The Investigation of Problems and Translation Strategies from Thai into English of Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University Students

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Abstract

The main objectives of this study were to explore the difficulties that SNRU students encountered when translating sentences and to examine the translation strategies they used when translating from Thai into English. Using the purposive sampling method, 74 SNRU students were chosen to participate in this study. These students were divided into three major disciplines of study: 32 B.E. students, 21 B.A. students, and 21 B.Ed. students. Semi-structured interview questions and a questionnaire were used to collect data. The questionnaire was used to examine quantitative data, which was then presented as percentages. Content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data which are collected from semi-structured interview. Three inter-raters were asked to verify data from the semi-structured interview. The findings showed that five types of translation issues were identified. Word choice problems were the most common, accounting for 30%, followed by grammatical issues at 24.75%. Rhetorical and cultural translation challenges were also frequently encountered, making up 17.36%. Pragmatic problems were the least frequent, representing 10.60% of the issues. In addition, the study identified several strategies used by participants to overcome translation challenges, some of which were innovative while others were familiar. In comparison to the other newly revealed strategies, the most common strategy was translating using internet resources.

Keywords: Translation strategies, Translation problems

Introduction

The significance of English in the 21st century cannot be overstated, as it serves as an essential tool of communication, exerting influence in various fields including career tasks, educational endeavors, public health initiatives, and beyond. In the study by Wankong (2016) highlights the significant influence that the English language has had on both Thai society and the broader global community. The indispensability of the English language is underscored by its widespread use in many forms of direct communication, Internet access, television, film, and academic computer applications. Lack of proficiency in English might result in major repercussions. For people, it can result in missed chances for career growth, restricted availability of educational materials, and difficulties in engaging in international communication (Crystal, 2003). The lack of English fluency in societies may hinder international cooperation, decrease competitiveness in global markets, and raise obstacles to accessing the extensive amount of information primarily available in English (Graddol, 2006). Thailand, as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), continues to align with the ASEAN charter, which designates English as the official working language, underscoring its critical importance. This commitment remains central to cooperation activities across ASEAN nations, particularly in facilitating effective communication in interactions with both public and private sectors (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021).

The necessity of translation courses is emphasized in the Ministry of Education's TQF1 and Bachelor's Degree Qualifications standards (2017), which support the inclusion of English in the curriculum. Translation courses play a vital role in improving the proficiency of students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The literature on translation pedagogy highlights the importance of teaching translation not only as a linguistic exercise but also as a skill that involves critical thinking and decision-making (Pym, 2012). Mathieu (2003) suggests that the process of translation entails making decisions that have the potential to modify the intended message of the text being translated. Consequently, it is essential to consult appropriate dictionaries and prioritize linguistic precision in order to achieve accurate translation. According to Newmark (1988), it is important to comprehend the writer's intention and choose appropriate words in order to maintain the intended meaning in the translated text.

The English language, due to its significance and impact, is pervasive in numerous aspects of existence, encompassing communication, professional advancement, and education. Sneddon (2003) underscores the significance of language within the context of international relations, highlighting its pervasive influence in significant organizations such as educational institutions. The integration of English language usage into everyday activities as a major component of educational instruction highlights the importance of comprehending various socio-cultural settings within each linguistic framework. As for the challenges associated to translating English to Thai and Thai to English among students at Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University, they still remain, as can be noticed and quantified in translation classes. However, no statistical investigation has been undertaken to identify these specific difficulties. Therefore, this study examines problems and strategies in translation at the sentence level by Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University (SNRU) students. Given that this study reveals the inherent content with which students struggle, it is likely to have a positive impact on translation as well. By identifying these challenges, the study will help educators and course designers create more effective translation courses, ultimately enhancing students' translation skills and their understanding of the complexities involved in translating between Thai and English.

