

# Translating Innocence: A Case Study of English-Thai Translations of John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and Emma Donoghue's *Room*

NIPAPORN TANGTORRITH & BANCHA RATTANAMATHUWONG

Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

Corresponding author email: [bancha.r@chula.ac.th](mailto:bancha.r@chula.ac.th)

---

Article information	Abstract
<p><b>Article history:</b> Received: 30 Dec 2020 Accepted: 23 Aug 2021 Available online: 11 Sept 2021</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> English-to-Thai translation Children in literature Young narrators Innocence</p>	<p><i>This article discusses the English-to-Thai translations of two contemporary novels: <i>Room</i> by Emma Donoghue and <i>The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas</i> by John Boyne. These two selected texts present some linguistic challenges to the translators because of the narrations which are meant to reveal the innocent perspectives of young children. Since the main characters in both stories are too young to fully comprehend the adverse situations they are faced with, the language used in the narratives concomitantly exhibits linguistic peculiarities highlighting the discrepancy between the reality and the characters' viewpoints. What merits a close examination is how such peculiarities are transposed to the translated versions. Do the Thai translations of both novels successfully convey the innocence of the protagonists embodied in the language of the source texts? In addressing these questions, our discussion will incorporate the concept of equivalence in tandem with verbal incongruity to analyze the transferral of meanings from the source texts to the translated texts in the target language.</i></p>

---

## INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to examine the problems that arise when verbal expressions of children's innocence are translated from one language to another. In order to examine this issue, we will look into the Thai translations of two contemporary novels originally written in English, namely *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne and *Room* by Emma Donoghue. The former was published in 2006 and was translated into Thai in 2008 by Waree Tantulakorn, a university lecturer in foreign languages. Apart from Boyne's novel, she has translated scientific books for general readers. As for Donoghue's novel, it was first published in 2010 and was translated by a translator under the pen name 'Punn' in 2012. Based on the information we have gathered, the translator has mainly translated mystery fiction.

In *Oxford Bibliographies in Childhood Studies*, Bühler-Niederberger (2015) defines innocence as "children's simplicity, their lack of knowledge, and their purity not yet spoiled by mundane affairs." In other words, innocence involves unworldliness. To discuss the translations of verbal expressions related to innocence, we will examine how the translators resolve the linguistic

issues that arise from the source texts. The analytical framework to be used in our discussion is the concepts of equivalence and incongruity. We shall contend that the contrast between the reality and the innocence of characters will be successfully delivered when the translations can maintain a certain degree of incongruity or the contradiction in the source text. Apart from incongruity, the discussion of the second novel will also touch upon children's linguistic immaturity that poses translational problems. What we hope to contribute is to offer a framework or a parameter by which one can assess the translation of texts which feature the opposition between the characters' perception and reality.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The discussion of the translated novels will draw on the concept of equivalence in translation studies. Equivalence in the translated texts will be evaluated and discussed in terms of the implication for the choices made by translators. As Pym (2014) explains in *Exploring Translation Theories*, the term "equivalence" presupposes that a source text and its translation may share the same value on some level (p. 7). In this respect, the concept does not specify which kind of value should be rendered similar, for there can be different types of equivalence (Pym, 2014, pp. 7-8). For example, Nida and Taber (1982) distinguishes between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence describes literal translation, focusing on the form and content, whereas dynamic equivalence takes into account the expressive factors in source texts:

Dynamic equivalence in translation is far more than mere correct communication of information. In fact, one of the most essential, and yet often neglected, elements is the expressive factor, for people must also feel as well as understand what is said. The poetry of the Bible should read like poetry, not like a dull prose account. Similarly, the letters of Paul should reflect something of the freshness of a general letter, and not sound like a theological dissertation. (Nida & Taber, 1982, p. 25)

Translations that maintain dynamic equivalence then should be natural and elicit reactions from the reader in the way that the original texts do. Often, conveying the senses made in the source text requires more than supplying words with similar meanings. This is especially applicable to the translation of fiction and other expressive texts in which the choice of words or stylistic components are meant to convey emotions as much as information. Discussing the equivalence achieved in the translations of the selected passages from the two novels, this paper will evaluate the extent to which expressive elements are kept in the translations, which are supposed to highlight the innocence of the main characters.

The expressive elements are of crucial importance for literary translation. In *How to Read Literature*, Eagleton (2013) explains that literary works are "pieces of rhetoric," which requires "a peculiarly vigilant kind of reading, one which is alert to tone, mood, pace, genre, syntax, grammar, texture, rhythm, narrative structure, punctuation, ambiguity – in fact to everything that comes under the heading of "form" (p. 2). He also adds that readers of literary works should not only pay attention to content but also the language, for "[l]anguage is constitutive

of the reality or experience, rather than simply a vehicle for it” (Eagleton, 2013, p. 3). Therefore, translating literary texts demands attention to language that will shape readers’ experience.

Regarding the two novels we selected, the protagonists are both young children, and the stories focalize their viewpoints. Although both are stories about children, they do not easily fall into the category of children’s literature because of the subject matters in the novels which are directly related to genocide and sexual violence. In addition, children’s literature itself is a highly contested term, with no exact definitions. This is apparent in Lesnik-Oberstein (2005)’s discussion of the difficulties in terms of its definition:

The definition of ‘children’s literature’ lies at the heart of its endeavour: it is a category of books the existence of which absolutely depends on supposed relationships with a particular reading audience: children. The definition of ‘children’s literature’ therefore is underpinned by purpose: it wants to be something in particular, because this is supposed to connect it with that reading audience—‘children’—with which it declares itself to be overtly and purposefully concerned. But is a children’s book a book written by children, or for children? And, crucially: what does it mean to write a book ‘for’ children? If it is a book written ‘for’ children, is it then still a children’s book if it is (only) read by adults? What of ‘adult’ books read also by children—are they ‘children’s literature’? (p.15)

In the broadest sense, children’s literature refers to works that are written for children, though it is still debatable as to what one means by “for children.” Can stories written for children be violent? Do they all need to be straightforward or moralistic? These questions need to be taken into consideration even in the translation process. Oittinen (2006), whose works explore the translation of children’s literature, addresses the notion of *child images*, stating that children’s literature is normally “adapted to a particular image of childhood,” and the child images that authors or translators have in their mind may vary, depending on their personal history (p. 41). Translating for children is never an innocent act in the sense that the translation usually mirrors the adults’ view about childhood and what it means to be a child (Oittinen, 2006, p. 41). Writing and translating texts for children then involves some assumptions about what a child knows or should be allowed to know.

