

An Analysis of Translation Strategies of Tootsie's Vocabulary from Thai into English: A Case Study of a TV Series, 'Diary Tootsies the Series'

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the strategies used in translating the Thai TV series, 'Diary Tootsies the Series Season 1 and 2' written and directed by Piyachart Thongaum. Employing Baker's (1992) eight translation strategies of non-equivalence at the word level from Thai to English, the study identified the occurrences of each strategy, exemplified the techniques used, and described the translator's intentions. Frequencies of occurrence were calculated to compare the use of translation strategies.

The findings illustrated that seven of Baker's (1992) translation strategies were used. The most frequently-employed translation strategy was Translation by a more general word, which accounted for 65 occurrences (36.72%) while the two least with 4 times (2.26 %) were Translation by using a loan word with or without explanation, and Translation by omission. The illustration-based translation, however, was not found. Furthermore, the study found 28 instances (15.82%) of literal translation, which was beyond Baker's (1992) framework.

The majority of gay terminologies according to findings, drew on existing Thai words before evolving into new meaning, usually relating to sexuality, resulting in some Thai words not being directly translated into English. Also, the greatest emphasis was placed on meaning while retaining the tootsieness in the target language was the least important factor. Evidently, gayness in the original text was diminished when translated into the target text. This study can assist translators in becoming aware of the unique characteristics of ladyboys' dialogues and in employing different non-equivalence translation strategies to translate idiosyncratic words in ladyboys' subtitle scripts in order to effectively convey their original meaning and flavor.

Keywords: Translation strategies, translation from Thai into English, gay dialogues, gay slang words

1. INTRODUCTION

The translation is one of the sciences that plays a critical role in connecting disparate knowledge, groups, and cultures. However, translation cannot take place without the presence of a major component known as 'language.' Language, according to Crystal and Robins (2018), is 'a symbol that occurs for humans to communicate in society; language can also be used to express one's identity, to play, to express one's imagination, and to release one's emotions.'

Nevertheless, the use of language in communication has changed dramatically in recent years, especially in the age of globalization that increased exposure to gender diversity. As a result of the American Psychiatric Association meeting in 1974, it was decided that homosexuality was no longer caused by a brain disorder or schizophrenia (Drescher, 2003), causing the group of people whose gender identity and/or gender expression falls outside of the prevailing societal framework to become more courageous in venturing outside of their comfort zones and banding together to

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express their identities leading to ‘argot.’ As Amara Prasitratasin (1998) stated that the union of people with similar viewpoints and ways of life results in ‘argot.’ They develop a distinct language for use in their small groups until large communities such as political language, medical terminology, and slang.

In addition, technology has advanced significantly in recent years, allowing people from different countries to easily communicate with one another and learn about different cultures, and learning through media is one of the most important ways to comprehend different matters. This includes television series, which is widely regarded as one of the most popular media genres, not only for entertaining the public but also for introducing knowledge and ideas that accurately reflect cultural issues (Phatthira, 2018).

Furthermore, as a result of the increased exposure to gender diversity in society, these groups are beginning to influence the media in the modern era, and many television producers have cast transsexuals in a variety of television dramas (Wongmung, 2016). Therefore, the language developed by this group began to be transmitted to modern society via the media in which it gained popularity and became an important identity. For these reasons, the narratives or dialogues of these types of characters are translated so that foreigners can understand what they are saying. Modern-day ladyboys, however, frequently invent new words, phrases, or even expressions that are unique and distinct from the common language. This presents a challenge for translators who must research the meaning of those words to correctly translate them and create the most enjoyable experience for audiences.