Research objectives

The two main research objectives of this study are:

1. To explore the difficulties that SNRU students encountered when translating sentences.

2. To examine the translation strategies they used when translating from Thai into English.

Literature Review

1. Translation Problems

Translation as previously established is the transfer of ideas from the source language to the target language, not the modification of the text's substance or intentions. Moreover, translation, like any other English skill, primarily addresses issues arising from translation, such as discrepancies between the translated work and the original language text. Furthermore, the study of Napu and Hansan (2019) studied about translation problems according to the research questions, "What are the translation problems made by students of the English department in translating academic essays? by examining the ten essay translations, argumentative essay, comparison and contrast with Mathieu's (2003) theory which consisted of several translations problems themselves," this study aimed to investigate the students of translation class problems in translating academic essays and the causal factors of the translations problems themselves. Furthermore, the research revealed that grammatical issues were the most commonly detected problems in the work of translation students. The both in argumentative, comparison and contrast essays. Importantly, this research will focus on the outcome of short story translations performed by SNRU EFL students who have taken translation classes and have prior translation expertise. The aim of the study was to examine the issues they encountered and the solutions they came up with. Therefore, the further explanation information of the translation problems was found in the research study (Napu & Hansan (2019); Mathieu (2003)), the problems stated earlier are as follows:

1) Word-choice problem

During translation, the word-choice problem, also known as lexical choice, was always present. Word-by-word translations can yield diverse interpretations. The lexical choices made by translators are impacted by the meaning of the target text.

2) Grammatical problem

Translators cannot ignore the topic of grammatical features in translation. When translating the source text, many translators try to adapt the grammatical structure of the target text without changing the content or intent of the source. Despite translating the content into their first languages, readers will still enjoy the original text.

3) Rhetorical problems

The translator's failure to interpret the figurative language in the source-language text is known as a rhetorical difficulty in translation. It leads to incorrect translations of figurative words and sentences. This results in the loss of figurative words and sentences during translation into the target language.

4) Pragmatic problems

Pragmatics in translation refers to the process by which translators interpret the meaning of a source language text before translating it into the target language. In addition, pragmatic issues arise when translators fail to convey the intended meaning of the source language text to the target language.

5) Cultural issues

Mathieu (2003) defined cultural problems as "questions that deal with the contrasts of cultural background between two countries, values, and ideological views." Cultural references such as foods and festival cultural implications may be difficult to translate into the target

language. Therefore, translators need to explore methods for transforming the meaning or intent of the source language into the target language, and effectively translate texts that incorporate various cultural terms. Moreover, the translator must be aware of the target reader's culture, as target readers will comprehend it if the translator can adapt it into a close equivalent.

To summarize, all of the aforementioned translation issues, this study concludes that translators must be aware of the significance of carefully selecting words from the dictionary, as most of the issues mentioned above involve lexical uncertainty, where words have various meanings. Also, a specific discourse context will enable proper comprehension of the words. Another important factor is grammatical structure, as we all know that the source and target texts have various sentence structure norms.

2. Translation Strategies

The purpose of this study was to investigate translation issues and examine SNRU EFL students' translation tactics based on their Thai-English translation practices. As a result, other academics have conducted studies on translation efforts, such as Chanthong & Kaowiwattanakul (2024), who employed in translating English idioms in the subtitles of TV series 'Riverdale' into Thai. Altogether, 510 idioms were examined using Baker's taxonomy. The eight translation strategies of Baker (1992) they are follows:

1) Translation by a more general word (superordinate), this method is used to deal with the target language's lack of specificity in comparison to the source language.

2) Translation by using a word that is more neutral or less expressive, this approach is used when there is no equivalent in the target text. Replace the source content with a near-equivalent in the target language. This alternative is less expressive and more formal.

3) Translation by cultural substitution as a strategy of translation If we provide unusual information, readers may not understand the concepts of another culture. When the source culture is too complex to understand, and the translators want their readers to understand it easily, they can choose a concept from the target culture that the readers are familiar with.

4) Translation by using a loan word or a loan word plus explanation as a translation When translating a culture-related material and finding an equivalent is difficult. However, in other cases, clarification of the loan word is required to ensure that the readers fully comprehend its meaning.

5) Using a closely related word as a paraphrase, when the idea in the source item helps in understanding the target language, but in a different form, this method is applied (Baker, 1992). Translators utilize related words to express the same idea in the target language, but if there is no equivalent, they may have to use other words or structures.

6) Translation by paraphrase and using words that aren't connected to each other can make a translation that when the source item's semantic complexity prevents it from being lexicalized in the target language, this method is applied. Instead, the translator uses a broader word that is unrelated to the source item.

7) Translation by omission, also because the length of explanation may confuse readers, translators may remove some words or expressions if the meaning supplied by a particular item or term is not important or unnecessary to the development of the text.