Similarly, Mørk (2017), who discusses the Norwegian translation of children’s literature about the Holocaust, also points out that translators will need to find the balance between staying truthful to the texts and making the translated content suitable for children. As a result, translators need to take into account “the ethical, ideological, historical, linguistic, and stylistic commitments to the source and the target texts -- and what to choose if they came into conflict” (Mørk, 2017, p. 187). This postulation is not merely applicable to translations of juvenile literature but literary translations in general too. Even if the two novels we selected cannot be categorically classified as fictional works for children, the concern that the scholarship in children’s literature translation shares with our study is the perception of children’s knowledge that will shape the choices made by the translators. The dynamic equivalence will be fully achieved when the readers can perceive the characters’ innocence through languages in the translation.

To discuss this issue, the equivalence in the texts will be framed with the notions of contradictions and incongruities. Based on our observations, the perspectives of the young characters in the two novels often clash with the harsh realities they witness, causing some contradictions or incongruities in the passages. Maintaining such contradictions and the verbal elements that constitute them is therefore of importance. In this respect, the scholarship in the studies of verbal humors may help inform our approach to the translations of textual contradictions to a certain extent. This is because humor, be it referential or verbal, draws upon incongruity, either semantically or pragmatically (Attardo, 2017, p. 2). The concept of incongruity in relation to humor has been discussed by various philosophers. For instance, in *The World as Will and Representation*, originally published in 1818 in German, Schopenhauer (1818/2010) explains, “[i]n every case, laughter arises from nothing other than the sudden perception of an incongruity between a concept and the real objects that are, in some respect, thought through the concept; in fact laughter itself is simply the expression of this incongruity” (p. 84). Similarly, Kierkegaard (2009) explicates that humor results from contradiction: “Mistakes are comic and are all to be explained by contradiction, however complicated the combinations become” (p. 432). Both philosophers point out that humor occurs when a notion or an expectation proves incongruous with or contradictory to reality. Moreover, according to Kierkegaard (1846/2009), what one finds tragic or humorous is usually predicated upon contradictions: “The tragic and the comic are the same in so far as both are contradiction; but the tragic is the suffering contradiction, the comic the painless contradiction” (p. 431). In simpler terms, the concept of contradiction is not merely limited to humor. Kierkegaard also states that contradiction is at work in negative feelings like suffering too. Therefore, the understanding of the incongruity or contradiction present in the narrative will not only be beneficial to the translators when translating humorous texts but also when they encounter contradicting elements in other contexts.

In addition, linguists also theorize the script-based semantic theory of humor and discuss how humor semantically operates through the concept of script overlap. In this context, a script refers to “an organized chunk of information about something (in the broadest sense)” and “a cognitive structure internalized by the speaker which provides the speaker with information on how things are done, organized, etc.” (Attardo, 1994, p.199). According to Raskin (1985), a text can be deemed amusing when two conditions are met. Firstly, the text is “compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts” while the second condition will be met when “[t]he two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite in a special sense” (p. 99). Normally, in a humorous text, the two scripts may oppose each other in the sense that one script may describe a normal, expected, or more plausible situation whereas the other is predicated upon an abnormal, unexpected, or much less plausible one (Raskin, 1985, p. 111). What is usually present in the text also is the “switch,” which allows the readers to shift from one script to the other (Raskin, 1985, 114). Raskin (2017) also adds that the first script tends to be suggested and reinforced only to be replaced by the second one, for which the evidence has been furtively accumulated (p. 112). Chiaro (2010) presents four methods commonly used by translators when they have to translate texts with verbally expressed humor (VEH). First, translators may leave the VEH unchanged. With this method, some humorous elements instigated by wordplays may be lost in the translation. The second method involves replacing the VEH in the source text with a different instance of VEH in the target text. Translators may also substitute an idiomatic expression in the target language for the source VEH, and sometimes translators

may choose to completely ignore the VEH (Chiaro, 2010, pp. 11-12). Admittedly, the expressions of innocence differ from expressions of verbal humor. However, our observation is that, similar to the concept of double scripts in verbal humor, the verbal expressions that demonstrate innocence in the two novels tend to refer to two concepts at once, and the parallel references result in some contradictions. Our argument is that, to fully preserve the dynamic equivalence in the translations, the contradictory elements should be kept.

To the best of our knowledge, there have been no studies on translation with the focus on language peculiarities and innocent voices of characters. So, this essay should offer a unique approach to translating texts whose purpose is to highlight the innocence of children. As for the literature on the translations of the two novels, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* has not received much critical attention in terms of the linguistic and translational issues. As for the translation of *Room*, in her thesis, Binhasan (2013) translates some passages in the novel and discusses the linguistic issues that prove problematic in her own translation.

Apart from the literature on translation, Dore (2017) examines the linguistic elements that shape the narratives in *Room*, employing the concept of Mind Style. Dore points out that the language the child narrator uses reflects how his cognitive development is affected by the limited access to the outside world. Based on Dore's evaluation of grammatical mistakes made by Jack, the narrative point of view proves to be convincing enough as it contributes to the strangeness that the author wants to create for her young narrator. Jack realistically exhibits the linguistic patterns typically found in the period when a child starts to acquire language (Dore, 2017, p. 72). Dore's evaluation of the verisimilitude in the novel highlights what Caracciolo (2016) emphasizes in *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction*, in which he explains "in first-person narrative the narrating character's perspective will tend to become salient in readers' experience of the text, particularly if it is perceived as deviant according to cognitive and sociocultural norms" (p. 29). It is therefore highly crucial for translators to transfer the language peculiarities expressed in the source text to the translated versions because they will eventually shape the readers' perceptions of the characters, the narrators, and the stories.