The challenges mentioned above are the impetus for the study of translating strategies from Thai to English for translating tootsies language from the popular Thai television series ‘*Diary Tootsies the Series*’ based on Baker’s (1992) strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 DIARIES TOOTSIE THE SERIES

‘*Diary Tootsies the Series*’ (*Diary of Tootsie*, a title in English) Seasons 1 and 2, is a Thai comedy series written and directed by Piyachart Thongaum, and co-directed by Pat Boonitipat. The series was first broadcasted on GMM 25, a Thai digital terrestrial television channel, in 2016. It is based on a cowriter Theetawit Setthachaitat’s true story published on Facebook page titled *Diary of Tootsie*. The story originated from a group of four close friends consisting of Gus, Golf, and Kim as gay men as well as Natty as a lesbian. They were coincidentally dumped by their partners on the same day, and they promised to seek for true love together. The series depicts their stories of mishap, laughter, tears and encounters with other eccentric characters (Melalin, 2016).

2.2 TRANSLATION

According to Nida and Taber (1969), translating entails duplicating the receptor's language to the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and then in terms of style. They develop a translation theory that incorporates ideas from transformation grammar. Also, Diller and Kornelius (1991) have suggested that translation is considered adequate if it contains the same reference, prediction, and inference as the original. A source language (henceforth SL) and a target language (henceforth TL) can only be semantically,

pragmatically, and stylistically equivalent in meaning if they are semantically, pragmatically, and stylistically the same.

2.3 CROSS-CULTURAL TRANSLATION STRATEGY

Previous research on cross-cultural translations has shown that it is difficult to translate cultural content. Fortunately, some researchers have already investigated translation strategies for cultural equivalence and referred to them as cultural equivalence translation (Theppaeng, 2012). A case study by Ngamsri (2017) analyzed the translation strategies chosen to translate each type of cultural word and phrase in ‘*The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp*’ translation of Khamman Khonkhai’s original Thai book, ‘*Khru Ban Nok* (ครูบ้านนอก).’ Based on the translation strategies’ framework of Newmark (1988) and Baker (1992), six translation strategies were reportedly employed. These were transference, use of a more general word, use of more than one strategy, literal translation, paraphrase, and omission. Among these, translation by transference is the most common, and omission is the method least chosen by the translator. This study sheds light on common translation strategies to address cultural differences in the source language (Thai) and the target language (English). However, the researcher, Ngamsri (2017), maintained that with only one version of English translation of the book, it is impossible to compare translation strategies chosen for different cultural words in the same context by various translators.

2.4 GAY SUBTITLE TRANSLATIONS

Furthermore, as stated above, this research is a study of Tootsie’s vocabulary translation strategies, according to Permpoon’s (2013) findings, *Plon Na Ya* (Episode 1) and *Wai Bum Cheer Kra Hum Lok Films* based on Newmark’s (1988) strategies, stated the translator placed the greatest emphasis on meaning while retaining the tootsieness in the target language was the least important factor. In addition, when it came to non-equivalence at the word level, the translator used the cultural substitution strategy the most while employing the least translation by a more general word. However, translation by using loan words plus an explanation and translation by illustration was not found in that study.

Three years later, a study of Ninpanit’s (2016) was conducted based on the previous work that its findings influenced the definition of gay. In this latter study, an investigation was conducted on a translation of gay dialogues from Thai into English in a movie, *The Iron Ladies 1* (2000), and *A True Love, Fake Romance Short Film, Change: Love...As Always* (2013). The foci were on the language characteristics in both the source text (Thai) and the target text (English), as well as translation strategies based on Baker’s (2011). Additionally, in terms of translation strategies based on the framework, the study found that translation by using more neutral or less expressive words was the most frequent strategy (26.09%). The translation strategies by cultural substitution and by omission were equally employed (21.74%), and the translation strategies by using a more general word and by paraphrasing had the same percentage of 13.04%.

2.5 DEFINITIONS OF SPECIFIC TERMS

The term ‘tootsie’ refers to gay people who have a gender identity or gender expression that differs from the sex assigned to them at birth, and Melalin (2016) stated that tootsie or tood, from the film Tootsie, has long been benign Thai slang for ‘effeminate gay men.’

