

# Towards the Study of Political Text and Translation in Thailand: A Case Study of Thai Translations of Biden's Inaugural Address

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Article information	Abstract
<b>Article history:</b> Received: 20 May 2021 Accepted: 4 Jan 2022 Available online: 21 Jan 2022	<i>The existing literature concerning the translation of political discourse in Thailand remains limited. To encourage more research in this area, this paper proposes a model for analysing the translation of political texts in the Thai context. Drawing upon Munday's (2012, 2018) appraisal approach to translation and Schäffner's (2004, 2012) analysis of the political context around translation, this paper offers a two-level methodology for investigating the Thai-English and English-Thai translation of political texts. The case of US President Biden's 2021 inaugural address was chosen for testing the model. The findings reveal that the two Thai news agencies translated only some parts of the speech, resulting in a selective re-presentation of Biden's political discourse. The ideological presentations of the two Thai versions are strikingly different: one representing a faithful portrayal of the original standpoint and the other with a stronger attitude in numerous ideology-laden terms. This paper also discusses the epitextual and contextual elements of the translations in question.</i>
<b>Keywords:</b> Appraisal Discourse analysis Inaugural speech Political text Translation	

## INTRODUCTION

### Political text and translation

Political text is a blanket term covering a wide range of genres and text types. It is a component of politics and serves a variety of political roles for various political activities. As Chilton (2004, p. 23) points out, it is also a part of the legitimization process in which political speakers/writers invest their authority and truth to entail the persuasive power of their outlook on certain issues. Such texts include international treaties, politicians' speeches, editorials and news commentaries.

Many translation studies scholars have delved into this text type in relation to target cultures in which the translated text operates. Newmark's (1991) cultural-specific features, Snell-Hornby's (1988) context-based analysis, and Trosborg's (1997) hybrid nature of political texts have long shown that such specific characteristics of political texts can contribute to a mismatch of personal or even ideological viewpoints in translation. In a similar vein, Schäffner (2004,

p. 138) opines that since political discourse is basically meant to function within the source culture, its function towards the target audience is subject to change. Thus, it does not need to conform to the text-typological conventions of the target culture, except for those form-specific texts such as legal treaties.

More recent studies employing discourse and register approaches in analysing political texts have begun to focus on the role of the translator as someone who intervenes in the source text, revealing their own views through the use of evaluative language. Munday (2012, 2018) studied the translations of President Obama's and President Trump's inaugural speeches by applying appraisal theory to gain an insight into the projection of value in the source text. The first study found that Obama's speech was full of lexical expressions of judgement, but in many translated versions, these patterns were distorted. He also found that the target language choices of pronouns 'we' and 'you' in Obama's speech were crucial, especially when they were translated into Asian languages that have multiple terms for 'we' (inclusive and exclusive sense) and 'you' (indicating formality and social status) (Munday, 2012, p. 74). In Trump's case, the findings revealed a small number of shifts in attitude and graduation, but shifts in pronouns were more frequent, resulting in the speaker's different dietic positions in the translation (Munday, 2018, p. 191).

As for political texts translated to/from Asian languages, Joz et al. (2014) investigated the translation strategies used in subtitling the English version of Iranian President Ahmadinejad's speech. Their results revealed the subtitler's manipulation of various ideological-loaded terms, resulting in mitigation of the profoundly religious implications in the original. Aslani and Salmani (2015) analysed news about Syrian President al-Assad from respected English news agencies and their Persian translations and found that power relations and the ideological stance of the agencies highly impacted the process of news translation, which resulted in the production of biased translations of that news. Lulu (2015) studied the translations of international news for the online Arabic newspaper and found that the most commonly used translation techniques for these political texts are alteration and subtraction. This reflects the translator's interventionist approach at the grammatical level. The researchers of the above studies were interested in the interrelation between political texts in the source culture and their translated versions, highlighting how the translation had been modified to accommodate the textual expectations of the target audience.

### **Translation of ideology vs ideology of translation**

One of the concepts relating to political discourse is ideology. Van Dijk (2011, p. 380) defines ideology as the basic beliefs sustaining the social representation of a particular group in society. It can safeguard the social status of a certain social group by fortifying the representation of that group against others. Another scholar who brings together the concepts of ideology and discourse is Fairclough (2003, 2015). In his opinion, ideology concerns itself largely with 'common sense', or when people in a society accept a certain thing as it is without raising any doubt about its existence. 'Common sense' can arise when the coherence of discourse production and the processes of discourse interpretation are achieved. When the construction of ideological assumptions in the text becomes more and more coherent, people will likely accept them as

common sense. The operation of ideology is a way to construct texts by selling certain assumptions constantly and cumulatively through text producers. Ideology attains its opaqueness by assimilating itself into social practices by means of language use, or by the way text producers portray their world and the way readers make sense of the text according to their own worldviews (Fairclough, 2003, p. 106).

In their influential book, *The translator as communicator*, Hatim and Mason (1997) make a distinction between the ideology of translation and the translation of ideology. The ideology of translation refers to those studies that found translation choices orientating towards either readership or the individual voice of text producers. These translation choices or selected strategies are, to certain a degree, ideological. Translation is therefore an ideological activity in itself (Hatim & Mason, 1997, p. 145). The translation of ideology, in contrast, concerns itself with studies explaining how and why the ideology in the original text is transferred into or variegated in other languages. Hatim and Mason (1997, p. 147) posit that the translator would translate the source text through their 'filter', or their own ideology. This can be called translator's 'mediation' in which his/her beliefs and value-systems are absorbed in different degrees into the target text, even misrepresenting the ideology of the source discourse in the process.

