Past Simple Tense Translation: A Comparative Case Study of English Major Students

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to study the patterns of translating past simple tense from English to Thai by third-year English major students from the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Education at Naresuan University. There were 80 participants in total, all of whom had previously completed basic translation courses and were enrolled in the study. Data was collected through a 20-item translation test administered in the classroom setting. The study found that students used three main patterns of translation structure, namely: 1) "ได้ (dai) + main verb," 2) "ได้ (dai) + main verb + แล้ว (léew)," and 3) "ø + main verb" (translating only the main verb without considering tense). Interestingly, both faculties exhibited similar frequencies in all three patterns, with pattern 3 being the most frequently used, followed by patterns 2 and 1, respectively. However, these translation patterns were found to inadequately convey the meaning of past tense in Thai. This research underscores the importance of translation teaching that emphasizes grammatical and semantic differences between Thai and English, particularly concerning tense, to ensure accurate and clear translation among students.

Keywords : Past Simple Tense / Translation / Models / Comparative Case Study

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Introduction

Translation is widely recognized as a pivotal language skill, with Naimushin (2002) advocating its inclusion as a fifth skill alongside listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Despite the longstanding presence of translation instruction in Thailand, challenges persist in effectively rendering texts between Thai and English. Among the prevalent issues, students frequently resort to literal translation from the source language to the target language and demonstrate a propensity for indiscriminate use of bilingual dictionaries. Particularly, Thai learners often grapple with English tenses, endeavoring to align them with their Thai counterparts and subsequently translating them into their native language. This tendency may stem from a foundational misunderstanding that the two linguistic systems are directly analogous. It is widely known that Thai conveys temporal information, encompassing both tense and aspect, through a complex interplay of verbs, lexical particles, and contextual cues. This stands in contrast to English, where tense is primarily marked by morphemes affixed directly to verbs. For instance, while English may convey temporal aspects implicitly, as in "I walked here," the corresponding Thai phrase "ฉันเดินที่นี่" fails to capture the nuanced temporal implications of the event. Consequently, Thai learners often resort to literal, word-for-word translation, impeding their ability to navigate between the two languages seamlessly. Building on the work of Baker (2005), second language acquisition emerges as a dynamic process driven by learners' active engagement with linguistic stimuli, ultimately leading to the internalization of linguistic patterns. This evolving internal representation, known as interlanguage competence, underscores the complexity inherent in language acquisition and translation.

The proficiency of students in producing the target language is heavily influenced by its similarities or disparities with their native tongue (Ellis, 2006). The aforementioned factors contribute to a potential misapprehension of temporal concepts among Thai students, leading to difficulties in employing English tenses accurately. Conversely, Thai learners of English as a second language encounter challenges in articulating past events in Thai. Notably, the past simple tense is widely utilized in English discourse due to its prevalence in narrating or referencing past occurrences (Borisuth, 2005). However, Sriphrom and Ratitamkul (2014) found that Thai learners of English show different levels of accuracy in using past tense verbs depending on their proficiency. Those with higher proficiency tend to use past tense forms more correctly than those with lower proficiency. Similarly, Chiravate (2018) discovered that

learners with stronger language skills are more accurate in using past tense morphology than those with weaker skills. These findings support the idea that Thai students often struggle to master the past simple tense. While English employs morpheme markers to denote tense forms, Thai typically employs "ได้" (dai) as a morpheme marker for past tense, although its usage is not exclusively confined to past contexts, as evidenced by expressions like "พรุ่งนี้จะได้ไปไหม" (Will you be able to go tomorrow?). This inherent ambiguity in the usage of "ได้" (dai) can lead to communication ambiguities. Consequently, it is imperative to identify suitable representatives of the Thai past simple tense for effective translation from English. Therefore, an investigation into Thai past simple tense translation strategies is warranted to furnish potential models and recommendations for enhancing translation pedagogy in university settings. The researcher seeks to explore the forms generated by third-year English major students at Naresuan University for translating English past simple tense into Thai, with the aim of advancing understanding and facilitating more effective instruction in translation.

Objective

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the translation of sentence patterns employed by third-year English major students at Naresuan University when translating English past simple tense into Thai. The researcher posits that the findings of this study will contribute valuable insights to translation courses, benefiting both learners and instructors in the field. By shedding light on the strategies utilized by proficient learners, this research aims to inform and enhance translation pedagogy, thereby facilitating more effective learning and teaching practices in the domain of translation.