Baker's (1992) eight translation strategies refers to the strategies proposed by Mona Baker to deal with the problems on finding equivalent words while doing translation, namely translating by a more general word, a more / less expressive word, cultural substitution; using a loan word or loan word plus explanation; paraphrasing using a related word; paraphrasing using unrelated words; omission; and illustration.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Diary Tootsies the Series, a Thai series which is first released in 2016 is compared with its English subtitle to shed light on the translation techniques used.

In the following section, the researchers analyzed the translation approaches taken to all gay dialogues found in the original text. Baker's (1992) eight translation strategies for dealing with non-equivalence at word-level were used to identify and categorize the translated text. After the data collected, the percentage was applied to find the frequency of all strategies.

In the next section, the results are grouped not in terms of type of gay term, but rather in terms of the types of translation techniques used by the translator. The Thai version of these passages appear in Thai script, with the specific terms highlighted in Romanized characters. The English versions of these phrases are then presented, with the terms are highlighted in bold-faced type. Sometimes the ‘terms’ being analyzed are individual words, such as ‘อีช้าง*ก /ee cháang láak/’, and ‘ลำไย /lam yai/.’ At other times, the ‘terms’ in Thai may be surrounded by the context, such as มึงจะหิวอะไรเบอร์นี้วะ /meung jà **hīw** à-rai ber nán wá/.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The researchers propose that the translator used seven translation techniques proposed by Baker (1992) plus literal translation for rendering gay language in English. The frequencies of each approach appear in Table 1.

Table 1: Translation Techniques Found in *Diaries Tootsie*

Translation Techniques	Occurrences (Words)	Percentage
Translation by a more general word	65	36.93
Translation by literal translation	28	15.91
Translation by cultural substitution	22	12.50
Translation by a more / less expressive word	21	11.93
Translation by paraphrasing using unrelated words	18	10.23
Translation by paraphrasing using a related word	15	8.52
Translation by omission	4	2.27

Translation by using a loan word or loan word plus explanation	3	1.70
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According to Table 1, the translator renders gay language applying eight techniques. The most frequently used technique is translation by using a more general word accounting for 36.93 percent followed by literal translation, cultural substitution, a more / less expressive word, paraphrasing using unrelated words, and paraphrasing using a related word constituting 15.91, 12.50, 11.93, 10.23, and 8.52 respectively. The translator also omits and uses a loan word or loan word plus explanation to render certain occurrences which makes up 2.27 and 1.70 percent respectively. The authors admit that these are someone subjective categories, so other researchers might arrive at slightly different percentages. However, the main point of this article is to explore the variety of techniques used, rather than the precise frequencies used.

The core of this paper illustrates the eight techniques in detail, by providing examples that compare the original version with the translated version. In each case, the Thai original is referred to as the source language (SL) coming along with its pronunciation, and while the English translation is referred to as the target language (TL). The focused words or phrases are represented in bold-typed face. Also, the period when the text occur is also provided. Brief discussion follows each of these examples.

4.1 TRANSLATION BY A MORE GENERAL WORD

As can be seen in Table 1, a more general word was used most often. As noted earlier, when translating by more general words translation, translators attempt to generalize the word to meet the target audience.

Example 1

SL: อีช้างล*น /ee cháang lâak/

TL: Bit*h!

(Diary Tootsies the Series SS1 EP.1 [3/4]: 03:50)

To compromise swear words, they are conventionally censored with partial-asterisks (*) throughout the series. According to the Example 1, the translator chooses the word ‘Bit*h’ to replace the word ‘อีช้างล*น’ which literally means ‘elephant drag.’ According to Cambridge dictionary (2021), the noun ‘Bitch’ means an unkind or unpleasant person which has a broad meaning (superordinate) and can convey the meaning of cursing in the gay language of the word ‘อีช้างล*น’ as well. Additionally, the researchers noticed the omission of an address term ‘อี,’ which normally precedes a woman whom a speaker does not admires or who is very intimate with a speaker. It is likely that the translators found the omission was not a problem as long as it did not distort the original meaning the characters wanted to convey.