## METHODOLOGY

### The data

#### ***The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas and Room***

The two novels we selected have enjoyed wide readership and have also been adapted into films. They feature young children whose narrative points of views both reveal and highlight the discrepancy between the innocence of such characters and the reality facing them. The protagonist in Boyne's novel is the son of a German official, living in the time of Nazi Germany whereas the main character in Donoghue's work is a boy who has been locked up in a small room along with his mother since he was born. Apart from the popularity of the novels, we selected these two novels for our analysis for the fact that there are some sections in the stories in which the verbal expressions of the children play a crucial role in their characterization

and thereby need to be kept in the translated version.

In terms of the narrative devices, Boyne's novel employs the third-person limited point-of-view where the narrator exists outside the story. On the other hand, Donoghue's novel uses a first-person point of view, meaning that the narrator utilizes the first-person pronoun to tell the story. Notwithstanding the different modes of narration, the narrations in both novels provide access to the thoughts and feelings of the main characters, who still cannot fully comprehend the cruelties they witness. The passages that illustrate the innocence of the two narrators are examined in order to discuss the translational problems that arise if the discrepancy between the reality and the characters' understanding of the situation is to be kept.

*The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* tells the story of Bruno, a nine-year-old boy living in Germany during the Second World War. Bruno's father is appointed commandant by Hitler. As a result, he and his family have to relocate to the Auschwitz concentration camp. Bruno's parents however do not want to expose their young son to the atrocities committed against the prisoners at the camp. As a result, Bruno remains ignorant of the purpose of the camp and his father's involvement in the Holocaust. The conversations between Bruno and adult characters as well as the narration itself often demonstrate Bruno's limited understanding of what is happening, causing some incongruities which pose some difficulties in the translation process.

As for *Room*, the story revolves around the life of Jack, a five-year-old boy who lives with Ma in a small room. To Jack, the room is his entire world where he eats, learns, plays, sleeps, and feels safe with his mother by his side, but to Ma, it is a place where she has been held against her will and repeatedly raped by Old Nick for seven years. Ma tries her best to give Jack as normal life a child should get, setting up daily routines including various activities to boost his physical strength and cognitive abilities, with the hope that one day they will escape from this prison and get to live a real normal life. With limited understanding of the outside world and almost zero interaction with other people besides Ma, Jack's narration and speech reflect not only his innocence but also his underdeveloped linguistic competence, presenting challenges in the translation process.

### **Analytical framework**

The analytical framework to be used in our discussion is the concepts of equivalence and incongruity. We mainly locate incongruities caused by two parallel meanings in the source language and examine how the underlying parallels are kept in the translated version. To determine whether incongruities are successfully maintained, our discussion mainly focuses on the equivalence in the translated texts. If the translation succeeds in the target language, the translated versions should retain the mood or the expressive elements in the source texts, which eventually should allow the readers to discern the innocence of the main characters.

## RESULTS: METHODS OF TRANSLATING INNOCENCE

### *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*

#### 1. Removing incongruity

In our first example, the innocence of Bruno, the main character, is illustrated when his family has to welcome Hitler, a historical figure to which the allusion in the story is implied rather than directly stated. Instead of calling the leader of the Nazi Party ‘Führer’, which means a leader in German, the boy refers to him as ‘the Fury’. This misnomer is deployed by the author to suggest that this historical figure incarnates wrath. It both reveals Bruno’s juvenile obliviousness to the ongoing political situation and at the same time reminds the readers of the atrocities committed during the Second World War. In the Thai translation, however, the play on the words ‘Fury’ and ‘Führer’ is removed completely:

#### Extract 1

Source text	Translation
‘Who’s <b>the Fury</b> ?’ asked Bruno. ‘You’re pronouncing it wrong,’ said Father, pronouncing it correctly for him. ‘ <b>The Fury</b> ,’ said Bruno again, trying to get it right but failing again. ‘No,’ said Father, ‘the— Oh, never mind!’ ‘Well, who is he anyway?’ asked Bruno again. Father stared at him, astonished. ‘You know perfectly well who the Fury is,’ he said. ‘I don’t,’ said Bruno.  (Boyne, 2006, p. 117)	“ท่านฟูเรอร์คือใครครับ” บรูโนถาม “ลูกออกเสียงผิดแล้ว” คุณพ่อพูด และออกเสียงที่ถูกต้องให้ฟัง “ท่านฟูเรอร์” บรูโนพูดอีกครั้ง และพยายามพูดให้ถูกแต่ก็ยังไม่ ทำไม่ได้ “ไม่ใช่” คุณพ่อบอก “ท่าน... เอ้า ช่างเถอะ” “แล้วตกลงเขาเป็นใครล่ะครับ” บรูโนถามซ้ำ คุณพ่อจ้องหน้าเขาอย่างแปลกใจ “ลูกรู้ดีอยู่แล้วนี่ว่าท่านฟูเรอร์เป็น ใคร” ท่านบอก “ผมไม่รู้ครับ” บรูโนบอก  (Boyne, 2014, p. 108)

The word ‘Fury’ in the English version embodies two meanings: one contains the overt meaning of the word ‘fury’ while the other implies the honorific Führer. In the translated version, however, only the latter is preserved, affecting the equivalence in the translations. As a result, the contrast between Bruno’s view and the respect the adult characters have toward this villainous figure is effaced. The translator’s choice however is understandable since there are no equivalent expressions in Thai by which the translator can maintain the double meanings embedded in the original text. To tackle this untranslatability, the translator employs the word ‘Führer’ in the translation instead of transcribing the word ‘Fury’. The innocence of Bruno is still observable in the translation to a certain extent; nevertheless, the effect on the translation is that the reference to the concept of fearful unbridled acrimony is completely lost. This translational choice also affects the characterization of Bruno. Lastly, in the translated version, the illustration of Bruno’s innocence is also undermined by the inclusion of the honorific ‘ท่าน’ because it implies that Bruno is not completely incognizant of who Hitler is. This addition effaces the contradictions produced in the original text which allows the protagonist to exude innocent cluelessness to the world of the adults.