Research Question

What are the models in translation Past Simple Tense into Thai created by the 3rd year English major students from the faculties of Humanities and Education at Naresuan University?

Scope of the study

The central inquiry of this study revolves around elucidating the sentence patterns utilized by third-year English major students from the Faculty of Humanities and Education at Naresuan University for translating the Past Simple Tense from English into Thai. The scope of the investigation encompasses an in-depth exploration of the various translation strategies and approaches employed by these students, aiming to uncover patterns, trends, and variations in their linguistic choices. Through a comprehensive analysis of the translation sentence patterns generated by the participants, this study seeks to contribute to the existing body of

knowledge in the field of translation studies, particularly in the context of English-Thai translation.

Related Theory

Translation theory encompasses diverse perspectives and approaches, each offering unique insights into the intricate process of transferring meaning from a source language to a target language. At its core, translation aims to facilitate successful communication by conveying the intended information and significance of a source-language text into an equivalent target-language text. Spolsky (2009) underscores the paramount importance of attaining functional equivalence in translation. This concept surpasses mere lexical correspondences, prioritizing the conveyance of the intended meaning of the source text and its resonance with the target audience. Consequently, translators often find themselves adapting the wording or structure to ensure effective communication in the target language. The linguistic approach to translation theory, advocated by scholars such as Ayvazyan & Pym (2016), Hedge (2008), Ehrensberger-Dow & Massey (2014) and Choroleeva (2009), delves deeply into issues pertaining to meaning and equivalence. According to this paradigm, translation involves the articulation of the essence of a source-language text in a corresponding target-language text, while accounting for the cultural and social intricacies inherent in the target language.

Besides, Baker (2005) introduces a seminal theory in translation studies, delving into the notion of equivalence across various levels of translation. She accentuates the intricate nature of equivalence, addressing it not only at the lexical level but also beyond. Baker underscores the significance of factors such as number, gender, and tense in achieving equivalence, particularly concerning individual words. Additionally, Cabrera Solano et al. (2014) underscores the importance of comprehending the semantic subtleties within tense and aspect systems to accurately decipher the meanings conveyed by linguistic components. They argue that grasping the semantic essence of each component is pivotal for effectively navigating the nuances of tenses. In addition, Mustafa, Kirans & Bagri Ys (2016) delves into language transfer, also known as first-language interference, wherein individuals draw upon their knowledge from their native language when engaging with a second language. Gass & Selinker (2008) propose two primary principles to elucidate language transfer: Negative Transfer, or interference, and Positive Transfer. Ellis (2006) further elaborates on language transfer, categorizing it into facilitation, avoidance, errors, and overuse, thereby illustrating the

myriad ways in which learners leverage their native language knowledge during the process of acquiring a second language. In conclusion, the intricate nature of translation theory encompasses various perspectives and approaches, each shedding light on different facets of the translation process, from issues of equivalence to the phenomenon of language transfer. Understanding these theoretical frameworks is crucial for both practitioners and scholars in the field of translation studies.

Methodology

Participants

This study engaged forty English major students from the Faculty of Humanities and an additional forty students from the Faculty of Education at Naresuan University. All participants have completed introductory-level translation courses as part of their prior academic preparation.

Research Instrument

The researcher administered a translation test comprising 20 items encompassing various tenses and aspects, with 10 of these items specifically focusing on English past simple tense forms. To ensure the content validity of this test, it underwent thorough proofreading and revision by an American lecturer, followed by further scrutiny and adjustments by a Thai lecturer specializing in Translation. Each test item includes an adverb of time denoting an event in the past, with the aim of eliciting the corresponding Thai form without explicit recognition of the English past simple tense. Consequently, only morpheme markers or inflectional morphology such as "-d" or "-ed" were utilized, or appended to the main verb to indicate past events. Notably, irregular verbs were intentionally excluded from each item. Below are examples of items included in the test.

Translate English into Thai

English: We normally played football with Jim here.

Thai: _____

English: Mark studied in Australia when he was young.

Thai: _____

English: A little girl watered a flower plantation.

Thai: _____

Procedures

The test was administered to the students as a midterm examination, prompting

them to exert their utmost effort in completing it. Subsequently, the researcher selected only 10 items from the test, each featuring preterit forms such as "-d" or "-ed", for the purpose of analyzing and categorizing their corresponding forms in the target language.

