

Translation Strategies for Thai Superstition and Belief in Netflix Thai Horror Films: A Multimodal Perspective on Interlingual Subtitling

กลวิธีการแปลไสยศาสตร์และความเชื่อไทยในภาพยนตร์สยองขวัญไทยบน Netflix: มุมมองเชิงการสื่อสารแบบพหุวิธีในการแปลคำบรรยายใต้ภาพระหว่างภาษา

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คำสำคัญ: ไสยศาสตร์ไทย, ภาพยนตร์สยองขวัญไทย, การแปลสื่อโทรทัศน์, กลวิธีการแปล, การแปลงเชิงการสื่อสารแบบพหุวิธี, ข้อจำกัดในการทำคำบรรยายใต้ภาพ, การถ่ายโอนทางวัฒนธรรม

Abstract

Background and Objectives: Superstition and belief are deeply embedded in Thai culture and frequently depicted in Thai horror films, posing challenges for translation into other languages. Despite growing research on culture-specific items (CSIs), limited attention has been paid to how such elements are translated across multiple films within the same genre. This study aims to analyse the translation strategies used to render Thai culture-specific expressions of superstition and belief in 14 Thai horror films streamed on Netflix between 2021 and 2024. It also adopts a multimodal perspective to explore how subtitling constraints are negotiated through the interaction of verbal and non-verbal elements

Methods: A total of 276 lexical items and phrases were analyzed using the translation strategy frameworks of Baker (1992) and Pinmanee (2018). The analysis combines quantitative frequency data with qualitative interpretation, considering each translation within its audiovisual context.

Results: Ten translation strategies were identified, with paraphrase using a related word being the most frequently employed strategy (43.68%), followed by paraphrase using an unrelated word (16.97%), cultural substitution (8.30%), and using a loan word (7.94%). The findings further revealed a tendency to employ concise translation strategies, particularly paraphrase-based strategies, the use of more general words, and omission, reflecting the technical constraints of subtitling in terms of space and time. This tendency suggests translators' efforts to balance audience comprehension and readability with the transfer of cultural meanings under subtitle limitations. Although some culturally specific meanings were simplified or adapted, cultural meanings could still be conveyed through the multimodal nature of film, in which visual and narrative elements played a role in co-constructing meaning.

Application of this study: This study contributes to audiovisual translation (AVT) research by demonstrating how multimodal elements support the transmission of culturally specific meanings, even when subtitles are condensed or adapted under technical constraints. The findings may also serve as practical guidance for translators and subtitle practitioners in handling culturally embedded audiovisual content and provide a basis for future studies on AVT in other culturally complex contexts.

Conclusions: The findings suggest that meaning in AVT is conveyed not only through subtitles but also through the interaction of verbal, visual, and contextual elements. In translating Thai superstition and belief, translators are required to balance cultural specificity with audience comprehension under the spatial and temporal constraints of subtitling. The findings also reflect the negotiation between domestication and foreignization, while some cases show features of exoticization. This suggests that the translation of culturally embedded content in audiovisual media should not be considered from a linguistic perspective alone, as multimodal elements also play an important role in supporting meaning.

บทคัดย่อ

ที่มาและวัตถุประสงค์: ไสยศาสตร์และความเชื่อเรื่องสิ่งลี้ลับเป็นองค์ประกอบทางวัฒนธรรมที่ฝังรากลึกในสังคมไทย และมักปรากฏอย่างเด่นชัดในภาพยนตร์สยองขวัญไทย การถ่ายถอดแนวคิดดังกล่าวผ่านการแปลเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศจึงเป็นความท้าทายสำคัญ แม้ว่าจะงานวิจัยด้านการแปลคำเฉพาะทางวัฒนธรรม (culture-specific items: CSIs) จะมีเพิ่มมากขึ้น แต่ยังมีงานศึกษาจำนวนไม่มากที่มุ่งวิเคราะห์การแปลไสยศาสตร์และความเชื่อโดยใช้ข้อมูลจากภาพยนตร์หลาย

เรื่องภายในประเภทเดียวกัน การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์กลวิธีการแปลคำศัพท์และสำนวนที่เกี่ยวข้องกับไสยศาสตร์และความเชื่อในภาพยนตร์สยองขวัญไทยจำนวน 14 เรื่องที่เผยแพร่ผ่าน Netflix ระหว่างปี พ.ศ. 2564–2567 โดยบูรณาการมุมมองการสื่อสารแบบพหุวิธี (multimodality) เพื่อศึกษาว่าผู้แปลจัดการข้อจำกัดทางเทคนิคของคำบรรยายได้ภาพผ่านปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างองค์ประกอบด้านภาษาและอวัจนภาษาอย่างไร

วิธีการศึกษา: งานวิจัยนี้วิเคราะห์คำศัพท์และวลีที่เกี่ยวข้องจำนวน 276 รายการ โดยอิงกรอบแนวคิดกลวิธีการแปลของ Baker (1992) และ Pinmanee (2018) การวิเคราะห์ประกอบด้วยทั้งการนับความถี่เชิงปริมาณและการตีความเชิงคุณภาพ โดยพิจารณาการแปลควบคู่กับบริบททางภาพและเสียง