The twin concepts of ideology and translation were systematically discussed by Lefevere (2016), who argues that translation is a form of rewriting. A translator can manipulate the original as a way to inform his/her own ideological standpoint. Expanding beyond the scope of the traditional notion of translation, rewriting has many types, including historiography, anthologisation, criticism, and editing. These text-manipulative activities are part of the concept of a literary system, which is conditioned by two main factors: (i) *professionals* - those who operate within the system and partly regulate the poetics (or an inventory of literary devices and a concept of literature); and (ii) *patronage* - those who manage outside the system and partly govern the ideology. Patronage (either individuals or groups) can impede or facilitate the process of writing (and rewriting) with three elements of their power (Lefevere, 2016, pp. 13-15): (a) ideological component relating to acts that control the options of literary forms and subject matter; (b) economic component relating to rewards available to (re)writers, literary critics, or academics; and, (c) status component relating to the integration of (re)writers into the literary system of the reputable circle of professionals.

Another important study was conducted by Munday (2007), who examined how a translator's ideology is transferred to the translations of political utterances/writings of Latin American leaders. His textual analysis revealed that any specific ideology can be inferred by the way the translator renames social actors in the speaker's or writer's texts, thus exposing the translator's personal worldview. This act of translator intervention incurs shifts in translation; some possibly motivated by the translator's own ideological stance, while others might arise from the translator's insufficient knowledge of both languages (Munday, 2007, pp. 198-199). Munday (2012, p. 20) points out in his later work that the intervention is evaluative in itself and indicative of both conscious and subconscious choices made by the translators.

Exploring the translation of news relating to North Korea, Kang (2007, pp. 237-238) found that recontextualisation is the prime technique the news agency translators employed to re-present

the news from a different perspective. Her study regards translator intervention as ‘collective effort’ in which the editorial teams blended their voices to undermine the original Korean news and occasionally to mute it entirely. These collective interventions, e.g. editing, revising, and rewriting (cf. Lefevere, 2016), become part of the institutional routine, suggesting that certain news translations tend to be oriented towards the publisher’s preferred voice and ideological standpoint.

All the above researchers agree that translation is the outcome of the translator’s conscious or subconscious intervention. Taking Lefevere’s translation as rewriting and Kang’s re-contextualisation into consideration, we can link their concepts to institutional translation. A number of translation scholars share the assumption that translation is a socially situated practice. One of them is Mossop (1990), who maintains that, in a broader sense, institutions can include corporations, governments, or even churches. Translation fundamentally results from institutional decisions in which certain projects can be ‘pre-determined’ by the goals and missions of the institution to which the translator belongs. The translator is therefore considered an agent of that particular institution (Mossop, 1990, pp. 343, 351). Another scholar who has contributed to the notion of institution and translation is Koskinen (2008). Studying the process of translation in the European Union, she dubs institutional translation ‘autotranslation’, whereby translation is employed by an official body as a means of informing the public. The voice in the translation, therefore, reflects the original ideas of that institution, particularly the European Union, which relies on translation to effectively function in such a multilingual context (Koskinen, 2008, p. 22).

All these studies highlight the salient characteristics of translation under patrons or commissioners. In order to attain their goals, the institution as a governing body is likely to assign particular translation techniques to translators who work for them. It seems that the political agendas and preferred values of those who commission a given translation project inevitably ‘shine through’ in the final translated texts, leaving a trace of institutional directionality and often the translator’s own ideological intervention.

### **Translator’s ideology**

A translation studies researcher can investigate the concept of ideology at the individual level. There are numerous ways to interpret and explain a translator’s ideology by comparing translation phenomena with the translator’s own perspective. Two interrelated ideas are the interpretation of the translator’s reading position of the source text and their evaluation shown in the target text.

Drawing upon the tripartite reading position of Martin and White (2005, p. 206), Munday (2012, p. 158) discusses the translator’s possible responses to a source text: (1) compliance with the text by re-presenting the source ideology, (2) resistance by opposing it, and (3) tactical position by avoiding repositioning of the audience in relation to the writer/speaker. Another concurring process is the translator’s evaluation as to what choice (e.g. lexis, syntax, structure) is appropriate in the target language. As Munday (2012, p. 155) points out, behind every discourse is the process of evaluation, precisely because (a) lexis cannot be regarded as an

isolated item, but intertextually imbued with a meaning greater than its referential sense, and (b) a choice can be made from a range of possible equivalents. A preferred equivalent, therefore, reflects the translator's decision-making – a refining process that brings about the selection of a certain equivalent.

Considering the Thai context, we can see that there are a small number of studies on translation concerning ideology (of both institution and translator). One of these is the study of Chittiphalangsri (2015), who challenged the historiography of Thai literature by looking at the irony that echoes from the translation's paratext.<sup>1</sup> Using Theo Hermans's (2006) concept of irony's echo to study the Thai translator's negative positioning in two classic translations, she found that both translations are a form of quotation. By stating clearly in the preface and blurb that the reader should not take the writer's narrative seriously, the translators strategically avoided direct responsibility for his work. One study on feminist ideology in translation that advances the translator's position in dealing with political correctness is that of Rattanakantadilok (2017). Applying the French and English translation approaches of Sherry Simon (1996) and Luise von Flotow (1997) to the Thai context, she has proposed feminist translation strategies for translation from the Western languages into Thai and argues that Thai translators should experiment with their work in order to deconstruct conventional language use that is loaded with misogynistic viewpoints. Another study on ideology in translation at the socio-cultural level was conducted by Techawongstien (2017). By analysing translation flows in Thai literature, she diagnosed the Thai literary system and its relationship to the world translation market. She argues that Thai literature with socio-politically committed themes tends to be sanctioned by groups of authority, which confirms the positions of certain translation agents in the Thai social milieu. Her research, to a certain extent, embodies the institutional ideology as imposed by the patronage (Lefevere's term) among Thai translators, especially concerning the selection of books to be translated and the translator's submissive stance.