Conclusion

Cross-language translation poses significant challenges in interpreting tenses, aspects, moods, and modalities due to the inherent differences between languages. The influence of one's mother tongue often acts as a barrier to achieving proficiency in a second language. Various theories of language transfer, including facilitation, avoidance, errors, and over-use, play a fundamental role in understanding second language acquisition. The analysis of translations of English Past Simple Tense into Thai, conducted by third-year English major students from the faculties of Humanities and Education at Naresuan University, revealed three main patterns: "ได้ (dai) + finite verb," "ได้ (dai) + finite verb + แล้ว (léew)," and "ø + finite verb." Notably, the "ø + finite verb" form was most frequently utilized, suggesting a lack of recognition of the Past Simple tense among the participants. Consequently, it is essential for learners to reconsider whether the translated form accurately conveys past events in Thai, as the "ø + finite verb" form may not clearly indicate past events equivalent to those in English Past Simple Tense. The concept of nonequivalence, as proposed by Baker (2005), underscores the disparity and unfamiliarity between Thai and English tenses, posing obstacles for Thai learners of English and vice versa. Consequently, using English tenses may present challenges for Thai learners, just as using Thai Past Tense forms may hinder those learning Thai as a second language. In summary, language transfer issues arise as learners encode, decode, and transfer messages between languages. Misinterpretations can occur if there are breakdowns in the translation process. Therefore, educators should emphasize the importance of understanding language differences in tenses, and students should exercise caution when translating between English and Thai. Additionally, further studies on language differences are warranted to enhance language learning and translation proficiency. Overall, a combination of factors including educational background, language proficiency, disciplinary influences, translation experience, cultural factors, instructional methods, and individual differences likely contribute to both similarities and differences in translation patterns among students from both faculties.

Discussions

After the midterm examination, the researcher collected the tests and proceeded to analyze the patterns of translation employed by the students when rendering English past simple tense into Thai. A total of 800 sentences were examined and categorized based on their respective forms. The results obtained from participants in the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Education are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively.

Table 1 Translation Patterns of English Past Simple Tense into Thai by Participants from Faculty of Humanities

Patterns	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. ได้ + finite verb (dai) + finite verb	115	28.75
2. ได้ + finite verb + แล้ว (dai) + finite verb + léew	129	32.25
3. ø + finite verb	156	39.00
Total	**400**	**100**

The table above delineates the analysis of 400 sentences translated into Thai by English major students from the Faculty of Humanities. These translations were scrutinized and categorized into three patterns: firstly, "ได้ (dai) + finite verb"; secondly, "ได้ (dai) + finite verb + แล้ว (léew)"; and thirdly, "ø + finite verb." The highest frequency among all forms observed in the translations is the "ø + finite verb" form, accounting for 39%. Following closely is the "ได้ (dai) + finite verb + แล้ว (léew)" form, representing 32.25% of the translations. Lastly, the "ได้ (dai) + finite verb" form was utilized in 28.75% of the sentences.

Table 2 Translation Patterns of English Past Simple Tense into Thai by Participants from Faculty of Education

Patterns	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. ได้ + finite verb (dai) + finite verb	113	28.25
2. ได้ + finite verb + แล้ว (dai) + finite verb + léew	125	31.25
3. ø + finite verb	162	40.50
Total	**400**	**100**

The table above presents the analysis of 400 sentences translated into Thai by English major students from the Faculty of Education. These translations were examined and categorized into three patterns: firstly, "ได้ (dai) + finite verb"; secondly, "ได้ (dai) + finite verb + แล้ว (léew)"; and thirdly, "ø + finite verb." Among these forms, the highest frequency observed is the "ø + finite verb" form, constituting 40.50% of the translations. Following closely is the "ได้ (dai) + finite verb + แล้ว (léew)" form, accounting for 31.25% of the translations. Lastly, the "ได้ (dai) + finite verb" form was utilized in 28.25% of the sentences.

Following parts below are some examples and discussions.

1. ø + finite verb form

Example 1

English: I called you many times.

Thai: ผมโทรหาคุณหลายครั้ง

Example 2

English: Enemies attacked our people.

Thai: ข้าศึกเข้าโจมตีผู้คนของเรา

One of the noteworthy aspects warranting further investigation is the prevalent use of the "ø + finite verb" form, which constitutes the most frequent pattern observed in the translation of Past Simple Tense into Thai. The researcher observes that this particular form often conveys an inappropriate meaning of past events in Thai. Learners of Thai as a second language may struggle to discern the temporal context or may encounter difficulties in accurately pinpointing the timing of events. The high percentage of usage of this form across translations by participants from both faculties underscores the significance of learners' proficiency and discernment in translation. Below are examples illustrating the usage of this form.