ผลการศึกษา: ผลการวิเคราะห์พบกลวิธีการแปลจำนวน 10 กลวิธี โดยกลวิธีการถอดความด้วยคำที่มีความสัมพันธ์เป็นกลวิธีที่พบมากที่สุด (ร้อยละ 43.68) รองลงมา ได้แก่ การถอดความด้วยคำที่ไม่สัมพันธ์โดยตรง (ร้อยละ 16.97) การแทนที่ทางวัฒนธรรม (ร้อยละ 8.30) และการใช้คำยืม (ร้อยละ 7.94) นอกจากนี้ ยังพบแนวโน้มการใช้กลวิธีที่เน้นความกระชับ โดยเฉพาะการถอดความ การใช้คำที่มีความหมายกว้างขึ้น และการละคำ ซึ่งสะท้อนข้อจำกัดทางเทคนิคของการทำคำบรรยายได้ภาพทั้งด้านพื้นที่และเวลา แนวโน้มดังกล่าวสะท้อนให้เห็นว่าผู้แปลให้ความสำคัญกับความเข้าใจของผู้ชมและความเข้าใจง่ายของคำบรรยาย ควบคู่กับความพยายามในการรักษาความหมายทางวัฒนธรรมภายใต้ข้อจำกัดของสื่อ แม้ความหมายเฉพาะทางวัฒนธรรมบางส่วนจะถูกกลดทอนหรือปรับเปลี่ยน แต่ความหมายทางวัฒนธรรมยังสามารถถ่ายทอดได้ผ่านลักษณะพหุวิธีของสื่อภาพยนตร์ โดยองค์ประกอบด้านภาพและการดำเนินเรื่องมีบทบาทในการร่วมสร้างความหมาย

การประยุกต์ใช้: ผลการศึกษานี้ช่วยขยายองค์ความรู้ด้านการแปลสื่อโสตทัศน์ โดยแสดงให้เห็นว่าองค์ประกอบเชิงพหุวิธีมีบทบาทในการถ่ายทอดความหมายเฉพาะทางวัฒนธรรม แม้การถ่ายทอดผ่านภาษาในคำบรรยายจะถูกย่อหรือปรับเปลี่ยนภายใต้ข้อจำกัดของคำบรรยายได้ภาพ นอกจากนี้ ผลการศึกษายังสามารถใช้เป็นแนวทางสำหรับนักแปลและผู้ผลิตคำบรรยายในการจัดการเนื้อหาที่มีความเฉพาะทางวัฒนธรรม ตลอดจนเป็นฐานสำหรับการศึกษาการแปลสื่อโสตทัศน์ในบริบทวัฒนธรรมอื่นที่มีความซับซ้อนใกล้เคียงกัน

บทสรุป: ผลการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นว่า ความหมายในการแปลโสตทัศน์มิได้ถ่ายทอดผ่านคำบรรยายได้ภาพเพียงอย่างเดียว หากแต่เกิดจากการทำงานร่วมกันขององค์ประกอบด้านภาษา ภาพ และบริบท ในการแปลไสยศาสตร์และความเชื่อไทย ผู้แปลต้องสร้างสมดุลระหว่างการรักษาความเฉพาะทางวัฒนธรรมกับการสร้างความเข้าใจแก่ผู้ชมภายใต้ข้อจำกัดด้านพื้นที่และเวลาของคำบรรยายได้ภาพ ผลการศึกษายังสะท้อนพลวัตของการต่อรองระหว่างการแปลแบบทำให้กลมกลืน (domestication) และการแปลแบบรักษาความแปลกต่าง (foreignization) โดยในบางกรณียังปรากฏลักษณะของการแปลแบบเน้นความแปลกต่าง (exoticization) ซึ่งชี้ให้เห็นว่าการแปลเนื้อหาทางวัฒนธรรมในสื่อโสตทัศน์ไม่อาจพิจารณาจากภาษาเพียงอย่างเดียว หากแต่ต้องคำนึงถึงบทบาทขององค์ประกอบเชิงพหุวิธีในการร่วมสร้างความหมายด้วย

Introduction

Today, online streaming platforms such as Netflix have become dominant forces in the global media and entertainment industry (Luo, 2024), providing widespread access to films and series across linguistic and cultural boundaries. As these platforms reach increasingly diverse audiences, subtitles play a crucial role in mediating meaning and facilitating cross-cultural communication. However, translating culturally specific content presents significant challenges, particularly in audiovisual contexts where meaning is conveyed not only through language but also through visual and contextual elements.

In Thailand, superstition and belief are deeply rooted in daily life and are often reflected in various forms of media, especially horror films. These films feature ghosts, spirits, rituals, and religious practices inspired by local traditions. Thai horror has also gained international recognition. For instance, *The Medium*, a Thai–Korean co-production, received international critical acclaim and reflects the growing global visibility of Thai horror cinema. As the presence of Thai horror films on platforms like Netflix continues to expand, subtitles become increasingly important in conveying these cultural elements to global audiences. Nevertheless, many of these elements do not have direct equivalents in the target language, making their translation in subtitling a complex and culturally sensitive task.

