Translating Cultural Heritage for Global Audience: A Study of Developing and Delivering English Narration for Thai Classical Performances

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Abstract

Thai classical performance, known as Natayasinthai, is a vibrant part of Thailand's cultural heritage, closely woven into Thai life and continually evolving in response to political, administrative, and socio-economic changes. This qualitative research investigates the development and delivery of English narration for Thai classical performances staged domestically and internationally. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 purposively selected key informants, comprising five Thai classical performance specialists and five experienced English narration professionals. Data triangulation and content analysis identified two key themes: 1) Culturally Grounded Script Development, which involves accurate translation and meaning equivalence, the use of authentic source narratives, collaboration among cultural and language specialists, and consideration of audience characteristics; and 2) Audience-Centered Narration Delivery, which emphasizes audience comprehension, appropriate pronunciation, script quality, and narrator expertise. The findings indicate that English narration for Thai classical performances requires an integrated approach that connects culturally appropriate script development with audience-oriented delivery. The study highlights the role of English narration as a form of intercultural mediation that can make culturally embedded meanings accessible to international audiences while maintaining the authenticity of Thai classical performance.

Keywords: Thai classical performances, English narration, cultural translation, intercultural communication, cultural heritage

Introduction

Communicating the intricate beauty of Thai classical performance to a global audience presents a unique set of challenges, necessitating a multifaceted approach that transcends mere linguistic translation. This endeavor intertwines the complexities of cross-cultural communication with the nuanced art of translation studies. As Byram (1997) articulated, effective intercultural communication extends far beyond grammatical accuracy; it demands Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), which encompasses a deep understanding of the value systems, beliefs, and cultural contexts of both the speaker and the listener. In the context of Thai classical performance, this requires not only conveying the narrative but also making the cultural meanings, artistic elements, and contextual information embedded within gestures, movements, characters, and musical elements accessible to international audiences. Furthermore, Hall's (1989) framework of high-context and low-context communication highlights the disparity in how meaning is conveyed between Asian and Western cultures. For Thai classical performances, where meanings may be conveyed implicitly through culturally shared knowledge and non-verbal performance elements, English narration can play an important role in providing the contextual information needed by audiences who may not share the same cultural background.

The act of translating Thai classical performance for an international audience involves more than simply converting words from Thai to English. It requires a meticulous process of meaning transfer, as Nida and Taber (1982) posited that translation aims to preserve aesthetic quality and evoke an empathic response in the target audience. Newmark (1988) further emphasized that even semantic translation necessitates careful interpretation to ensure clarity and completeness. This focus on capturing "meaning" completely and accurately, rather than just form, is critical when dealing with cultural concepts unique to Thai classical performance that lack direct English equivalents. Therefore, the translator acts as a cultural intermediary, engaging in cultural decoding and re-encoding to ensure that the message resonates authentically (Nida, 1964). This approach moves beyond the limitations of purely literal translation, which often falls short in conveying rich cultural tapestries. While literal translation helps identify preliminary linguistic challenges, interpretative translation aligns more closely with the objective of communicating complex performances by prioritizing content adaptation over strict adherence to the source-language form (Newmark, 1988; Prachakul, 1997). This process mirrors the essential steps of translation: reading for understanding, detaching from the source structure, reformulating meaning, and final review (Pinmanee, 2003). Accordingly, developing English narration for Thai classical performances requires attention not only to linguistic equivalence but also to the authenticity of source narratives, culturally specific terminology, and the needs of the intended audience.

The successful narration of Thai classical performance emerges as a highly specialized form of public speaking (Dutt, 2013; Spratt et al., 2005). This aligns directly with English for Specific Purposes

(ESP), an approach focused on equipping learners with language skills for professional contexts (Mackay & Mountford, 1978). For narrators, ESP provides a framework for developing targeted vocabulary and discourse competence relevant to the arts. In this context, English narration requires specialized communicative competence involving script development, explanation of culturally specific content, appropriate pronunciation, and oral delivery for a particular professional audience. Brown (2014) and Richards (2006) similarly emphasize the importance of using language for meaningful communication and developing the ability to use English appropriately in context. These principles are particularly relevant to narration, where linguistic knowledge must be translated into purposeful oral communication for an audience. The creation of these scripts, often involving transliteration for cultural terms (Royal Institute, 2020), and their effective oral delivery are vital for preserving Thai national identity (Rodsawang, 2018). However, the relationship between culturally grounded script development and audience-centered English narration remains insufficiently examined in the specific context of Thai classical performances presented to international audiences.

Although translation studies have extensively addressed meaning transfer, cultural mediation, and translation strategies, less attention has been given to how these principles operate in the development and delivery of English narration for Thai classical performances. Likewise, while ESP emphasizes the development of language for specific professional contexts, existing approaches do not fully explain the combination of cultural knowledge, translation decisions, audience considerations, pronunciation, and narrator expertise required in this specialized communicative setting. In particular, limited research has examined how English narration scripts are developed from authentic Thai classical performance narratives and how these scripts are subsequently delivered to international audiences. This gap is significant because Thai classical performances communicate cultural meanings through an interconnected combination of narrative, language, movement, music, and performance conventions. Understanding how these elements are translated and communicated in English is therefore necessary for developing appropriate approaches to international cultural presentation and ESP training for specialized narration.