Example 3

English: We normally played football with Jim here.

Thai: พวกเรามักจะเล่นฟุตบอลกับจิมที่นี่

Example 4

English: I often watched movies.

Thai: ผมดูหนังบ่อย

The examples provided suggest that each event ma

y potentially be perceived as occurring in the present time, resembling the form of the English Present Simple Tense. This observation aligns with the tendency in grammar books written in Thailand, which often emphasize the use of adverbs of frequency exclusively for the English Present Simple Tense. However, in English, such adverbs are also employed to denote actions that were consistently performed in the past. This discrepancy in usage may lead to misunderstandings in communication when participants translate into Thai. As stated by Nida & Taber (1974), "Cross-language interpretation is difficult to make it equivalent," a common refrain often encountered in translation textbooks.

 2. ได้ (dai) + finite verb + แล้ว (léew)

  Example 5

   English: James listened to the song.
   Thai: เจมส์ได้ฟังเพลงนั้นแล้ว

The provided sentence serves as a representative example among 129 sentences that adhere to the same model. Extensive scholarly attention has been devoted to the analysis of the sentence-final particle "แล้ว" (léew), as evidenced by studies conducted by Howard (1997), Iwasaki (1996), Shirai & Andersen (1995) and Andersen (1989). However, scholarly discourse has witnessed some contention regarding the relationship between this sentence-final particle and its intersentential counterpart. Scholars have also emphasized the significance of considering aspectual meaning within the context when interpreting these particles.

Drawing from Shirai & Andersen's (1995) work, the interpretation of temporal reference in any given utterance is influenced by numerous coinciding factors, necessitating careful consideration when assigning meaning to morphemes such as "léew." It is crucial to ascertain whether the meaning is inherent in the morpheme's semantics or derived from other contextual variables. In the translations of the Past Simple Tense form by participants, the grammaticalized word "ได้" (dai) frequently co-occurred with the sentence-final particle "แล้ว" (léew), resulting in the pattern "ได้ (dai) + finite verb + แล้ว (léew)." This construction serves as a manifestation of the participants' interpretation of the events referenced in the past.

 3. ได้ (dai) + finite verb

  Example 6

   English: My mom transferred me some money.
   Thai: แม่ของฉันได้โอนเงินจำนวนหนึ่งให้ฉัน

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Despite the prevailing notion among many Thai linguists that Thai lacks tense markers and relies instead on temporal aspects, discourse context, and inherent verb semantics to convey temporal information, participants in the study demonstrated an alternative approach. They utilized the grammaticalized word "ได้" (dai) to indicate past tense in Thai, even in the absence of explicit temporal markers within sentences. Additionally, some participants recognized the use of finite verbs with inflectional morphology such as "-d" or "-ed" to denote past events.

Suggestions

Recommendations for Applying the Research Findings

Based on the research findings, several practical recommendations can be made. First, analyzing common translation errors can help identify the mistakes learners frequently make when translating the English Past Simple Tense into Thai, as well as the reasons behind these errors. This can provide valuable insights for language teachers and curriculum designers. Additionally, developing and testing new teaching methods that focus on the differences in tense and aspect between English and Thai could help learners improve their translation accuracy. Integrating technology-assisted translation tools, such as machine translation and AI-powered software, may also be beneficial in the learning process. However, it is important to assess both the strengths and limitations of these tools. Another useful approach is to gather insights from professional translators who specialize in English-Thai translation. Understanding their strategies for handling tense and aspect could help bridge the gap between professional and learner-level translations, ultimately leading to more effective teaching and learning strategies.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should explore various aspects of English-Thai translation to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges learners face. One important area is comparative analysis, which examines how learners at different proficiency levels translate tense and aspect and how their skills develop over time. Studying the cognitive processes involved in translation, such as how learners encode, decode, and transfer meaning between languages, could also provide valuable insights. Additionally, using corpus-based research to analyze large collections of translated texts can reveal common translation patterns and recurring linguistic challenges. Researchers should also consider the influence of sociolinguistic factors, such as cultural norms and language attitudes, on translation choices. Longitudinal studies

that track learners' progress over an extended period would be useful in understanding how their translation strategies evolve. Finally, investigating the impact of different translation tasks, such as written translation versus interpreting, could provide insights into how task type influences learners' ability to accurately convey tense and aspect.

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