Subtitling presents a number of challenges in audiovisual translation. Translators must work within strict spatial and temporal limitations (Munday, 2016) while maintaining readability and accuracy. One of the primary strategies used to manage these technical constraints is condensation (Gottlieb, 1992). Such limitations complicate the translation of culture-specific items (CSIs), especially superstitious and belief-related terms that often lack direct equivalents in English. In addition, audiovisual meaning is constructed through the interaction of linguistic, visual, and contextual cues, which further shape translation decisions. Cross-cultural differences make this process even more complex, requiring translators to adopt a range of strategies to preserve meaning and cultural nuance.

Although several studies have examined Thai–English subtitle translation of CSIs, they have mostly focused on individual films or media products, such as *Love Destiny* (Somsin, 2024), *Home Sweet Home* (Permpoon, Piromnak, & Pattanakraisin, 2024), and *The Medium* (Mettraipan, 2023). While these studies provide valuable insights into translation strategies, they tend to analyze CSIs within isolated cases rather than across multiple works within the same genre. This focus on individual case studies limits the ability to identify broader patterns in translation practices. Examining multiple films within the same genre therefore allows for a more systematic understanding of how such items are translated across similar narrative and cultural contexts. In addition, research specifically addressing the translation of superstitious and belief-related concepts remains limited. Despite their cultural significance in Thai society and their central role in horror narratives, these elements have received little systematic attention in audiovisual translation.

Furthermore, most existing studies focus primarily on identifying translation strategies at the textual level. However, scholars in audiovisual translation, such as Gambier (2006, 2013) and Pérez González (2014), emphasize that meaning in audiovisual texts is constructed through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes. While this perspective has been widely acknowledged, it has not been systematically applied to the analysis of culture-specific items in Thai audiovisual contexts. This gap is particularly evident in Thai horror films, where visual and cultural elements are integral to meaning-making.

To address this gap, the present study examines how CSIs related to superstition and belief are translated from Thai into English in selected Thai horror films available on Netflix between 2021 and 2024. The study aims to identify the strategies employed and to explore how these strategies reflect processes of cultural adaptation and cross-cultural communication. Drawing on a multimodal perspective, it further investigates how verbal and non-verbal elements interact to convey culture-specific meanings within the constraints of subtitling. By focusing on a dataset of films within the same genre, the study provides a more systematic account of translation patterns and contributes to a deeper understanding of how culturally embedded meanings are negotiated in audiovisual translation.

Research Questions

1. How are superstitious and belief-related culture-specific items translated from Thai into English in Thai horror films on Netflix?
2. Which translation strategies are most frequently used, and how does this trend relate to the technical constraints of subtitling?
3. What does the interplay between verbal and non-verbal elements reveal about the translation of Thai cultural concepts under subtitling constraints?

Research Objectives

1. To analyse the translation strategies used for Thai superstitions and beliefs in Thai horror films on Netflix (2021–2024).
2. To discuss how the translation strategies reflect the technical constraints of subtitling.
3. To examine the collaboration between verbal and non-verbal elements in conveying Thai cultural concepts under subtitling constraints.

Literature Review

Superstition and belief are cultural phenomena that differ across societies and traditions. In Thailand, they are deeply connected to daily life and reflect the country's spiritual and social values. People often perform acts such as making merit, wearing amulets, or seeking blessings from sacred figures to bring good fortune and protection. According to Huque & Chowdhury (2007), superstition is an irrational belief in events that cannot be explained by science, while St. Amour & DeHart (2020) describe it as a practice based on fear of the unknown or a mistaken idea of causation. These beliefs, albeit superstitious, provide meaning and social order in Thai culture, and their representation in films helps express how people interpret spiritual experiences in modern life.

In translation studies, CSIs are words or expressions that are deeply rooted in the local context and have no direct equivalent in another language. They can include names, rituals, religious objects, foods, or cultural references (Zagood, 2023). When translators work with CSIs, their task is not only linguistic but also cultural: they must find ways to make the message understandable for foreign audiences while preserving its cultural flavor. Therefore, translating superstition and belief involves interpreting the cultural meanings behind the words, not only transferring them literally.

Audiovisual translation (AVT) provides a useful framework for studying this process. Subtitling, in particular, is one of the most common and challenging modes of AVT, as it transforms spoken dialogue into written text that must appear on screen for only a few seconds. Subtitlers must balance accuracy, readability, and timing constraints—usually limited to about two lines per subtitle (Hiraoka & Yamada, 2019; Thawabteh, 2017). These restrictions make translating CSIs especially difficult because translators have little space to add explanations or cultural notes (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007; Pedersen, 2017).

Several studies have examined how Thai CSIs are handled in subtitle translation. Mettraipan (2023) analyzed *The Medium* and found that cultural substitution was frequently used to help non-Thai audiences understand Thai concepts. Mamoon, Lah, & Moindjie (2023) studied Thai–English translation in tourism videos and found that translators often combined strategies, such as using both paraphrasing and borrowing, to express cultural nuances. Thongin (2021) investigated the Thai television series *Manner of Death* and identified techniques like amplification and adaptation as effective ways to communicate culturally marked content. Similarly, Permpoon, Piromnak, & Pattanakraisin (2024) compared translation of culture-specific terms in video games and films, noting strategies such as preservation, omission, and transformation, depending on context.