Accordingly, this study investigates the factors involved in developing and delivering English narration for Thai classical performances for international audiences. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What factors should be considered in developing English narration for Thai classical performances for international audiences?

RQ2: What factors should be considered in delivering English narration for Thai classical performances to international audiences?

Literature Review

Translation Studies

Translation involves the transfer of meaning from a source language to a target language while maintaining accuracy, naturalness, aesthetic quality, and the intended impact of the original text (Nida & Taber, 1982). Newmark (1988) identified several approaches to translation, including word-for-word, literal, semantic, and communicative translation. Among these approaches, semantic and communicative translation are particularly relevant to cultural performance because they allow translators to consider both the meaning of the source text and the communicative needs of the target audience. Yaisomanang (2018) described translation as both a linguistic and cognitive process through which the author's intended message, including feelings, opinions, perspectives, and tone, is transferred without distortion. Similarly, Phetchawattana (2016) emphasized that Thai-to-English translation requires attention to the translator, content type, denotative and connotative meanings, translation skills, linguistic accuracy, aesthetics, and target audience in order to achieve meaning equivalence. Saibua (2021) further emphasized that high-quality translation requires the translator to extract and accurately transfer the complete meaning and intention of the source text.

Literal translation, as defined by Newmark (1988), involves converting the grammatical structures of the source language into comparable structures in the target language, often through close or word-for-word rendering. Although this approach may disregard some contextual meanings, it can serve as an initial stage for examining the structure of a source text and identifying potential translation problems. Jitaree (2005) further described modified literal translation, which makes limited adjustments to grammar and word choice to improve clarity and naturalness, as well as idiomatic translation, which prioritizes natural language while attempting to retain the meaning and style of the source text. Mallikamas (2013) similarly emphasized the principles of accuracy, faithfulness, and the closest possible equivalence in meaning, structure, and linguistic units.

For cultural performance, however, translation frequently requires an interpretative rather than strictly literal approach. Interpretative translation, also referred to as free translation, is a communicative and cognitive process that prioritizes the transfer of meaning rather than adherence to the linguistic form of the source text. Nida (1964) conceptualized translation as cultural decoding in which translators interpret meanings embedded in the source culture, transfer those meanings without distortion, and re-encode them naturally for the target culture. This process requires knowledge of values, beliefs, customs, and cultural symbols that may not have direct equivalents in another language. Newmark (1988) similarly argued that interpretative translation allows paraphrasing, elaboration, and modification when necessary to make content clear and appropriate while preserving its principal meaning. Prachakul (1997) viewed this process as one of conveying the author's thoughts and intended meaning rather than reproducing the linguistic form of the source text. Duff (1989) further emphasized the importance of preserving emotion, atmosphere, and authorial intention in literary translation, while

House (2015) highlighted the importance of discourse appropriateness, language, tone, audience, and communicative context.

These perspectives are particularly important when translating Thai classical performances because cultural meanings cannot always be transferred through direct linguistic equivalence. Phetchawattana (2016) noted that translation facilitates the transfer of knowledge, ideas, and information across languages and cultures and requires particular attention to conceptual meaning. The Thai-to-English translation process involves four major stages: (1) reading and understanding the source text, (2) detaching from the source-text structure, (3) reformulating and rendering the meaning, and (4) final review (Borisutdhi, 1999; Pinitphuwadol, 2000; Pinmanee, 2003). These stages are particularly relevant to English narration scripts because the translated text must function not only as a written representation of the Thai source but also as an orally deliverable text for an international audience.

Another important issue in Thai-to-English translation is transliteration. Saibua (2021) explained that transliteration involves rendering a word from one writing system into another while approximating the pronunciation of the original word. The Royal Institute (2020) provides principles for transliterating Thai into Roman script, including the representation of consonants and vowels and conventions concerning word separation, capitalization, geographical names, loanwords, marks, abbreviations, and numbers. Transliteration is particularly useful for proper names and culturally specific terms for which direct English equivalents may not exist. In the context of Thai classical performances, therefore, transliteration can function together with explanation or internationally recognized equivalents to maintain cultural identity while supporting audience comprehension.

The translation process is also closely related to ESP because English narration for Thai classical performances represents a specialized communicative context rather than general English use. ESP emphasizes language needed for particular professional or academic situations and is characterized by tailored content, practical relevance, and attention to learners' real-world communication needs (Mackay & Mountford, 1978; Munby, 1982; Widdowson, 1983). The development of specialized English for professional contexts emerged alongside increasing international communication and the use of English as a lingua franca (Harding, 2007; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Suntornsawate, 2018). However, ESP may face challenges involving insufficient subject-specific expertise, inadequate needs analysis, limited learner-centered approaches, specialized vocabulary, and inappropriate or outdated learning materials (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Ruankam & Chuenchaichon, 2016; Thanh, 2016; Tsao, 2011; Xu, 1999). These concerns are particularly relevant to English narration for Thai classical performances, where linguistic competence must be combined with knowledge of specialized terminology and cultural content.

Thai Classical Performance

Thai classical performance, or Natayasinthai, represents a dynamic form of national cultural heritage that is deeply integrated into Thai life and has continuously evolved in response to political, administrative, and socio-economic changes (Boonsong, 2017). Its development encompasses distinctive dance postures, historical influences, performance transformations, and contributions from important practitioners and masters (Makpa, 2012). Thai classical dance is characterized by specific body alignment, movement patterns, and techniques that have been transmitted through generations of practitioners, including Khon masters since the Ayutthaya period. At the same time, Thai classical performance has demonstrated considerable adaptability through the incorporation and transformation of elements from folk, ethnic, and royal court traditions.