The above studies, albeit few, demonstrate that the issue of ideology and translation has begun to gain ground among Thai academics. However, some other topics directly showing the translator's intervention in the text as conditioned by the socio-political context have not yet been well explored. The existing literature on ideology and translation in Thailand seems to be separated between textual and contextual analyses. The author of this paper asserts that although translation studies have long focused on cultural and sociological aspects of translation, empirical linguistic evidence remains essential to prove the researcher's argument when studying translation at the contextual level. It is precisely because such evidence can serve as a basic understanding and explication of language used in real-life situations. It reflects both the text producer's and translator's attitude and worldview, which, when displayed through discourse features, can help indicate the meaningful relationship between the text written/translated and its context in different cultures. Another area where Thai research falls short is a close examination of political text (particularly that generated by institutions) and its translation. Only Phanthaphoommee's (2019, 2021a) studies on the generic structure and translation of the weekly Thai prime ministerial address appear to exist. Therefore, it is

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<sup>1</sup> Paratext is a text surrounding the book (preface, footnotes, cover, blurb), excluding the actual translated narrative. It makes prominent the translator's voice to the reader. See also Genette (1997).

appropriate to offer a model for investigating the political text in translation from English into Thai and Thai into English, which hopefully can be applied to different language pairs comprising Thai and other languages.

### **Political translation analysis in the Thai context**

How can we gauge one's ideological intervention, and what exactly is the translator's 'trace' that we discussed earlier? This paper aims to develop a suitable model for analysing translation and the translator's ideological standpoint vis-à-vis political text in the Thai context. The author considers that textual (discourse) analysis remains of importance in interpreting individual voices and the values a particular translator holds, including those implied by the institution. The appropriate method seems to be to interpret one's own ideas or worldview through the way language is used in texts or utterances. A detailed analysis and comparison of language uses in both source text (ST) and target text (TT) could elucidate potential answers, and one can use the results of the textual analysis to infer its significance within the socio-political setting in which both texts operate.

#### **1. Identifying translation shift at the textual level**

According to Paltridge (2012, p. 1), discourse analysis - a process of examining text with the use of linguistic tools - lays stress on how patterns of language created by the text producer of a certain discourse are expressed; how those characteristics perform in a certain socio-cultural context; and what their functions are. In relation to translation, Munday and Zhang (2017, p. 3) maintain that choices made by the text re-producer (translator/interpreter) are of great importance in the translation process. They should be explained by paying close attention to genre conventions and lexico-grammatical differences that may cause an obligatory shift in the final product. Discourse analysis then can play an illuminating role in revealing the original text producer's (ST) and translator's (TT) patterns of choice in responding to language-specific differences and context-bound communication.

One of the most influential linguistic theoretical frameworks for discourse analysis was developed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), two renowned scholars in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Various aspects of their works have been applied to translation studies precisely because SFL is useful in the study of language in context, meanings derived from the interplay between people, their worldviews (of source culture and target culture), and ideological values attached to the people's language use (e.g. transitivity, mood and modality, and interpersonal epithet). Dissecting discourse to unveil one's ideological stance by comparing the ST and TT profiles is fundamental to this paper. It pays particular attention to the *appraisal* system, one of the SFL frameworks for interpreting the speaker's evaluation and judgement, which are indicative of beliefs and values. Munday (2012, 2018) has investigated these, and what interests this researcher is how this framework can be applied to the Thai context while taking into account the unique Thai linguistic structure and writing norms.

According to Martin and Rose (2007, p. 26), the appraisal system is a part of the interpersonal function, one of discourses semantics (the other functions of language use are ideational and



textual), which ‘enacts’ relationships between speaker and listener, or writer and reader. In SFL, discourse semantics are conditioned by register variables or the variation of language use in certain contexts, and these can be divided into three aspects: *field* (topic and activity in which one is engaged); *tenor* (relationship between the people in a certain set of circumstances); and *mode* (form of interaction, e.g. written, spoken, situation-specific, or spatial/experiential distance). All these layers of meaning are influenced by the socio-cultural environment of a society.

Appraisal concerns itself with ‘attitude’ and the way one evaluates their own emotions, judges people’s character, and gives opinions on things. It takes into account all the text producer’s attitudes in a sentence (e.g. nouns, verbs, adjectives). Munday (2012, p. 146) describes this kind of vocabulary as ‘attitude-rich’ terms that place the attitudinal burden on the text. Attitude has three options: *affect* (expressing the speaker’s feelings), *judgement* (criticising people’s demeanours and morality), and *appreciation* (evaluating phenomena or entities). Attitude can be explicit when the lexis is openly used to describe one’s feelings towards things and people. It can also be implicit when the attitudinal token is employed to imply one’s feelings (Martin & Rose, 2007, pp. 29-38). Such an implicit way of expressing feelings is significant in translation because when the ST appears with an attitudinal token such as figurative language, counter-expectancy (e.g. *however, only, even*), non-core lexis (terms that share a common semantic field), or factual piece of information showing ‘common sense’ (e.g. statistics, quote), the translator tends to bypass its bundle of potentially evoked meanings and render it with terms that convey less weight in attitude.