These works demonstrate the diversity of approaches in translating Thai cultural expressions, but most focus on single media products or isolated examples. Few have explored how superstition and belief, which are central to Thai horror, are translated across multiple films within the same genre. Horror films provide a rich context for studying CSIs because they blend religion, folklore, and emotion in ways that are difficult to transfer across cultures. Understanding how translators manage these elements in subtitles can therefore shed light on how Thai spiritual identity is represented, and sometimes adapted, for global audiences on platforms like Netflix.

Research Methods

This study examines how CSIs related to superstition and belief are translated from Thai into English in Thai horror films streamed on Netflix between 2021 and 2024. A total of 14 films were selected based on three criteria: 1) they belong to the horror genre, 2) they were broadcast on Netflix during the target period, and 3) they include clear representations of Thai superstition and belief. These films were chosen to provide a representative dataset of Thai horror films available on Netflix during the specified period, ensuring coverage of recurring themes related to superstition and belief. The dataset includes both Netflix original productions and licensed content available on the platform. While these categories may differ in terms of production and subtitling workflows, such distinctions could not be systematically examined due to limited publicly available information. Therefore, all subtitles were analyzed as they appear on Netflix, reflecting platform-specific constraints rather than variations in production origin. The selected films include *The Medium* (2021), *Ghost Lab* (2021), *The Whole Truth* (2021), *Haunted Tales* (2021), *Cracked* (2022), *SLR* (2022), *The Antique Shop* (2022), *Death Whisperer* (2023), *The Djinn's Curse* (2023), *Home for Rent* (2023), *Inhuman Kiss: The Last Breath* (2023), *Moei: The Promised* (2024), *The Cursed Land* (2024), and *Haunted Universities 3* (2024).

Data were collected from the English subtitles of these films, focusing on terms related to superstition and belief. These terms were identified based on definitions by St. Amour & DeHart (2020) and Huque & Chowdhury (2007), who describe superstition as a belief or practice rooted in fear, magic, or spiritual causation. Each identified item was treated as a unit of analysis. The total dataset contains 276 examples of CSIs.

The subtitles analyzed in this study were obtained from Netflix. However, due to the lack of publicly available information regarding subtitle production, the identities and number of translators involved could not be determined. This limitation is acknowledged as a constraint of the study. Therefore, the analysis focuses on the translation output as presented on the platform, treating subtitles as finalized products of audiovisual translation rather than representations of individual translator practices.

To organize the data, each term was classified into one of seven categories based on semantic and contextual criteria: ghost species, religious acts, abstract concepts, items or amulets, rituals, individuals, and places (see Table 1). The classification of CSIs in this study follows semantic grouping to ensure consistency and clarity in representing culturally embedded expressions. All CSIs were categorized according to meaning rather than grammatical form. The definitions and examples of each category are provided in Table 1. The number and percentage of each category were calculated to show the general distribution of terms. This step provides an overview of how superstition and belief are represented linguistically in Thai horror films.

Table 1 Classification of Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) Related to Thai Superstition and Beliefs (N = 276)

Category	Definition	Example (Thai – English)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Religious acts	Actions related to religious or spiritual practices	สวดมนต์ 'pray'	86	31.16
Ghost species	Supernatural beings and spirit entities in Thai audiovisual context	ผีกระสือ 'Krasue'	69	25.00
Abstract concepts	Intangible belief-related ideas	กรรม 'karma'	59	21.38
Items / amulets	Objects associated with spiritual power	น้ำมนต์ 'holy water'	23	8.33

Table 1 Classification of Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) Related to Thai Superstition and Beliefs (N = 276) (cont.)

Category	Definition	Example (Thai – English)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Places	Locations associated with supernatural beliefs	บ้านผีสิง 'haunted house'	17	6.16
Individuals	Individuals with spiritual roles	หมอผี 'shaman'	12	4.35
Rituals	Structured ceremonial practices	ทำพิธี 'perform a ritual'	10	3.62
Total			276	100.00

The translation strategies were analyzed using the frameworks proposed by Baker (1992) and Pinmanee (2018) as analytical tools for categorizing translation solutions. Rather than applying each model separately, the two frameworks were synthesized into a unified set of strategies to better account for culture-specific items (CSIs) related to superstition and belief. The combined framework consists of 12 translation strategies, such as *paraphrase using a related word*, *generalization*, *cultural substitution*, *loan word*, *omission*, and *literal translation*, which form the basis for the analysis. The definitions and equivalences between the two frameworks are summarized in Table 2, while the distribution of strategies is presented in the Results section.

Table 2 Synthesized Translation Strategies Based on Baker (1992) and Pinmanee (2018)

Baker (1992)	Pinmanee (2018)
Translation by a more general word	Generalization
Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word	-
Translation by cultural substitution	Cultural substitution
Translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation	Loan words
Translation by paraphrase using a related word	Equivalence
Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words	-
Translation by omission	Reduction
Translation by illustration	-
-	Particularization
-	Literal translation
-	Addition
-	Notes

Note: Strategies listed in the same row are considered conceptually equivalent across the two frameworks and are treated as a single analytical category in this study.