## 2. Preserving the form and modifying the context

Another instance in which the naiveté of the character is not conveyed in the same manner as in the original text is when Bruno converses with his sister about the concentration camp located in proximity of his residence:

### Extract 2

Source text	Translation
<p>‘Out-With?’ asked Bruno. ‘What’s an Out-With?’</p> <p>‘It’s not <i>an</i> Out-With, Bruno,’ said Gretel with a sigh.</p> <p>‘It’s just Out-With.’</p> <p>‘Well, what’s Out-With then?’ he repeated.</p> <p>‘Out with what?’</p> <p>‘That’s the name of the house,’ explained Gretel.</p> <p>‘Out-With.’</p> <p>Bruno considered this. He hadn’t seen any sign on the outside to say that was what it was called, nor had he seen any writing on the front door. His own house back in Berlin didn’t even have a name; it was just called number four.</p> <p>‘But what does it mean?’ he asked in exasperation.</p> <p>‘Out with what?’</p> <p>‘Out with the people who lived here before us, I expect,’ said Gretel. ‘It must have to do with the fact that he didn’t do a very good job and someone said out with him and let’s get a man in who can do it right.’</p> <p>(Boyne, 2006, pp. 24-25)</p>	<p>“เอาทิวีสเหอ” บรูโนถาม “แปลว่าออกไปเหอ”</p> <p>“ไม่ใช่อย่างนั้น บรูโน” เกรเทลพูดพลางถอนใจ</p> <p>“เอาทิวีสเป็นชื่อนะ”</p> <p>“ก็ได้ ถ้ามันเอาทิวีสนี่ชื่อของอะไร” บรูโนถามย้ำ</p> <p>“แล้วอะไรออกไปเหอ”</p> <p>“เป็นชื่อบ้านนี่” เกรเทลอธิบาย</p> <p>“เอาทิวีส”</p> <p>บรูโนครุ่นคิด เขาไม่เห็นป้ายอะไรข้างนอกที่บอกชื่อบ้านนี้เลย และก็ไม่เห็นข้อความใดๆ ที่ประตูด้านด้วย บ้านเขาที่เบอร์ลินไม่มีชื่อด้วยซ้ำ ทุกคนก็เรียกกันแค่บ้านหมายเลขสี่</p> <p>“แล้วแปลว่าอะไรล่ะ” เขากถามอย่างหงุดหงิด</p> <p>“อะไรออกไปเหอ”</p> <p>“คนที่เคยอยู่ก่อนหน้าเราละมั้ง พี่ว่า” เกรเทลพูด “ต้องเป็นเพราะว่าเขาทำงานได้ไม่ดีแน่ คนก็เลยบอกให้เขาออกไป แล้วหาคนที่ทำได้เข้ามาแทน”</p> <p>(Boyne, 2014, pp. 27-28)</p>

The play on the proper noun Auschwitz proves to be problematic in the translation process. The passage suggests that Bruno is unfamiliar with the name of the concentration camp and mistakes it for a generic expression. The narrative told through Bruno’s perspective also omits the correct pronunciation of the word pronounced by Bruno’s sister, again emphasizing Bruno’s ingenuousness as well as his obliviousness to the mass murder of the Jews. The translator in this case however adopts a translational approach that is different from the previous case as the mispronounced version is kept instead. This is because the meaning of the word ‘out’ will be of importance in Bruno’s subsequent questions. If ‘Auschwitz’ had been used in lieu of Bruno’s coinage in the Thai version, the flow of narrative may be disrupted when Bruno mentions outness.

Still, in order to help the readers to grasp the meaning of the word ‘out’ more easily, the translator also alters the phrasing of Bruno’s question. The question of what is an Out-with is replaced with “Does it mean exiting?” in the Thai version so that the meaning of the word



‘out’ can still be kept. In doing this, the translator can maintain the functionality of Bruno’s question in the original version, which is supposed to prompt his sister to correct him. The exchange that follows is also modified because the meaning related to Out-with in the original text is predicated upon articles, a linguistic element absent in Thai. The translator hence substitutes the explanation given by Bruno’s sister, which centers upon the article, with a more explanatory reinterpretation of her message: “เอาทิวเป็นชื่อนะ” (Outwith is a name). This modification helps convey a sense of definiteness normally expressed through definite articles and allows the translator to maintain both the contradiction caused by Auschwitz and Out-with as well as the naiveté embodied in the original text. The incongruity achieved however is not merely due to the choice of the translation but also partially because of the nature of the original text itself. Unlike the first extract, the two words that form parallel meanings are both proper nouns, and to fully understand their significance readers must have some cultural knowledge from the beginning. Moreover, when the understanding of the word plays is contingent upon historical knowledge of the readers, opting for Out-With may better enable the translator to transfer both the historical reference and Bruno’s naiveté. One can even say that the translational choice here reveals the translator’s assumption that the readers must be able to associate Bruno’s misconceived neologism with Auschwitz. Readers of the translated version who have some basic knowledge in English and world history should be able to understand the historical reference to the infamous concentration camp.