As mentioned in the previous section, Munday (2012, 2018) has applied the appraisal approach to the translation of political leaders’ and translators’ evaluation and intervention into the text. This paper asserts that appraisal theory can be likewise applied to the study of English-Thai and Thai-English translations of political texts, but with careful attention paid to structural differences between English and Thai. Drawing on Patpong’s (2006) SFL interpretation, this paper considers a number of possibilities for translation shifts as a result of grammatical differences between English and Thai. Possibilities for obligatory shift (as opposed to optional shift resulting from the translator’s own choices) may be found in the domains of aspect, serial verb construction, pronoun use, grammatical number, marked theme, and numerous potential modality combinations.

## 2. Identifying socio-cultural factors

In her proposal, Schäffner (2004) urges researchers of translation and political texts to apply Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) approach in their work. She insists that PDA helps elicit a link between linguistic behaviours and politics and explains why a linguistic feature has a politically persuasive force. Her notion pertaining to translation are: (1) *coercion* - translation as a means of limiting access to information, (2) *resistance* - translation strategies that help give voice to minorities, (3) *dissimulation* - commissioner’s selective and preferred treatment of certain texts over the others, and (4) *legitimation* - positive self-presentation or negative presentation of the others in translation (Schäffner, 2004, pp. 144-145). She asserts that the study of the above ‘translation process’ can underscore socio-cultural and political practices, norms, and constraints of both ST and TT.

Schäffner (2012) also calls for more attention to be paid to institutional influences on translated political texts. In her view, political texts can be recontextualised to match their target culture's characteristics. Often is the case where political institutions commission the translation of their texts. For a translation studies researcher, several questions can be raised when analysing the translation of a political text that is heavily influenced by its institution. Those questions are: who makes the decision as to what languages the texts need to be translated into and how they are to be made available; who is to translate those texts; does the institution have its own translation department; and who determines correction and style of writing and rewriting? (Schäffner, 2012, pp. 121-122). This suggests that the investigation of a certain translation project should go beyond the textual level that relies mainly on linguistic tools; the researcher may employ ethnographic methods, including participatory observation and interviews with relevant parties.

Schäffner's (2012) arguments are of great relevance to our case, particularly the reconstruction of political reality after a text has been translated, because the final product can foreground some voices but conceal others. The processes and products of discourse reconstruction are inevitably shaped by institutional ideologies. This correlates with the opinions of other translation studies scholars; among them are Koskinen (2010), who asserts the importance of ideological dynamism in institutions, and Munday and Zhang (2017), with respect to the extralinguistic analysis of culture and society. This kind of ethnographic method can be applied to the study of translation of political interviews, leaders' speeches, press releases, and even the translation of news.

### **3. A proposed methodology for political translation in the Thai context**

Taking the appraisal approach to translation studies (Munday, 2012, 2018) and socio-political factors (Schäffner, 2004, 2012) into account, this paper proposes and tests the usefulness of the two-level model for analysing the Thai-English translation of political texts that may be conditioned by the ideological stance of the commissioner's institution.

The case study is US President Joe Biden's inaugural address on 20 January 2021 and its Thai translations by VOA Thai as target text 1 (TT1) and Matichon as target text 2 (TT2), two well-known news agencies in Thailand.<sup>2</sup> To apply the model, the researcher starts at the textual level by examining the source text in order to obtain Biden's appraisal profile. The same procedure is applied to both target texts, and the two profiles are compared against the list of possible shifts, both obligatory shift (derived from lexico-grammatical differences) and optional shift (indicative of the translator's or commissioner's ideological standpoints).

At the contextual level, based on the questions raised by Schäffner (2012) in the previous section, this paper proposes that researchers conduct a semi-structured interview, participatory observation, and analysis of epitextual elements (translation commentaries or editorials on

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<sup>2</sup> VOA Thai is the Thai equivalent of the Voice of America, which began broadcasting in the US in 1942. Matichon is a prominent Thai newspaper with a clear political focus and is one of the most influential publications in Thailand.



the news website),<sup>3</sup> and other secondary sources of data that could indicate the general ideological stance of the commissioners (in our case, VOA Thai and Matichon). In fact, the author has attempted to investigate a similar translation phenomenon elsewhere (Phanthaphoommee, 2021b), with a focus on a different set of political texts. This paper, on the other hand, attempts to go one step further by offering a holistic approach to political translation that shares a meaningful implication among Thai scholars. Due to the limited space, the present paper compares only the ST-TT appraisal profiles and looks into epitextual elements and secondary sources to explain the possible reasons behind their translation choices and shifts found in both Thai versions.

### **Appraisal profile of the 2021 Biden inaugural speech and its translations**

To prepare the text being studied, President Biden's inaugural address was retrieved from the White House website. Interestingly, with 2371 words in total (21:14 mins),<sup>4</sup> it was almost twice as long as Trump's (Munday, 2018). This long-winded address seemed to deter Thai translators because both VOA Thai and Matichon decided to translate only some parts.<sup>5</sup> This omission is arguably a form of selective presentation of Biden's appeal to his American audience. Only segments that both agencies translated were chosen for comparison; other untranslated segments were taken into account at the point where relevant topics were mentioned.

As Munday (2012, p. 34) opines, political text is always replete with attitude and overwhelmed with ideology-infused items or cultural, spatio-temporal references. This was also the case with Biden's speech. By emphasising unity, Biden painted a picture of a resilient democracy in the US but hinted at the looming threats to it. To ground his address and depict the current political situation, Biden employed a total of 27 new words that had yet to be used in any previous president's inaugural speech, such as *riotous*, *pandemic*, and *virus* (Mellnik & Blanco, 2021). Biden centred his speech around reknitting the country, repeating the plights that America had encountered, and fulminating against white supremacy and nativism. Nominalisation and passivisation are two key strategies in depicting the country as such, without identifying the actual target of this scorn or those behind such turmoil.

