

# 'I'll find it... or I'll look it up...?': Decoding Thai EFL Students' Translation Errors in the Thai-English Language Pair in Multi-Linguacultural Higher Education

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Article information	Abstract
<p><b>Article history:</b> Received: 27 Sep 2023 Accepted: 20 Aug 2024 Available online: 22 Aug 2024</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Translation errors Translation teaching and learning English-Thai translation Thai-English translation Multi-linguacultural higher education</p>	<p><i>Amid the abundance of studies on translation errors in Thailand, a scarcity remains especially within the multi-linguacultural context of Thailand's Deep South. To address this gap, this study aims to examine Thai-English and English-Thai translation errors encountered by 232 Thai EFL university students studying English in three universities located in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, primarily Pattani-Malay speakers with Thai and English as second and third languages, and some proficient in Arabic. The study employed two sets of 20-sentence translation tests and analyzed via qualitative content analysis. The findings reveal that semantic errors (65.02%), miscellaneous errors (20.73%), and syntactic errors (14.25%) were found in English-Thai translations, whereas syntactic errors (46.88%), semantic errors (40.76%), and miscellaneous errors (12.36%) were found in Thai-English translations respectively. The results suggest that linguistic proficiency, cultural familiarity in both the source and target languages and cultures, and L1 interference were considered as possible core factors influencing students' translation abilities. The study suggests integrating cultural experiences into translation teaching to better prepare learners for real-world challenges in multilingual educational settings.</i></p>

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## INTRODUCTION

While English is extensively taught in Thai educational institutions, English as a foreign language (EFL) students in Thailand often struggle to achieve language proficiency. Notably, translation between Thai and English persists as a major challenge, as evidenced by the frequent errors documented among Thai learners (Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007). The substantial differences in grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and other linguistic features likely contribute to these difficulties. Consequently, Thai EFL students often exhibit predictable errors in word choice, verb tense, prepositions, and sentence structure when translating from their native language to English (Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007; Wongranu, 2017). One of the primary obstacles for Thai learners in their pursuit of English language proficiency and the ability to compete globally lies in building effective translation strategies. These strategies are essential for enabling learners to translate

between their first language (L1), Thai, and their second language (L2), English (Fitriani, 2020; Kampookaew, 2020; Laongpol, 2018).

Several key differences exist between English and Thai linguistic structures and features that pose translation challenges for Thai EFL students. For instance, English relies on subjects and verbs to construct sentences, while subject pronouns are often omitted in Thai (Bennui, 2008; Khumphee, 2015). Moreover, Thai does not employ verb tenses in the same way as English. These grammatical variations often lead to issues with incorrect verb tense or sentence structure when Thai students translate into English (Kampookaew, 2022; Sermsook, et al., 2017; Wongranu, 2017). Additionally, the writing systems differ enormously, with English using an alphabetic script and Thai employing syllabic and alphabetic scripts. Translating across such vastly different orthographies introduces pronunciation and spelling difficulties (Chakravarthi et al., 2021; Lew, 2014). Cultural differences further complicate translation because concepts or texts may not have equivalent meanings across languages (House, 2002). By directly addressing some of the central morphological, syntactic, orthographic, and semantic variations, Thai EFL students may gain greater linguistic awareness to facilitate translation.

Despite learners frequently employing translation to understand English, many still experience errors that impede effective communication (Arsairach et al., 2017; Wongranu, 2017). While grammar-translation methods have historically been commonplace in foreign language teaching, they chiefly concentrate on grammar rules, morphology, vocabulary, and translation of decontextualized sentences. As such, reliance solely on grammar translation fails to provide learners with practical translation strategies needed to interpret meaning in extended discourse and accurately convey complete ideas across languages. This gap highlights why additional strategic approaches are necessary to facilitate proficient translation. A primary cause of persistent translation errors may be the inherent complexity of translating between languages with substantial structural differences. Translation necessitates carefully interpreting a source text, including elements like meaning, style, and purpose, then rendering that full interpretation into another language. This process requires expertise in both the source and target languages to comprehend distinctions in grammatical frameworks and embedded cultural contexts (Wimonchalau, 2000). Recognizing the multifaceted nature of translation helps underscore the formidable barriers Thai EFL students face in navigating translations between the highly divergent Thai and English languages. Identifying those obstacles is key to developing effective pedagogical techniques, resources, and targeted learning strategies to enhance translation proficiency.

