

Loan Wording vs Cultural Substitution: Study of Thai University Students' Perception of Translation Techniques Used in Translated Literature 'The Happiness of Kati'

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ABSTRACT

In the past decade, the demand for the English translation of Thai literature has increased due to the effect of globalization. To efficiently translate one language to another, translation techniques are commonly employed by translators (Larson, 1998). However, the prejudice toward a specific variation of English and translation techniques could limit the options to produce truly beautiful and understandable translation works. Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' perception of two types of translation techniques namely loan wording and cultural substitution. The objectives of the study are to answer three research questions: 1) Which version of translated excerpts that the majority of the students found to be more comprehensible?, 2) Between loan wording and cultural substitution, what is the most suitable strategy according to the students' opinion?, and 3) What are the main reasons for the selection of a specific version? The study compares 10 excerpts (short text) that are English translations of text from the Thai novel 'The Happiness of Kati' in terms of their comprehensibility. The participants consisted of 2 male and 2 female third-year English major students from the faculty of humanities and social sciences, at Khon Kaen University. The instruments used in this study were a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The study employed the use of a mixed-method design for gathering and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data. The result shows that the majority of the students disagreed with the use of the loan wording technique while the cultural substitution technique was usually seen as an appropriate choice regardless of the translator's knowledge, experience, and well-established background. The reasons behind the students' decisions are mainly the understandability of foreign readers who are not familiar with the Thai language or culture,

the preservation of the Thai culture's cultural undertone in the translated text, and the need for sufficient description and appropriateness in an international context.

Keywords: Thai-English translation, comprehensibility, loan wording, cultural substitution

Rationale of the study

Translation is one of the most ancient and important language skills in human history. According to Newmark (1988), the practice of translation can be traced back to around 3,000 BC, and still plays a crucial role today. Translation is often considered to be the main way of sending and receiving cross-cultural information (Prompan, 2012). To better understand the said process, it is advisable to study the meanings of translation provided by several translation theorists throughout the years (Larson, 1998: Nida, 1974: Newmark, 1988). In brief, translation, in a lexical sense, could be considered as a transmittal of written text from one language to another. The text from the original language is called 'source text' while the production of translation is called 'target text' respectively. To reproduce a text in another language, a translator requires both linguistic capability and background knowledge, so translated texts produced by different translators may differ in form, quality, and style.

When translating text from one language to another, a translator has to use strategies while translating a text. Larson (1998) proposed that the act of translation not only focuses on lexical properties but also the meaning of words that have been sent from one language to another. Similarly, Khanjanavisitipol (2018) also supports this idea saying that translation techniques that focus on meaning are more effective in the Thai context where the language itself and the target language (English) have so many differences in terms of grammatical properties. Larson's meaning-based translation strategies are divided into eight categories including; loan wording, addition, omission, generic to specific, synonym, cultural substitution, idioms, and mistranslation. The appropriateness of selecting which strategy to be used in different situations is also crucial to determine the comprehensibility of translation work (Prompan, 2012). Of all eight strategies, loan wording and cultural substitution are the most culturally sensitive strategies. The act of using a loan word or replacing translated text with another word entirely can confuse and prevent readers to understand the true meaning of the word. For example, the translation of the word “ส้มตำ” in English can be either “Somtum” (loan wording) or “Papaya salad” (cultural substitution). In this situation, the translator can either choose to preserve the original name of the food and risk causing readers to not

understand the meaning or use cultural substitution and risk losing the identity of the food. Either way, there is no such thing as a perfect choice for translation, thus determining which one is ‘culturally comprehensible’ would require an opinion from the readers themselves (Kaidchadathon, 2014).