However, what clearly evinced Biden's ideological stance was the way he peppered his speech with various attitudinal tokens – crucial elements that deserve attention when we analyse the text in question.

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<sup>3</sup> Epitext is related to peritext; the two elements combine to form 'paratext' (Genette, 1997). An epitext refers to texts created outside of the main text (such as reviews, commentaries, or interviews), while a peritext refers to texts on the periphery of the published text that can influence one's entire reading of it (such as preface, blurb, or note).

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/01/20/inaugural-address-by-president-joseph-r-biden-jr>; and, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8L4Or8KlpY&t=65s>

<sup>5</sup> Both translations were retrieved from the websites of VOA Thai and Matichon.

## 1. Translating Biden's invoked attitude

Words that convey a speaker's feelings may result in a positive/negative assessment of their attitudes towards things/people since they create a quiescent contextual connection in the reader's mind. Munday (2012, p. 41) refers to such words as 'critical points' in translation because they are vulnerable to value manipulation by the translator if he/she perceives them differently from the source text producer. When used in a political text, these words are prone to being shifted or conveyed in terms with a lower/higher evaluative degree of attitude than the speakers intended. However, in the present case, the translators seemed unable to deal with such 'critical points' in which Biden's negative attitude reigns supreme.

### Example 1

This is democracy's day, a day of history and hope, of **renewal** and **resolve**.  
Through a **crucible** for the ages, **America** has been tested anew

This is the opening line of the address, and it is quite unusual because Biden did not follow the tradition of thanking his predecessor for the transfer of power. Trump, who refuted the election result, was not present at the ceremony. Two main 'critical points' that arguably refer to Trump's presidency deserve attention: an alliteration of *renewal and resolve*, and a lexical metaphor of *crucible*.

	Target text	Back translation
TT1	นี่เป็นวันของประชาธิปไตย วันแห่งประวัติศาสตร์และความหวังของการเริ่มต้นใหม่และความแน่วแน่ อเมริกาได้ถูกทดสอบอีกครั้งผ่านความท้าทายที่ยิ่งใหญ่ที่สุดของยุคสมัย	This is a day of democracy, a day of history and hope, of <b>renewal</b> and <b>resolve</b> . <b>America</b> has been tested anew through <b>the greatest challenge</b> of the age.
TT2	วันนี้คือวันแห่งประชาธิปไตย วันที่เป็นประวัติศาสตร์และความหวังของการเริ่มต้นใหม่อีกครั้งอย่างมุ่งมั่น สหรัฐอเมริกาที่ผ่านบททดสอบทั้งหมดมาตลอดทุกยุคทุกสมัย ถูกทดสอบใหม่อีกครั้ง	This is a day of democracy, a day of history and hope, of <b>renewal, again, with determination</b> . <b>The United States of America</b> that has been through <b>gruelling tests</b> for ages is being tested anew.

Alliteration is one of the rhetorical devices that feature in Biden's speech. By repeating sounds in succession, Biden adds weight to his pace and pauses to convince his audience (Callo, 2021). However, neither Thai translation can maintain this alliteration. TT1 generalises it with *การเริ่มต้นใหม่และความแน่วแน่*, transferring correct meanings of *renewal* and *resolve*. TT2, on the other hand, combines the two nouns into a noun phrase *การเริ่มต้นใหม่อีกครั้งอย่างมุ่งมั่น* 'renewal, again, with determination', putting more weight on attitude than TT1 or even ST.

The lexical metaphor *crucible* is employed to invoke an emotional response. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, *crucible* invokes a historical sense of fire and heat that

one encounters when forging metal.<sup>6</sup> Although the full connotation of the term *crucible* is unachievable in either translation, TT2 compensates with a more negative attitude expressed in the translator's choice of บททดสอบทรหด 'gruelling tests'. This choice carries more emotional impact for the addressee than the mere phrase ความท้าทายที่ยิ่งใหญ่ที่สุด 'the greatest challenge' of TT1.

Additionally, naming is another strategy found in the last clause of the above excerpt. It interrogates the speaker-listener relationship in a subtle manner (Munday, 2007, p. 204). Biden uses the terms *America* and *American* a total of 36 times; more often than any other president has used in their inaugural speech (Mellnik & Blanco, 2021). However, the translator for TT2 seems to have been unable to grasp the real intention of this frequent use of *America* because the scope of Biden's naming was extended to สหรัฐอเมริกา 'The United States of America', which inadvertently conjures up a grander image than TT1's อเมริกา 'America'.

## Example 2

Today **we** celebrate the triumph, not of a candidate, but of a **cause**, the **cause** of democracy. The **people**, the **will of the people**, has been **heard** and the **will of the people** has been **heeded**.

Arguably targeting his predecessor, Biden sprinkled his address with reference to the idea that American democracy has overcome 'threats' but also accepted that this was not the end of them (Blake & Scott, 2021). Example 2 demonstrates three interesting techniques applied to this: repetition, deictic positioning, and change of process type.