### 3. Using two expressions in translation

The last case to be discussed deals with the contradictions caused by the double meanings of the word ‘history’. The word normally is defined as “the whole series of past events connected with a particular person, country, institution, or thing” (“history”, 2020). The use of the word ‘history’ by Herr Liszt, who is Bruno’s tutor, in the following passage creates some confusion for Bruno because he refers to the collective history of the nation whereas his young interlocutor thinks that ‘history’ here means Bruno’s family background. In Thai, however, the words that refer to these two notions differ. The former tends to be translated as ‘ประวัติศาสตร์’ while the latter is more commonly associated with the word ‘ประวัติ’. Since they are formally close to each other, the translator employs both words in the translation.

#### Extract 3

Source text	Translation
<p>“... How much do you know of your <b>history</b> anyway, young man?” (To his credit, Herr Liszt referred to Bruno as ‘young man’, like Pavel and unlike Lieutenant Kotler.)</p> <p>‘Well, I know I was born on April the fifteenth nineteen thirty-four—’ said Bruno.</p> <p>‘<b>Not your history,</b>’ interrupted Herr Liszt.</p> <p>‘<b>Not your own personal history. I mean the history of who you are, where you come from. Your family’s heritage. The Fatherland.</b>’</p> <p>Bruno frowned and considered it. He wasn’t entirely</p>	<p>“...เธอรู้อะไรเรื่อง<b>ประวัติศาสตร์</b>ตัวเองมากแค่ไหนล่ะ หนุ่มน้อย” (ก็ยังดีที่คุณครูlixที่เรียกบรูโนว่า “หนุ่มน้อย” เหมือนพาวเวล ไม่ได้เรียกเหมือนผู้หมวดคอตเลอร์)</p> <p>“เออ ผมรู้ว่าผมเกิดวันที่สิบห้าเดือนเมษายน ค.ศ.หนึ่งพันเก้าร้อยสามสิบสี่...” บรูโนบอก</p> <p>“<b>ไม่ใช่ประวัติของเธอเอง</b>” คุณครูlixที่ขัด</p> <p>“<b>ไม่ใช่ประวัติส่วนตัวของเธอ</b> ครูหมายถึงประวัติที่ว่าเธอเป็นใครมาจากไหน เชื้อสายตระกูลของเธอ แผ่นดินพ่อ”</p> <p>บรูโนขมวดคิ้วและครุ่นคิด เขาไม่ค่อยแน่ใจว่าคุณพ้อมีที่ดินหรือเปล่า เพราะแม้ว่าบ้านที่เบอร์ลินจะใหญ่โตและอยู่สบาย แต่ก็มีส่วนที่สวนโดยรอบไม่มากนัก</p>

Source text	Translation
<p>sure that Father had any land, because although the house in Berlin was a large and comfortable house, there wasn't very much garden space around it. And he was old enough to know that Out-With did not belong to them, despite all the land there.</p> <p>(Boyne, 2006, pp. 97-98)</p>	<p>และเขาก็พอจะรู้ว่าเอาที่วัดไม่ใช่ของครอบครัวเขา แม้ว่าจะมีที่ดินมากมายก็ตาม</p> <p>(Boyne, 2014, pp. 89)</p>

For the initial question asked by Herr Liszt, the translator first decides to use the word ‘ประวัติศาสตร์’, which evokes the concept of the past events of a country, the meaning intended by the adult speaker. This seems to be a better alternative than ‘ประวัติ’, the meaning of which is normally used in a context related to personal backgrounds more than ‘ประวัติศาสตร์’. However, in the subsequent exchange, where Bruno’s statement suggests that the protagonist misinterprets the question, the translator employs ‘ประวัติ’ so that Herr Liszt’s explanation given to rectify Bruno’s misunderstanding will make sense in the text. In addition, the translator maintains the fact that ‘your history’ here evokes two meanings by varying the translation of the possessive adjective ‘your’. ‘Your’ used by Herr Liszt in the first statement has a collective meaning while the one used later refers to Bruno as an individual. In the Thai version, the translator opts for the expression ‘ตัวเอง’ (own), a term that can refer to both collective and personal identities, so that it is still possible for Bruno to misinterpret Herr Liszt’s initial question. When Herr Liszt clarifies the meaning of his question to Bruno, ‘your’ becomes ‘ของเธอเอง’ (personal). This is how the translator negotiates the collective and personal connotations of the possessive adjective.

Another instance of problematic contradictions in the passage is the use of the word ‘Fatherland’ in English, which does not have an equivalent in Thai. In fact, its common equivalent in Thai is ‘ประเทศ’ (country), but it will lose the connotation related to paternity, which is essential to Bruno’s misunderstanding here. The translator then solves this issue by verbatimly translating the term into ‘แผ่นดินพ่อ’ (Fatherland). The word ‘แผ่นดิน’ means land, and ‘พ่อ’ means father. This formally equivalent combination may sound unnatural in Thai, yet it is possibly the only alternative which allows the translator to keep the confusions caused by the protagonist’s literal understanding of the word and the jingoistic sentiments expressed by Herr Liszt.

In summary, the translator adopts various methods to translate the passages that demonstrate the innocence of Bruno. When the contradictions are not maintained however, some senses in the original text are lost to the reader as shown in the first extract. The translated versions in the second and the third extracts on the other hand feature some contradictions, but the translator needs to modify some parts in the passage or vary some expressions.

## Room

### 1. Transferring grammatical errors in translation

This story is narrated entirely through Jack’s eyes and voice. Apart from the issue related to innocence, what is unique about the situation in *Room* is that Jack is at an age where his language is still developing, but having been raised in the 11-by-11-foot room since birth deprives him of a rich linguistic environment. According to theories of language acquisition, abundant language input and opportunity to interact with people and learn from mistakes are key factors necessary for complete language development (Krashen, 1985; Long, 1996; Skinner, 1957; Swain, 1995), which Jack does not have much access to during the first five years of his life. Coupled with the fact that the boy has very limited exposure to the world outside his room, his language thus often sounds idiosyncratic both grammatically and semantically, which can present some difficulties in maintaining the dynamic equivalence in the translated versions. In this context, to fully achieve dynamic equivalence, the translation should create the same persona of the narrator as the one in the original text.