According to the statement of Kachru et al. (2008), the parameters of intelligibility can broadly be categorized into three components; intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability. Firstly, having intelligibility means that the receptor of a foreign language notices the message sent to them and found said message to ‘make sense or familiar’ even though they may not know the meaning of the word. Having comprehensibility is another step in receiving a message from a foreign language. Being comprehensible of something means that one can understand the meaning of the said word. For example, when the student receives the word 'chair' and he or she can interpret that chair means a piece of furniture that people used to sit on, this means the student has full comprehension of the word chair. Finally, interpretability is the last level of receiving a foreign message. Having interpretability not only means that the receiver notice and understand the message, but they can also grasp the hidden meaning and use said word appropriately in suitable situation. These three levels of intelligibility determine whether the word or phrase would be able to convey the intentional message from one language to another. However, in the specific situation where the message was written and focused on word level, comprehensibility would play a more important role since the receiver would normally be able to notice the word because it was written, and interpreting hidden meaning would require a lot of information that text in word level alone cannot provide (Smith, 2005).

During the past decade, written literature has seen a significant increase in quantity especially in digital form (SE-ED Book Center, 2006). One of the most well-known literary works from recent decades that caught the attention of both Thai and foreign readers is the novel 'The Happiness of Kati'. This best-selling book was written by Jane Vejajiva and published by 'Amarin Printing and Publishing' during the year 2003 (Michaels, 2020). The book received a prestigious S.E.A. award winner in the summer of 2006 and was adapted into a movie in 2009 (Goodreads, 2009). Since the book was well-known literature that was written in Thai and later translated into English by a professional translator, it is a perfect fit as material for studying translation techniques and language comprehensibility.

Several studies in Thailand focus on students' perception and language comprehensibility. According to the study of Jindapitak and Teo (2010), it has been found that, although the global model of English as an international language (EIL) has been promoted by the international socio-linguistic press to be accepted by users of English around the world, majority of Thai students still nominated 'inner circle language' (Kachru, 1992) such as American English as their primary choice of English. The survey found that the inner circle variety of English was viewed as 'easily comprehensible' by 63.34% of all participants while only 26.92% preferred an expanding circle variety (e.g. Thai English, Laotian English). On the other hand, the study by Natiladdanon and Thanavisuth (2014) focused on attitude, awareness, and comprehensibility of ASEAN English accents. The initial survey showed that inner circle and outer circle English were rated as more comprehensible. However, the result showed that familiarity was the key to determine which accents were more comprehensible for listeners as the most comprehensible accent was the Thai accent while the least comprehensible accents were Brunei and Malaysian accents. This showed that, for the words to be comprehensible, they must also be familiar to the user of the target language. In other studies, when Thai words were used in English sentences or a code-mixing strategy was employed, the majority of participants viewed said activity as 'inappropriate' (Jindapitak & Teo, 2012; Patchomchaiwat, 2019). However, the use of code-mixing and loan wording are, in fact, a common strategy according to several scholars who invented translation techniques (Baker, 1992; Larson, 1998; Malone, 2016). A study by Prompan (2012) even found that loan wording is the third most used strategy in the translation of the novel 'A Little Princess' from English to Thai. Although numerous previous studies in Thailand have been conducted in contribution to the fields of student perception on comprehensibility and translation techniques, few or possibly no studies in Thailand had explored these factors in written literature. Additionally, it should also be noted that students who were interviewed in past studies were usually from other fields of proficiency such as engineering or medicine. Therefore, by investigating English major students' perception of the comprehensibility of Thai-English loan wording and cultural substitution in translated literature 'The Happiness of Kati', this study aims to contribute and fill gaps of knowledge left by previous works.

Research Questions

1. Which version of translated excerpts that the majority of the students found to be more comprehensible?
2. Between loan wording and cultural substitution, what is the most suitable strategy according to the students' opinion?
3. What are the main reasons for the selection of a specific version?

