

## PROBLEMS AND FACTORS AFFECTING ENGLISH TO THAI TRANSLATION AMONG THIRD-YEAR ENGLISH TEACHER STUDENTS

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### Abstract

The objectives of this research were: 1) to identify the most common problematic syntactic parts that were difficult for translation among third-year English teacher students and 2) to investigate whether there was relation between knowledge of grammar (syntactic construction) and translation effectiveness. The data were collected from 34 third-year English teacher students enrolling in translation I course in the first semester of the academic year 2017. This group of students were purposively selected. The tools for data collection were a translation test containing 19 English sentences and a grammar test. The data were analyzed by frequency, percentage, content analysis, and by Pearson product-moment correlation. The results showed that the three highest-rate syntactic parts that students could not translate correctly were “referred subject”, “perfect participle adverb phrase” and “specific words”. Other difficult parts for students to translate correctly were “past participial adjective”, “present participles adverb phrase”, “passive voice verb”, “special verb (interest, surprise)”, “adverb before adjective”, “using noun as adjective”, and “present participial adjective”. In terms of relation between knowledge of grammar (syntactic construction) and translation effectiveness, the research findings revealed that students’ scores from the grammar (syntactic construction) test were significantly positively related to their rates of correct translation ( $p<.001$ ).

**Keywords:** Translation effectiveness, syntactic construction knowledge, syntactic parts, English into Thai translation.

### Introduction

English-Thai translation is a course of converting the information from English into Thai correctly, smoothly and coherently. Normally, it includes receiving, understanding the meaning of the source language (English), and rearranging it into target language. Due to the basic difference between the structure of English and Thai languages, how to translate English sentences to Thai has become a common topic for translation students.

Translation now is the prominent field for language research. There have been several attempts to define the term ‘translation’, since this term is mentioned in language teaching and learning (Catford, 1965; Newmark, 1988; Nida & Taber, 1982; Peter, 2001; and Nida, 2003). According to the review of some of

the available well known definitions of translation, it can be concluded that translation is a process of transferring a text from source language into target language with an aim of keeping the meaning of the two languages texts equivalent.

In the society nowadays, English is one of the international language which is useful for people in communicating. In order to help Thai people who are illiterate in English to understand English text, translation from English into Thai is necessary. It can help people to understand the meaning of the English words, phrases, sentences and the whole text (Newmark, 1988 cited in Jeeyasak, 2008).

Although translation plays a major role in conveying messages from English language to Thai language (Suksaeresup and Thep - Ackrapong, 2009),

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to be successful in translation is still the problem for most Thai students. The cause of these problems may be contributed to many reasons. For example, it is not easy to translate effectively because the differences in cultures, semantic, and syntactic of the source and target languages (Larson, 1991, Robinson, 1997; and Pojprasat, 2007).

Even though many studies have been carried out in the field of Language Translation, most of them focused on translation strategies (Khonbumpen, 2008). However, only a few studies in Thailand have focused on translation errors from English to Thai. These studies concluded on the types of translation error that they are based on the practitioners' experience; semantic knowledge, syntactic knowledge, culture knowledge; and miscellaneous knowledge (Pojprasat, 2007; Suksaeresup and Thep - Ackrapong, 2009; and Wongranu, 2017).

According to the review on some of the available research studies on translation errors from English language to Thai language above, it can be concluded that syntactic structure is one of the type of translation errors in translating English to Thai. In order to acquire the meaning of source language to achieve effective translation, syntactic construction knowledge is the first step which helps the translator to "break down" the source language sentence for meaning acquisition (Chan and Pollard, 1995, 2001).

Therefore it is essential to develop students of translation class on their lexical and syntactic construction knowledge. However, to achieve this aim the translation teachers need to know the background knowledge on these factors of the students, so they can help them improve their knowledge on these points and will be beneficial for their translation (Pojprasat, 2007). This study, therefore, investigated students' problematic parts of syntactic construction of sentence that were essential for translation and investigated the relation between syntactic construction knowledge and translation effectiveness.