8) Translators use illustration as a method of translation. When there are limitations in translation or no equivalent in the target language, translators utilize the illustration technique.

Baker's (1992) eight approaches are also recommended for translators to use in order to produce high-quality work for their audiences. The researcher used these strategies to analyse the data for this study. Another linguist, Boonyasaquan (2006) proposes the following translation strategies: Ignorance and avoidance. When a translator is translating a text and does not know the equivalent in the target language, they will choose a first-language substitute. Errors may occur during the translation of the first language due to the translator's ignorance.

If a translator cannot discover a first-language equivalent for a lexical item, he or she will use another word instead of translating it.

In the meantime, Farghal & Obiedat (1995), and Huang (2001) suggest translation strategies. Boonyasaquan (2006) quoted them, as do many other researchers.

1) Synonymy: When a translator does not know the equivalent, this strategy refers to using a word or phrase that has the same or almost the same meaning as another word or phrase.

2) Avoidance: When translators are unable to understand the meaning of lexical items in the target language, they employ this strategy.

3) Transfer: This strategy assumes a one-to-one relationship between the first and target languages. The target language utilizes this assumption.

4) Paraphrasing: This strategy dedicates itself to providing a definition for a word, phrase, or explanation using various words to clarify the original meaning. Translators sometimes use this strategy when they are unfamiliar with the equivalent concept in the target language.

Finally, there are a variety of translation strategies. The translators can choose the best translation technique. This, of course, is dependent on the source text and the issues at stake. Undoubtedly, translators employ multiple techniques to produce high-quality translated works. Therefore, this study will showcase the various strategies that SNRU EFL students have been using in their classes and practice sessions. Furthermore, they may employ other strategies that are not discussed in this paper, or alternative translation strategies.

Research Conceptual Framework

This exploration is essential to understand the specific difficulties students encounter during the translation process. The primary objective highlighted in the framework is to utilize the research findings to inform and enhance the planning and creation of translation instruction. This is aimed at overcoming the identified challenges, ultimately leading to more effective and contextually appropriate translation courses that can better prepare students for the complexities of translating between Thai and English. To completely understand this study, Figure 1. represents the concept through this conceptual framework.
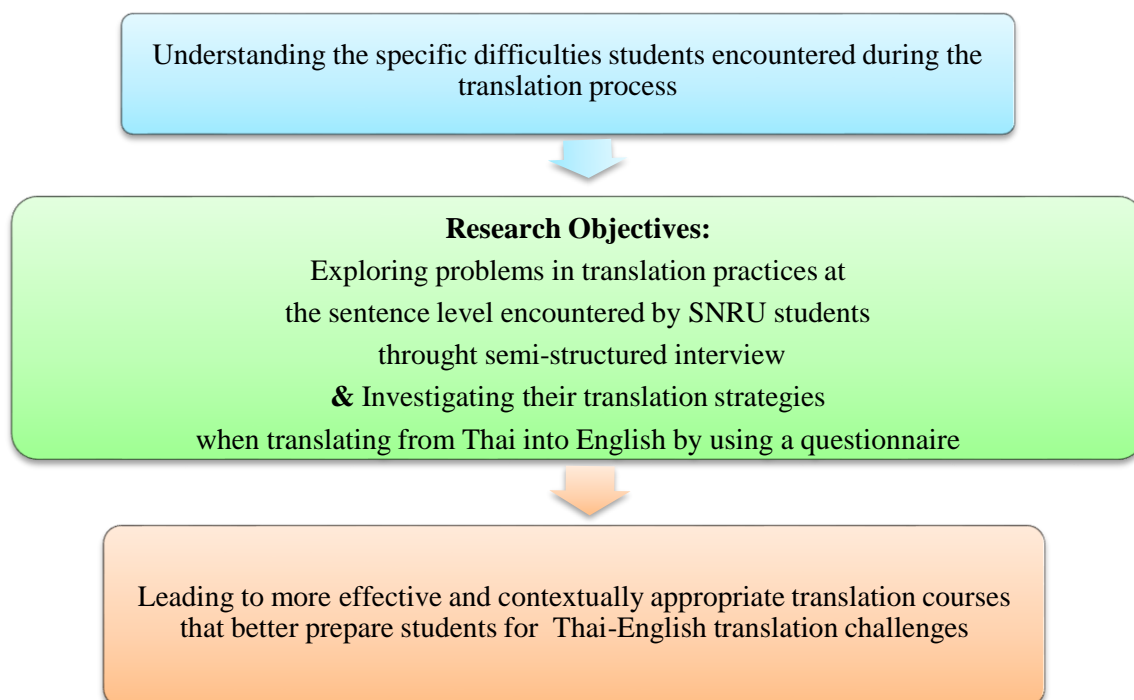