4.2 LITERAL TRANSLATION

When using literal translation, the translator attempts to retain all the elements of the source text, translating each of those elements as literally as possible. For that reason, the technique is also known as direct translation or word-for-word translation.

Example 2

SL: มึงจะหิวอะไรเบอร์นั้นวะ /meung jà hǐw à-rai ber nán wá/

TL: How **hungry** can you possibly be?

(*Diary Tootsies the Series* SS1 EP. 2: 03:46)

The example text ‘มึงจะหิวอะไรเบอร์นั้นวะ’ can be directly translated as ‘You will hungry what number that?’ that cannot fully convey its meaning. Besides, normally, the definition of ‘hungry’ is the desire or need for food. Nevertheless, in this case, the word hungry or ‘หิว’ refers to a desire to have sex with a man rather than a desire to eat (Tapsuwan, 2018) which seems applicable to the context.

According to the preceding example, the researchers expect that the translator will employ a literal translation technique to make the translation version more understandable to the audience. Furthermore, translators may want to retain the original language style in order to keep it interesting.

4.3 TRANSLATION BY CULTURAL SUBSTITUTION

If translators introduce unfamiliar information, readers may not understand the concepts of foreign culture concepts in some cases. As a result, when the source culture is too complicated to understand and translators want their audiences to understand the source culture easily, they may choose a concept in the target culture in translation (Khongbumpen, 2008).

Example 3

SL: อีช้าง มึงเป็นอะไร? /ee cháang meung bpen à-rai/

TL: **Horton**, what's the matter?

(*Diary Tootsies the Series* SS1 EP.1 [1/4]: 07:37)

In relation to the example, the word ‘อีช้าง’ is used as a representation of a fat person in this context, so if the translator chooses to translate directly, it may be invisible to foreign viewers. Due to cultural differences, they do not understand the intention of what the characters are going to convey. Thus, the translator chose the word ‘Horton’ for allusion to the elephant character in the animated film *Horton Hears a Who!* (2008) so that audiences from various cultures can understand more.

4.4 TRANSLATION BY MORE NEUTRAL/ LESS EXPRESSIVE WORDS

This strategy is used when there is no equivalent in the target text. The source text should be replaced with a nearly equivalent in the target language. This equivalent is less expressive as well as more formal.

Example 4

SL: **ตอแหล!** /dtor-lăe/

TL: Liar.

(*Diary Tootsies the Series* SS2 EP.2: 07:21)

Because it is a rather vulgar term, ‘ตอแหล’ in gay slang, refers to a deceptive statement, usually used with friends or acquaintances. However, as shown in the example, from our point of view, the translator chose the term ‘liar’ not only to eliminate cultural differences but also to improve audience comprehension. Furthermore, we believe it reduces ‘ตอแหล’ rudeness while also adding more formal phrasing.

4.5 TRANSLATION BY PARAPHRASING USING UNRELATED WORDS

This strategy is used when the source item cannot be lexicalized in the target language because it is semantically complicated. A more general word which is not related to the source item is introduced instead.

Example 5

SL: **ลำไย!** /lam-yai/

TL: How annoying!

(*Diary Tootsies the Series* SS2 EP.3: 02:47)

From the example, ‘ลำไย’ in Thai refers to a tropical or subtropical fruit or a medium-sized perennial plant (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). However, in gay language, it refers to the feeling of being annoying to someone. Therefore, it is impossible for the translator to convey meaning through literal translation, causing the translator to choose the word ‘annoying’ as the most meaningful of the word ‘ลำไย.’

4.6 TRANSLATION BY PARAPHRASING USING A RELATED WORD

This strategy is used when the concept in the source item is lexicalized in the target language in a different form. Translators use related words to convey the same meaning in the target language, but they may have to use different words because there is no equivalent word.

Example 6

SL: นางชอบ**พิจอง**จับทอม /naang chôp **fí jer rîng** gáp tom/

TL: She likes **hooking up** with Tomboys.