Thai classical performance encompasses four broad genres: Khon, drama, dance and dance drama, and folk play (Makpa, 2012). Khon includes distinctive hero, demon, and monkey characters, each associated with particular training and movement patterns. Drama includes both formal court traditions and community-based folk forms, while dance and dance drama encompass courtly and folk expressions. Folk plays similarly incorporate elements of court traditions and indigenous performance practices.

These performances consist of interconnected cultural and artistic elements. These include traditional yet adaptable costumes; scripts, literature, and lyrics that communicate cultural values; personnel such as teachers and performers; distinctive characters including Phra, Nang, Yak, and Ling; diverse performance repertoires; and forms of folk drama that emphasize storytelling in contrast to the more formally regulated conventions of court drama (Makpa, 2012). Consequently, understanding Thai classical performance requires more than knowledge of the storyline. It requires an understanding of movements, characters, performance conventions, literature, cultural beliefs, and the historical and social contexts embedded in the performance.

These characteristics create particular challenges when Thai classical performances are presented to international audiences. Much of the meaning embedded in the performance may be communicated through movement, symbolism, cultural references, and shared cultural knowledge rather than through explicit verbal explanation. Byram (1997) argued that effective intercultural communication requires more than linguistic proficiency and involves knowledge of cultural values and beliefs, skills of interpreting and relating cultural meanings, skills of discovery and interaction, and attitudes that recognize cultural differences. Similarly, Hall (1989) distinguished between high-context and low-context communication, emphasizing that cultures differ in the extent to which meaning is conveyed implicitly or explicitly. These perspectives suggest that presenting Thai classical performance to international audiences requires narration that makes culturally embedded meanings sufficiently accessible without losing their cultural significance.

Thus, English narration serves an important mediating function between the performance and international audiences. It can provide contextual information about characters, stories, movements,

artistic conventions, and cultural beliefs that may not be immediately accessible to audiences unfamiliar with Thai classical traditions. The need for such mediation also reinforces the importance of specialized English knowledge and culturally informed translation when Thai classical performances are presented internationally.

Thai Classical Performance Script Writing

Script writing involves constructing narratives by connecting events, characters, information, and ideas into a coherent textual form. The process generally includes researching, compiling, and organizing information to communicate feelings, thoughts, and intentions (Iamkrasin, 2023). Scripts may be developed for different communicative purposes and media, including printed texts, broadcast programs, radio and television, and theatrical performances (Nitsamer, 2008). Depending on their characteristics and purposes, scripts may include complete scripts, semi-complete scripts, performance schedule and timing scripts, sequential story scripts, and open scripts.

Effective scriptwriting requires attention to narrative structure, essential script elements, and appropriate writing techniques. Srijinda (2018) suggested that engaging scripts can use descriptions of settings and atmosphere to evoke emotions, while storylines should be organized from introduction through climax and should provide sufficient information about important characters and events. Scriptwriting generally involves planning, defining objectives, researching and selecting content, drafting and outlining, writing, and reviewing and revising. For Thai classical performances, relevant scriptwriting processes include planning, research, synopsis development, preparation of the performance script, and rewriting (Rattanasimakul, 2012; Rodsawang, 2018; Wittayarat, 2022; Yongyut, 2014).

For English narration of Thai classical performances, script development must go beyond general principles of scriptwriting because the script functions simultaneously as a cultural representation and an oral communication tool. The scriptwriter must therefore identify the essential information that international audiences need to understand the performance while ensuring that cultural meanings are not unnecessarily simplified or distorted. This requires careful selection and organization of source information, accurate translation, culturally appropriate explanation, and consideration of audience characteristics.

Cross-cultural communication is therefore integral to the development of Thai classical performance narration scripts. Byram (1997) emphasized that intercultural communicative competence requires the ability to interpret and relate cultural meanings across different cultural frameworks. In a similar way, Hall (1989) argued that communication is shaped by culturally specific patterns of meaning, particularly the distinction between high-context and low-context communication. Because Thai classical performance contains culturally embedded meanings that may be implicit to Thai audiences, an English narration script may need to make selected information more explicit for

international audiences. This does not imply removing cultural complexity; rather, it involves providing appropriate contextualization so that audiences can interpret the performance more effectively.

This consideration is also consistent with the principles of ESP, in which language and content are selected according to specific communicative purposes and professional contexts (Mackay & Mountford, 1978; Munby, 1982; Widdowson, 1983). In the present context, the specialized purpose is not simply to produce grammatically correct English but to create a functional narration script capable of communicating Thai classical performance to an international audience. The script therefore needs specialized vocabulary, culturally appropriate explanations, accurate terminology, and discourse suitable for oral delivery.

The development of such scripts may also benefit from principles associated with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes meaningful communication, interaction, and the ability to use language appropriately in real-world contexts (Brown, 2014; Saengboon, 2012). Larsen-Freeman (2000) emphasized learner participation and meaningful language use, while Richards (2006) highlighted meaningful communication, interaction, and the balance between accuracy and fluency. Namwong (2011) and the English Language Institute (2014) similarly emphasized communicative competence and the appropriate use of language in diverse contexts. In the context of narration, these principles support the development of scripts that are not merely grammatically accurate but also clear, natural, audience-oriented, and appropriate for live communication.