	Target text	Back translation
TT1	วันนี้เราไม่ได้ฉลองชัยชนะของผู้ทำชิงตำแหน่งประธานาธิบดีคนใดคนหนึ่ง แต่เรามีสิ่งที่ควรค่าแก่การเฉลิมฉลอง นั่นคือประชาธิปไตย คนในประเทศ เสียงของคนในประเทศได้รับการรับฟัง และความต้องการของพวกเขาได้รับการใส่ใจ	Today <b>we</b> do not celebrate the triumph of a certain presidential candidate, but <b>we</b> have <b>things that deserve celebration</b> . That is democracy. People in the country, <b>the voice of the people in the country is heard/listened to</b> . And <b>their needs are heeded</b> .
TT2	วันนี้ เราเฉลิมฉลองชัยชนะ ไม่ใช่ชัยชนะของผู้สมัครชิงตำแหน่งผู้หนึ่ง แต่แน่นอน เป็นชัยชนะของครรลองประชาธิปไตยต่างหาก เจตนารมณ์ของประชาชนได้รับการรับฟัง ปราศรัยของประชาชนได้รับการปฏิบัติตาม	Today <b>we</b> celebrate the triumph, not the triumph of a candidate for the position. But <b>certainly/of course</b> , [it] is the triumph of <b>a course of democracy</b> . <b>The will of the people is heard/listened to</b> . <b>The wish of the people is followed/acted upon</b> .

First, although exhibiting cohesion by repetition tends to realise a textual meaning (Thompson, 2014, p. 146), it also creates a sense of engagement for listeners. Yet, both translations cannot retain the effect of the repetition. TT1 is obviously a rewrite of the whole clause with a noun

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/crucible>

phrase that shows a positive attitude: *สิ่งที่ควรค่าแก่การเฉลิมฉลอง* ‘things that deserve celebration’. TT2 appears even more positive; the repetition of *cause* is replaced with terms that have a totally different meaning, as in *แน่นอน* ‘certainly/of course’ and  *بالطبع* ‘course’. A likely explanation for this is that the translator for TT2 misread the term *cause* as *course*. Ironically, this misreading resulted in more force in positivity with ‘of course’ and ‘a course of democracy’. Another repetition is *the will of the people*, which the translators took different approaches to dealing with. TT1 uses *เสียง* ‘voice’ that typically collocates with *heard* for the first instance and *ความต้องการ* ‘needs’ for the second, while TT2 equivalently uses *เจตนารมณ์* ‘will’ for the first but *ความปรารถนา* ‘wish’ for the second. The TT2 choices prompt a more persuasive sense by using a higher level of Thai stylistic writing.

The second issue is the shift of deixis. Deictic positioning is a strategy for conceptualising speaker-listener relations, expressed through terms indicating physical/temporal location and pronominal use to distance or draw closer the addressees (Chilton, 2004, p. 56). In Biden’s speech, there are a total of 120 instances of *we/us*. However, because of VOA Thai and Matichon’s selective translation, we do not get a full picture of Biden’s deictic positioning in Thai. In the above example, the deixis of the speaker-listener relationship is clear in the first clause: *Today we celebrate*. This is the inclusive plural *we* – signifying Biden and American at the centre position. At first glance, both translations seem to have no problem keeping the inclusive *we* in the first line. However, in the clause that follows, TT1 instead distances Biden from his audience with the phrase *ความต้องการของพวกเขา* ‘their needs’. Biden in TT1 seems to remove *the people* from his deictic centre of ‘here and now’. This choice appears to undermine the sense of inclusiveness in the ST nationalist discourse.

The third issue is the change of process type. In SFL, a process is a system that represents the experiential perspective – action, event, or state of a clause that participants (people or things) are involved in (Thompson, 2014, p. 92). In the original, the verb *heed* (a mental process) is employed to show Biden’s emotional response to *the will of the people*. But TT2 instead identifies a material process: *ปฏิบัติตาม* ‘followed’ – signifying a more active actor (Biden) in the Thai clause. TT1, on the other hand, retains the same process type of *ได้รับการรับฟัง* ‘listened to’ and *ได้รับการใส่ใจ* ‘heeded’. Unfortunately, both were unable to provide an appropriate alliteration (*heard* and *heeded*).

### Example 3

the **harsh, ugly** reality that **racism, nativism, fear, demonization** have long  
torn us apart.

This excerpt shows Biden acknowledging the complicated reality of the American ideal, and the country’s resilience against political polarisation (Wolf & Merrill, 2021). A string of seven ‘critical’ terms in the above line charts Biden’s strongly negative views of the previous administration’s immigration policy. This poses a significant challenge for Thai translators because the majority of those negative terms are based on Western perceptions that may not be found in the Thai context.

### Target text

### Back translation

TT1	และความเป็นจริงอันน่าเกลียด เช่น การเหยียดผิว ชาติ ภูมินิยม และการสร้างภาพลักษณ์ความเป็นปีศาจให้ แก่ฝ่ายตรงข้าม ที่สร้างความแตกแยกในสังคมมาเป็น เวลานาน	And the <b>ugly</b> truth, like <b>racism, nativism</b> and <b>creating the image of demons for the</b> <b>opposition</b> that have long <b>created division</b> <b>in society.</b>
TT2	กับความเป็นจริงที่น่าเกลียด หยาดกระดังของการ รังเกียจชาติพันธุ์, ลัทธิภูมิภาวะ, ความหวั่นกลัว, การ ยัดเยียดความเป็นปีศาจให้กันและกัน ซึ่งฉีกกระชาก พวกเราออกจากกันมาช้านาน	With the <b>ugly, harsh</b> truth of <b>racial hatred,</b> <b>nativism, fear, mutually labelling the</b> <b>others as demons</b> that have long <b>ripped</b> <b>and torn us apart.</b>

The first two attitude-laden terms (*harsh, ugly*) are kept intact in TT2, but the translator for TT1 discarded the first one that clearly shows the speaker's sense of displeasure, resulting in a lesser degree of negativity of ความเป็นจริง 'truth'. In the latter group of negative concepts (*racism, nativism, fear, demonisation*), both translated versions stay close to all ST meanings, but perhaps with a stronger connotation in TT2, as in การยัดเยียดความเป็นปีศาจให้กันและกัน 'labelling the others as demons', and the omission of *fear* in TT1.