(*Diary Tootsies the Series SS1 EP.1 [1/4]: 07:06*)

In the text ‘นางชอบ**ฟีเจอริ่ง**กับทอม’ or ‘She likes featuring with Tomboys.’, the word ‘ฟีเจอริ่ง’ borrowed from the English word ‘featuring’ in gay slang is synonymous with having sex with someone (Tohmila et al, 2018). The translator, on the other hand, employs a different vocabulary to appeal to the audience’s aesthetic.

4.7 TRANSLATION BY OMISSION

If the meaning conveyed by a specific item or expression is not significant or redundant for the development of a text, translators may delete certain words or expressions because the length of the explanation may confuse the viewers.

Example 7

SL: อ่ข่มาเ่บ้บใส**ห้วใจสี่ควง** /yàa maa äep säi hūua jai sēe duuang/

TL: Don’t act all **innocent**.

(*Diary Tootsies the Series SS1 EP.2 [1/4]: 02:29*)

From the example above, ‘อ่ข่มาเ่บ้บใส**ห้วใจสี่ควง**’ rendered as ‘Don’t come innocent clear four hearts’ does not make any sense. Specifically, ‘ห้วใจสี่ควง’ is partly derived from the full title ‘รักใส ๆ ห้วใจสี่ควง’ of Meteor Garden, a Taiwanese series which gained a huge popularity in Thailand during airing in 2001. The phrase, somehow, is widely used to rhyme with any /ai/ word, e.g. ‘ใส’ /sai/. The translator may reach a conclusion to omit since it may not be known by foreign audience.

4.8 TRANSLATION BY USING A LOAN WORD OR LOAN WORD PLUS EXPLANATION

This strategy is typically used to deal with culturally specific items as well as modern concepts. When a loanword first appears in the text, a translator can explain it, and then it can be used on its own (Baker, 1992).

Example 8

SL: พวกมึงที่แสบ**เทอ**แล้ว /pūuak meung pēe hâek **tay** goo láew/

TL: Girls, Hack 'tay'-(ed) me!

(*Diary Tootsies the Series SS1 EP.1 [1/4]: 07:46*)

In the example of ‘พวกมึงที่แสบ**เทอ**แล้ว’ (Guys, brother Hack dumped me already.), the translator chose the word ‘tay’ to mean dumping someone, which is a transliteration in gay slang (Tohmila et al, 2018). The researchers anticipated that the translator might want to introduce gay language to viewers while retaining the creativity of gayness word formation in this context. The authors also discovered that the translator preserves the source language's grammatical constraint,

the word ‘already,’ indicating past tense, causing the verb ‘tay’ to add the suffix ‘-ed.’ However, the word ‘ม’, on the other hand, has been translated literally by the translator, as ‘dump’ in other occurrences.

Therefore, the researchers can conclude that translations of the same word but using different theories indicate that the translator wishes to select the best word for the context to increase the audience's enjoyment and understanding.

5. DISCUSSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE STUDIES

5.1 DISCUSSIONS

Firstly, the researchers discovered that the most important aspect of translating gay terms is having a thorough knowledge and understanding of their meanings. Since many words in the gay language in Thai were coined from cultural knowledge and social backgrounds by Thai natives. As a result, some gay words, such as ‘อึ๋ม’ in Example 5 cannot be directly translated as the cultural content would not be carried along to be understood by foreign audience.