Understanding the specific difficulties students encountered during the translation process

Research Objectives:
Exploring problems in translation practices at
the sentence level encountered by SNRU students
throught semi-structured interview
& Investigating their translation strategies
when translating from Thai into English by using a questionnaire

Leading to more effective and contextually appropriate translation courses that better prepare students for Thai-English translation challenges

Figure 1 Research conceptual framework of the study (Researchers, 2023)

Methodology

The methodology of the research consists of four main aspects for selecting and gathering information: the samples, research instruments, data collection, and data analysis. The method to select the sample for this current study is presented as follows:

1. Population

The research population is SNRU students who are studying in the faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, and faculty of Education. They enrolled in the translation course from Thai to English in the academic year 2019–2020, and they also had experience translating messages from Thai to English. According to the setting of the population that was mentioned earlier, the total population is 255 students.

2. Sample

The sample of this current study was selected by using the purposive sampling method. The size of the sample is calculated based on the formula of Dr. Anuwat Koonkaew (Koonkaew, 2019). As a result, the sample from the English for Business Communication (B.E.) program is 32 students, the sample from the English (B.A.) program is 21 students, and the sample from the Education Program in Special Education and English (B. Ed.) is 21 students.

3. Research Instruments

The research instrument for this current study is classified into two main sets, there are questionnaires to collect quantitative data and semi-structured interview questions to gather qualitative data. The instruments in this current study are divided as follows:

3.1 Questionnaire

The first set of research instrument is a questionnaire that is utilized for collecting quantitative data. It is used to collect demographic information of informants and strategies they apply to solve the problems facilitating their translation. There are 4 opened-ended questions, which relates to strategies during their translation practice. This questionnaire is applied to response to research purpose no. 2.

3.2 The semi-structured interview questions

The second set is semi-structured interview questions that are utilized to collect information for qualitative data, it is utilized to response to research objective no. 1. This instrument is aimed to interview by using open-ended questions for confirming their answers that were gained from the questionnaire, the experience in translation from Thai to English including problems of the informants faced in their practices. There were 4 questions that address problems encountered in translation.

The research instrument used for collecting the data is as mentioned earlier. The questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions were validated by three experts through using the index of item objective congruence or IOC (Laksana, 2016). The IOC value of questionnaires and semi-structured interview questions were 0.915 and 1 respectively.

4. Data Collection

The data collection process in this study was divided into two separate phases, employing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The initial phase involved the presentation of the qualitative data collecting. The explanation of the quantitative data gathering was provided during the second phase. The explanation of the complete data collection process was provided as follows:

The first phase of the data collection

The data qualitative collection is the first phase in which semi-structured interview questions were used to collect the data. This data collection is gathering the data from the sample by interviewing about their translation practice which are the qualitative data from an open-ended questions interview. The informants were asked their permission for a recording before starting the interview. In the primary interview, the informants or the sample were interviewed about demographic information, their experiences including the level of translation work they ever translated, especially translation from Thai to English. Next, the sample were asked about the problems that they faced during their translation, it was an essential point according to the purpose of the current study.

The second phase of the data collection

Quantitative data collection was used to collect the data in the second phase which is the questionnaire, the sample questions in the questionnaire were explained to the informants. This component contains questions in questionnaires related to informant demographics.

The questionnaire was used to collect data in the second phase to back up the qualitative data.

5. Data Analysis

The analysis of the present study is classified into two parts, which consist of the data analysis for quantitative information and the data analysis for qualitative information. The data analysis is as follows:

5.1 Data analysis for quantitative information

To response to research objective no.2, the quantitative information was collected by using the questionnaire which is stated to the translation strategies. The data were analyzed and presented the data in the form of percentage. In addition, the form of percentage was shown from the highest percentage to the lowest percentage, it shows the percent of strategies that the informants applied. Further, the standard statistical formula for quantitative data analysis was percentage.