While Baker's (1992) framework is not specifically designed for CSIs, it provides a well-established set of strategies for addressing lexical and cultural gaps between source and target languages. Although it has been critiqued as being limited in addressing the multimodal nature of audiovisual translation, it remains a widely recognized and systematic taxonomy for categorizing translation strategies. In contrast, Pinmanee's (2018) framework specifically focuses on the translation of CSIs related to Thai superstitions and beliefs, making it particularly relevant to the present study. Therefore, Baker's model is used as a general analytical taxonomy, while Pinmanee's framework offers domain-specific categories that reflect the cultural and conceptual characteristics of Thai CSIs. The integration of these frameworks is intended to provide both theoretical breadth and contextual relevance, rather than to propose a new unified model.

After identifying the strategies, both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted. The frequency of each strategy was calculated to show the overall pattern of translation practices. In addition, representative examples were selected to illustrate how each strategy was applied and what effects it produced. This step aimed to move beyond simple description by interpreting why certain strategies were preferred and how they might influence audience understanding.

Although the study mainly focuses on textual analysis, it also considers the visual and contextual elements of each film. To account for the interaction between linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of the source text, the analysis utilizes a multimodal perspective as discussed by scholars such as Pérez González (2014). In many cases, the image, setting, or character behavior helps clarify the meaning of the subtitles, supporting the idea that meaning in audiovisual texts is a “composite product of the combined effect of all the resources used to create and interpret them” (Pérez González, 2014). Therefore, each translation was examined within its audiovisual context to understand how language and image work together to convey Thai cultural meanings to global audiences.

To enhance the reliability of the analysis, all results and classifications of translation strategies were jointly discussed between the student researchers and the corresponding author, who served as the supervisor. Differences in interpretation were reviewed carefully until a shared understanding was reached.

Research Results

This section presents the translation strategies used to render superstitious and belief-related CSIs in Thai horror films streamed on Netflix between 2021 and 2024. Based on the analytical framework consisting of 12 translation strategies derived from Baker (1992) and Pinmanee (2018), a total of 10 strategies were identified in the dataset. The analysis of 276 CSI terms indicates that the most frequently applied strategy was *paraphrase using a related word*, followed by *paraphrase using an unrelated word* and *cultural substitution*, as summarized in Table 3. Two strategies included in the analytical framework were not observed in the dataset.

Table 3 The Frequency of Translation Strategies Used

Translation Strategy	Number	Percentage (%)
Paraphrase using a related word	121	43.68
Paraphrase using an unrelated word	47	16.97
Cultural substitution	23	8.30
Using a loan word	22	7.94
A more general word (subordinate)	18	6.50
Particularization	14	5.05
Literal translation	11	3.97
Addition	9	3.25
Omission	9	3.25
A more neutral/less expressive word	2	0.72
Total	276	100.00

In the following subsections, one representative example is provided for each translation strategy to illustrate how superstitious and belief-related CSIs were rendered in English subtitles.

1. Translation by Paraphrase Using a Related Word

In this study, translation by *paraphrase using a related word* was the most frequently applied strategy. This approach involves rendering a term in the target language (TT) using a word that has the same or a closely related meaning as the source text (ST).

Example 1

ST: ร่างทรง (*Rang Song*)

TT: medium

(Pisanthanakun & Na, 2021)

In the film, *rang song* refers to a person who communicates with spirits through specific rituals. The term is translated as *medium*, which conveys a closely related meaning in English. This example illustrates *paraphrase using a related word*, where a culturally specific term is rendered using an equivalent concept in the target language.

In the scene where the character's role as a spirit medium is introduced, the meaning of the term is supported by both verbal and visual elements. The narrator's explanation of spirit possession, references to local beliefs, and the depiction of ritual space and acts of worship provide contextual cues for interpreting the role of a *medium* within the cultural setting.

2. Translation by Paraphrase Using Unrelated Words

This strategy involves translating a term from the ST into a target-language expression that is not directly related lexically but conveys a similar meaning.

Example 2

ST: ยันต์ (*Yan*)

TT: protection

(Nimibutr & Aree, 2024)

In this context, *yan* refers to a sacred object believed to protect an area from evil spirits. The term is translated as *protection*, which reflects the function of the object rather than its specific cultural form. This example illustrates *paraphrase using unrelated words*, where a culturally specific item is expressed through a function-based or descriptive expression in the target language.

In other instances, the term is translated as *amulet*, highlighting its physical form as an object. This variation suggests that the translation of *yan* depends on its contextual reference in the dialogue. While *amulet* emphasizes the material aspect, *protection* reflects a more abstract interpretation of its function. In this scene, the meaning of the term is supported by narrative context, particularly through dialogue referring to its protective function, rather than through direct visual depiction of the object itself.

3. Cultural Substitution

This strategy consists of replacing an expression or culture-specific item in the ST with a TT item that may not have the same propositional meaning but is likely to produce a comparable impact on the target audience. The primary advantage of this approach is that it conveys a concept the audience can more readily identify with.

Example 3

ST: น้ำมันพราย (*Namman Phrai*)

TT: A love potion

(Nithijiraoj & Riensuwan, 2021)

Namman phrai refers to an oil derived from a corpse and associated with love-related supernatural practices in Thai belief. The term is translated as *a love potion*, which represents a more familiar concept in the target language. While the two differ in cultural background and specific characteristics, they share a similar function related to influencing romantic attraction. This example illustrates cultural substitution, where a culturally specific item is replaced with a more familiar concept in the target language.

