

การศึกษาความผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ที่พบบ่อยในการแปลไทยเป็นอังกฤษของนักศึกษา สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษในมหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏ

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาความผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ในการแปลภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษารายวิชาการแปล ภาคการเรียนที่ 2 ปีการศึกษา 2565 จำนวน 34 คน โดยศึกษาความผิดพลาดที่เกิดขึ้นจากแบบฝึกหัดการแปล 3 ประเภท ที่ประกอบไปด้วย งานแปลด้านวรรณกรรม งานแปลข้อมูลทั่วไป และงานแปลทางวัฒนธรรม จากภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ จำนวนข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ที่พบมีทั้งหมด 990 ครั้ง วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา การหาค่าความถี่ของประเภทความผิด และการหาค่าร้อยละ โดยการอธิบายลักษณะและที่มาของความผิดพลาดอันเกิดจากความเหมือนและความแตกต่างกันระหว่างไวยากรณ์ของทั้งสองภาษา ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ความผิดพลาดที่เกิดขึ้นบ่อยได้แก่ countability (16.57 %), tenses (14.24 %), articles/determiners (13.13 %), fragment (10.10%), ellipsis (8.59 %), punctuation (8.38 %) ตามลำดับ ลักษณะและที่มาของความผิดส่วนใหญ่เกิดจากความแตกต่างระหว่างไวยากรณ์ของทั้งสองภาษาโดยได้รับอิทธิพลมาจากภาษาที่ 1 เป็นหลัก เนื้อหาความรู้ในบทความนี้จะส่งเสริมให้นักศึกษาได้นำไปประยุกต์ใช้ในกระบวนการแปล และองค์ความรู้เกี่ยวกับความแตกต่างดังกล่าวจะช่วยให้ นักศึกษามีความรู้ความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับการแปล ส่งเสริมการมีส่วนร่วมในการเรียนรู้ ตลอดจนความสามารถในการแปลเอกสารจากภาษาต้นทางสู่ภาษาปลายทางได้อย่างเหมาะสม ทั้งยังเป็นประโยชน์ต่อการสอนการแปลของผู้สอนการแปล

คำสำคัญ: ความผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ที่พบบ่อย การแปลภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ ความผิดพลาดในการแปล



A Study of Common Grammatical Errors in Thai to English Translation of Students from English Program in a Thai Rajabhat University

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Abstract

The research aimed to investigate the common grammatical in Thai to English translation of 34 students enrolled in the second semester of 2022 at a Thai Rajabhat University. The source of the 990 errors-corpus was taken from three different sample tasks from in-class assignments, including one fictional text, one informative text, and one cultural text. Data were analyzed by using content analysis, sorted by frequency and percentage. The investigation emphasized the sources' descriptions and the causes of errors rooted in similarities and differences between both language structures. Findings revealed that the most commonly found and notable errors ranged from countability (16.57 %), tenses (14.24 %), articles/determiners (13.13 %), fragment (10.10%), ellipsis (8.59 %), punctuation (8.38 %), respectively—the sources and causes of the errors derived mainly from the two languages' differences in grammatical systems by the influence of L1. The awareness of the differences was the key in promoting translation learning engagement, recognition, and production of appropriate translation from a source language to a target language. Additionally, the knowledge of both grammatical differences of the languages eventually benefited to translation instruction.

Keywords: Common grammatical errors, Thai to English Translation, Translation Errors

1. Introduction

Globalization is the predisposition of world advancement in this twenty-first century. In general speaking, today's nations cannot exist independently from one another. People tend to rely on one another for their existence. As Munday [1] noted that since there is a greater demand for communication and knowledge exchange in practically every area of human endeavor, the study of translation has become increasingly important. The translation is defined as the process of changing a text from one language into one another language. A meaning or idea must be transferred from the source language to the target language. It is necessary to construct appropriate translations to express meanings from the source language to the target language as accurately as possible and avoid misinterpretation or inaccurate translation. In the translation process, it is required for a translator to follow translation steps, including analysis of the lexicon, grammatical structures, situational contexts, and cultural background of the text of the source language. The source text must be divided into components to determine its true meaning. Then, the words will be reorganized with similar meanings using lexical and grammatical construction knowledge that is appropriate for the target language and its cultural settings. This entire process is truly challenging and convoluted for L2 learners.

