
AN ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FROM THAI INTO
ENGLISH: A CASE STUDY OF THE MUSEUM LABELS AT KHON KAEN
NATIONAL MUSEUM

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ABSTRACT

Translation is the transfer of meaning from the source language to the receptor language (target language), which is considered as an essential tool for transferring knowledge and culture, especially in the context of tourist attractions. It employs various translation strategies to convey information about national identity and culture and foster understanding among speakers of different languages. This study aimed to analyze the problems solving of 8 translation strategies by Baker (1992) for non-equivalence at word level using in labels at Khon Kaen National Museum. The data were collected from the museum labels at Khon Kaen National Museum using a purposive sampling method. As a qualitative study, data analysis was conducted based on Baker's (1992) translation strategies. The results indicated that translation with more general words was the most frequently employed strategy, while translation by cultural substitution and translation by illustration did not appear in the results of this study.

Keywords : Translation strategies, Cultural translation, Museum studies

Introduction

Thailand's tourism industry is currently experiencing significant changes and challenges amid ongoing global uncertainties. Despite setbacks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions, Thailand has proven its resilience in the tourism sector. With the gradual reopening of borders and the implementation of strict health and safety measures, the country has made efforts to revitalize its tourism industry (Biswas, 2023). According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), efforts have been made to promote domestic tourism and attract international visitors through targeted marketing campaigns highlighting Thailand's unique cultural heritage, pristine natural landscapes, and renowned hospitality. In addition, Thailand focused on diversifying its tourism offerings by highlighting emerging destinations and promoting sustainable tourism practices to appeal to travelers. Thailand's tourism industry in 2023 demonstrated adaptability and innovation in response to evolving global dynamics (TAT Newsroom, 2024).

Translation is considered an essential tool for overcoming language barriers and helps with successful communication and understanding in different language environments. By converting written texts from one language to another, translation enables individuals to obtain information, exchange ideas, and participate in discussions regardless of their native language (Leonardi, 2022). In Thailand, a country with an extensive number of museums and a rich cultural legacy, translation is essential to enhancing the traveler experience. (Kapff, 2018). Thailand is home to an abundance of cultural treasures that are on display in museums all over the nation. These museums provide tourists with an insight into Thailand's many customs, historical background, and artistic expressions while acting as guardians of the nation's rich legacy. Museums across Thailand, such as the Khon Kaen National Museum, not only showcase the nation's historical and artistic treasures but also provide translated materials to make the cultural narratives accessible to international visitors (Museum Thailand, 2023). According to Tananone, Vongkulluksn, and Settapitak (2019), tourists who actively engage with Thai culture demonstrate greater satisfaction with their trip and are more likely to return or recommend Thailand as a travel destination.

Therefore, acquiring insights into Thai culture not only enhances the enjoyment of tourists but also contributes to the sustainability and preservation of Thailand's cultural heritage. For this reason, successful cross-cultural communication promotes mutual understanding across cultural divides, especially language differences (Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel, 2016).

According to a study by Wang and Zhang (2018), competent translation in the tourism sector not only promotes cultural exchange, but also contributes significantly to the economic growth of destinations by attracting a large number of visitors. Accurate translation is essential for the international business world, as even small errors can have significant financial or legal consequences, leading to misunderstandings due to misinterpretation (Tongpoon-Patanasorn, 2016). Furthermore, a correct translation helps to avoid misunderstandings and promote positive interactions between tourists and local communities, thus improving intercultural understanding. As mentioned above, translation serves as a bridge between different cultures and languages and allows tourists to receive information about destinations, attractions, and services in their native language. Effective translation ensures that visitors can easily find their way around unfamiliar environments, making travel more accessible and enjoyable. Translation becomes more complex when it is accompanied by cultural elements. There are gaps between cultures caused by these cultural differences that arise in the translation process, which translators have to deal with. Therefore, translation strategies have been

adopted to avoid cultural inequalities and losses in translation (Pinmanee, 2019). The study mainly aimed to analyze the translation strategies found in the museum labels at Khon Kaen National Museum, as some of the objects exhibited in the museum do not match or cannot be found due to cultural differences.

Objective of the Study

This study aimed to analyze the problems solving of 8 translation strategies by Baker (1992) for non-equivalence at word level using in labels at Khon Kaen National Museum.

Literature Reviews

Definition of translation

Translation is the process of transferring the meaning from one language to another, which is considered an important skill in learning a language. It involves transferring the different language from the original written text or source language (SL) into the target language (TL). According to Munday (2009), the definition of translation is:

1. *The process of transferring a written text from SL to TL is conducted by a translator, or translators, in a specific socio-cultural context.*
2. *The written product, or TT, that results from that process and which functions in the socio-cultural context of the TL.*
3. *The cognitive, linguistic, visual, cultural and ideological phenomena that are integral part of 1 and 2.*

Hatim and Munday (2004)

In short, translation could be a science or art that refers to the process of translating or moving one original language into one target language that provides the same meaning by using different types and procedures of translation (Saibua, 2021). The following is the translation theory, which provides knowledge of the translation method and the solution to the translation problem.