5.2 Data analysis for qualitative data

To response to research objective no.1, the part of data analysis for qualitative data was explored by using semi-structured interview questions that were clarified in the form of content analysis. The interview data from semi-structured interview questions were identified in content analysis. Three inter-raters were asked to verify data from the semi-structured interview. For this reason, the coding of the data in the form of content analysis was numerous used in qualitative research. Further, the content analysis was coded from the interview information. The purpose of the content analysis is to transform the data into extremely organized and compacted information. The raw data analysis, which included word-by-word coding of data from interviews, resulted in the creation of categories and themes, which were used to extract further information at each step of the analysis: from the literal meaning to the latent meaning or from lower level to higher level (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). The component of data analysis includes the step of the content analysis, they were detected using the concept of Erlingsson & Brysiewicz (2017), the step of the content analysis is presented as follows;

- The meaning unit is the raw data or the literal meaning of the interview information.
- The condensed meaning unit step is about selecting only essential keywords from the step of the meaning unit.
- Code is the third step for interpreting the meaning of all keywords from the step of the condensed meaning unit.
- The category is the fourth step of the group all lists from the first-three steps before, in terms of the similarity or difference of the text were together including the problems and the strategies that are obviously seen in the data.

- The theme is the last step. It is the summary of all steps mentioned earlier, shown in the data at the analysis level, it is a theme to lead purpose for analysis, including shows theme is the problems or the strategies that are analyzed which is the main goal of the current study.

All in all, the code grouping depends on the aim of the study which was the theme of this current study, to explore the translation problems and to study the translation strategies of SNRU students as they were the informants of this present study.

Results

The data were analyzed and presented in two different sets. The first set is presented for qualitative data by using the method of content analysis, which is based on the theory of Erlingsson & Brysiewicz (2017). The data from the interview was analyzed as qualitative data in the form of tables. The second set is quantitative data. The standard statistical formula, like percentage, is used for quantitative data analysis. The results were presented in response to the research objective as follows:

The results in response to the research objective 1: The findings identified problems in translation practice at the sentence level of SNRU students. Whether they ever enrolled in a translation course or had any experience in translating, they were still facing problems in translation. The findings revealed that there were five translation issues, with word choice issues being the most prevalent (30%) and grammatical issues coming in second (24.75%). Translation problems about rhetorical problems and cultural issues were found to be frequently faced (17.36%). The pragmatic problems were found to be the last problems (10.60%), respectively.
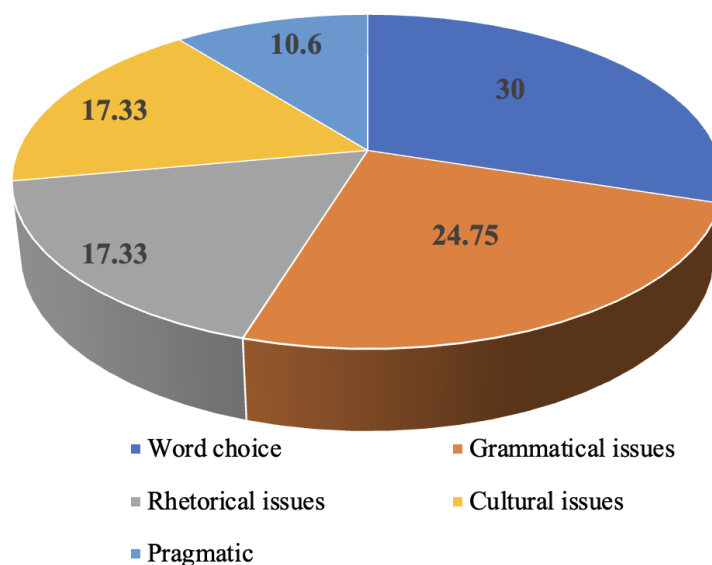

Figure 2 The results of translation problems encountered by SNRU students
(Researchers, 2023)

The research results presented as percentages above were obtained through content analysis, where the frequency of themes was counted to display the results as percentages. A sample steps of content analysis is shown in the following table.

Table 1 One sample of the grammatical problem of the informant

Overarching theme: The most problem of SNRU students faced while they were translating.