#### Purposes of the research

1. To identify the most common problematic syntactic parts that were difficult for translation among

third-year English teacher students.

2. To investigate whether there was relation between knowledge of syntactic construction and translation effectiveness.

#### Research questions

1. Which parts in English sentences students were often unable to translate correctly?
2. Was there relationship between knowledge of syntactic construction and translation effectiveness?

#### Research methodology

This study was an error analysis conducted with one group of 34 participants purposively selected from students enrolling in translation I course in the first semester of the academic year 2017. The research instruments included a translation test and a grammar test. The translation test consisted of 19 items of sentences in various patterns. The test was discussed in the meeting of the co-raters to check whether it covered the patterns and grammar points that the researchers wanted to investigate on students' translation effectiveness. In these 19 items, various patterns of sentences were focused. These patterns included:

1. Sentence with gerund subject
2. Sentence with present participle adjective
3. Sentence with past participle adjective
4. Sentence with to infinitive subject
5. Sentence with passive voice verb
6. Sentence with special verb
7. Sentence with noun clause subject
8. Sentence with noun phrase reduced from noun clause
9. Sentence begin with present perfect participle adverb phrase
10. Sentence with adverb clause
11. Sentence begin with present participle adverb phrase
12. Sentence with adjective clause
13. Sentence begin with absolute phrase
14. Sentence begin with past participle adverb phrase
15. Sentence with preposition phrase

16. Sentence begin with to infinitive adverb phrase

These patterns of sentences were considered as complicated patterns which could give the evidence about whether or how students understand the meaning of such complicated text.

The grammar test consisted of 4 parts:

- 1) identifying the highlighted parts of sentences,
- 2) determining types of sentences, 3) determining types of subordinate clauses, and 4) analyzing syntactic construction of sentences. Part 1 consisted of 20 items (sentences), the other three consisted of 10 items (sentences) each. Test 2 was also discussed for the content validity in the meeting of the co-raters

The data from this study were the rates of correct and incorrect translation found from each of 24 syntactic parts in overall 19 English sentences.

These rates were counted as frequency and transferred into percentages. Then the rates of correct and incorrect translation of 24 discourses were ranked. In addition, the relation between the rates of correct translation and grammar scores of 34 students were investigated by using Pearson product-moment correlation.

## Results

### 1. Rates of incorrect translation

The results from the checking process found that besides the 16 patterns the researchers intended to investigate, some others syntactic parts of sentences were focused and rated because they appeared to be difficult parts for students to catch the meaning. Totally, there were aspects of 24 syntactic parts to be rated. The results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Rates of incorrect translation

	Types of Discourses	Rates of wrong translation (%)	Ranking
1	referred subject	94.12	1
2	perfect participle adv. phrase	94.12	1
3	Specific words: - one-third (94.12%) - search (n.) (91.18%) - unheard of (91.18%) - hitch a ride (55.88%) - stayed close to... (100%) - document (v.) (100%) - item (94.12)	89.50	2
4	absolute phrase	88.24	3
5	noun. phr. reduced from noun.cl	88.24	3
6	past participle adv. phr	88.24	3
7	to infinitive v.	85.29	4
8	noun with modifier	74.12	5
9	present perfect v.	71.57	6
10	past participle adj.	67.65	7
11	present participle adv.ph	65.63	8

**Table 1:** Rates of incorrect translation (cont.)

	Types of Discourses	Rates of wrong translation (%)	Ranking
12	passive v.	63.97	9
13	Special v. ‘interest’, ‘surprise’	63.24	10
14	adv. + adj.	58.82	11
15	noun as an adj.	53.92	12
16	present participle adj.	52.94	13
17	gerund subject	42.65	14
18	preposition phrase	41.18	15
19	adv.cl.	41.08	16
20	gerund object	35.29	17
21	pronoun ‘one’s ____’	29.41	18
22	subject complement	26.47	19
23	n. phr. marker ‘whether’	26.47	19
24	to infinitive subject	23.53	20

Table 1 shows that the highest-rate syntactic part that students could not translate correctly (94.12%) were “referred subject” and “perfect participle adv. phrase”.