Translation theory and translation strategies

Translation theory (Newmark, 1982, as cited in Muday 2009) is a translation study mainly concerned with the process of determining translation methods, which provides the framework, principles, or rules related to semantics in translating. Translation theory focused on the relationship between source language (SL) and target language (TL) about

meaning and language and also extended to the relationship between translations in terms of culture, individual language, and behavior to be an effective translation. To translate, a translator has to know the individual culture, language, and characteristics of the target language to interpret fruitful language translation.

There are four stages of translation theory, as follows:

1. The linguistic stage is concerned with the word-for-word translation in literary texts.
2. The communicative stage includes non-literary and literary texts which categorized the readership groups.
3. The functionalist stage is mainly concerned with non-literary texts related to real world, commercial, and essential messages.
4. The ethical/aesthetic stage is provided for official or documentary texts.

This stage can be related to social prejudice, ethics, race, gender, and religion.

There are many types of translation. Each type is suitable for different characters and purposes. The translator chooses the type and strategy of translation accordingly. The translator should not rely on only one type of translation, one method, or the same linguistic expressions in different kinds of text. The translation reflects the language of the translator, not the author. The types, techniques and objectives of translation must be consistent. In this way, it will be possible to obtain a high-quality translation. The choices depend on the text and its purposes, whether it should be a full translation, partial translation, or gist translation. These depend on the messages the translator wants to convey (Pinmanee, 2019).

According to different cultures and language structures, these led to the difficulty of translating from the source language to the target language with the same meaning. The following are the strategies of translation to assist in problem solving for translators.

Baker (1992), as cited in Khongbumpen (2008), preferred eight translation strategies for non-equivalence at the word level, which are used.

1. Translation by more general words (superordinate)

It uses to carry the original meaning of the source language from the unspecific words in the target language, to use general words to identify the specific words.

2. Translation by more neutral/less expressive words

It uses the nearest words, or there is no exact word in the target language, to express the less expressive or more formal meaning of the word in the source language.

3. Translation by cultural substitution

This strategy related to the culture concept will be used when the source language is too complicated, and that will be an unfamiliar expression to a foreigner. To understand words easily, sometimes the translator used the target culture, which readers are already familiar with.

4. Translation using loan words or loan words plus explanation

This strategy will be used when it is difficult to express in the target language. The translator will use loan words to be more specific and sometimes add an explanation for the reader to have a better understanding. It can be the proper name, the name of the place, etc.

5. Translation by paraphrase using related words

The target words will be lexicalized into different forms but still have the same meaning by using related words.

6. Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words

If the source language cannot be lexicalized, the translator will use another term and complicated semantics to identify the source language, and the target language will not be related to the source version.

7. Translation by omission

The translator sometimes deletes some words that have no need or are unnecessary to make the word more simple, but it does not affect the meaning or understanding of the reader.

8. Translation by illustration

This strategy will be used when there is a lack of equivalence in the target language. The translator will give some examples to help the reader gain a better understanding of the target text.

Research Methodology

In the present study, the labels translated into Thai and English were collected using purposive sampling method from the Khon Kaen National Museum, Khon Kaen province, Thailand, which is under the Department of Fine Arts. The museum was established to collect, preserve and exhibit national treasures and cultural resources in the northern part of Thailand, where several archeological sites have been discovered (Museum Thailand, 2023). The followings are the services and exhibition sections.

Exhibition section 1: Pre-historical period, the exhibition describes the history of Khon Kaen province, which is an important site of Isaan civilization. The archeological evidence indicates that there were numerous ancient communities in the province that were capable of producing tools and artifacts.

Exhibition section 2: The history period and Dvaravati culture – The people residing near the Shee River were influenced by the Dvaravati culture, which may have been transmitted through the city of Sri Thep. There is evidence of the construction of a sacred site of the Buddhist religion.

Exhibition section 3: Khmer culture – This section shows the historical history of Khon Kaen province and the upper northern region (Isaan), which was influenced by the Khmer culture or the ancient Cambodian culture that spread to the Mun River. The sacred sites built of sandstone and decorated with sculptures in the Khmer style bear evidence of this.

Exhibition section 4: Lan Chang culture – The exhibition presents the influence of the Lan Chang culture around the Khong River and the Lanna culture in the Chao Phraya Basin. Evidence includes the discovery of Lan Chang-style Buddha statues.