Research Framework

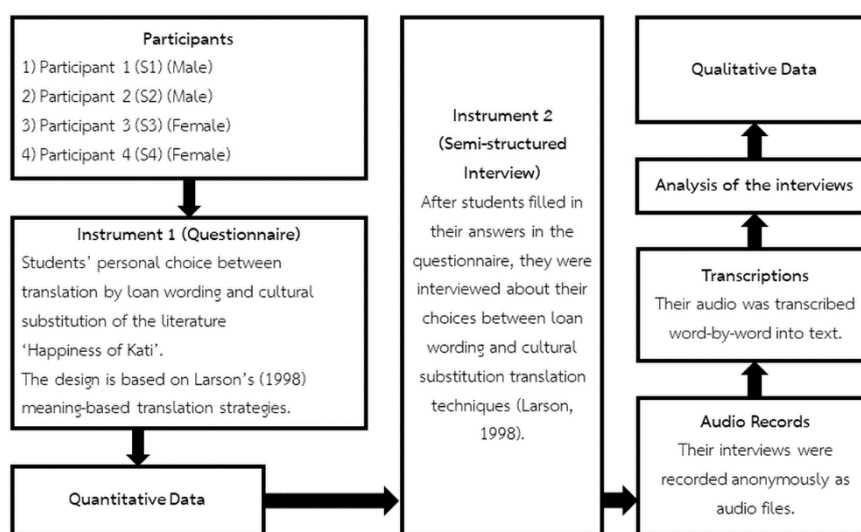


Figure 1 Research Framework

Research Methodology

Participants

This study employed the use of purposive sampling. The participants of this study were third-year English major students from the faculty of humanities and social sciences, at Khon Kaen University. As a result, two male students and two female students volunteered to be part of the study. All of the participants were at least intermediate-level English learners (B1) who had studied English for more than 10 years according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Participants enrolled in the course 'English Translation' during the second semester of their second year at the university. The first-year and second-year students were excluded because they did not enroll in the translation course while fourth-year students were excluded because they did not have time to participate in the activity mostly due to their responsibilities for internship and thesis paper. For this study, pseudonyms were used to maintain their anonymity.

Research Design

This present study employed the use of a mixed method design to incorporate data from both quantitative survey questionnaire and qualitative interview to increase reliability and validity.

Research Instruments

There are two instruments used in this study the survey questionnaire and the semi-structured interview.

1) The questionnaire was about students' personal choice between translation by loan wording and cultural substitution according to Larson's (1998) meaning-based translation strategies. Ten excerpts from the novel 'Happiness of Kati' from chapter one 'Pan and Spatula' to chapter nine 'The Urn for Incense Sticks' were used as comparative choices. The students had to pick between translation version A and version B according to what version they thought would be most comprehensible for readers. Excerpts from version A of the translation were extracted directly from the original novel. They consisted of some parts that were translated from Thai sources using either loan wording or cultural substitution strategies. On the other hand, excerpts from version B of the translation were altered to use the 'opposite' type of strategy, meaning the parts that use loan wording were altered to use cultural substitution while parts that use cultural substitution were altered to use loan wording. Both version A and Version B contain 5 loan wording and 5 cultural substitution strategies in scrambled order. Additionally, excerpts from the original Thai version were provided for students as well

2) The semi-structured interview was also incorporated for finding reasons supporting the students' decisions during the questionnaire part. An example of the question is; "Why did the students decide to pick their selected versions of the translation?"

Data Collection

Both the questionnaire and interview were conducted on the same day (March 7, 2020). The statement containing information about the procedure of this present research and the contents of the interview was issued to all third-year students from March 1 to March 6, 2020. The students were free to decline or volunteer. The study was conducted on March 7 in the campus area of the Faculty of Humanity and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University. After given instruction, the questionnaire was distributed to each of the volunteered students at 17:00 and collected at 17:20 respectively. After a 5-minute break, the researcher informed

students of the interview procedure, and the volunteered students were then asked to participate in an interview session. The average time of the sessions was 9 minutes and 13 seconds per student. The time taken for the study was around 15 minutes per participant and 1 hour in total.

Data Analysis

1) Data from the questionnaire

Data from the questionnaire were counted, categorized, and analyzed quantitatively. The researcher collected answers from all volunteered students and then used Microsoft Excel as the main tool for addressing relevant variables such as the number of students who selected each version of translation from all ten excerpts, the overall number, and percentage of students who preferred loan wording and overall number and percentage of students who preferred cultural substitution respectively.

