected studies were conducted after 1999 and cover the period from 2012 to 2020, during which an increasing trend of foreignizing translation can be observed in literary translation in Thailand (see Ninrat, 2019).

As for the review-and-selection procedure, first, the studies are reviewed to identify translation strategies that fall within the scope of literal translation, as discussed in the literature review section. The identified translation strategies are purposively collected and stored in an Excel spreadsheet using the purposive sampling method (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013).

As can be seen in recent decades, translation cannot be approached from a single perspective, for example, only from a linguistic or cultural one (Siponkoski, 2014, p. 1). Triangulation is one of the analytical concepts that allows researchers to study translation from multiple perspectives, both in terms of theories and practices (Aguilar Solano, 2020, p. 32). For example, it allows the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Munday, 2009, p. 237). According to Breitmayer et al. (1993), triangulation assists in placing analytical methods in a wider context and demonstrates links among data, related concepts, and dimensions of related matters and interests (p. 238). This yields a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. Following the view of Barbosa and Neiva (2003), triangulation can include the exploration of methods, data, and theories together, illustrating links between these elements. This method is intended to circumvent the inherently subjective nature of interpreting translation strategies and to reduce researcher bias.

Since the aim of this research is to explore the concept of literal translation strategy, determine its characteristics, and examine the extent to which it is used for translations of words and phrases into Thai, triangulation is adapted and used as a concept to provide a "structured qualitative synthesis" of literal translation strategies derived from previous studies. Since the data of the present research come from previous studies in which literal translation strategies are elaborated, their sources are similar in nature and are not considered to derive from different methods. For this reason, although triangulation helps to explore the extent to which data sets intersect, it cannot be used directly in this study. Instead, the "structured qualitative synthesis" is used as it helps illustrate the following domains: (1) classifications of literal translation strategies, (2) definitions, and (3) applications in translations.

Next, the previous studies are reviewed to identify similarities and differences based on the three proposed aspects. This process assists in compiling translation strategies classified as literal translation. Subsequently, the definitions of the identified translation strategies are explored. Finally, the extent to which they are used in translations is discussed, indicating the implications that may derive from the application of literal translation strategies in the context of Thai literary translation.

## Results and Discussion

### *Domain 1: The Classification of Literal Translation Strategies*

The first domain strives to explore which translation strategies are considered literal translation. Based on the notion of literal translation, 12 translation strategies were considered to fall within the scope of literal translation strategies as shown below.

**Table 2**

*Translation Strategies Classified as Literal Translation*

| Previous Study Code | Translation Strategies Classified as Literal Translation   |
|---------------------|--|
| JAR                 | 1. Translation using denotative meanings of source-text words or phrases (Jaritngam, 2017, p. 50)  |
| KHR                 | 1. Translation using words and phrases with same source-text denotative meanings (Khruachot, 2020, p. 96)<br>2. Translation with target-text linguistic shifts: re-arrangement of words or phrases in the target texts due to the linguistic needs in the target language (Khruachot, 2020, p. 96) |
| KIT                 | 1. Translation using denotative meanings of source-text words or phrases (Kittidussadeekul, 2015, pp. 193-194)<br>2. Translation with target-text linguistic shifts: shifting of words or phrases into clauses in the target texts (Kittidussadeekul, 2015, p. 217)                                |
| MAT                 | 1. Translation using the corresponding denotative meanings of target-text words and phrases (metaphor) (Mata, 2016, p. 43)   |
| NED                 | 1. Translation using denotative meanings of source-text words or phrases (Nedjaroen, 2014, p. 91)  |
| NIN                 | 1. Literal translation: retention of source-text forms and meanings of words or phrases (allusion) in the target texts (Ninrat, 2019, p. 109)  |
| SAE                 | 1. Word-for-word translation with denotative meanings of the source-text words or phrases (Sae Ong et al., 2017, p. 66)  |
| SUK                 | 1. Literal translation: translation with a retention of source-text words or phrases (simile and metaphor) in the target texts (Suksalee, 2018, p. 61)   |