Exhibition section 5: Rattanakosin era – This section displays the founding of the city of Khon Kaen, which began under King Rama I and was officially recognized as a province under King Rama IV. The name was changed from “Khon Kaen City” to “Khon Kaen Province”.

Exhibition section 6: Local Isaan art and cultural hall – The exhibition showcases knowledge about the way of life, culture and traditions, local beliefs, and diverse ethnic groups and minorities residing together in the northeastern region. On display are clothing, utensils, and tools; homes; traditional music; and performing arts that showcase the unique identity of the people in the region.

Conceptual Framework

This study was examined using Baker's eight translation strategies in order to address the research objective. Also, the study uses descriptive statistics to find the result of the study, such as frequency and percentage, by using Microsoft Excel. Baker (1992) used eight translation strategies to analyze the strategies used in the museum label translation of the study, as follows:

1. Translation by more general words (superordinate)
2. Translation by more neutral/less expressive words
3. Translation by cultural substitution
4. Translation using loan words or loan words plus explanation

5. Translation by paraphrase using related words
6. Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words
7. Translation by omission
8. Translation by illustration

In addition, the analysis will analyze Thai into English, which concerns three aspects: source language, back translation, and target language. Depending on its meaning, the sentence will be broken up into words or phrases during the analysis process.

Results of the study

According to the objective of the study, there are six strategies used in museum label translation out of eight. The most frequently used is translation by using more general words, followed by translation by omission, translation using loan words or loan words plus explanation, translation by paraphrase using related words, translation by paraphrase using unrelated words, and lastly, translation by using more neutral or less expressive words, respectively. Nevertheless, there are two more translation strategies that were not used in this label translation: translation by cultural substitution and translation by illustration.

Table 1 The frequency and percentage of translation strategies used in the labels at Khon Kaen National Museum

Translation Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1.Translation by using more general words	75	61
2.Translation by omission	19	16
3.Translation using loan words or loan words plus	14	11
4.Translation by paraphrase using related words	11	9
5.Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words	3	2
6.Translation by more neutral/less expressive words	1	1
7.Translation by cultural substitution	-	0
8.Translation by illustration	-	0
Total	123	100

According to Table 1, six of eight translation strategies are used in the translation of museum labels, based on Baker's eight translation strategies. The most frequently used translation method in the translation of museum labels is translation by using general words with a percentage of 61, followed by translation by omission with a

percentage of 16. The third translation strategy is translation using loan words or loan words plus explanation with a percentage of 11, followed by translation by paraphrase using related words with a percentage of 9 percent, followed by translation by paraphrase using unrelated words with a percentage of 2, and finally translation by more neutral or less expressive words with only 1 percent. Furthermore, translation by cultural substitution and translation by illustration are not included.

It can be concluded that six translation strategies were used in the translation of labels, while the other two strategies were not used. The use and examples of the strategies are discussed, and the order of the translation strategies is arranged from the most frequently used to the least frequently used.

1. Translation by using more general words (superordinate)

It was found that the translation by using more general words was most frequently used to express the target version. According to the study, the translation by more general word was used 75 times when translating labels, which corresponds to 61 percent. Below is an example and explanation of the translation by using more general words.

Example 1

Source language:

เมื่อมนุษย์เปลี่ยนแปลงการดำรงชีวิต มาสู่สังคมเกษตรกรรม
จากกลุ่มชุมชนล่าสัตว์

Back-Translation: When human change their living style from

hunter-gatherers to agricultures

Target language: Changing from hunter-gatherers to

agricultures

Example 2

Source language: สมัยก่อนประวัติศาสตร์

Back-Translation: The period of pre-history

Target language: Prehistoric period

Therefore, the translator has tried to use the closest or same meaning or general words to translate words from Thai into English that are already familiar to most people so that the tourist can easily understand them.

2. Translation by omission

A translation by omission occurs when the author considers the retention of a target word unnecessary, but it still makes sense and does not impair or mislead the reader's understanding. In the translation of the museum label, translation by omission was calculated at 16 percent, with a frequency of 19 as the second most fluently used strategy. According to the labels, there are quite a few words that were omitted, as follows:

Example 1

Source language:	จังหวัดขอนแก่น
Back-Translation:	Khon Kaen Province
Target language:	Khon Kaen

Example 2

Source language:	ชื่อเรียกนั้นโดยทั่วไปตามลักษณะของภูมิประเทศ
Back-Translation:	Generic name based on topography
Target language:	is called

In the examples shown above, the unnecessary word has been omitted from the text in the target language. The translator has omitted some words in the text to tighten the sentences, but this does not affect the reader's understanding. The same meaning is still conveyed on the museum label.