One frequent error noticeable in Jack’s language concerns overgeneralization, or the extension of a grammatical rule in cases where it does not apply, at the morphological level and at the syntactic level<sup>1</sup>, as shown in the table below.

#### Extract 4

	Source Text	Translation
A.	He <b>cutted</b> off the power so the vegetables went slimy. (Donoghue, 2015, p. 228)	เขาตัดไฟพวกผักเลยเป็นเมือกๆ (Donoghue, 2012, p. 206)
B.	I don’t like her to have other names that I never even <b>knowed</b> . (Donoghue, 2015, p. 145)	ผมไม่ชอบให้แม่มีชื่ออื่นที่ผมไม่เคยรู้เลย (Donoghue, 2012, p. 132)
C.	“Our friend Grace <b>winned</b> the race.” “Won it,” says Ma. (Donoghue, 2015, p. 109)	“เพื่อนของเราชนะการแข่งขันสุดอะเมซ” “ชนะจ๊ะ” แม่แก๊ (Donoghue, 2012, p. 100)
D.	I blow bubbles to make it <b>funner</b> . (Donoghue, 2015, p. 68)	ผมเป่าฟองเพื่อทำให้มันสนุกขึ้น (Donoghue, 2012, p. 63)
E.	Now I’m even <b>scareder</b> . (Donoghue, 2015, p. 115)	ตอนนี้ผมกลัวเยอะขึ้น (Donoghue, 2012, p. 106)

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that overgeneralization errors are common developmental errors in child language acquisition (Ambridge et al., 2013; Marcus et al., 1992).

	Source Text	Translation
F.	He brings groceries and Sunday treat and <b>disappears</b> the trash, but he's not human like us. (Donoghue, 2015, p. 22)	เขาจะเอาของชำและของขวัญวันอาทิตย์มาให้และ <b>ทำให้</b> ขยะหายไป แต่เขาไม่ได้เป็นมนุษย์เหมือนเรา (Donoghue, 2012, p. 20)
G.	When Old Nick <b>creaks</b> Bed, I listen and count five times on my fingers, tonight it's 217 creaks. (Donoghue, 2015, p. 46)	พอเพื่อนึกทำให้คุณเตียงส่งเสียงเอี๊ยดอ๊าด ผมฟังและนับหนึ่งถึงห้าด้วยนิ้วของผม คืนนี้มีเสียงเอี๊ยดอ๊าด 217 ครั้ง (Donoghue, 2012, p. 42)

According to sentences A-E, Jack's mistakes include adding the past tense or the past participle marker -ed to regular verbs ('cutted', 'knowed', and 'winned') and attaching the comparative suffix -er to words that do not take the suffix ('funner' and 'scareder'). However, the translator chooses not to keep these deviations in the Thai version in most cases (sentences A, B, D, and E). This is probably due to the fact that the use of such inflectional suffixes does not exist in Thai, as additional words like 'แล้ว' and 'กว่า/มากขึ้น/เยอะขึ้น' are usually added to show past tenses and comparison, respectively. Therefore, it could be said that the linguistic differences between English and Thai justify the translator's decision not to transfer these grammatical errors, as it is not possible to come up with Thai equivalents that contain similar inflectional errors. Nevertheless, only when a mistake is explicitly addressed, for example, by another character, would the translator be forced to retain the mistake in the translated version, as seen in sentence C, where the translator distorts Jack's pronunciation of the word 'ชนะ' (won) into 'ชนะ' (winned) so that it goes with the correction Jack's mother makes in the next line.

Besides overgeneralizing inflectional suffixes, Jack usually extends, as seen in sentences F and G, the use of the transitive verb construction with exclusively intransitive verbs ("He *disappears* the trash." instead of "He makes the trash disappear."; "Old Nick *creaks* Bed." instead of "He makes Bed creak."). Although the two English sentences indicate developmental errors in child language acquisition concerning verb construction, such errors are not translated into the target language. The only thing that the translator chooses to maintain is the awkwardness of Jack's lexical choices, which reflects his young age and his limited world knowledge. The use of the phrase 'ทำให้ขยะหายไป' in sentence F implies that Jack does not seem to know where trash goes because he has been confined to Room since his birth. Similarly, Jack is too young to understand that his mother is being sexually abused and therefore simply describes it as an action that "ทำให้คุณเตียงส่งเสียงเอี๊ยดอ๊าด" in sentence G.

## 2. Maintaining awkwardness

As for the translation of expressions illustrating the protagonist's innocence, a close scrutiny of the following passage reveals some instances in which the translator tries to maintain the incongruous elements that contribute to the awkwardness in the source language. While the

incongruities in Boyne’s novel are mostly related to cultural references, some contradictory elements in *Room* are mainly caused by grammatical components:

**Extract 5**

Source text	Translation
<p>On Sunday we’re having bagels for dinner, very chewy, with jelly and peanut butter as well. Ma takes her bagel out of her mouth and there’s a pointy thing stuck in it. “At last,” she says.</p> <p>I pick it up, it’s all yellowy with dark brown bits.</p> <p>“Bad Tooth?”</p> <p>Ma nods. She’s feeling in the back of her mouth.</p> <p>That’s so weird. “We could stick him back in, with flour glue, maybe.”</p> <p>She shakes her head, grinning. “I’m glad it’s out, now it can’t hurt anymore.”</p> <p>He was part of her a minute ago but now he’s not. Just a thing. “Hey, you know what, if you put him under your pillow a fairy will come in the night invisibly and turn him into money.”</p> <p>“Not in here, sorry,” says Ma.</p> <p>“Why not?”</p> <p>“The tooth fairy doesn’t know about <b>Room</b>.” Her eyes are looking through the walls.</p> <p>Outside has everything. Whenever I think of a thing now like <b>skis or fireworks or islands or elevators or yo-yos</b>, I have to remember they’re real, they’re actually happening in Outside all together. It makes my head tired. And people too, <b>firefighters teachers burglars babies saints soccer players</b> and all sorts, they’re all really in Outside. I’m not there, though, me and Ma, we’re the only ones not there. Are we still real?</p> <p>(Donoghue, 2015, pp. 87-88)</p>	<p>วันอาทิตย์เรากินเบเกิลเป็นอาหารเย็น มันเหนียวมาก เรากินมันกับแยมลีสี่และเนยถั่ว</p> <p>แม่ดึงเบเกิลออกจากปากและมีอะไรแหลมๆ ติดอยู่ในนั้น</p> <p>“ในที่สุด” แม่พูด</p> <p>ผมหยิบมันขึ้นมา มันเป็นสีเหลืองและมีสีน้ำตาลเข้มปน</p> <p>“คุณฟันเกเรหรืออะ”</p> <p>แม่พยักหน้า แม่สัมผัสฟันด้านหลัง</p> <p>นั่นประหลาดเป็นบ้า “เราเสียบเขากลับไปได้นี่อะ ใช้แป้งเปียกก็ได้”</p> <p>แม่ยิ้มพลางส่ายหน้า “แม่ดีใจที่มันหลุดออกมาเสียที ตอนนี้นั้นมันจะไม่ทำให้เจ็บอีกแล้ว”</p> <p>เขาเคยเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของแม่เมื่อนาทีที่แล้ว แต่ตอนนี้กลับไม่ใช่แล้ว กลายเป็นแค่ของชิ้นหนึ่ง “เฮ้ แม่รู้มั๊ยอะว่าถ้าแฉวางเขาไว้ใต้หมอน นางฟ้าจะแวะมาตอนกลางคืนไม่ให้ใครเห็นและเสกเขาให้กลายเป็นเงิน”</p> <p>“เสียใจด้วยจะลูก แต่มันจะไม่เกิดขึ้นที่นี่หรอก” แม่พูด</p> <p>“ทำไมล่ะอะ”</p> <p>“นางฟ้าที่กัซฟันไม่รู้ว่ามีคุณห้องอยู่” ตาของแม่มองผ่านทะเลกุ๊กแกแง ออกไป</p> <p>ข้างนอกมีทุกอย่าง เมื่อไหร่ก็ตามที่ผมคิดถึงสิ่งของสักอย่าง เช่น สกีหรือดอกไม้ไฟหรือเกาะหรือลิฟต์หรือลูกตุ้ม ผมต้องคอยระลึกว่า พวกมันเป็นของจริง พวกมันมีอยู่จริงในข้างนอกนั่น ความคิดอย่างนี้ ทำให้สมองผมเหนื่อย รวมถึงคนด้วย ทั้งพนักงานดับเพลิง ครู ซอเมย ทารก นักบุญ นักฟุตบอลและคนอื่นๆอีก พวกเขา มีอยู่จริงในข้างนอก แต่ผมไม่ได้อยู่ที่นั่น ผมและแม่ มีแค่เราเท่านั้นที่ไม่ได้อยู่ที่นั่น แล้วอย่างนี้เราจะใช้คนจริงหรือเปล่า</p> <p>(Donoghue, 2012, pp. 80-81)</p>

For instance, the words ‘Outside’ and ‘Room’ are used as proper nouns as opposed to an adverb and a common noun respectively. This is because the protagonist has never been outside of the room where he and his mother are imprisoned. As a result, he misconstrues the concept of ‘Outside’ as a proper noun referring to a specific place while the room in which he lives has acquired a special meaning for both his mother and himself. These incongruities however can be difficult to be directly translated in the Thai version because the source text illustrates the boy’s ignorance making use of capitalization, a feature which does not exist in

the Thai writing system. For the translation of 'Room', the translator solves this issue by adding the word 'คุณ', a gender-neutral honorific in Thai. This personifying addition may change the meaning intended in the original text, yet it successfully preserves the special meaning embedded in the capitalization. The common meaning of 'room' in the Thai version is still dominant, but the translation can also convey another sense that the room here is more than just an ordinary location for the narrator. It plays a dominant role in the life of the child and his mother.

The translation of 'Outside', on the other hand, is more complicated. In this case, the translator just supplies the Thai equivalent of the adverb (i.e. 'ข้างนอก') without adding anything. When the word is used as an adverb in sentences, adding an honorific is not always a grammatically viable option. However, to a certain extent, one can argue too that the Thai version can still present the character's peculiar construal of the world outside by keeping the ungrammatical use of the preposition 'in' before the adverb 'outside' (i.e. 'ในข้างนอก'). In both versions, the expressions 'in Outside' will undoubtedly sound unidiomatic to readers, accentuating the child's juvenile perception of the world. Moreover, the way the translator translates 'Bad Tooth' in the passage above also merits a close examination. While the phrase is normally used to describe tooth decay, 'bad' in this context can also be read with a broader meaning. The Thai translation reflects the way the translator interprets the meaning of the adjective 'bad' in this passage. In the Thai version, the translator uses the word 'เกเร' (unruly) to make Jack's statement compatible with the ensuing exchange where the boy refers to the mother's tooth as a person. This also helps emphasize even more the innocent perspective of a child.

In addition, this passage also features some language awkwardness. The translator preserves Jack's linguistic peculiarity concerning linking, which reflects how the young boy organizes and articulates his thoughts, where possible. According to the last part of the above excerpt, when the boy wants to give examples of items he thinks of, he repeatedly uses the simple coordinator 'or' between all the nouns (*Whenever I think of a thing now like skis or fireworks or islands or elevators or yo-yos*), in which the translator keeps repeating the word 'or', maintaining Jack's language awkwardness in the target language. However, the translator opts not to transfer similar linking awkwardness when Jack lists groups of people without using any commas between nouns (*firefighters teachers burglars babies saints soccer players*). Such discrepancy results in different effects in reading the two texts: pauses between items will not be applied when reading the English text, but breaks, indicated by spacing between items, are inserted when reading the Thai text. This translational approach might be the translator's attempt to preserve the readability and naturalness of the target text over retaining every stylistic element of the start text.