The number of universities in Thailand offering translation courses has increased dramatically to meet the high demand for translation services in the business market. Consequently, a wide variety of translation courses are taught at the tertiary level, primarily focusing on English-to-Thai and Thai-to-English translations and encompassing basic, intermediate, and advanced levels (Duklim, 2022). In addition, these courses also cover a broad scope of translation for specific purposes, such as career-oriented translation, communication-oriented translation, or translations tailored to specific genres, such as academic texts, literary texts, and informative texts. However, regardless of the number of courses taken or the extent of translation experience, pitfalls and errors persist (Dobnik, 2019; Sari, 2019; Siriseranee &

Chompurach, 2021; Wongranu, 2017). Hence, to minimize translation errors, it is crucial for translators to analyze their translations, identify any errors, and make the necessary corrections. By learning from their mistakes and understanding approaches to avoid such errors, translators can develop greater awareness and accuracy in translation. Furthermore, this study contributes to the field of translation teaching and learning research, specifically by shedding light on the translation errors committed by Thai EFL university students.

While considerable prior research has analyzed translation errors among Thai EFL students (Arsairach et al., 2017; Duklim, 2022; Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007; Wongranu, 2017), few studies have focused specifically on the unique context of the culturally and linguistically diverse Deep South border provinces in Thailand. In particular, most previous work has predominantly centered on native Thai speakers, overlooking the distinct linguistic backgrounds of Deep South students, where many speak Pattani-Malay as their mother tongue before acquiring Thai and English (Assalihee & Boonsuk, 2022; Premsrirat & Burarungrot, 2022). Although persistent errors across proficiency levels are well-documented (Dobnik, 2019; Sari 2019), limited attention has been given to investigating pedagogical strategies to help these multilingual students minimize enduring translation errors that impede communication. Given English's prevalent global role, investigating the translation challenges faced by these diverse learners is critical. This study addresses critical gaps by examining the English-Thai (EN-TH) and Thai-English (TH-EN) translation challenges and common pitfalls among tertiary-level Thai EFL students in the multilingual Deep South. The findings provide valuable localized insights tailored to the translation needs and barriers of learners with varying linguistic backgrounds, including native Pattani-Malay speakers. Consequently, the outcomes carry crucial implications for developing instructional materials and designing translation courses suitable for this distinct setting, promoting a targeted, culturally responsive approach to translation education. This fosters a more inclusive, impactful learning experience for students.

To address this research aim, the study examined the EN-TH and TH-EN translation errors of Thai EFL university students studying English in the three southern border provinces, guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the most common types of translation errors in translating from English into Thai encountered by Thai EFL university students in the Deep South of Thailand?
2. What are the most common types of translation errors in translating from Thai into English encountered by Thai EFL university students in the Deep South of Thailand?

### **Translation error in English language education**

In general, translation is a method that involves the transfer of ideas from a source language (SL) to a target language (TL) while adhering closely to the terms and forms of TL (Salam et al., 2017). In other words, the aim of translation is to ensure that the original text's meaning is preserved while presenting it in a natural and coherent manner in the TL. Note that translation is not only about replacing words from one communication medium with those of another. Instead, it involves the complex task of accurately conveying the intended meaning or idea from the SL to the TL (Cúc, 2018).

The concept of errors in foreign language education is a domain of linguistic analysis primarily concerned with the errors made by L2 learners (Crystal, 1999; Ridha, 2012). In the context of language education and learning, Crystal (1999, p. 108) defines errors as “unacceptable forms of learning a language, particularly a foreign language,” which is congruent with Séguinot’s (1989) definition that errors result from a lack of understanding of the source text or the translator’s inability to effectively render it into the TL (Jahanshahi & Kafipour, 2015). Scholars have extensively researched errors made by L2 learners while learning foreign languages, especially English, in Thai and international contexts (e.g., Altameemy & Daradkeh, 2019; Kampookaew, 2020). These studies aimed to leverage the knowledge gained from analyzing these errors to develop more effective English language teaching (ELT) methods.