**Table 2**

*Translation Strategies Classified as Literal Translation (Cont.)*

| Previous Study Code | Translation Strategies Classified as Literal Translation  |
|---------------------|---|
| THA                 | 1. Translation using phrases or sentences existing in the target language with a retention of source-text words or phrases: (1.1) translation using words or phrases or an addition of words or phrases with the same denotative meanings in the source texts; (1.2) translation with words or phrases creation (and/or with additional explanation) in the target-text with the source-text denotative meaning equivalents; (1.3) translation using loan words or phrases or related words or phrases (and/or with additional explanation) with very close denotative meanings of the source-text language (Thappang, 2012, p. 98) |
| INP                 | 1. Literal translation: translation that follows source-text linguistic structure and meaning closely (Inphen, 2020, p. 298); (1.1) Literal translation: translation that follows source-text linguistic structure and meaning closely, however, with slight linguistic shifts due to the linguistic needs in the target language (Inphen, 2020, p. 298)  |

After reviewing these strategies, it is discovered that translation strategies classified as literal translation in the literary translation sphere reflect two main characteristics: (1) literal translation strategies focusing on the denotative meaning of the source texts and (2) literal translation strategies focusing on the linguistic structure of the source texts. The first group comprises translation strategies that focus on the denotative meaning of source-text words and phrases, striving to retain such meanings in the target texts. The second group consists of translation strategies that pay attention to the linguistic structure of source-text words or phrases, striving to follow such structures as closely as possible, albeit with slight modifications due to linguistic needs in the target language.

### ***Domain 2: Definitions of Literal Translation Strategies***

Domain 2 shows that the translation researchers in these studies define their literal translation strategy based on the following characteristics.

The first group contains characteristics related to the denotative meaning of the source texts. The translation researchers defined their literal translation strategy as (1) translation using the denotative meaning of source-text words or phrases, for example, swallower translated into ผู้กลืน (back translation: swallower) (Jaritngam, 2017, pp. 50, 52); (2) translation using words and phrases with the same source-text denotative meaning, for example, crockery translated into จานชามกระเบื้อง (back translation: dish plate earthenware) (Khruachot, 2020, p. 76); (3) translation using the denotative meaning of source-text words or phrases, for example, meth translated into ยาบ้า (back translation: methamphetamine) (Kittidussadeekul, 2015, pp. 193–194);

(4) translation using corresponding denotative meanings of target-text words and phrases (metaphor), for example, Her ugly pig eyes translated into ดวงตาที่เหมือนตาหมูที่น่าเกลียดของเธอ (back translation: her ugly pig eyes) (Mata, 2016, p. 43); (5) translation using the denotative meaning of source-text words or phrases, for example, spooky translated into เหมือนผี (back translation: ghost-like) (Nedjaroen, 2014, p. 91); (6) literal translation involving retention of source-text forms and meanings of words or phrases (allusion) in the target texts, for example, crystal ball translated into ลูกแก้ว (back translation: glass ball), King of the Jews translated into กษัตริย์แห่งชาวยิว (back translation: king of people Jew), and a king called Strathern translated into กษัตริย์พระองค์หนึ่งทรงพระนามว่าสแตรธีเทิร์น (back translation: a king named Strathern) (Ninrat, 2019, pp. 126, 301, 317); (7) word-for-word translation of the denotative meaning of source-text words or phrases, for example, stood rooted to the spot translated into ยืนเหมือนรากงอก (back translation: stood like being rooted) (Sae Ong et al., 2017, p. 65); (8) literal translation involving retention of source-text words or phrases (simile and metaphor) in the target texts, for example, as the (gentle) rain translated into เหมือนฝน (back translation: as the rain) (Suksalee, 2018, p. 61); and (9) translation using phrases or sentences existing in the target language while retaining source-text words or phrases, for example, bar man translated into คนคุมบาร์ (back translation: man controlling the bar) (Thappang, 2012, p. 99).