It can be observed that most of the textual incongruities caused by grammaticality in the selected passage cannot be directly translated into Thai. Yet, the translator attempts to maintain the sense in source language as much as possible by adding some language elements that render the language of the narrator awkward in the Thai version.

## CONCLUSION

We hope to contribute to the scholarship in translation studies when translation deals with the texts or narratives that express a perspective of a child by pointing out that the challenges in the translation of verbal expressions related to juvenile innocence sometimes involve maintaining incongruities or contradictions embedded in the text. As shown in the Thai translations of the two novels whose protagonists are young children, the incongruities contribute to the reader's understanding of their points of views, and both translators have tried to produce translations that convey the senses in the original text. When incongruities are not maintained, some senses may be lost in translation. This perhaps explains why the translators in some cases decide to modify or alter the text in the translated version so that contradictory elements in the source language can still be kept to a certain degree. This by no means suggests that contradictions are the only factors to be taken into account when translating a text of which the narrative point of view focuses on a child's perspective. As shown in the discussion of the second novel, the linguistic peculiarities or the language awkwardness contribute to the naive voices of the narrators too. However, an awareness of incongruities in relation to dynamic equivalence in the target language should allow translators to work with such texts in a more informed and attentive manner.

## THE AUTHORS

**Nipaporn Tangtorrith** is a lecturer at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. She holds a master's degree in Education from Simon Fraser University, Canada. Her research interests include second language acquisition and language education.

[nipaporn.english@gmail.com](mailto:nipaporn.english@gmail.com)

**Bancha Rattanamathuwong** is a lecturer at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. His academic interests include contemporary fiction, English poetry, and comic studies.

[bancha.r@chula.ac.th](mailto:bancha.r@chula.ac.th)

## REFERENCES

- Ambridge, B., Pine, J. M., Rowland, C. F., Chang, F., & Bidgood, A. (2013). The retreat from overgeneralization in child language acquisition: Word learning, morphology, and verb argument structure. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, 4, 47-62.
- Attardo, S. (1994). *Linguistic theories of humour*. Mouton de Gruyter.
- Attardo, S. (2017). Humor in language. In M. Aronoff (Ed.), *Oxford research encyclopedia*. Oxford University Press. <https://oxfordre.com/linguistics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.001.0001/acrefore-9780199384655-e-342>
- Binhasan, C. (2013). *Translation of Emma Donoghue's Room* [Master's thesis]. Chulalongkorn University.
- Bühler-Niederberger, D. (2015). Innocence and childhood. In H. Montgomery (Ed.), *Oxford bibliographies in childhood studies*. Oxford University Press. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199791231/obo-9780199791231-0161.xml>



- Boyne, J. (2006). *The boy in the striped pyjamas*. David Fickling Books.
- Boyne, J. (2014). *The boy in the striped pyjamas* (W. Tantulakorn, Trans.). Praew Publishing. (Original work published 2006)
- Caracciolo, M. (2016). *Strange narrators in contemporary fiction: Explorations in readers' engagement with characters*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Chiaro, D. (2010). Translation and humour, humour and translation. In D. Chiaro (Ed.), *Translation, humour and literature* (pp. 1-29). Continuum.
- Donoghue, E. (2012). *Room* (Punn, Trans.). Praew Publishing. (Original work published 2010)
- Donoghue, E. (2015). *Room*. Picador.
- Dore, M. (2017). Narrative strategies and mind style in Emma Donoghue's *Room*. In D. Montini (Ed.), *Fictions: XVI 2017* (pp. 61-74). Fabrizio Serra Editore.
- Eagleton, T. (2013). *How to read literature*. Yale UP.
- "history, n." (2020). *OED online*. Oxford University Press. [www.oed.com/view/Entry/87325](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/87325). Accessed 1 December 2020.
- Kierkegaard, S. (2009). *Concluding unscientific postscript to the philosophical crumbs*. Translated by Alastair Hannay. Cambridge University Press. (Original work published in 1846)
- Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Longman.
- Lesnik-Oberstein, K. (2005). Defining children's literature and childhood. In P. Hunt (Ed.), *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (pp.15-29). Routledge.
- Long, M. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. Ritchie & T. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 413-468). Academic Press.
- Marcus, G. F., Pinker, S., Ullman, M., Hollander, M., Rosen, T. J., Xu, F., & Clahsen, H. (1992). Overregularization in language acquisition. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 57(4) [Serial No 228], i-182. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1166115>
- Mørk, K. L. (2017). Voices from a void: The holocaust in Norwegian children's literature. In J. Boase-Beier et al (Eds.), *Translating holocaust lives* (pp. 171-194). Bloomsbury.
- Nida, E., & Taber, C. R. (1982). *The theory and practice of translation*. Brill.
- Oittinen, R. (2006). No innocent act: On the ethics of translating for children. In J. Van Coillie & W. P. Verschueren (Eds.), *Children literature in translation: Challenges and strategies* (pp. 35-46). Routledge.
- Pym, A. (2014). *Exploring translation theories*. Routledge.
- Raskin, V. (1985). *Semantic mechanisms of humor*. D. Reidel.
- Raskin, V. (2017). Script-based semantic and ontological semantic theories of humor. In V. Raskin (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of language and humor* (pp. 109-125). Routledge.
- Schopenhauer, A. (2010). *The world as will and representation: Volume 1*. Translated by Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway. Cambridge University Press. (Original work published in 1818)
- Skinner, B. F. (1957). *Verbal behavior*. Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Swain, M. (1995). Three functions of output in second language learning. In G. Cook & B. Seidlhofer (Eds.), *Principles & practice in applied linguistics*. Oxford University Press.