The meaning of the translated term is shaped by audiovisual elements. The act of mixing the substance into a drink and administering it to another character provides cues for interpreting its function. The subsequent possession and long-term influence further reinforce the role of the substance within the narrative.

4. Using a Loan Word

This strategy entails borrowing a word from the ST by transcribing it directly into the TT, preserving its original form and cultural connotation.

Example 4

ST: ไหลตาย (*Lai Tai*)

TT: Lai Tai

(Pisanthanakun & Na, 2021)

Lai tai refers to a condition in which a person suddenly dies during sleep without medical explanation, potentially linked to heart abnormalities. In Thai belief, however, it is understood as a local myth in which a widow ghost takes a person's soul at night. The condition is known in English as Sudden Unexplained Nocturnal Death Syndrome (SUNDS). In the subtitle, the translator introduced a loan word *lai tai* to retain the cultural and supernatural nuance, rather than using the technical medical term.

The borrowed term is introduced through on-screen explanatory text, where the phrase "Esan people call it Lai Tai" explicitly frames the expression as a culturally specific term. The meaning is further supported by the audiovisual context, where the depiction of sudden death during sleep provides cues for interpreting the concept without additional elaboration.

5. A More General Word (Subordinate)

This strategy is applied when there is no lexicalized word in the TT. It provides a general term rather than a detailed meaning, allowing the audience to understand the context without requiring an in-depth explanation.

Example 5

ST: สัมภเวสี (*Samphawesi*)

TT: spirits

(Pisanthanakun & Na, 2021)

According to Nanda (2019), *Samphawesi* refers to a being seeking rebirth. In Thai belief, it is a type of ghost that wanders hungry and seeks reincarnation, often consuming food offerings placed at haunted locations such as T-junctions. Using the general term *spirits* represents a shift from a culturally specific category to a broader and more general classification in the target language.

The generalized term is further constructed by audiovisual elements. The collection of ritual objects, along with references to traces left on these items, provides cues for interpreting the presence of supernatural entities.

6. Particularization

In contrast to generalization, this strategy replaces general terms with more specific words or phrases to reflect the cultural context and make the meaning clearer for the audience.

Example 6

ST: มนต์ดำ (*Mon Dam*)

TT: a curse

(Nimibutr & Aree, 2024)

In this case, the term *mon dam* is rendered through multiple expressions, including *black magic* and *curses*, reflecting different aspects of the original concept. While *black magic* retains the general meaning, *curses* provides a more specific manifestation of the practice, illustrating a shift from a broader category to a more concrete representation.

The term is reinforced by audiovisual elements. The character's speech during possession, marked by an altered tone and fragmented delivery, together with references to past events, provides cues for interpreting the practice as a form of curse within the narrative.

7. Literal Translation

This strategy, corresponding to Gottlieb's (1992) 'direct transfer', is a word-for-word rendering directly from ST to TT without fully considering the context. As a result, it may not convey the intended meaning accurately.

Example 7

ST: จิตแข็ง (*Chit Khaeng*)

TT: strong mind

(Yuvaboon & Wantha, 2023)

In Thai superstition, a person with *chit on* 'weak mind' is believed to be more vulnerable to ghosts due to their fearful or fragile nature. The opposite, *chit khaeng* 'strong mind', implies fearlessness and spiritual resilience. *Literal translation*, as *strong mind*, reflects a general psychological trait but does not represent the supernatural and cultural dimensions associated with *chit khaeng* in Thai belief.

The interpretation is shaped by audiovisual and narrative elements. The statement is framed as a necessary condition for facing supernatural danger. The reference to the journey and anticipated encounters provides cues for interpreting the term beyond its literal psychological sense.

8. Addition

This strategy provides additional explanations or details to clarify a concept, especially when paraphrase using a related word may not fully convey the meaning.

Example 8

ST: ถวาย (*Thawai*)

TT: give the offering

(Pisanthanakun & Na, 2021)

Thawai in Thai can function without an explicit object, as the context usually implies what is being offered. In English, however, *give* requires a direct object. To address this difference, the translator adds “*the offering*” to clarify the action while maintaining the cultural nuance of *thawai*.

The term is further contextualized through visual and narrative elements. The scene shows a character holding offerings and presenting them to a spiritual entity, providing clear cues for interpreting the act of offering. The performative gesture, together with the visible ritual objects, reinforces the intended meaning within the cultural context.

9. Omission

Omission, also referred to as deletion or condensation in Gottlieb’s (1992) framework, involves leaving out words from the source text when they are considered not important or not vital for the context.

Example 9

ST: ภูของเข้าจนเป็นบ้า (*Thuk Khong Khao Chon Pen Ba*)

TT: gone insane

(Yuvaboon & Wantha, 2023)

In *Death Whisperer*, a character’s attempt at black magic backfires, driving her insane. The source text phrase contains two actions: the first, *thuk khong khao*, which means ‘it backfired,’ and the second, *chon pen ba*, which means ‘gone insane.’ However, the translator omits *thuk khong khao* and translates only the second action *chon pen ba*. This choice focuses on the consequence of the black magic rather than its cause. Moreover, the cause of the insanity is suggested through narrative context, with limited support from the visual elements of the scene.