The sentence that consists of “referred subject” was

(10) Since the search to find and document sites of Native American cave paintings was first begun, **several hundred** have come to light.

Only 1 out of 34 students (5.88%) could translate this sentence correctly by referring “**several hundred**” to “**paintings**”

The sentence with “perfect participle adv. phrase” was **Having been remodeled**, the house will be more valuable on the market.

Most students (94.12%) understood this participial phrase as a gerund and translated it as a noun.

The second highest rate discourse which students translated incorrectly was “Specific words”. These words included “one-third”, “search (n.)”,

“unheard of”, hitch a ride”, “stay close to shorelines”, “document (v.)”, and “item”, in the following sentences.

(6) Using sophisticated instruments, lightning experts have learned that lightning travels at **one-third** the speed of light.

(10) Since the **search** to find and **document** sites of Native American cave paintings was first begun, several hundred have come to light.

(13) The fork, which did not become a standardized **item** in Europe until the eighteenth century, was almost **unheard of** in America.

(14) The car having been broken, we had to **hitch a ride** to town.

(19) To find their way, they **stayed** close to shorelines or used the position of the sun to plot the latitude.

No students were able to correctly translate the words “document”, “stayed” sentences 10 and 19. They translated “document” in sentence 10 as a noun instead of verb. Meanwhile all students

translated “stayed” as *reside* instead of *keeping the distance*. There were 94.12% of students who could not translate “one-third” in sentence 6 as one out of three parts. The same rate of incorrect translation was found in the word “item” in sentence 13. Another translation as a wrong part of speech occurred in the word “search” in sentence 10. Most students (91.18%) understood and translated it as a noun.

The third highest rate of incorrect translation (88.24%) occurred in the discourses of “absolute phrase”, “noun phrase reduced from noun clause” and “past participle adverb phrase” shown in sentences 15, 8, and 16 respectively.

(15) The old mining town was utterly deserted, *its streets gray and dead*.

(8) I don't know *whether to join the group or go by myself*.

(16) *Knocked on his head*, he fell down. The parts having the rates of their incorrect translation between 70 – 75 % were “noun with modifiers” in sentences 10, 13, 15, 17, and 18 as shown below:

(10) Since the search to find and document-sites of *Native American cavepaintings* was first begun, several hundred have come to light.

(13) The fork, which did not become a *standardized item* in Europe until the eighteenth century, was almost unheard of in America.

(15) The old mining town was utterly deserted, its streets gray and dead.

(17) The student coming late to the class was punished by reducing the attention score.

(18) Intelligence testing has caused great excitement within the scientific community and the larger society.

The incorrect translation rate of the discourse of “present perfect verb” was between 70 – 75 %. These sentences were as follows:

(6) Using sophisticated instruments, lightning experts *have learned* that lightning travels at one-third the speed of light.

(10) Since the search to find and document-sites of Native American cave paintings was first begun, several hundred *have come* to light.

(18) Intelligence testing *has caused* great excitement within the scientific community and the larger society.

Other syntactic parts having the rate of incorrect translation more than 50% were “past participle adjective”, “present participle adverb phrase”, “passive voice verb”, “special verb (interest, surprise)”, “adverb before adjective”, “using noun as adjective”, and “present participle adjective”.