The second group contains characteristics related to the linguistic structures of the source texts. The translation researchers defined their literal translation strategy as (1) translation with target-text linguistic shifts, involving rearrangement of words or phrases in the target texts, for example, Aslan himself quietly slipped away translated into อัสลานก็ปลีกตัวออกไปอย่างเงียบกริบ (back translation: Aslan slipped away quietly) (Khruachot, 2020, p. 97); (2) translation with target-text linguistic shifts involving the expansion of words or phrases into clauses in the target texts, for example, tendency to drink six to eight glasses of champagne a day no matter what's going on translated into จะชอบดื่มแชมเปญวันละหกถึงแปดแก้วไม่ว่าจะเกิดอะไรขึ้นก็ตาม (back translation: tend to drink champagne six to eight glasses a day no matter what's going on) (Kittidussadeekul, 2015, p. 217); and (3) literal translation that closely follows source-text linguistic structure and meaning, including translations with slight linguistic shifts in the target texts, for example, the bells of St Peter's translated into บรรดาระฆังแห่งมหาวิหารเซนต์ปีเตอร์ (back translation: the bells of the great vihara Saint Peter) (Inphen, 2020, p. 298). This group of literal translation strategies places greater emphasis on adherence to source-text linguistic structures than on denotative meanings of source-text words and phrases. In summary, literal translation strategies that attend to source-text linguistic structures mainly refer to strategies

that closely follow linguistic form while allowing slight modifications in the target texts due to structural differences between the language pairs.

### ***Domain 3: Key Characteristics of Literal Translation Strategies in Thai***

Based on the two key characteristics—(1) literal translation strategies focusing on the denotative meaning of the source texts and (2) literal translation strategies focusing on the linguistic structures of the source texts—the results indicate that the term *literal translation strategy* should be used more systematically among Thai translation scholars.

Some data from previous studies indicate that characteristics of source-text words and phrases can influence the ways in which target-text word versions are chosen. For instance, Inphen (2020) illustrates that the religious marker the bells of St Peter’s was translated into Thai as บรรดาระฆังแห่งมหาวิหารเซนต์ปีเตอร์ (back translation: the bells of the great vihara Saint Peter) (p. 298). This example shows that the characteristics of the source-text term influenced the translator: because St Peter’s is a church and thus a religious building, the translator chose a different type of religious building (i.e., the great vihara Saint Peter) to explain the name in Thai. This indicates that characteristics of source-text words can influence translators to select target-text versions that invoke Buddhist notions in the Thai target culture, thereby making the translation less foreign to the target audience.

This influence of source-text word and phrase characteristics is important because it can affect how literal translation strategies are defined and applied. To clarify this point, the section that follows will (1) discuss the denotative meaning of words and phrases in translation, following Baker’s (1992) translation strategies at the word level, and (2) illustrate how characteristics of source-text words and phrases can influence target-text choices, leading them to contain denotative meanings that may differ in the Thai context from those in the source context. The aim is to show that the ways in which literal translation strategies are classified, defined, and applied can result in unclear boundaries. This unclarity highlights the importance of considering key characteristics of words and phrases in translation.

#### ***1. Denotative Meaning in Translations from English into Thai***

The first aspect that needs to be mentioned is the denotative meaning of both source- and target-text words and phrases. The term *denotative meaning*, in a broad sense, refers to the direct meaning that derives from words and phrases (Baker, 1992, pp. 12–13). According to Baker (1992), denotative meaning can be divided into propositional meaning and expressive meaning. Propositional meaning refers to meaning that directly refers to “what [the word] refers to or describes in a real or imaginary world, as conceived by the speakers of the

particular language to which the word or utterance belongs” (pp. 12–13). As seen, one of the key characteristics of literal translation strategies in Thai translations is adherence to source-text meaning terms, which refers specifically to propositional meaning.