2) Data from semi-structured interview

All data from the semi-structured interview were transcribed and then analyzed in two parts. The first part was the analysis of each excerpt based on the main question; “Why did the students decide to pick their selected versions of the translation?” showing the most relevant part of the students’ answers one by one. The second part summarized all the data including additional unstructured questions and utterances produced by the students that are relevant to the main keywords of the research such as; attitude, comprehensibility, translation strategies, and cultural awareness.

Result

The findings of this present study will be presented according to each research question to give a clear answer for each question.

RQ1: *Which version of translated excerpts that the majority of the students found to be more comprehensible?*

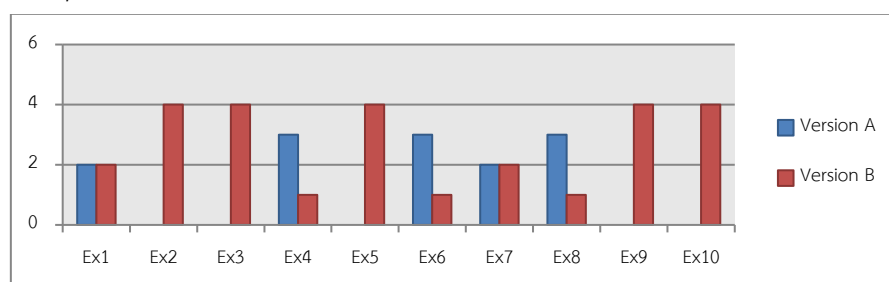


Figure 2 Comparative numbers of students’ decisions on the excerpts

According to the statistical data from Figure 02, the overall most picked version of translated excerpts was translation version B. was picked 27 times from a total of 40 times. The pick rate is equal to 67.5%. While translation version A was picked 13 times from a total of 40 times. The pick rate is equal to 32.5%.

RQ2: *Between loan wording and cultural substitution, what is the most suitable strategy according to the students' opinions?*

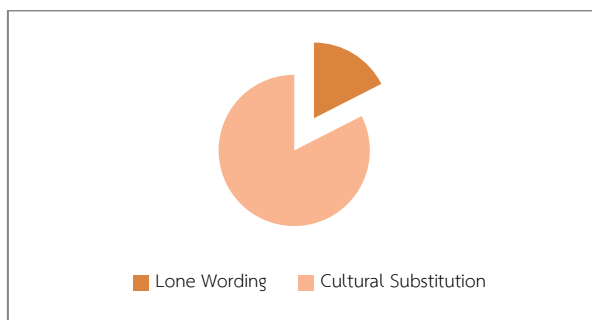


Figure 3 Percentage of students who picked loan wording and cultural substitution

Note: Both versions A and B of translated text contain 5 excerpts that used loan wording and 5 excerpts that used cultural substitution.

According to the statistical data from Figure 03, the translation strategy that most students preferred was cultural substitution with an overwhelming number of 33 students equal to an 82.5% pick rate while only 7 students equal to a 17.5% pick rate chose lone wording.

RQ3: *What are the main reasons for the selection of a specific version?*

Note 1: R = Researcher, S1 = Student 1, S2 = Student 2, S3 = Student 3, S4 = Student 4

Table 1 Excerpt 1

Original Thai version	English version A	English version B
ตาบอกว่าพี่ทองน่าจะไปอยู่คณะตลกเชิณยิม ยิมของพี่ทองเหมือนโรคติดต่อ	Grandpa said Tong should join an acting troupe and go into comedy theatre, his smile was so contagious.	Grandpa said Tong should join the Chernyim comedy troupe, his smile was so contagious.

Summary of excerpt 1

In summary, it can be seen from the result that students' opinions on excerpt 1 were equally divided. S1 and S4 who agreed on version A both provided similar reasons explaining that the word “Chernyim” might confuse foreigners. On the other hand, S2 and S3 who agreed on version B stated that it is more ‘compact’ and straight to the point while version A provided too much unnecessary information.