In the Thai context, previous research on translation errors had been conducted by Bunyarat Duklim [2]. The finding discovered that Thai university students had limited English proficiency when they attempted to translate texts from Thai into English. They often made more mistakes than when translating texts from English into Thai. It becomes a mystery why Thai students translate words incorrectly and more frequently from Thai to English. An investigation of these errors draws attention to those in the translation profession in Thailand. Theoretically, based on previous research conducted by Pepsco [3], the empirical evidence from his finding indicated the main cause of the written translation errors was inadequate structural knowledge of a language and grammatical influences mistaken from native Thai language features, regardless the language use. The ungrammatical translated composition can lead to misinterpretation. As a result, the most common grammatical mistakes in translating Thai to English become one of the subjects of interest and a challenge in the field of translation for Thai students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Grammatical Errors in Translation

Linguistically, according to Corder [4], he said, “studying the errors made by learners of a second language needs no justification. It is something which teachers have always done for purely practical reasons.” As it is common to see L2 learners produce phrases with poor grammar, analysis of errors comes into play. One of the textual products is translation. Translation errors result from misreading the source text or a translator's incapacity to generate the target text according to the original intention. In other words, as stated by Séguinot [5], the concept refers as the effects of misinterpretation of the source text. In the study conducted by Youfi [6], the errors are caused by translators' inadequate knowledge of the target language and their seeming lack of familiarity with both the source and target languages. According to a research claim by Pepsco [3], a factor that contributes to grammatical translation errors is a translator's



inadequate linguistic competence. It can be problematic for translators to establish proper sentence structures if they lack sufficient knowledge of the linguistic organization of the target language. Additional factors include the translator's mother tongue interference and a lack of competency in the target language as noted in the studies of Cúc [7] and Utami [8]. People frequently possess mental models of how languages are organized. When they need to translate a text into another language, they attempt to utilize these models to create the text in that language. As a result of those factors, it is apparent that a lack of linguistic proficiency in the target language and interference of the mother tongue is scientifically proven as the primary causes of grammatical errors in translation.

2.2 Causes and Sources of Errors

According to Corder [9], he noted that errors in language production typically result from two main factors: interlingual and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors occur when a learner's native language knowledge partially or completely prevents them from picking up the patterns and rules of their second language (SL) or the target language (TL). Interference from the mother tongue (MTL) is a negative transfer affecting the performance of the target language (TL). Meanwhile, interlanguage occurs when learners incorrectly apply their understanding of TL principles and structures to new contexts, resulting in erroneous or poorly produced sentences. Despite belonging to different language families, Thai and English share some similarities. SVO - Subject, Verb, and Object is the simplest fundamental Thai and English sentence structure description. However, there are some differences between the Thai and English languages. The unmarking of verb tenses and noun plurals, for instance, can be occurred. Extra structural terms denote verb tenses and singular and plural word forms.

Additionally, Clewley, Jai-Ua and Golding [10] commented that inflection is not used in the Thai language. When working on a translated sentence, translators try to construct a proper sentence utilizing the grammatical knowledge they have acquired in both languages. Then, they must consider such analogies to put the words together appropriately. Thus, translators of Thai and English languages must comprehend these differences. It can be conclusive that the similarities and differences of the features of both languages come into play in translation.

2.3 Previous Related Research on Writing Errors

As mentioned in several studies, for example, Alcoy and Biel [11], Bennui [12], Foosuwan, Chumpavan and Suksaeresup [13], they gave the notice that grammatical errors in translation are frequently parallel to those in typical writing errors. Previous research has been carried out to investigate learners' written errors, and the researchers analyzed the errors from multiple perspectives. The investigations aimed to determine the student's writing errors and their potential causes. The findings were divided into subcategories and varied based on the frequency of errors concerning their native language, countries of origin, and the students' academic levels. Therefore, there are no fixed models to categorize writing errors. In line with the current study, Chan [14] attempted to identify structures and compared student errors to the attributes of their first languages (L1) to detect cross-linguistic impacts. The study discovered two primary

causes of the errors. The first factor was the L1 influence, as many students usually think in their first language before translating the text into the target language. The second factor was a need for more support in matching their mother tongue language with the target language. An example of a more relevant study was conducted in Thai context. Watcharapunyawong and Usaha [15] studied the writing errors of Thai EFL students in different text types. They found that the five most common grammatical errors in writing narrative genre included verb-tense, word-choice, phrase structure, preposition, and modal verbs. The five most common grammatical errors in writing comparative and descriptive genres were article, phrase structure, word choices, plural form, and subject-verb agreement. Notably, the effects of the writing error types can vary depending on different genres and settings. The present study was conducted to find grammatical errors that were frequently found in Thai to English-translation of Thai students in the Rajabhat University and to get more in-depth information lying behind the mistakes as the sources of the errors.