Consequently, Thai classical performance script writing should be understood as an interdisciplinary process involving cultural knowledge, translation, scriptwriting, audience analysis, and oral communication. Collaboration among Thai classical performance specialists, Thai-language experts, translators, and English-language specialists can therefore contribute to greater cultural accuracy and communicative effectiveness. Such collaboration is particularly important when culturally specific concepts, character names, literary references, figurative expressions, and performance terminology must be transferred into English.

Narrative Techniques in Thai Classical Performance

The narration of Thai classical performance in English can be regarded as a specialized form of public speaking that involves more than reading a prepared text aloud. Effective narration requires the integration of grammar and vocabulary, contextual appropriateness, pronunciation, body language, interaction, and knowledge of the performance being presented. The narrator's primary role is to guide audiences in understanding events, characters, artistic elements, and cultural meanings represented in the performance. The narrator may also need to explain character movements, directions, artistic conventions, and cultural beliefs that provide the performance with its deeper meaning (Dutt, 2013; Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983; Lertjanyarak, 2015; Spratt et al., 2005).

Pronunciation is particularly important in this context because narration involves both English-language pronunciation and the accurate articulation of Thai names and specialized cultural

terminology. As discussed in relation to transliteration, Thai terms may not have direct English equivalents, requiring the narrator to balance accessibility for international audiences with fidelity to the original Thai pronunciation (Royal Institute, 2020; Saibua, 2021). The use of transliterated forms, together with appropriate explanation or the original Thai pronunciation, can therefore help audiences recognize culturally specific terms while maintaining their connection to Thai cultural identity.

Narrative techniques must also support audience comprehension. The narrator needs to control the amount and type of information provided according to the audience's background knowledge, the complexity of the performance, and the communicative context. This principle is consistent with the communicative orientation of CLT, which emphasizes meaningful communication, contextual appropriateness, accuracy, fluency, and effective interaction (Richards, 2006). It is also consistent with ESP, where language use is determined by the specific purposes, contexts, and needs of the intended users (Mackay & Mountford, 1978; Munby, 1982; Widdowson, 1983).

In addition, effective narration requires subject-matter knowledge. A narrator who understands Thai classical dance and drama can provide more accurate explanations of movements, characters, storylines, and cultural meanings. Narrator expertise therefore complements linguistic proficiency. The combination of English-language competence, Thai-language and cultural knowledge, and specialized knowledge of Thai classical performance enables narrators to function as cultural interpreters rather than simply language users.

Presenting Thai classical performances internationally commonly involves scripted speaking, in which an English narration script is prepared either directly in English or through translation from an original Thai source. The development of an accurate script and its effective oral delivery are consequently important components of communicating Thai classical performance to international audiences and of preserving and sharing Thai national identity internationally (Chanate, 2018; Chanvisatlak, 2017; Rodsawang, 2018; Saiseub, 2003).

Overall, the literature suggests that effective English narration for Thai classical performances requires the integration of meaning-equivalent translation, cultural contextualization, audience-oriented scriptwriting, specialized terminology, appropriate transliteration and pronunciation, and narrator expertise. These interconnected elements provide a conceptual basis for examining the factors involved in both the development and delivery of English narration for Thai classical performances.

Methodology

Participants

The target participants comprised two groups with direct and relevant experience in the development and delivery of English narration for Thai classical performances: Thai classical performance experts and experienced English narrators. We purposively selected five Thai classical performance specialists (SP.1–SP.5) who had experience in managing, producing, organizing, and mentoring Thai classical performances, particularly Khon and drama, and five experienced English

narration professionals (EP.6–EP.10) who had experience delivering English narration for Thai classical performances in domestic and international settings.

We selected these two groups because they possessed complementary expertise directly relevant to the two processes investigated in this study. Thai classical performance experts were able to provide specialized knowledge concerning performance traditions, narratives, characters, movements, cultural meanings, and artistic conventions. Experienced English narrators, in contrast, were able to provide practical insights into script use, English-language delivery, pronunciation, audience comprehension, and the challenges of communicating Thai classical performances to international audiences. Including both groups therefore enabled us to examine English narration from complementary perspectives, encompassing both script development and narration delivery.

We used purposive sampling to identify participants who could provide information-rich accounts based on their professional experience. Participants were contacted through professional networks at their respective workplaces. Their experience and direct involvement in Thai classical performance and English narration were considered essential for addressing the research questions.

Instrumentation

We developed a semi-structured interview protocol to investigate the factors involved in developing and delivering English narration for Thai classical performances through three stages. First, we reviewed the research context, relevant concepts, theories, and previous literature to identify issues related to translation, Thai classical performance, Thai classical performance script writing, and narrative techniques in script writing with cross-cultural principles. Second, we developed semi-structured interview questions based on 11 questions for Thai classical performance experts and 15 questions for experienced English narrators.