Step of Content Analysis	Meanings
Theme	The most problem faced while translating
Category	faced grammatical problems in translation
Code	Grammatical problem
Condensed meaning units	grammatical problem, translate from English to Thai and vice versa, use of grammar may not be 100% accurate
Meaning unit	When I was studying translation, I encountered a grammatical problem. I need to translate from English to Thai and vice versa. The use of grammar may not be 100% accurate.

Source: Erlingsson & Brysiewicz (2017)

Table 1 shows one sample of the problem of B.Ed. student. The informant expressed confusion regarding the grammatical structure of the text. Therefore, it is interpreted his/her problem as grammatical problem.

The results in response to the research objective 2: The second objective was to study the translation strategies of SNRU students. The results addressing this objective were obtained from interview data and can be presented in two main categories: findings related to translation strategies based on translation theories and the translation techniques used by the target group during their translation process. The study's findings are as follows:

The findings related to translation strategies based on translation theories

The findings showed that the most frequently used strategy was finding synonymy (20.04%), followed by surfing the internet (19.00%), then consulting an expert (17.36%). The context clues were surveyed before translating (9.48%); this strategy was frequently used. Utilizing the application (8.93%) was almost as common as using the back translation (8.43%) and then using the omission translation (7.34%). Then, the use of translation by loan word or loan word plus explanation (4.16%) or using a dictionary was rarely used (2.63%).

The translation techniques used by the target group

The rest were translated by using more neutral or less expressive words (1.59%). The last, ignorance and avoidance were barely used (1.04%), respectively.
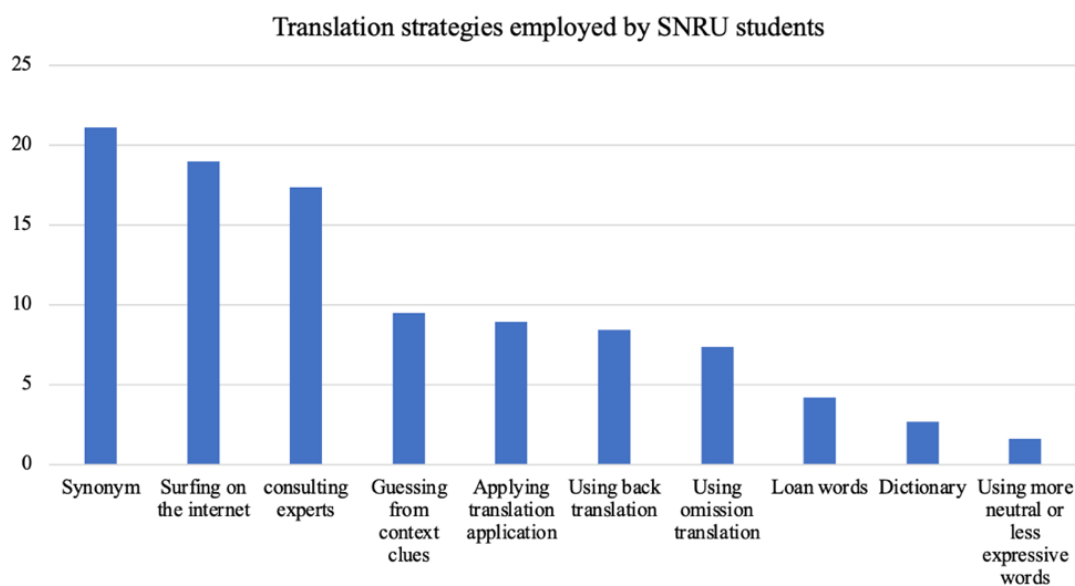
Translation strategies employed by SNRU students

Figure 3 The results of translation strategies employed by SNRU students
(Researchers, 2023)