Table 2 Excerpt 2

Original Thai version	English version A	English version B
ไข่ลูกเขยน้ำจิ้มข้นเหนียว	crispy fried ‘son-in-law’ eggs with their sweet-and-sour tamarind sauce	crispy fried eggs with their sweet-and-sour tamarind sauce

Summary of excerpt 2

According to the opinions of the students, all of them chose version B. S1 was concerned that only Thai people would understand the word ‘son-in-law’ while S2 and S4 thought the word is ‘weird’. S3 also provided her opinion that it is not easily understandable for foreigners.

Table 3 Excerpt 3

Original Thai version	English version A	English version B
พี่ทองคว้ากระบวยตักกับกะละมังใส่มะพร้าวได้ก็เดินพรวดๆลงใต้ถุน	Tong grasped the scraping rabbit and the basin of coconuts and briskly made his way to the yard area under the house.	Tong grasped the coconut scraper and the basin of coconuts and briskly made his way to the yard area under the house.

Summary of excerpt 3

In summary, all the students chose version B. S1, S3 and S4 were concerned that the meaning of the word ‘rabbit’ which refers to a tool for scraping coconut in Thai culture would be mistaken for the actual ‘rabbit’ which is an animal when heard by a foreigner who does not possess knowledge of Thai culture. On the other hand, S2 provided his opinion that coconut scraper ‘sounds more natural’ than the word scraping rabbit.

Table 4 Excerpt 4

Original Thai version	English version A	English version B
แต่น้ำรอบกายทั่วทั้งทุ่งรากระแวกว้างกันไอร้อน	But around them the water completely covered the field, acting as a coolant to cut out the heat.	But around them the water completely covered the field, acting as a glass armor to cut out the heat.

Summary of excerpt 4

In summary, a total of 3 students chose version A while 1 student chose version B. Both female students (S3 and S4) expressed confusion toward the original Thai text, but after some explanation, they all chose version A because the word ‘coolant’ seems more suitable while ‘glass armor’ sounds too straightforward for them. S1 chose version A right away, saying that it made him feel the atmosphere of coolness. Only S2 picked version B with an explanation that the word ‘glass armor’ retain the same ‘emotion’ as it was in the original text.

Table 5 Excerpt 5

Original Thai version	English version A	English version B
ตากรวดน้ำใต้ต้นโพใหญ่	Under the big banyan tree, Grandpa poured water from a little brass vessel onto the ground, completing the offering to the monks.	Under the big banyan tree, Grandpa poured ceremonial water onto the ground, completing the offering to the monks.

Summary of excerpt 5

In conclusion, all students chose version B in this excerpt. S1 expressed that he was concerned about culture and thought that ‘ceremonial water’ conveys messages that the writer wants to tell readers. S2 chose version B because he said the word ‘water’ should be described more to differentiate normal water from the one used in the ceremony. S3 said the word ‘ceremonial’ sounds more religious while S4 explained that ‘ceremonial water’ describes more and provides readers with a better understanding.

Table 6 Excerpt 6

Original Thai version	English version A	English version B
บัวผันใบกลมไม่มีแฉก ดอกสีเหลืองจัด สายบัวกรอบสดจิ้มน้ำพริกที่ยายห่อใบบัวมาพร้อมข้าว ใหม่ จัดเป็นอาหารกลางวันมื้ออร่อยทีเดียว	The pun lilies had bright yellow flowers and round leaves with no veins. Their crisp fresh stems were delicious dipped in the pungent chili sauce which Grandma had wrapped in lily leaves along with newly harvested rice for their lunch.	The pun lilies had bright yellow flowers and round leaves with no veins. Their crisp fresh stems were delicious dipped in the Nam Prik which Grandma had wrapped in lily leaves along with newly harvested rice for their lunch.

Summary of excerpt 6

According to the result, 3 students chose version A while 1 chose version B. S1 and S2 gave the same explanations saying that foreigners who cannot read Thai would struggle

to understand the word ‘Nam Prik’. S3 choose version B because she wanted to show Thai culture and expressed that Nam Prik is something that could be found only in Thailand (According to her limited knowledge). Interestingly, S4 was concerned about expressing Thai culture, but a loan word should be followed by some description to make readers understand the meaning. She also stated that understanding is the main goal of translation.