3. Research Methods

The study's objective was to explore grammatical errors in Thai to English translation of the participants and investigate the sources and causes of the errors.

3.1 Research Participants and Samples

The participants in this study consisted of the intact 34 sophomores enrolled in a Translation course at a Thai Rajabhat University in the second semester of 2022. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants from English Program in a Thai Rajabhat University. Since the study is focused on a specific area of a Rajabhat institution and only the English program offers the translation course. Therefore, only students from the program made up the group of the samples. This group had no prior background in the translation of Thai and English languages.

3.2 Research instruments

The source of the 990 errors-corpus was taken from three different sample tasks derived from in-class assignments, including one fictional text, one informative text, and one cultural text. Each text was approximately 100-120 words long. The assignments were translations of Thai to English, and the score was evaluated based on criteria of equivalent meaning, language accuracy, consistency, and naturalness overall. Grammatical errors were taken to be the focus of the study.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

For data collection and analysis, according to Corder [9], the error analysis framework was adapted as the following consecutive sequence: 1) data collection, 2) identification of errors, 3) description of errors, 4) explanation of errors, and 5) evaluation of errors.

3.3.1 Data collection of errors: To collect a corpus of translation works, the researcher asked participants to translate a text of 100-120-word length for each in-class assignment, including one fictional text, one informative text, and one cultural text. The time given was one hour for each work with one-week interval. The entire procedure lasted for three weeks.



3.3.2 Identification of errors: After gathering the translated works, the researcher examined the grammatical errors found in the incidental samples. Those errors were compared with the source texts first and then in each sentence. One frequency of each error was accounted as one occurrence or one individual student's grammatical error in the translation.

3.3.3 Description of errors: It entailed the attention paid to the surface properties of the students' translation works. It was the way to identify what errors were similar and which were different between both languages' structures. This process was necessary for putting those errors into categories. The taxonomy was adapted from Suksaeresup and Thep-Ackrapong [16], Muhammad et al. [17] and Haji Saad and Sawalmeh [20] which consisted of the main different syntactic patterns of grammatical errors. There were 19 emerging error categories for the analysis.

3.3.4 Explanation of errors: Analysis was conducted for a sought of the details or explanation of the sources of such the errors. It was carried out based on the distinction between interlingual and intralingual errors, where the former is the result of transfer from L1 interference, and the latter is the effect of overgeneralization within the target language. These factors are the most frequently used in the explanations in terms of the psycholinguistic sources of errors.

3.3.5 Evaluation of errors: After clarifying the factors affecting the errors, they were calculated and assessed as a whole for the student's future development. The total number was tallied to determine its frequency and percentage using the following formula:

$$\frac{E \times 100}{T}$$

E = Number of each type of translation errors

T = Total Number of all types of translation errors

In this process, the descriptions of the patterns, frequency, and error occurrences were assigned into proper error categories in form of tables. The finding data were finally provided for further discussion in the study.

4. Findings

The students' translated works were examined to get better understanding of the grammatical errors in Thai to English translation, and to identify each error type and frequency. As shown in Table 1, the frequency of errors was discovered in students' translated works, and the percentage of errors was also calculated. Adapted from previous studies such as those of Suksaeresup and Thep-Ackrapong [16], Muhammad et al. [17] and Haji Saad and Sawalmeh [18] and incorporating some others from the linguistic element, the 19 taxonomies in total were taken into this study.

Table 1 Percentage of syntactic errors of each category based on linguistic descriptions

Types of Errors	Frequency	Percentage
1. countability	164	16.57
2. tenses	141	14.24
3. articles/determiners	130	13.13
4. fragment	100	10.1
5. ellipsis	85	8.59
6. punctuations	83	8.38
7. preposition	55	5.56
8. transitions	43	4.34
9. word form	40	4.04
10. voice	37	3.74
11. singular/plural agreement	32	3.23
12. capitalization	30	3.03
13. subject and Verb agreement	26	2.63
14. parts of speech	11	1.11
15. pronoun references	5	0.51
16. serial verbs	4	0.4
17. word order	2	0.2
18. relative clauses	1	0.1
19. noun clauses	1	0.1
Total	990	100

As illustrated in Table 1, the results revealed that there were 990 error occurrences in the Thai to English translation works. The most frequently found and notable errors ranged from countability (16.57 %), tenses (14.24 %), articles/determiners (13.13 %), fragment (10.10%), ellipsis (8.59 %), punctuation (8.38 %), respectively. Descriptions and explanations were given to 6 most frequent and noteworthy categories as following details:

4.1 Countability: errors when counting mass, singular, and plural nouns. Thai nouns are always used as the single same forms with no countability rule in the language.