The interpretation of the term relies primarily on narrative cues rather than explicit visual representation. The female character’s condition is conveyed through referring to the effects of black magic on the character, while the visual sequence instead follows the male protagonist’s movement toward the associated location.

10. A More Neutral/Less Expressive Word

This strategy translates a term from the ST into a less expressive or more neutral term in the TT, resulting in reduced emotional or connotative meaning.

Example 10

ST: อาถรรพ์จัญไร (*Athan Chanrai*)

TT: bad luck

(Yuvaboon & Wantha, 2023)

Athan Chanrai consists of *athan* ‘magic that can be used for good or bad purposes’ and *chanrai* ‘offensive, conveying disgust’. The TT term *bad luck* conveys a general sense of misfortune but lacks the offensive and intense connotation of the original. As a result, the expressive meaning in the TT is reduced, making it more neutral than the ST.

In this context, the interpretation of the term relies largely on verbal expression rather than visual representation. While dialogue conveys a sense of danger and taboo, the visual sequence shows a relatively neutral sequence of the character’s movement toward the location, without explicit visual markers of the negative connotations present in the source term.

In summary, this study identified ten translation strategies: *paraphrase using a related word*, *paraphrase using an unrelated word*, *cultural substitution*, *use of a loan word*, *a more general word (subordinate)*, *particularization*, *literal translation*, *addition*, *omission*, and *a more neutral/less expressive word*. The following section discusses how these strategies relate to meaning transfer, cultural specificity, and the role of audiovisual context in the translation of Thai superstition and belief in horror films.

Discussion

The analysis of translation strategies for Thai superstition and belief offers a crucial opportunity to engage with current theoretical issues in AVT. The discussion focuses on interpreting the strategic choices observed in the data, specifically with how translators negotiate technical constraints by utilizing the film’s multimodal environment and how these decisions position the translation within the debate between foreignization and domestication.

1. Multimodal Distribution and Response to Subtitling Constraints

The analysis of frequency data (Table 3) shows a dominance of brevity-focused strategies, particularly *paraphrase-based strategies*, *loan word*, and *omission*. The heavy reliance on paraphrase—accounting for over 60% of all instances (combining both related and unrelated paraphrase)—along with the consistent use of *loan words* and *omission*, is not merely a statistical trend. It reflects instead the translator’s deliberate application of the principle of condensation, which is necessitated by the technical constraints of subtitling in AVT (Gottlieb, 1992). This is supported by Díaz-Cintas (2019), who defined subtitles as ‘timed text’ that must correspond to condensed, synchronized translations of the original verbal input. These constraints are further specified in industry guidelines such as Netflix’s English Timed Text Style Guide, which limits subtitle length (e.g., a maximum of two lines per frame and character restrictions per line), thereby directly influencing how culturally specific terms can be rendered in practice.

This preference for brevity is feasible due to the inherent multimodal composition of film. As Pérez González (2014) noted, film meaning is a composite product, a blend of multiple semiotic modes, including both verbal (subtitles) and visual elements (image, setting, and character behavior). Translators, in response, exploit this interplay of semiotic resources, effectively distributing the cognitive burden of cultural interpretation onto the visual dimension to maintain subtitle brevity.

For instance, in a representative case such as *Inhuman Kiss: The Last Breath* (2023), the creature *krasue* was rendered as a loan word because the audience can simultaneously interpret the visual/iconographic code, which provides necessary context. Similarly, *omission* is employed when visual cues convey sufficient context. This approach aligns with the idea that visual elements support the interpretation of culture-specific content, while subtitles function as a complementary verbal channel. By distributing meaning between images and subtitles, translators effectively balance the need to convey cultural specificity with the spatial limitations imposed by subtitle formatting. Ultimately, it is this interplay between visual compensation and character constraints that drives the dominance of concise translation strategies in representing CSIs related to superstition and belief in Thai horror cinema.

2. Theoretical Implications: Foreignization versus Domestication

Contextualizing the findings within AVT reveals important theoretical parallels and contrasts. In this respect, strategies such as *paraphrase-based strategies* and *generalization* tend to align with domestication, while *loan word* and certain cases of retention reflect foreignization. The frequent use of *paraphrase using a related word* (43.68%) reflects similar strategic patterns observed by Somsin (2024) in a comparable study of film translation. This indicates a common method for dealing with cultural expressions that have attained a degree of target-language lexicalization or familiarity. Additionally, the selective use of *loan words*—particularly in scenes supported by visual context—points to a general preference for preserving cultural specificity (foreignization) within the narrative of Thai horror films.

In contrast, the study by Permpoon, Piromnak, & Pattanakraisin (2024) presented a different pattern. Their analysis of video game localization found a predominance of *absolute universalization*, a strategy derived from Aixelá's (1996) model and strongly aligned with domestication. This contrast is theoretically meaningful, as it reveals how translation strategies are profoundly influenced by the medium itself. While video game localization often prioritizes universal accessibility and functionality, promoting domestication, the translation of Thai horror films prioritizes retaining what may be described as “cultural texture”, including affective, symbolic, and ritual dimensions, to enrich the narrative. This difference highlights a key debate in AVT: should translation aim for cultural preservation through foreignization, or prioritize functionality through domestication?