3. Translation using loan words or loan words plus explanation

Translation using loan words or loan words plus explanation takes place when there is no target word to be expressed. The loan words that occur in the translation of labels are mostly place names, 11 percent. The example of translation with loan words or loan words plus explanation is shown below:

Example 1

Source language:	โนนนกทา
Back-Translation:	-
Target language:	Non Noktha

Example 2

Source language:	บ้านนาดี
Back-Translation:	-
Target language:	Ban Nadee

The translator has translated using loan words or loan words with an explanation, as the word is the name of a place that is a proper name.

4. Translation by paraphrase using related words

Translation by paraphrase using related words is used when there is no specific term in the target version. In the translation of the label, translation by paraphrase using related words was used 11 times, which corresponds to a percentage of 9. An example of this translation strategy can be found below.

Example

Source language: การนำสัตว์มาเลี้ยง

Back-Translation: take care of animals

Target language: domesticated animals

The translator has used a different word in the target language to indicate the source language so that the reader can more easily understand the meaning and understanding of what the translator wanted to convey.

5. Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words

There are some words that were expressed as unrelated words in the target language but reveal the same understanding, which is called translation by paraphrasing with unrelated words. According to the results of the study, translation by paraphrase using unrelated words was used at a percentage of 2. The following is an example of translation by paraphrase using unrelated words.

Example

Source language:

ภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือพบร่องรอยการอยู่อาศัยของมนุษย์

Back-Translation: Northeast found trace of human beings

Target language: The people firstly settled in the Northeast

This type of translation strategy was used to explain the target language in a simpler way so that readers could better understand the labels.

6. Translation by more neutral/less expressive words

Only one percent was found. It can be assumed that the target version is less meaningful than the source language, as the following example shows.

Example

Source language:	การบันทึกเรื่องราวต่างๆ เป็นลายลักษณ์อักษร
Back-Translation:	Recording the historical story as the written
text	Target language: before <u>writing</u> or <u>recorded</u> history

The target word used is too general. The translated texts are used to express less expressive or less formal words of the source language.

Discussion

In the study, the researchers used Baker's eight translation strategies to analyze and descriptive statistics to interpret the results. As part of the translation analysis, the source language, the back-translation and the target language were analyzed, and some non-equivalence translation were found. It also identified the translator's techniques or strategies in translating the text relevant to cross-cultural contexts.

To summarise, six translation strategies were used in the translation of museum labels. The most frequently used translation strategy was the use of more general words. It is interesting that the use of general words was the most common because the translators mostly used the target words that have the same meaning to translate the source language into the target language by simply using words to express themselves. There is a certain word to be expressed in the target language and it is easy for the foreigner to understand without using many explanatory words. In contrast, the study "An analysis of translation strategies used in the short story *The song of the leaves*" by Saewong (2004) found that translation by using general words accounted for only 8.3 percent.

The translation strategy of translation by omission is the second most frequently used in the translation of museum labels, with a percentage of 16. The translator has omitted some words that did not need to be identified but still had the same meaning and understanding. The excavation concerns a lot of historical texts, so there are some unnecessary words of the source language that should not appear in the target text. In contrast, the study "Strategies employed in translation from Thai into English: a case study of an article in Focus Bangkok" by Khongbumpen (2008) indicated that translation by omission is the most commonly used strategy in his study.

In addition, translation using loan words or loan words plus explanation ranks third among the eight translation strategies, with a frequency of 14 and a percentage of 11. The translation referred to the place of settlement in the prehistoric period, so the

translator used a loan word, the term of place, to identify the unique name of the place identified.

The fourth most frequently used translation strategy is translation by paraphrase using related words, which was calculated with a percentage of 9 and a frequency of 11. According to the museum label, the word paraphrase is used in the sentence to renew the sentence to avoid repetition and make the sentence more admirable.

Moreover, the translation by paraphrase using unrelated words comes after the translation by paraphrase using related words with a percentage of 2, which occurred three times. The translator has used simple and familiar words from the source language, rendered more simply so that the reader can understand them easily.

Finally, the least used translation in the museum label is the translation by more neutral or less expressive words with a in percent and occurred only once. In the target language, the exact word level of the source language is not recognisable. The source language is more formal, but it is translated into the target language using general words.

Meanwhile, translation by cultural substitution and translation by illustration did not occur. This could be because the information on the label usually describes the explanation or history with a short story and simple style so that the foreigner can easily understand the Thai history with a short viewing time. Similar to Khongbumpen (2008), translation by illustration did not occur in the analysis.

To summarize, the most frequently used translation strategy is translation using general words, while the least frequently used is translation using more neutral or less expressive words, but translation by cultural substitution and translation by illustration were not found.

Suggestion

The latest study analyzed data using Baker's (1992) eight translation strategies, revealing opportunities to explore translation in other modern media, such as YouTube channels and movies. Further research might focus on how digital translations—such as audio guides and smartphone apps—enhance the museum experience, as well as their effects for museum visitors' understanding and engagement.

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