Relation between syntactic construction knowledge and translation effectiveness

**Table 2:** Grammar scores and rate of correct translation

Std	Grammar score	Correct translation
	50	100%
1	26	34.46
2	10	37.21
3	26	35.39
4	32	43.46
5	23	46.89
6	35	27.64
7	27	48.04
8	8	6.32

**Table 2:** Grammar scores and rate of correct translation (Cont.)

Std	Grammar score	Correct translation
9	30	55.36
10	27	33.68
11	18	38.18
12	36	58.00
13	19	20.07
14	29	40.71
15	26	42.50
16	24	40.61
17	23	53.21
18	21	23.25
19	22	32.68
20	20	25.89
21	21	45.32
22	12	18.54
23	10	25.43
24	26	23.64
25	27	47.79
26	24	30.14
27	19	32.96
28	19	18.25
29	28	48.32
30	13	11.46
31	24	24.04
32	23	46.54
33	21	42.79
34	20	52.25

Table 2, showed the scores of syntactic construction knowledge and the rates of correct translation of 34 students. The result showed that the students who got high scores in syntactic construction test relatively got the high rates of correct translation, meanwhile the ones who got low syntactic

construction scores got the low rates of correct translation. To investigate this relation, Pearson product-moment correlation was employed. The finding was shown in Table 3. **Correlations of syntactic construction score and translation score**

**Table 3:** Correlations between grammar score and translation score

	Grm	Trans
Grm Pearson Correlation	1	.585**
Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
N	34	34
Trans Pearson Correlation	585**	1
Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
N	34	34

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

The output from Pearson product-moment correlation showed that significant positive relation existed between syntactic construction knowledge and translation accuracy. Results of the correlation indicated that higher syntactic construction scores were associated with higher correct translation scores ( $r = .585$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

### Conclusion and Discussion

The findings for research question number 1 indicated that there were 16 syntactic parts having the rates of incorrect translation higher than 50%. They were ranked from the highest to lower rates as follows: “referred subject”, “perfect participle adverb phrase”, “specific words”, “absolute phrase”, “noun phrase reduced from noun clause”, “past participle adverb phrase”, “to infinitive verb”, “noun with modifiers”, “present perfect verb”, “past participle adjective”, “present participle adverb phrase”, “passive voice verb”, “special verb”, “adverb + adjective”, “noun as adjective”, and “present participle adjective”.

The first two places of ranking were “referred subject”, and “perfect participle adverb phrase”. This indicated that students were not able to refer the idea in the sentence “since the search to find and document sites of Native American cave paintings was first begun, **several hundred** have come to light” correctly.

Meanwhile in the sentence “**having been remodeled**”, the house will be more valuable on the market.” Most students (94.12%) translated “**Having**

**been remodeled**” as a noun. This indicates that students could not distinguish ‘gerund and perfect participle’.

The second place of ranking is the syntactic part with “specific words”. The incorrect translation in this type of syntactic construction indicated that students were limited in vocabulary.

Meanwhile the third place of ranking included “absolute phrase”, “noun phrase reduced from noun clause”, and “past participle adverb phrase”. This indicated that these types of discourses are the complicated syntactic parts that students’ metalinguistic have not developed. This reason could also be referred to the syntactic parts that have the incorrect translation rates higher than 50%. Therefore, syntactic construction knowledge was the important factor of translation (Chan and Pollard, 1995, 2001; Larson, 1991; Robinson, 1997). This finding is congruent with the findings in the studies of Pojprasat (2007), Suksaeresup and Thep – Ackrapong (2009), and Wongranu (2017).

The finding for research question number 2 indicated that students’ scores of syntactic construction knowledge test were positively related to the rates of correct translation. ( $r=.585$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This finding meant that the metalinguistic knowledge was the important factor for translation effectiveness (Chan and Pollard, 1995, 2001; Larson, 1991; Robinson, 1997). Recommendation

This findings were taken from the students’ syntactic construction pre-test and translation pre-test. When learning the problematic syntactic parts in

translation, the teacher should provide them the knowledge of how those syntactic parts function in the sentence, and how to interpret them. This may help students understand the sentences more clearly. The further research should study whether there is improvement of translation when the grammar knowledge are improved.

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