The interview questions addressed several key areas relevant to the research questions. For the Thai classical performance experts, the interview topics included the characteristics and cultural meanings of Thai classical performances, the selection and use of original narratives, principles for developing narration scripts, translation accuracy and meaning equivalence, the use of Thai names and transliteration, collaboration between content and language specialists, audience characteristics, and factors affecting effective English narration. For the experienced English narrators, the interview topics included preparation and use of English narration scripts, audience comprehension, pronunciation of Thai names and specialized terminology, script quality, narrator expertise, English-language proficiency, knowledge of Thai classical performance, audience characteristics, and challenges encountered when delivering narration in domestic and international contexts. These topics were designed to elicit participants' experiences and perspectives concerning both the development of narration scripts and the delivery of English narration.

Third, we presented the semi-structured interview protocol to five experts for content validity assessment. We evaluated the content validity using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC),

with scores assigned as +1 (agree), 0 (uncertain), or −1 (disagree) (Thaweerath, 1997). An IOC score of +1 indicated full agreement that an interview question corresponded to the research objectives, 0 indicated uncertainty, and −1 indicated disagreement. The IOC values for the interview questions ranged from 0.60 to 1.00, with all items achieving values of at least 0.50. These results indicated that the interview protocol had acceptable content validity and was appropriate for data collection after incorporating the experts' recommendations. Sample interview questions are provided in the Appendix.

Data Collection

Before collecting data, we submitted the research project to the Human Research Ethics Committee at Burapha University for ethical review. The project received ethical approval under code HU069/2566.

We collected qualitative data through semi-structured interviews conducted between October and December 2023. We contacted the selected Thai classical performance experts and experienced English narrators through their respective professional networks and supervisors to arrange convenient interview dates and times. We conducted the interviews using the validated semi-structured interview protocol.

During the interviews, we encouraged participants to elaborate on their professional experiences and provide examples relevant to the development and delivery of English narration for Thai classical performances. This approach allowed us to explore issues emerging from participants' experiences while maintaining consistency across interviews, with permission to record audio. After each interview, we reviewed the collected information to verify its completeness and ensure that all relevant topics had been addressed.

Data Analysis

We conducted qualitative data analysis using data triangulation and content analysis of the semi-structured interviews with the five Thai classical performance experts and five experienced English narrators. The interviews were conducted between October and December 2023 and were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

We first organized the interview data according to the research questions and identified recurring concepts and issues across participants. We repeatedly read the transcripts to become familiar with the data and identify relevant statements. We then classified the data into categories and key issues to establish conceptual boundaries and identify relationships among related concepts.

We subsequently used typological analysis, including domain analysis, to classify key concepts and examine relationships among major and subordinate categories. We compared the perspectives of the two participant groups to identify areas of convergence and complementary insights concerning script development and narration delivery. Data triangulation across the two groups was used to

strengthen the interpretation of the findings by examining whether themes were supported across different sources of professional experience.

Finally, we synthesized the categories into broader themes corresponding to the research questions and interpreted the relationships among the identified concepts. The findings were presented descriptively and supported by selected quotations from participants. To protect participant identities, quotations were identified using the abbreviations SP.1–SP.5 for Thai classical performance specialists and EP.6–EP.10 for experienced English narration professionals.

Results and Discussion

The qualitative data analysis identified two major themes concerning the development and delivery of English narration for Thai classical performances. The themes reflect the perspectives of Thai classical performance experts and experienced English narrators regarding the preparation of narration scripts and their delivery to international audiences.

Theme 1: Culturally Grounded Script Development

The findings indicate that developing English narration scripts for Thai classical performances is not a straightforward process of linguistic transfer but involves the integration of translation accuracy, cultural authenticity, specialist collaboration, and audience awareness. These interconnected considerations position the script as a form of cultural mediation between Thai performance traditions and international audiences. The following discussion examines four aspects: 1.1 accurate translation and meaning equivalence; 1.2 utilization of original narratives; 1.3 collaboration with specialized personnel; and 1.4 audience characteristics in script development.

1.1 Accurate Translation and Meaning Equivalence

The findings highlight that developing English narration scripts for Thai classical performances requires accurate translation that preserves both denotative and connotative meanings. Phetchawattana (2016) emphasizes that successful translation in artistic contexts requires more than linguistic accuracy because cultural value is often embedded in meanings that cannot be transferred through direct word-for-word translation. The translation process therefore requires careful reading, understanding, detachment from the source structure, reformulation of meaning, and final review to achieve appropriate meaning equivalence.

This finding is also consistent with Nida's (1964) view of translation as cultural decoding. From this perspective, the translator functions as an intermediary who interprets culturally embedded meanings in the source language, transfers the intended message, and re-encodes it naturally for the target audience. Such a process requires understanding both the source and target cultures and may involve functional or dynamic equivalence rather than formal correspondence. Similarly, Newmark

(1988) argues that interpretative or free translation may require paraphrasing or elaboration to make meaning clear and appropriate for target readers or listeners, provided that the main meaning and communicative intention are maintained.

The participants' accounts provide practical evidence of these principles. One participant explained:

> *"Our translation process involves reviewing specialized terms, deciding on transliteration with explanations. The rules for written vs. communicative language often clash. Translating Thai to English presents a common challenge of potential misunderstanding for listeners." (SP.3, Oct 20, 2023)*

Another participant stated:

> *"You can't translate Thai into English with a Thai mindset. Correct translation is Translation 101. A solid vocabulary and paraphrasing are essential, as word-for-word translation often makes Thai cumbersome in English." (EP.7, Dec 22, 2023)*

These accounts demonstrate that the participants distinguish translation for communicative purposes from literal linguistic substitution. Their emphasis on paraphrasing, specialized terminology, and potential misunderstanding supports the view that English narration must reconstruct meaning for the target audience rather than reproduce the source-language form. Thus, translation accuracy in this context is best understood as preserving intended cultural and communicative meaning while adapting its linguistic expression for international listeners.