However, since the denotative meaning of words and phrases can vary across social and cultural contexts—an obvious example being register in Thai—Thai translations often need to address the issue of hierarchical registers. Registers represent different levels of formality between addressers and addressees (e.g., between senior and junior people, and between royals, priests, and commoners, to name but a few). Translators therefore must select translations of words and phrases based on such extralinguistic considerations, even though the denotative meaning of these words or phrases remains largely the same in the source texts. For instance, Khruachot (2020) states that the denotative meaning of the source-text word *crockery* is จานชามกระเบื้อง (back translation: *dish plate earthenware*) in Thai. She posits that the phrase *dish plate earthenware* represents the denotative meaning of *crockery* because of its direct reference to the source language (p. 97). The translation emphasizes the characteristics of *crockery* clearly, since the words *dish* and *plate* in the Thai translation denote the same source-text meanings. This sounds more idiomatic and less foreign in Thai when compared to other translation choices. Considering that the key characteristic of adherence to source-text denotative meaning is present, Khruachot’s (2020) classification of the phrase as a literal translation is plausible (p. 97). However, *crockery* can also be translated simply as จานชาม (*dishware*), which likewise denotes the complete denotative meaning of the source-text word. This alternative with the same denotative meaning raises an important question: to what extent are translations of words and phrases with similar or close denotative meanings to the source text judged as literal translations? To explore this further, the characteristics of source-text words and phrases also need to be considered.

## **2. Characteristics of Source-Text Words and Phrases from a Denotative Meaning Point of View**

It also appears that characteristics of source-text words and phrases affect the ways in which translators make translation choices. For instance, Ninrat (2019) categorizes the King of the Jews, translated as กษัตริย์แห่งชาวยิว (back translation: king of people Jew), as a literal translation strategy (p. 317). Inphen (2020) also classifies Jewish stars, rendered into Thai as ดวงดาราแห่งยิว (back translation: stars of Jew), as a literal translation due to adherence to the denotative meaning of the source text.

If such target-text versions are classified as literal translations without considering other elements that affect translation choices—namely,



the characteristics of the source texts influencing translation in these cases—this may result in a limited understanding of the translation decisions involved. For example, the source-text word *star* can be translated into Thai as either *duang dao* or *duang dara*. Most translators consider both versions to convey the source-text denotative meaning fully and accurately. However, due to differences in lexical choice in Thai, the latter (*duang dara*) can create a stronger sense of affiliation with Thai culture, making it less foreign than the former. This is because it may be perceived as having literary qualities and as being connected to cultural beliefs in the target context. This example illustrates that the denotative meaning of source-text words and phrases can be supported by different connotative meanings in target-text replacements.

More generally, the analysis also indicates that source-text words and phrases containing religious and monarchical characteristics can significantly influence translation choices. For example, Ninrat (2019) categorizes the source-text phrase *a king called Strathern*, translated into Thai as กษัตริย์พระองค์หนึ่งทรงพระนามว่าสเตริตเทิร์น (*kasat phra-ong nueng song phra nama wa straet thoen*) (back translation: *a king named Strathern*), as a literal translation (p. 301). The translated version adheres closely to the source-text denotative meaning and can therefore be classified as literal. Upon closer inspection, however, the application of literal translation in this case may not be as straightforward as it initially appears. Although the Thai phrase fully encompasses the source-text denotative meaning, it contains royal lexical items used exclusively in reference to the monarch in Thai. The phrase thus reflects Thai ideological constructions of kingship (Poopongpan, 2007). An alternative translation choice could be คิงส์ว่าสเตริตเทิร์น (*king straet thoen*) (back translation: *king Strathern*), which omits the Thai royal phrasing entirely. This illustrates that, while the translated version follows the source-text linguistic structure and denotative meaning closely, its status as a translation is largely obscured using royal register, signalling a strong connection to Thai cultural and ideological norms.

These examples can be classified as literal translations, but such classification may be more accurate if adherence to source-text denotative meaning is considered together with translators' choices of target-text replacements. Based on this analysis, it is proposed that literal translation strategies should also consider how characteristics of source-text words and phrases can result in translations that sound highly familiar to Thai audiences due to the close relationship between language, religion, and kingship. Source-text words and phrases with monarchical characteristics, for instance, are likely to be rendered using specialized Thai royal vocabulary. While these translated versions closely match the source-text denotative meanings, they may also reflect target-text cultural notions of kingship and therefore not fully




align with conventional understandings of literal translation. The same applies to words and phrases with religious meanings, such as Buddhist terms (e.g., translating cathedral as มหาวิหาร (maha vihara) [back translation: the great vihara]). Thus, classification as a literal translation strategy may not always be straightforward.