Table 2 Examples of countability errors

Source text	Student's translation	Correct Translation
พ่อของเธอชอบออกไป สังสรรค์กับเพื่อน	Her dad likes hanging out with his <u>friend</u> .	Her dad likes hanging out with his <u>friends</u> .
ซูหลิงได้ความรู้จากพ่อแม่ ของเธอ	Su Ling gained <u>knowledge</u> from her parents.	Su Ling gained <u>knowledge</u> from her parents.



The first example showed that the word "friends" in the translated sentence did not fall into a singularity category but rather a countable plurality according to the surrounding context. The error in the second example involved an uncountable noun rather than a countable noun.

4.2 Tenses: Another grammatical issue that students encountered was tense. In English, the idea of time is crucial. Depending on when the acts occurred, the verb forms would change. On the other hand, because Thai verbs have a similar form, the time has no effect on Thai grammar. As a result, students who do not pay careful attention or are unaware of these distinctions are more likely to make mistakes in their translation constructs.

Table 3 Examples of tense errors

Source text	Student's translation	Correct Translation
ตำรวจเดินทางมาถึงที่เกิดเหตุ	Police <u>arrive</u> at the crime scene.	Police <u>arrived</u> at the crime scene.
กฎจราจรช่วยป้องกันอุบัติเหตุและการเสียชีวิต	Traffic laws <u>prevent</u> serious accidents and death.	Traffic laws <u>prevent</u> serious vehicle accidents and death.

Table 3 illustrated how the errors occurred during a tense rule was applied. "Arrive" in the first example denoted a past event rather than the present. The second example showed "preventing" in the incorrect tense and form.

4.3 Articles/determiners: As presented in Table 1, there were article and determiner mistakes. Even though there were just three options: "a," "an," and "the," for the selection, the students had trouble with it. Because the students were confused about definite and non-definite nouns, they frequently made a mistake when deciding whether to use "a/an" or "the." Quantifiers were typically used in sentences in English.

Table 4 Examples of article and determiner errors

Source text	Student's translation	Correct Translation
เขาไม่เข้าใจว่าการแต่งงานจะเปลี่ยนชีวิตคน หนึ่งได้อย่างไร	He did not understand how <u>marriage</u> could change one's life.	He didn't understand how <u>a marriage</u> could change one's life.
ลูผลักซูหลิงลงบนโซฟา	Lu pushed Su Ling onto <u>the sofa</u> .	Lu pushed Su Ling onto <u>the sofa</u> .

The word "marriage" was missing an article in the first example, and the word "the" was missing from the noun sofa in the second example.

4.4 Fragment: An incomplete sentence is another error found in the students' translation. Either it was the subject or the main verb. Some sentence fragments were the consequence of straightforward errors or word omissions. Since the subject can be omitted in Thai, students tend to leave out the words resulting in incomplete sentences.

Table 5 Examples of fragment errors

Source text	Student's translation	Correct Translation
เขาเป็นเจ้านายที่ยอดเยี่ยมมาก	He <u>great.</u>	He was a <u>great boss.</u>
ซูหลิงตื่นเต้นดีใจที่รู้ว่าพ่อแม่ของเธอกลับมาอยู่ที่บ้าน	Su Ling was surprised. <u>To discover that her parents returned home.</u>	Su Ling <u>was surprised to discover that her parents returned home.</u>

The first example presented a sentence fragment because the verb had been absent from the sentence, and the second example illustrated the same problem. That made the two example sentences incompleting.

4.5 Ellipsis: In Thai, using an ellipsis or omitting a word is widespread and acceptable; however, it is incorrect in English. If the students do not notice or are aware of the difference, they frequently omitted grammatical words.