1.2 Utilization of Original Narratives

The findings further indicate that English narration scripts should be grounded in authentic source narratives. This is particularly important because Thai classical performances, or Natayasinthai, constitute a form of cultural heritage closely connected to Thai history, social life, and cultural traditions (Boonsong, 2017). The diversity of Thai classical performances, including Khon, Lakhon, Rabam, and various forms of folk performance, reflects distinctive historical development, courtly traditions, community beliefs, and performance practices (Makpa, 2012).

Consequently, English narration should be developed from reliable source narratives rather than from decontextualized or simplified descriptions. This is particularly relevant when performances are based on established literary traditions such as the Ramakian, Enao, or indigenous folk narratives. The process of scriptwriting involves researching, compiling, and organizing information in order to communicate intended meanings and ideas (Iamkrasin, 2023). Using authentic sources, therefore,

provides the cultural and narrative foundation from which English explanations can be developed without disconnecting the narration from the original performance tradition.

The participants emphasized the importance of maintaining consistency when presenting culturally specific characters and narratives. One participant explained:

> *"When using names like Thotsakan, we clarify in brackets with their internationally recognized name, e.g., (Ravana). This ensures diverse audiences understand it's 'their version,' preventing confusion across different cultural contexts." (SP.1, Dec 15, 2023)*

Another participant stated:

> *"With literature, various texts describe things differently. We must nail down and stick to the most widely understood version. You can't switch names like 'Thotsakan' to 'Ravana' mid-way; it causes confusion and makes people think a new character appeared." (EP.7, Dec 22, 2023)*

These accounts indicate that authenticity does not necessarily mean presenting Thai cultural references without explanation. Instead, authenticity can be maintained while providing additional information that enables international audiences to establish connections with culturally familiar references. The use of "Thotsakan" together with "Ravana," for example, can retain the Thai cultural reference while reducing potential confusion among audiences familiar with the Ramayana tradition. The participants' emphasis on consistency also suggests that narrative coherence is an important component of culturally responsible translation.

1.3 Collaboration with Specialized Personnel

The findings demonstrate that developing English narration scripts requires collaboration among individuals with complementary areas of expertise. Phetchawattana (2016) identifies the translator as an important component of the translation process, while the findings of the present study further indicate that linguistic expertise alone is insufficient when the source material involves specialized cultural and performance knowledge.

Thai classical performance experts possess knowledge concerning dance postures, character archetypes, performance repertoires, narratives, and culturally specific concepts such as Natayasap. Their involvement can therefore help ensure that the English narration accurately represents the artistic and cultural dimensions of the performance. Collaboration during planning, research, and synopsis development is consistent with previous approaches to script preparation (Rattanasimakul, 2012; Rodsawang, 2018; Wittayarat, 2022; Yongyut, 2014). Such collaboration is particularly important

because the meaning of a performance is distributed across language, movement, music, character, costume, narrative, and cultural symbolism.

This collaborative process was reflected in the participants' accounts:

> *"Yeah, most of the time, it's both ways. The person writes it in Thai, includes the English, and then someone who knows the language reviews it. Usually, it's about fifty-fifty." (SP.4, Jan 1, 2023)*

Another participant explained:

> *"The Thai scriptwriter is the source, acting as the art director, mapping everything out. If they have English skills, they should team up with the English script writer and hash things out with experts on the content." (EP.7, Dec 22, 2023)*

These statements illustrate that script development is a collaborative rather than individual activity. The participants describe a complementary relationship between source-content expertise and English-language expertise. This finding extends the role of the translator from an individual language mediator to a member of a multidisciplinary script-development process in which cultural specialists, Thai scriptwriters, and English-language specialists jointly negotiate how cultural meanings should be represented for international audiences.

1.4 Audience Characteristics in Script Development

The findings also demonstrate that audience characteristics need to be considered before the English narration script is finalized. Although the source material is rooted in Thai cultural traditions, the intended audience may have limited knowledge of Thai classical dance, drama, literature, characters, and cultural beliefs. Consequently, the selection of information, terminology, explanations, and level of detail needs to be adapted to the anticipated audience.

This finding is closely connected to the translation principles discussed by Phetchawattana (2016), particularly the importance of considering the target audience when transferring knowledge across languages and cultures. It also relates to Nida's (1964) emphasis on the target audience's response and Newmark's (1988) recognition that interpretative translation may involve adaptation, paraphrasing, or elaboration to achieve clarity.

The implication is that audience analysis should occur during script development rather than being treated solely as a concern of the narrator during the live performance. Decisions about what cultural information needs explanation, which Thai terms should be retained, and where additional contextual information is necessary are already embedded in the scriptwriting process.

Theme 2: Audience-Centered Narration Delivery

The second theme concerns how the prepared English narration is delivered to international audiences. The findings indicate that delivery involves more than reading a completed script aloud. It requires attention to audience comprehension, pronunciation, and the interaction between script quality and narrator expertise. The following discussion considers these three aspects: 2.1 audience comprehension and informative content; 2.2 pronunciation strategy; and 2.3 script quality and narrator expertise.