3. Multimodal Retention of Cultural Texture

The findings point to a preference for condensation-driven strategies, including *paraphrase-based strategies*, *generalization*, and *omission*, shaped by the technical constraints of subtitling and commonly associated with domestication. In many instances, culturally bound concepts are rendered through more accessible equivalents, as in *samphawesi* translated as *spirits* or *athan chanrai* as *bad luck*, leading to a reduction in cultural specificity. This tendency reflects what Venuti (1995) described as an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-culture values. However, this reduction is not absolute, as the multimodal nature of film provides additional resources for meaning-making.

Cultural meaning, as the analysis demonstrates, is not confined to subtitles alone but emerges across multiple semiotic modes. Visual imagery, narrative development, and character performance contribute to how meaning is conveyed, allowing culturally specific elements to remain interpretable even when not explicitly expressed in the subtitles. This is evident in cases such as *rang song*, rendered as *medium*, where the ritual dimension is maintained through visual and narrative context. At the same time, this process is not consistent across all cases. For instance, in *namman phrai*, translated as *love potion*, the general function is retained, while the cultural specificity linked to ritual practices is significantly reduced. Taken together, these patterns suggest that meaning is not simply transferred through language but reconstructed through the interaction of multiple modes.

From this perspective, subtitling in Thai horror cinema can be understood as operating through an interplay between domestication and foreignization, with some cases reflecting forms of exoticization rather than full foreignization. While subtitles tend to prioritize brevity and accessibility, in line with the constraints of audiovisual translation (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007), the audiovisual environment allows aspects of what may be described as “cultural texture” to be retained. Linguistic domestication, therefore, does not necessarily lead to the loss of cultural specificity, but instead coexists with it in a more fluid and context-dependent manner, challenging the notion of a binary between domestication and foreignization (Venuti, 1995).

4. Justifying Analytical Frameworks

This research adopted the linguistic-based models of Baker (1992) and Pinmanee (2018) as primary frameworks to classify the translation strategies observed in the data. While it is recognized that Baker’s model has been criticized for not fully accommodating the complexities of today’s multimodal AVT landscape, where the multisemiotic blends of signs are often neglected or not integrated into a cohesive framework (Gambier, 2006), it still provides valuable analytical clarity and methodological discipline for categorizing textual outcomes.

What distinguishes this study, however, is its interpretive depth. By incorporating a multimodal perspective alongside the linguistic models, the analysis moves beyond simply identifying which strategies were used. Instead, it investigates the underlying rationale, exploring why certain choices, such as *omission* or *loan word*, are contextually appropriate in specific audiovisual scenes. This integrated approach enables the study to retain the systematic rigor of traditional taxonomies while simultaneously addressing their limitations, ultimately offering a more current and nuanced perspective within the field of translation studies.

Conclusion

This study examined how CSIs related to superstition and belief are translated in Thai horror films on Netflix, using the frameworks of Baker (1992) and Pinmanee (2018). The findings indicate a preference for condensation-driven strategies, reflecting the technical constraints of subtitling. While these strategies often simplify culturally bound concepts, they do not entirely eliminate their cultural significance.

Rather than being conveyed through subtitles alone, cultural meaning emerges through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes. Visual, narrative, and performative elements contribute to how meaning is constructed, enabling aspects of “cultural texture” to remain accessible even when linguistic expression is reduced. In this context, subtitling operates through a dynamic interplay between domestication and foreignization, with some instances reflecting forms of exoticization rather than complete cultural retention.

Overall, the findings suggest that translation in audiovisual contexts cannot be fully explained at the level of language alone. Instead, it requires attention to how meaning is constructed across modes. This perspective offers a more nuanced understanding of how culturally embedded content is adapted for global audiences.

Limitations and Future Research

1. Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on Thai horror films available on Netflix between 2021 and 2024. As such, the findings—particularly the preference for concise translation strategies and the role of multimodal distribution—are shaped by the platform’s specific subtitling constraints, including character limits and formatting conventions. For this reason, the results

cannot be generalized to all audiovisual translation contexts. In addition, the focus on a single genre limits the scope of the analysis, as horror films tend to rely heavily on visual and narrative elements in conveying culturally specific meanings, such as supernatural entities and ritual practices.

2. Directions for Future Research

Future research could extend this line of inquiry in several directions. One possible direction is to examine subtitle translation across different streaming platforms, such as HBO Max or Amazon Prime Video, to determine whether the preference for concise, condensation-driven strategies is platform-specific or influenced by differences in subtitling workflows and production practices across platforms. Another direction would be a diachronic analysis of Thai horror films translated in earlier periods, which could reveal how translation strategies have evolved over time.

Further research may also explore cross-linguistic differences by comparing subtitle translations into other target languages, such as French or Japanese, in order to understand how multimodal meaning is negotiated across linguistic systems. Finally, expanding the analysis to other film genres—such as comedy, drama, or historical films—would provide a broader perspective on whether the patterns identified in this study are specific to horror or characteristic of Thai audiovisual exports more generally.

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