Table 6 Examples of ellipsis errors

Source text	Student's translation	Correct Translation
ถาดที่ลอยอยู่นั้นค่อย ๆ จมลงไปใต้น้ำจนกระทั่งมองไม่เห็น	The floating tray slowly sunk into the water, <u>and could not see.</u>	The floating tray is gradually sinking into the water <u>and disappears.</u>
เกิดอุบัติเหตุรถไฟพุ่งเข้าชนเครื่องกั้น	Train accident <u>hits barriers.</u>	There was a train accident. <u>The train hit the barrier.</u>

When the students translated Thai to English, the subjects were left out of the sentences in both examples as they attempted to imitate the same pattern of their native Thai structure. As a result, the sentences sounded confusing in English.

4.6 Punctuation: The use of punctuation is crucial when writing in English. Punctuation aids the reader's comprehension of the message in any piece of writing. Generally, it links the transition between one idea to the next for the readers. However, punctuation is challenging for Thai L2 learners since Thai and English were significantly different. The students needed not to use capitalization or punctuation when writing in Thai because neither is necessary (e.g., commas, question marks, or semicolons). Also, Thai sentences are split up by using spaces. Therefore, in Thai language, people less often uses punctuation.

Table 7 Examples of punctuation errors

Source text	Student's translation	Correct Translation
ฉันจะกลับบ้านซักพัก	I will go home for a while	I will go home for a while <u>.</u>
กระทงสามารถทำมาจากกะลามะพร้าว ดอกไม้และขนมปัง	Krathongs can be made from <u>coconut shells, flowers, and baked bread.</u>	Krathongs can be made of <u>coconut shells, flowers, and baked bread.</u>



In the first example, a period was missing. In the second, there was no comma after an appropriate list of words because period and comma punctuations are unnecessary in Thai language.

5. discussion

According to the research, most individual students needed to pay more attention to the translation notions, especially in regard to linguistic structures. In other words, they could not transmit meaning using the right form. The students tended to disregard the grammatical variations between the two languages. Therefore, when teaching English grammar, instructors should emphasize using the structures and give students more practice opportunities. Particularly, when it comes to Thai-to-English translation, which is harder, the students need to deal with the Thai text that they had to first understand before determining the best way to convey its meaning in English as equally and appropriately as possible.

The three rational justifications for the grammatical errors were remarkably comparable to the discoveries of numerous previous research in examining translation errors of Thai students. According to the ideas of O'Grady, Doborvsky, and Katamba [19], the first factor was mother tongue interference, which occurs when a second language learner transmits linguistic attributes from their first language to their second language. The results showed that most errors were interfered by the mother tongue's language structure. This direct transfer is inappropriate and easily leads to an error because the conceptual meaning and language structure of English and Thai are quite different. The second factor was that the students need to have more knowledge of the target language or more use of the target language beyond their level of proficiency as mentioned earlier by Corder [9]. Furthermore, the recent paralleled study conducted by Aini [20] also revealed several corresponding contributing factors to grammatical errors in the translation of L1 to L2, which included first-language influence and the structural differences between Indonesian (L1) and English (L2). The concept again was underpinned. Duklim [2] also found in her study about errors in translation of Thai students that when the two languages' structures diverge, students frequently choose to translate texts by using word-for-word or literal translation approach, based on their L1 knowledge. The incidental influence is considered as the most convenient and possible way for the Thai students. That results in common errors in their translation works.

Additionally, the Thai students found it challenging to acquire the intricate English grammatical structure due to their limited exposure to the target language. Sufficient exposure to the target language, including translation, is important to language learners. As Domingo [21] stressed on the correlation between students' English language proficiency and their exposure in his study, there is a substantial correlation between the students' linguistic proficiency and their exposure to target languages.

The third factor to be mentioned was the students' need for more knowledge of comparative views between these two languages. Because they cannot distinguish the differences, they cannot formulate sentences in the target language. Sentence construction in a target language always benefits from understanding differences and similarities in which the translator needed to conform to the rules they newly acquired.

6. Conclusion

With the growing significance of international languages and the rise of uses, a country like Thailand, where the official language is monolingual, is encountering intense language challenges. The study revealed the most common grammatical errors in translating Thai into English, including countability, tense, articles/determiners, fragment ellipsis, and punctuation. This phenomenon shows that Thai students have somehow interchanged the language structures between the two languages. The finding descriptions illustrate how the dynamic dimension of students' view on Thai and English language differences in terms of linguistic aspects. The researcher hopes that the paper will shed light for the beginners in translation journey before moving on to a higher level by escalating their grammatical skills. Moreover, the instructors could adopt a more effective teaching technique for a translation course to avoid common grammatical mistakes. All in all, the study can benefit teachers, lesson planners, and material developers in the preparation and instruction of translation lessons for Thai students.

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