The last 'critical point' is the negative metaphorical *torn apart*. TT1 merely uses สร้างความแตกแยก 'create division' – a matter-of-fact phrase that describes the state of American society. In contrast, the TT2 choice underscores the sense of negativity with a doublet ฉีกกระชาก 'ripped and torn apart'. The doublet is often found in expressive texts (e.g. literature), and Thai writers typically use them to induce an emotional response from the readers.

### Example 4

we must end this **uncivil war** that **pits** red against blue

This example is one of the most memorable lines from Biden's speech, providing a picture of deep-seated animosity that accurately conveys the true nature of American politics (Wolf & Merrill, 2021). The two Thai translators used different techniques in dealing with such negative terms as *uncivil war* and *pits*.

### Target text

### Back translation

TT1	เราต้องยุติสงครามที่ไร้อารยธรรมนี้ ที่ทำให้ฝ่ายสีแดง หันมาสู้กับฝ่ายสีน้ำเงิน	we must end <b>this war that lacks civilisation</b> [sic] that <b>makes</b> the red side fight against the blue side.
TT2	เราต้องยุติศึกที่ไม่ศิวิไลซ์ที่ผลักดันให้สีแดงต่อสู้กับสีน้ำเงิน	we must end <b>the uncivilised war/battle</b> that <b>pushes</b> the red into fighting the blue.

The first point may be an intentional pun: *civil war* and *uncivil war*. But neither translation retains this expressive effect. The term *uncivil* is kept in both translations, but TT2 employs a

loan word or false friend *คิวิไลซ์* ‘civilise’ that has historical connotations in the Thai context, dating back to the Southeast Asian colonial period. Furthermore, the TT2 choice of metaphorical *ศึก*, sharing the same referential meaning with *สงคราม* ‘war’, develop a more historical, nationalistic sense in the Thai version. According to the Thai National Corpus, this term is frequently found in historiographical text and literature.<sup>7</sup>

Another important point is the rendering of process *pits*, metaphorically meaning ‘set into opposition or rivalry’.<sup>8</sup> TT1 tones down the intensiveness of the ST with the general term *ทำให้* ‘make’. In contrast, TT2 seems to elevate the seriousness of *pits* with a doublet *ผลักดัน* ‘push/support’ that conveys the active engagement of the speaker in the final translated text.

As mentioned earlier, only some parts of the address were selected to be re-presented in Thai despite a number of ‘critical points’ in the approximately 21-minute-long speech. Such points include *our **better angels** have always prevailed, **weeping** may **endure** for a night, but **joy cometh** in the morning, or **folks**, this is a time of testing*. It is unfortunate that the entirety of the attitude-rich items in the original cannot be fully analysed to explore their variation in degree and shift in attitude.

## 2. Shift of force and focus

Attitude can be amplified or softened by the scalable axes of graduation (Martin & Rose, 2007, pp. 42-48). It can be upscaled with such terms as *real dispute*, or downscaled *kind of mercy*, making the focus sharper or otherwise. One can add force of attitude by using quantifiers (e.g. *few, some, greatest number*) or lexical intensifiers (e.g. *total, somewhat, relatively*). In Biden’s case, more instances of positive force were found (e.g. 3 *many*, 4 *better*, 8 *more*, and 6 superlatives) than those of negative force (e.g. 1 *deadly*, 1 *little*, 1 *few*). Although Biden’s intensification of attitude is widespread throughout his speech, the rendering of graduation in the Thai translations differs.

### Example 5

**Few periods** in our nation’s history have been more challenged or found a time **more** challenging or difficult than the time we’re in now.

This excerpt has Biden alluding to past challenges (such as the Great Depression), comparing them to the present as the COVID-19 pandemic continues and the economy is in crisis. The goal of this line is to plead for unity as Americans fight their way through tough times.

	Target text	Back translation
TT1	น้อยคนนักในประวัติศาสตร์ของประเทศเราจะเคยประสบปัญหา	<b>Very few people</b> in our country’s history would encounter problems

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.arts.chula.ac.th/~ling/tnc3/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pit>



### Target text

### Back translation

TT2	มีเพียงไม่กี่ครั้งเท่านั้นในประวัติศาสตร์ของชาติที่ [เรา] ต้องตกอยู่ในสภาพที่ถูกท้าทาย	There were <b>only a few times</b> in the nation's history that [we] had to fall into the challenged [ <i>sic</i> ] condition
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TT2 manages to maintain the same degree of graduation as the ST, in เพียงไม่กี่ครั้งเท่านั้น ‘only a few times’. However, TT1 makes a rather surprising choice because the translator changes the participant of the phrase from *times* to คน ‘people’ with a slight increase in negative attitude (intensifier *นัก* ‘very’). A careful check of the official address and the video transcription for TT1 shows the reason for this: The English transcription appears with *people* instead of *times*. The translator’s choice of TT1 is possibly derived from a transcriber’s typo, which results in the diminished force of attitude for the whole sentence. Biden’s unifying perspective of the people across the country (speaker plus the addressee: *our nation, the time we’re in now*) is therefore challenged and reduced to only ‘very few people’. Both versions, however, fail to retain the term *more*.