Table 7 Excerpt 7

Original Thai version	English version A	English version B
ตาซื้อเรืออีแปะหรือที่ชาวบ้านในละแวกเรียกเรือปาย มาไว้พายเที่ยวเล่นในทุ่งหน้าน้ำ	Grandpa bought a little flat-bottomed boat to paddle in the flooded fields when the rainy season came.	Grandpa bought ‘I pae boat’ or what locals called ‘paap boat’ to paddle in the flooded fields when the rainy season came.

Summary of excerpt 7

In this excerpt, 2 students chose version A while 1 student chose version B. S1 and S4 chose version A and said that they want to give more explanation and description instead of using loan words. On the other hand, S2 and S3 thought that the word ‘I-pae boat’ was something local people use and they want to keep it in the translation.

Table 8 Excerpt 8

Original Thai version	English version A	English version B
ตาบ่นลับหลังยายว่า อาหารยายเหมือนทาเซลแล็ก สัก วันจะเอากระทะกับตะหลิวของยายไปบริจาคให้ กองทัพทำปืนใหญ่กู้ชาติ	He complained behind Grandma’s back that eating her cooking was like eating everything coated in varnish, and that one day he would donate Grandma’s pan and spatula to the army to melt down for a cannon for King and Country	He complained behind Grandma’s back that eating her cooking was like eating everything coated in varnish, and that one day he would donate Grandma’s pan and spatula to the army to melt down for a ‘Save the Country’ cannon.

Summary of excerpt 8

In summary, 3 students chose version A while 1 student chose version B. S1 expressed that the word ‘save the country cannon’ sounds weird while S2 said that it is ambiguous for people whose country isn’t familiar with war. Interestingly S3 gave a reason that she chose the word ‘save the country cannon’ because it was written as an adjective which mirrors the original word ‘ปืนใหญ่กู้ชาติ’. On the other hand, S4 explained that ‘save the country cannon’ sounds very strange because it was too directly translated and feels out of context.

Table 9 Excerpt 9

Original Thai version	English version A	English version B
น้ำกินใส่ในโอ่งมังกรใบโตตั้งไว้ในครัวสำหรับใช้ประกอบอาหารอย่างเดียว	Cooking water went in the big dragon jar in the kitchen	Cooking water went in the big ceramic jar in the kitchen.

Summary of excerpt 9

In excerpt 9, students expressed their concern about imagery and how a foreigner would imagine the word 'dragon jar' wrongly. Therefore, all of them chose the word 'ceramic jar' (Version B) because it is easier to interpret and provides a clear image of what to expect.

Table 10 Excerpt 10

Original Thai version	English version A	English version B
ตายก็มีอหัม ถ้ามีเรื่อยๆว่าจะทำขวัญนาคหรืออย่างไร	Here Grandpa raised his hand to stop the flow of words and asked smoothly if they were planning to conduct the Kwan Narc recital.	Here Grandpa raised his hand to stop the flow of words and asked smoothly if they were going to continue speaking all-day

Summary of Excerpt 10

According to the result, all students chose translation version B in this excerpt. S1 was concerned about the religious factor and expressed that if foreigners were not Buddhist or Thai they might not understand the word 'Kwan Narc' at all. S2 said that it would be hard to grasp the hilarious emotion if one does not know the meaning of the word. S3 had some trouble understanding the question because she herself did not know about 'Kwan Narc' before this interview. Finally, S4 expressed some concern that not everyone in the world would understand Thai culture without some description.

Research Analysis

From the summaries of students' opinions on 10 excerpts, four main factors determine whether the students would choose translation version A or version B.

1) The translation must be *understandable* by everyone. For example, even foreigners who never experience Thai culture should be able to pick up and enjoy literature without cultural barriers. This was the most common reason given by students.