Discussions

The findings revealed that the SNRU students faced five significant issues in their translation practice, which persisted despite their prior translation experience or enrollment in a translation course. This suggests that translation challenges are complex and require more than just instructional exposure to overcome. The prevalence of word-choice issues (30%) highlights the inherent difficulties in selecting the correct meaning among multiple possibilities, a problem noted in recent translation studies as a key challenge for non-native speakers (Laviosa, 2014). This issue is exacerbated when the vocabulary in the source language has multiple meanings in the target language, leading to confusion and potential inaccuracies in translation (Mellinger &Thomas, 2017). The grammatical issues encountered by students, which were the second most common at 24.75%, underscore the importance of grammatical competence in translation. Similar to the findings of Napu & Hasan (2019), grammatical errors are a significant challenge for EFL learners, which can compromise the accuracy of the translated text. Rhetorical and cultural problems, which accounted for 17.36% of the issues, indicate the difficulty in preserving the original text's intent and cultural nuances during translation. This is supported by House (2014), who argues that effective translation requires not only linguistic competence but also a deep understanding of the cultural context in which the source text was produced. The pragmatic problems, which were the least frequent at 10.60%, nonetheless highlight the complexity of translating language that carries implicit meanings or requires context-specific knowledge. When it comes to addressing these translation challenges, the study found that SNRU students employed a variety of strategies. The most frequently used strategy was finding synonymy (20.04%), followed closely by surfing the internet (19.00%) and consulting an expert (17.36%). This suggests that students often rely on external resources and peer consultation to overcome translation difficulties, which aligns with the findings of Kiraly (2014), who emphasized the collaborative nature of the translation process in educational settings. The diversity in the strategies employed by students, as revealed by this study, reflects the adaptive nature of translation practice. As observed by Baker (1992), translation is not a one-size-fits-all process, but rather a dynamic activity that requires translators to use a range of strategies depending on the specific

challenges they encounter. The findings of this study are also in line with those of Junining & Kusuma (2020), who found that students used multiple strategies from Baker's taxonomy when translating news stories, indicating the need for flexible and context‑sensitive approaches in translation education. Overall, the results of this study underscore the importance of incorporating strategic competence into translation instruction. By understanding the specific challenges that students face and the strategies they employ, educators can develop more targeted instructional methods that address these challenges and enhance the overall effectiveness of translation courses.

Conclusion and suggestions

In conclusion, the translation problems and translation strategies in translations of SNRU students as they were the samples in this current study, still found the problems, namely word‑choice problems, grammatical problems, rhetorical problems, cultural problems, and pragmatic problems respectively. In addition, the presented study explored the strategies of the samples earlier. The result of translation strategies showed that finding synonym strategy is a major strategy, followed by surfing the internet, consulting the expert, context clues surveyed, using applications, back translation, omission, loan word or loan word plus explanation, dictionary source, a more neutral/less expressive word, and ignorance and avoidance strategy. Those results were the strategies that the sample used to solve the problems in translation.

The suggestions were clarified for people or readers who are interested in researching translation challenges. In addition, further study is suggested about the problems that were found based on this current research including, the solving problem tactics or strategies. The following are some suggestions from the researcher for those who are interested:

1. The first suggestion is about studying at other levels such as paragraph‑level and essay level.

2. The second suggestion is about suggestions to use technology to facilitate their translation practice.

New knowledge and the effects on society and communities

This current study's results indicated that the students from SNRU, who served as the participants in this investigation, encountered the five aforementioned challenges discussed earlier. Despite their prior knowledge of translation or enrollment in a translation course, individuals nevertheless encountered difficulties throughout their translation practice. The identification of translation problems varied among informants, based on their individual translation efforts. Moreover, in the context of this study, the translators, serving as the primary sources of information, possessed various approaches or strategies to address the problems encountered during the translation process. The present study examined the translation strategies employed by the informants, based on several approaches for addressing translation challenges. The utilization of translation techniques showed variations, with the specific selection of strategies depending on the informants' employed approaches for problem-solving, which were seen to be both diverse and interconnected. For the contribution from this study, the findings of this study will provide vital information for teachers of translation studies to use as a guide for improving the efficiency of translation teaching techniques, particularly in translating from Thai to English. In addition, the findings of this research will aid students who are learning English as a foreign language since they will improve these students' understanding of various translation strategies and contribute to the implementation of these strategies in the students' future translation practices.

Acknowledgments

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Appendices
Appendix 1: List of questions in the questionnaire & Semi-structured interview
Questions about translation problems and strategies
1. Have you had experience translating from Thai to English?
2. Do you have any experience translating Thai to English? At what level have you translated example phrases, words, sentences, paragraphs, and essays?
3. Did you encounter any problems in translation? What is the problem (if you don't have permission to use the translation application)?
4. How do you deal with problems in translation?

** All of the questions in the questionnaire are utilized to interview for confirming the informants' answers about their experiences in translation from Thai to English, including problems the informants faced in their practices**.**