Since target-text replacements can vary among multiple options with similar or close denotative meanings, the boundary of what counts as literal translation can be unclear, particularly in English–Thai translation. To clarify this issue, positioning literal translation strategies along a continuum based on a source-text oriented approach may be useful (Inphen, 2024, p. 104). It can therefore be proposed that, in determining whether a translation strategy falls within the category of literal translation in the Thai context, adherence to source-text denotative meaning should be further sub-classified and more precisely defined.

The proposed sub-classification of literal translation strategies is grounded in the concept of source-text oriented translation, which can signal foreignness through linguistic structures and denotative meanings in translated texts. However, identifying foreignness in translations is challenging due to its abstract nature. For this reason, a continuum representing the cline between source-text and target-text oriented translation can be a useful analytical tool.

**Figure 1**

*Sub-Classification of a Literal Translation Strategy with Adherence to Source-Text Denotative Meaning*

| Source-text oriented translation<br>oriented translation  |  | Target-text   |
|---|--|---|
|   |  |   |
| <b>Strict Literal Translation</b><br>Target-text replacements with close denotative meanings of source-text words and phrases denoting evident foreignness in the translation | <b>Literal Translation</b><br>Target-text replacements with neutral replacements of words and phrases, denoting foreignness in the translation | <b>Limited Literal Translation</b><br>Target-text replacements with words and phrases indicating foreignness but links to target-text ideologies and belief systems |

The analysis of this study follows the figure above. The figure is adapted from Inphen's (2024) classification of foreignizing (source-text oriented) and domesticating (target-text oriented) translation. He uses the continuum between source-text and target-text translation to illustrate boundaries of translation strategies. According to him, copying, transliteration, and literal translation

manifest higher degrees of foreignness due to adherence to the linguistic structures and denotative meanings of the source texts, when compared to limited localization (as discussed further below), which contains words and phrases with denotations associated with target-text words and phrases (pp. 104–106).

The first category follows conventional literal translation strategies defined earlier but is further defined to include evident foreignness in translation. Evident foreignness refers to the ways in which translators transliterate source-text items into Thai phrases by following English linguistic structures closely. The concept of evident foreignness derives from Inphen's (2024) classification of transliteration as a source-text oriented strategy (p. 106). On the scale from least to most, transliteration manifests a higher degree of foreignness than other local translation strategies such as literal translation and in-text or extra-text gloss. Based on this, strict literal translation refers to ways in which translators translate source-text words and phrases into Thai by adhering closely to denotative meanings and employing transliteration as part of the translated phrase. For example, the translation of Leonardo's farm into ฟาร์มของลีโอนาร์โด (back translation: the farm of Leonardo) in the novel *She's Not Coming Home* (Cox, 2012, as cited in Intana, 2019) can be sub-classified as a strict literal translation strategy (p. 26). This is because the translator transliterated Leonardo and farm into Thai and reorganized them into a phrase that follows English linguistic structure closely. The translation preserves denotative meanings while indicating evident foreignness through transliteration as an integral part of the target-text phrase.

The second category is similar to the first in that the target-text words and phrases denote the source-text meanings almost fully or fully. The difference, however, is that the target-text words or phrases are more neutral in register when denoting source-text meanings. To differentiate between strict literal translation and literal translation more clearly, neutral registers here refer to Thai versions of words and phrases that can be perceived as less foreign (based on the continuum presented above) but are not as evidently foreign as those used in strict literal translation. This is because translators replace source-text words and phrases with Thai equivalents without employing transliteration as part of the translated phrase. The translation therefore remains less foreign than strict literal translation discussed above. I posit that literal translation here aligns with Inphen's (2024) definition of literal translation (p. 106). For example, the translation of North of England in the novel *He Is Watching You* (Gallagher, 2018) into Thai as ทางตอนเหนือของอังกฤษ (back translation: north of England) can be classified as literal translation due to the neutral replacements of words and phrases that do not denote evident foreignness, in contrast to strict literal translation.