2.1 Audience Comprehension and Informative Content

The findings indicate that audience comprehension is a central consideration in delivering English narration for Thai classical performances. The narrator's role is not simply to describe what is occurring on stage but also to provide contextual information that enables international audiences to understand characters, events, movements, cultural meanings, and underlying beliefs.

This finding can be interpreted through Byram's (1997) concept of ICC, which emphasizes understanding the values, beliefs, and cultural contexts underlying communication. It is also consistent with Hall's (1989) distinction between high-context and low-context communication. Thai classical performances may communicate meaning through culturally embedded narratives, gestures, movements, symbolism, and contextual knowledge that may not be immediately accessible to international audiences. English narration therefore functions as a bridge between meanings that may be implicit within the Thai performance context and the explicit explanations that international audiences may require.

The participants illustrated this practice:

> *"We always provide an introductory narration for our performances. This announcement ensures the audience understands the background and key details of each segment or full-scale production, like Khon" (SP.1, Dec 15, 2023)*

Another participant stated:

> *"We prepare and research authentic narrative elements from Thai folk plays/Ramakien before scripting narration. This ensures comprehensive knowledge and audience understanding, vital for any on-stage contingencies" (EP.9, Dec 23, 2023)*

These accounts show that informative narration serves an interpretive function rather than merely providing verbal accompaniment to the performance. The participants' emphasis on background information and authentic narrative elements suggests that narration helps international audiences

construct the cultural context necessary to interpret what they see and hear on stage. This supports the view that effective intercultural communication requires more than linguistic competence; it requires the ability to make culturally embedded meanings accessible to the target audience.

2.2 Pronunciation Strategy

The findings further indicate that pronunciation is an important component of English narration, particularly when narrators introduce Thai names and culturally specific terms. Participants described the use of both transliterated forms and Thai pronunciation. This approach reflects the need to balance accessibility for international audiences with fidelity to the Thai source language.

The Royal Institute (2020) and Saibua (2021) emphasize that transliteration involves systematic principles for representing Thai consonants and vowels in Roman script. In the context of Thai classical performance, transliteration can provide international audiences with a practical representation of Thai terms while retaining their connection to the original language. However, transliteration alone does not necessarily communicate how a term is authentically pronounced in Thai. The findings therefore suggest that written transliteration and oral pronunciation can serve complementary rather than competing functions.

The importance of pronunciation was evident in the participants' accounts:

> *"English is super important for clarifying diverse story versions, like Ramayana and Ramakien, ensuring a diverse audience has shared understanding. Its broader reach as a global language helps our narrations connect internationally." (SP.3, Oct 20, 2023)*

Another participant stated:

> *"Yes, it's really quite important to describe the show correctly, conveying the right message for each performance piece. This gives the audience deeper understanding. Pronunciation must be right, true to the original source, often with notes like 'Ravana, or as we say in Thai, Thotsakan" (EP.8, Dec 18, 2023)*

These statements indicate that pronunciation is not merely a matter of English phonological accuracy. It is also related to cultural representation. The participant's example of "Ravana" and "Thotsakan" illustrates how narration can simultaneously provide an internationally recognizable reference and preserve the Thai form. Pronunciation consequently becomes part of the broader process of negotiating accessibility and cultural authenticity.

2.3 Script Quality and Narrator Expertise

The findings indicate that the quality of the narration script and the expertise of the narrator are mutually supportive. A well-prepared script provides a reliable foundation for delivery, but the script alone cannot guarantee successful communication. The narrator must also possess sufficient knowledge of Thai classical dance and drama, understand the source culture, and demonstrate appropriate English and Thai pronunciation.

This finding reinforces the view that narration is a specialized communicative practice rather than simply the oral reading of a prepared text. Narrators require subject-matter knowledge to interpret movements, characters, narratives, and cultural meanings, while Thai language proficiency enables them to understand culturally embedded expressions and source materials. The combination of script quality and narrator expertise is therefore important because the narrator may need to interpret, clarify, or respond to aspects of the performance that cannot be fully anticipated in a written script.

The participants emphasized this relationship:

> *"A good script truly supports the narrator. If it's incomplete, extra explanations are needed. Without foundational knowledge, narrators are stuck. A perfect script is a bonus, otherwise, skilled improvisation is key for an easier job." (SP.1, Dec 15, 2023)*

Another participant stated:

> *"Both script and narrator must be on point. Even with an amazing script, if the narrator is clueless about the story or has poor delivery, like the MC mispronouncing 'Surpanakha' for the Princess, it's a disaster. Careful narration is crucial." (SP.2, Dec 15, 2023)*

A further participant explained:

> *"A solid script is a massive help for narrators, especially non-professionals. Even with excellent English, nervousness can cause issues. If the script isn't perfect, internal conflict arises, making it hard to convey the message, even if understood." (EP.10, Dec 16, 2023)*

Taken together, these accounts demonstrate that script quality and narrator expertise should not be considered separate requirements. The participants consistently describe a relationship in which a strong script reduces uncertainty for the narrator, while subject-matter knowledge and delivery skills enable the narrator to use the script appropriately during a live performance. The findings therefore

suggest that narrator preparation should combine English-language ability with knowledge of Thai classical performance and cultural content.