Another interesting example is the reverting effect of attitude despite its degree of intensification being lessened in the translation. We are looking at the ST sentence: ***hundreds of thousands of businesses closed***. This is when Biden points to the country’s unabating problems of unemployment arising from the economic recession. TT1 is faithful with the use of ธุรกิจห้างร้านหลายแสนต้องปิดตัวลง ‘**many hundreds of thousands** of businesses and shops had to close down’. On the other hand, TT2 appears with กิจการธุรกิจอีกนับร้อยนับพันต้องปิดตัวลง, which literally means ‘other **hundred**, [other] **thousand** businesses had to close down’. This idiomatic นับร้อยนับพัน, albeit referring to a smaller quantity, has a different attitudinal impact on the Thai audience, not by quantifying the amount but by producing a rhythmic effect that is stylistic and deemed appropriate for this persuasive discourse in Thai.

The last example is the case of TT2 creating more force in attitude than the ST and TT1. There are two points of force in the sentence: ***every disagreement doesn’t have to be a cause for total war***. The translator for TT1 omits the first force ***every disagreement*** and uses a domain-specific term สงครามเบ็ดเสร็จ for ***total war***. However, the translator for TT2 comes up with strikingly contrasting choices. Keeping the first force with ความเห็นที่ไม่ลงรอยกันทุก ๆ อย่าง ‘**every kind** of disagreed opinion’, the translator continues by adding extra negative weight to the word *war* with the rhythmic, idiomatic เขาเป็นเอาตาย ‘fatal’ and quantifier ทุกครั้งไป ‘**every time**’, giving the phrase a greater sense of urgency and severity.

All in all, even though we cannot investigate the whole list of ‘critical points’ in Biden’s speech because only some have been translated, the empirical linguistic evidence discovered in the comparison of the ST and the two translations is instructive. Considering the overall effect of the translators’ evaluation in the translation they produced, it can be argued that TT2 carries a relatively different attitude from TT1 and even the original because the excerpts translated and analysed point to this tendency. Various optional shifts in TT2 clearly disclose the translator’s ideological efforts to vary the ideological stance of the ST as he/she deems appropriate, including the selection of negative lexes (‘gruelling test’, ‘ripped and torn apart’), misreading

of and positive attribution to neutral terms ('course'), choice of more expressive terms ('war/battle', 'labelling the others'), favouring rhythmic effect over a decrease in force of attitude ('other hundred, [other] thousand'), or simply adding force ('every kind', 'every time'). The comparison between the two translations shows differences in the ways attitudinal meanings can be conveyed through translation, which is likely connected to the ideological stances of the concerned institutions.

However, another question remains as to how to gauge the level of institutional (news agency) influence over translators to modify inferences according to their political beliefs and worldview, as Kang (2007) and Schäffner (2012) both suggest. The findings need to be triangulated with epitextual elements and other sources of data. VOA Thai (TT1) gives a hint at their reason for selecting some parts to be translated: "[Biden] called for Americans to engage in a peaceful dialogue to heal the pain of social division. The US is facing all-round problems and challenges, a serious test in the country's history" (my translation).<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Matchon (TT2) explains on the Thai version of their website that "all principles and ideas [in Biden's address] can be applied to every conflicting situation and division of every society" (my translation).<sup>10</sup> Matchon's explanation implies their liberal stance on the current political situation in both the US and Thailand. Matchon is considered critical of the Thai government and their social commentary. This might be one of the reasons why Matchon's version (TT2) was found to have a higher level of intervention and portrays Biden as an assertive, progressive and eloquent president-elect, which readers can compare with his Thai counterpart. It is not unreasonable to assume that the translation then serves as a criticism of Thailand's political leadership. On the other hand, TT1 may have had a different objective because VOA Thai's epitext does not obviously show what their position with respect to Biden is. When looking further into other sources, however, we can see that VOA Thai might be trying to protect American overseas interests since it is part of the US-funded Voice of America and may have an interest in supporting Biden's cause (as opposed to his predecessor's).<sup>11</sup> Therefore, a rather faithful portrayal of the US president could be the diplomatic and safest translation strategy for them.

## CONCLUSION

This paper started with a sketch of how political texts and translation can serve as crucial materials for translation studies researchers, for they can be a means of channelling certain political thoughts and ideological values, faithfully or manipulatively, to audiences of other cultures. This paper has also charted a course for academics in the field of translation studies in Thailand, where there is limited literature on political translation. It proposes an integrated model by applying appraisal theory as a tool for discourse analysis and paratextual/epitextual analysis, along with ethnographic methods at the contextual level. The triangulation of results derived from the perusal of the text with interviews or other texts appertaining to the translation

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.voathai.com/a/highlights-from-joe-bidens-speech-at-inauguration/5745396.html>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.matchon.co.th/foreign/news\\_2541075](https://www.matchon.co.th/foreign/news_2541075)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2020-election/trump-allies-dismissed-voa-biden-administration-names-new-leadership-n1255244>

in question should be of great assistance in discovering the underlining ideological stance behind a certain translation project, if one exists.

President Biden's 2021 inaugural speech and its Thai translations have been scrutinised for this purpose. The findings reveal different levels of intervention by the Thai translators in re-interpreting Biden's stress on the *status quo* and unity between the two translated versions: one with a straightforward presentation of his remarks and the other with a more attitude-laden and nuanced interpretation of meanings. The author acknowledges the limitations imposed by the absence of ethnographic methodology to address the contextual dimension proposed in the previous section; for example, interviews with the translator and editor of both Thai versions could provide insightful accounts of how these media outlets approach a specific translation task, and how the translators handle the translation brief. Further research may include more in-depth socio-cultural or media-institutional theories to explain and link the case study. By considering Thai translation norms (e.g. preference for style over precision) and linguistic differences (e.g. dropping pronouns, doublets), the proposed model can be applied to other Thai political texts (e.g. declarations, press releases, online news) in order to test their accuracy and establish a common ground for the translation of such content in the Thai context.

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