2) The translation should *preserve and promote Thai culture*. Although many students highly value understanding over other factors, if the text is already understandable, the next factor they would consider is the preservation of cultural undertone. For example,

S3 stated during her interview in excerpt 6 that she wants to preserve the word 'Nam Prik' because it shows Thainess and expressed that said object could only be found in Thailand.

3) The translation should *provide a description* when using loan wording or lexical borrowing. On many occasions such as in S4 opinion on excerpt 9, a loan word could be selected if it incorporates some description that helps explain a characteristic or provide imagery of the word.

4) Lastly, the translation should also be *appropriate* meaning that it should not contain meanings that would sound 'weird' or ambiguous in certain situations. When words that sound inappropriate such as 'save the country cannon' in excerpt 8 appeared, it might cause the translation to feel unnatural.

Other than these four main factors, some other factors were also referred to during the interview such as the beautifulness of the language, straightforwardness, and the expression of emotion in words.

Discussion and Conclusion

The obtained result revealed that the majority of the students or around 67% selected translation version B even though version A was the original work done by an established professional translator. This implied that the overall quality of the translation itself may not be the main factor that affected the overall perception of Thai students on the comprehensibility of the translated text.

On the other hand, in terms of translation strategies, it is clear that loan wording is usually avoided as only 17.5% of translation excerpts that use this strategy is chosen. In contrast, students prefer the use of cultural substitution as 82.5% of translation excerpts that use this strategy is chosen. These results do not come as a surprise, considering that the technique of mixing Thai words with English words was one of the distinctive features of Thai English (Trakulkasemsuk, 2012). This result supports the findings of several previous studies which claimed that Thai students found the use of a loan Thai word or code-mixing during the intercultural exchange to be inappropriate while highly favoring the use of a more 'international' grammatical structure and varieties of English practiced by the inner circle native speakers (Jindapitak & Teo, 2012; Khanjanavisitipol, 2018; Patchomchaiwat, 2019).

However, the result from the semi-structured interview sessions implies that maybe the reasons why the students chose to avoid the use of loan wording strategy is not because of their negative perception toward the use of their native language. In fact, they have

expressed their concerns about several factors. These factors include; the understandability of foreign readers who are not familiar with the Thai language or culture, the preservation of the cultural undertone in the translated text, and the need for sufficient description and appropriateness.

In contrast to previous studies, all Thai students who participated in this present study do value the preservation of cultural undertone in translation. However, the risk of creating a cultural barrier prevented them from choosing the loan wording strategy. This is a result of the possibility that the translated text that uses said strategy would require international readers to have some background knowledge of the Thai language and culture in order to fully understand the meanings of loan words without help from a dictionary. Therefore, in many cases, translating Thai words into more generic English words that provide clear meanings for audiences of all backgrounds proved to be a much more suitable choice. As stated by Larson (1998) that ‘understanding is the ultimate goal of translation work’, and the fact that English major students of Khon Kaen University possessed a similar point of view might be a result of their involvement in the translation course. This reality differentiates them from previous groups of participants. It should also be noted that this present study focused on written literature instead of speech or conversation, thus differences in results might be a result of differences between written and spoken discourses.

In conclusion, the understanding of language along with proper guidance could open the way for students to approach language from a different point of view and allow them to understand more about themselves and people from other cultures (Crystal, 2012)

Pedagogical Implication

In summary, the findings from this present study suggested that Thai students should be more aware of their prejudice toward non-native English. Their favor for the use of cultural substitution is a result of their idolization of inner-circle English. In reality, we are approaching a new era of globalization and digitalization. In the next decades, the ability to communicate in English effectively will be one of the best tools for future generations to thrive in a competitive working environment. In this modern age, being understandable is more important than being native-like or grammatically correct. Therefore, the students should broaden their perspective and view outer circle English such as Tenglish (Thai English) as something that expresses the identity of Thai people, not something to be ashamed of. In the end, this study achieved the goal of filling research gaps left by previous studies on translation techniques

and language comprehensibility. It is a valuable asset for students who are interested in discourse analysis, translation, or research about the English language in general. To make the result more reliable and credible, future studies can increase the number of participants, add more excerpts, and explore other Thai works of literature.

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