Next, previous studies have revealed that most of the gay language depicted in the series is profane and sexuality-related, especially the penis, which accords to Permpoon’s findings (2013), Thai gay words, phrases, and expressions frequently contain contents or references to sexuality or genitalia. Some are translated directly i.e. ‘หิว’ as ‘hungry’ as appeared in Example 2. However, the researchers speculated that the initial formation of gay slang occurred to communicate with each other in specific groups, and the vocabulary is vulgar to enhance enjoyment in their community. Therefore, in some instances where the translator has dealt with this issue, the translator is attempting to reduce the vulgarity and increase the formality of those words, such as when translating the word ‘ตอมทล’ to ‘Liar’ in Example 4. Another intriguing point is the use of cultural substitution, such as the word ‘Horton’ for an allusion to the elephant character in the animated film *Horton Hears a Who!* (2018), to translate the phrase ‘อึ้ง’ as shown in Example 3; it can be seen that the source language has a sense of cursing or bullying, but, in the target language, it gives a sense of cute or cherubic.

Furthermore, the researchers learned that translator was more concerned of conveying the meanings than retaining the charm of the gay language, which the researchers have classified as two issues: the degradation of the source language, and the use of paraphrasing and omission techniques.

The first assurance is that the translator kept the conversational tone in the subtitles so that colloquialisms could be conveyed more naturally. However, the researchers were aware that the style and creativity of the gay language had been lost due to the use of lexical translation strategies that primarily focuses on conveying meaning. This issue also corresponds to Permpoon's (2013) findings; he identified subtitle translators typically placed the greatest emphasis on meaning, while retaining uniqueness of the source language was the least important factor. This approach frequently results in the decline of the source language. For instance, the address term ‘อึ๋ม’ which indicates a unique meaning in Thai used by gay community had vanished. Apparently, translator compensated and mitigated this problem by adapting loanwords or literal translations, such as the word ‘tay-ed’ in Example 8. In this case, not only is there an attempt to maintain the charm of the gay term, but also a need to preserve Thai grammar. Another interesting point is

that the translators have brought cursing or swearing terms from the western culture to enhance the international audience's enjoyment and understanding of the context, such as translating the words ‘อีซ้ิงล*ก’ as ‘Bit*h’ in Example 1. The researchers discovered that the number of these words was small. And it is understandable, in this case; the translators must not only deal with cultural differences but also encounter the problem of finding equal substitutes for translation. In other word, it is difficult to preserve the identity of a gay language when translating into a new language, which is from Thai to English.

Another fascinating finding was that translation by paraphrasing with a related word, translation by paraphrasing with unrelated words, and translation by omission were also used to address cross-cultural translation issues. Overall, the researchers believed that these strategies encountered the problem of no equivalent in the target text. In brief, paraphrasing was used to deal in the case of specific terminology, adding relevant and irrelevant words to the source language to broaden the audience's understanding. For instance, the word ‘featuring’ which is borrowed from English, is somehow referred to ‘hook up.’ While omitting technique was used to assist in the case of eliminating the unnecessary word, such as the translation of the phrase ‘อย่ามาแอบใสหัวใจสี่ดวง’ to ‘don't act all innocent’ in the Example 7. This finding appears to be consistent with Ninpanit's (2016) research, which discovered that translator can paraphrase words to make them sound more natural or remove unnecessary words as long as the overall meaning of the source language is not affected.

5.2 LIMITATIONS

Despite the fact that data analysis was conducted on dialogues in one series, the researchers believe the translator's tactics or translation strategies can be used as an example for further study or guidelines for analyzing translation strategies.

Also, the gay language never stops evolving because its native speakers, such as Thai gays, are constantly inventing new words. And since the series studied was aired in 2016-2017, gay slangs invented after were not discovered in this study.

Finally, according to Baker's (1992) classification, this translation analysis emphasized only at the word level. Thus, those interested in studying translation at a higher level may find this a viable option.

5.3 FUTURE STUDIES

5.3.1 The scope of this study is only to investigate the strategies for translating cultural words, gay language, that appear in the TV series, *Diary Tootsies the Series*. There are many other types of media to be explored including gay films, documentaries, or magazines. Investigation can be on the tactics to translate cultural words in other contexts and comparison of meaning.

5.3.2 The translation analysis focused solely on the word level based on Baker's (1992) classification. Therefore, it is interesting to study other levels of analysis, like grammatical, textual, and pragmatic features of tootsie words.

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