Implications and Conclusion

This study examined the development and delivery of English narration for Thai classical performances for international audiences. The findings identified two interconnected themes: culturally grounded script development and audience-centered narration delivery. The first theme indicates that effective English narration scripts require accurate translation and meaning equivalence, authentic source narratives, collaboration between Thai classical performance and English-language specialists, and consideration of audience characteristics. The second theme demonstrates that effective narration delivery requires attention to audience comprehension, appropriate pronunciation strategies, script quality, and narrator expertise. Together, these findings demonstrate that English narration for Thai classical performances involves not only linguistic transfer but also cultural interpretation and audience-oriented communication.

The findings have important implications for ESP, particularly in the preparation of individuals who use English in Thai classical performance contexts. ESP instruction should move beyond general language proficiency by integrating specialized vocabulary, culturally specific expressions, transliteration, pronunciation of Thai names and terms, translation strategies, and English script writing into authentic performance-related tasks. Teaching and learning activities can be designed around the actual communicative needs of narrators, such as researching Thai classical narratives, developing culturally appropriate English scripts, adapting explanations for international audiences, and practicing oral narration. In addition, ESP instruction should incorporate subject-matter knowledge through collaboration among English-language teachers, Thai classical performance specialists, translators, and practitioners. Such an interdisciplinary approach can help learners develop the linguistic, cultural, and professional competencies required to interpret Thai cultural content and communicate it appropriately rather than merely read a prepared script.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that effective English narration for Thai classical performances requires the coordinated development of culturally grounded scripts, accurate and meaning-equivalent translation, audience-centered communication, appropriate pronunciation, and narrator expertise. These findings extend the application of ESP to a specialized cultural-performance context in which English functions not simply as a medium of communication but also as a means of cultural interpretation and intercultural exchange. Practically, organizations presenting Thai classical performances internationally may apply these principles to script development and narrator preparation. However, because this study relied on qualitative perspectives from Thai classical performance experts and experienced English narrators and did not directly examine international audience responses, future research should investigate audience comprehension and perceptions using quantitative or mixed-

methods approaches and include other stakeholders, such as directors, performers, translators, and international audience members.

Research Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, three recommendations are proposed for applying the findings to ESP, particularly in the preparation of English narrators and other professionals involved in presenting Thai classical performances to international audiences.

Integrate Thai Classical Performance Narration into ESP Instruction: ESP courses for learners who are preparing to work as English narrators, cultural presenters, or professionals involved in Thai classical performances should incorporate authentic performance-related communication tasks. Instruction should include specialized vocabulary, culturally specific expressions, translation and paraphrasing, transliteration, pronunciation of Thai names and cultural terms, and the development of English narration scripts. Learners should also practice transforming culturally embedded Thai content into clear and accessible English explanations for international audiences. This approach would allow ESP instruction to move beyond general language proficiency toward the communicative demands of a specific professional context.:

Develop Audience-Centered and Intercultural Communication Skills in ESP: ESP instruction should incorporate audience analysis and intercultural communication as essential components of English narration training. Learners should be trained to identify the cultural background, prior knowledge, linguistic needs, and expectations of international audiences and use this information when selecting terminology, explanations, and levels of detail in narration scripts. Classroom activities could involve adapting the same Thai classical performance content for audiences with different levels of familiarity with Thai culture, followed by practice in oral delivery and pronunciation. Such activities can help learners develop the ability to mediate culturally embedded meanings while maintaining the authenticity of Thai cultural references.

Establish an Interdisciplinary ESP Training Model for English Narrators: ESP programs should consider developing an interdisciplinary training model that combines English-language competence with knowledge of Thai classical performance and cultural heritage. The model should facilitate collaboration among English-language teachers, Thai classical performance specialists, translators, scriptwriters, and practitioners. Training should integrate script development, meaning-equivalent translation, cultural interpretation, pronunciation, audience-centered communication, and live narration practice. The resulting training model could subsequently be implemented and evaluated in ESP courses to determine its applicability for preparing learners to communicate Thai cultural heritage effectively to international audiences.

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Appendix

Sample Interview Questions:

1. What is your approach to the preparation of English narration scripts for Thai classical performances?
2. Do you consider a thorough comprehension of the source material, including plot, theme, situations, events, conflicts, characters, and figurative language, essential for the preparation of English narration scripts? If so, how?
3. Do you consider specialized terminology, particularly character names in both their original and Thai forms within Khon and Lakon performances, essential for the preparation of English narration scripts? If so, how?
4. Do you consider translation accuracy essential for the preparation of English narration scripts? If so, how?
5. Do you consider translation accuracy essential for the delivery of English narration? If so, how?
6. Do you believe that the quality of the English narration script impacts the narrator's performance on stage? If so, in what ways?
7. Is the individual responsible for the Thai script also tasked with translating it into English, or is the translation assigned to a language specialist? How is this process typically managed?
8. In cases where the translation is conducted by a specialist, have any translation-related issues been encountered? If so, what are the nature of these issues?
9. In cases where the Thai scriptwriter is responsible for the English translation, what challenges are typically encountered, and how are these challenges addressed?
10. Is the narrator's role limited solely to delivery, or are they also involved in the preparation of the narration script? If involved, to what extent?