When identifying literal translation strategies in the Thai context, the denotative meaning of target-text words and phrases should also be considered to reflect source-text adherence more accurately. This motivates the proposal of the final category. In reviewing previous literature on translation strategies, Inphen (2020) identifies limited localization as a strategy used for translating culture-specific words and phrases from English into Thai (pp. 297–298). Limited localization is based on Aixelá's (1996) concept of limited universalization (p. 63) and Davies' (2003) concept of globalization (p. 82). It refers to ways in which translators render source-text words and phrases into Thai using close or similar denotative meanings, while such replacements largely denote foreignness of the source texts in translation. As a result, translations may sound foreign to the audience; for example, crucifix translated into กางเขน (back translation: a cross), which does not carry Catholic connotations in Thailand, whereas the source-text word denotes Catholicism in English.

Limited literal translation reverses the logic of limited localization. It refers to ways in which translators replace source-text words and phrases with Thai equivalents that denote foreignness but are closely connected to Thai target culture. Specifically, the classification of limited literal translation draws attention to necessary and sufficient characteristics (NSCs) of the target text, namely target-text words or phrases that invoke ideologies of kingship and Buddhism. According to San Martín (2022), words and phrases should denote the necessary and sufficient characteristics required to group them together (pp. 1–5). Based on the analysis presented here, limited literal translation refers to target-text words and phrases that indicate foreignness while simultaneously invoking target-text ideologies and belief systems such as kingship and Buddhism. For example, Inphen's (2020) classification of the translation of the bells of St Peter's as บรรดาระฆังแห่งมหาวิหารเซนต์ปีเตอร์ (back translation: the bells of the great vihara Saint Peter) as literal translation can be refined as limited literal translation (p. 298). This is because St Peter's was rendered as the great vihara Saint Peter, a term that, despite closely denoting the source-text meaning, is strongly associated with Buddhist culture, an integral component of Thai society.

In summary, literal translation can be sub-classified into three categories: strict literal translation, literal translation, and limited literal translation. Strict literal translation refers to translations that preserve close denotative meanings while exhibiting evident foreignness. Literal translation refers to translations that preserve denotative meanings using more neutral registers. Limited literal translation refers to translations that preserve denotative meanings while invoking target-text ideologies and belief systems.

## Conclusion

The analysis indicates that the notion of literal translation strategy encompasses diverse translation strategies from the perspective of adherence to source-text denotative meanings. The findings suggest that a literal translation strategy should be expanded to include target-text replacements that denote local ideologies and belief systems. In Thai, choices of words and phrases can vary depending on the context of the source and target languages; for example, words and phrases related to kingship and Buddhism are, by and large, strongly tied to Thai beliefs. This shows that even though translated words and phrases may fully and accurately convey the denotative meaning of the source text, such target-text replacements may carry registers that steer them away from the emerging trend of source-text oriented translation due to the cultural familiarity associated with kingship and Buddhist ideologies. As a result, it may not be accurate to straightforwardly classify such translations as literal translation. Therefore, it is proposed that literal translation strategy be further diversified into strict literal translation strategy, literal translation strategy, and limited literal translation strategy.

However, the characteristics of Buddhist and royal words and phrases can motivate translators to opt for translated words and phrases with registers that sound familiar to Thai readers. This tendency is linked to target-text oriented translation and gradually deviates from the idea of literal translation as originally posited. The replacement of source-text words and phrases with target-text registers associated with Buddhist ideologies and kingship suggests that such choices may reflect translation norms, or what is accepted in Thai translation practice (Inphen, 2024). Since norms are defined as what is accepted within a literary system (Toury, 1995), these translation choices may indicate norm-governed behaviour rather than purely source-text oriented strategies.

## Biodata

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