In foreign language learning contexts, such as studying EFL, scholars have widely acknowledged that linguistic, comprehension, and translation errors are the most frequently occurring types of errors (e.g., Cúc, 2018). Based on this notion, this investigation specifically focused on translation errors (TE) and reviewed relevant literature in Thailand and other countries where EFL instruction is provided. Findings revealed that the root causes of errors in English translations are similar across geographies. In the context of Thailand, carelessness resulting from incorrect reading and schema impediments (Duklim, 2022; Suksaeresup & Thep-Ackrapong, 2009), insufficient vocabulary knowledge (Fitriani & Suyitno, 2019; Roongsitthichai et al., 2019), and a poor understanding of the correct translation process, translators lacking confidence in their abilities, and panic (Duklim, 2022; Wongranu, 2017) were identified as common causes of errors in EN-TH and TH-EN translations. In other EFL contexts, several factors were identified as contributing to TE, including insufficient training materials for learners or translators (Jahanshahi & Kafipour, 2015), inadequate mastery of the target language’s linguistic knowledge (Cúc, 2018; Silalahi et al., 2018), and the influence of the learners’ or translators’ mother tongues (Silalahi, et al., 2018).

Currently, scholars do not have a consensus on the types of translation errors in the EN-TH language pair, resulting in variations among proposals. For instance, Pojprasat (2007) categorized translation errors in this language pair into three groups: semantic, syntactic, and cultural. Semantic errors involve the mistranslation of words, including single words, collocations, and idioms, while syntactic errors refer to the mistranslation of sentences and grammatical structures. Cultural errors, on the other hand, are attributed to differences in the cultural backgrounds of learners or translators. Other scholars have also proposed similar categorizations of translation errors. For example, Wongranu (2017) suggested three common translation errors: syntactic, semantic, and miscellaneous. Similarly, Yousofi (2014) reported three types of translation errors: linguistic, cultural, and stylistic, while Jahanshahi and Kafipour (2015) proposed three types of translation errors: language, miscellaneous, and rendition.

In addition to the previously mentioned types of translation errors, Suksaeresup and Thep-Ackrapong (2009) also presented a categorization based on error causes. This categorization distinguishes between reading errors and interpreting errors. Reading errors occur when the learner or translator misreads the source text, resulting in errors that may arise from either a pure miscue, such as confusing “hop” with “hope,” or errors that stem from the learner’s or translator’s background knowledge, such as mistaking “Kramer fighting Kramer” with “Khmer fighting

Khmer.” In contrast, interpreting errors occur when the learner or translator misinterprets the source text, possibly caused by issues related to grammatical structure, denotative meaning of words, and connotative meaning of words. Besides, Pym (1992) proposed a categorization of translation errors based on whether they are binary or non-binary errors. To elaborate further, binary errors refer to translation errors that are clearly incorrect or inaccurate. In contrast, non-binary errors may not necessarily be incorrect but may seem inappropriate and can benefit from further improvements. Overall, these classifications of translation errors are essential since they can assist in assessing learners’ language and translation proficiency. As stated by Pym (1992), binary errors suggest that learners’ language proficiency requires improvement. In contrast, non-binary errors reflect the learner’s translation ability, defined as the capability to produce a group of target texts and select the most appropriate option based on the objectives and readers of the text.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research contexts and participants**

Despite the wealth of literature on translation errors in Thailand, most previous studies (e.g., Duklim, 2022; Wongranu, 2017) have primarily focused on higher education students whose mother tongue is Thai, the national language of Thailand. As a result, little research has been conducted on students whose first language is not Thai and who reside in multilingual societies where Thai is not the primary language of communication. To address this gap, this study purposefully recruited 232 participants from three universities in Southern Thailand using purposive sampling, ensuring the inclusion of native Pattani-Malay speakers to provide a distinctive linguistic context diverging from most participants in previous studies. These participants had completed EN-TH and TH-EN translation courses, offering a nuanced perspective on translation challenges in multilingual environments. These participants predominantly communicate in Pattani-Malay as their mother tongue, with Thai and English as additional languages. Some also possess Arabic language skills. Variations in linguistic background and exposure may contribute to differing translation skills and tendencies between learners. Hence, investigating whether contrasting native languages among participants predicts divergent error patterns is a worthwhile endeavor.

### **Research instrument**

To comprehensively examine the translation errors encountered by the participants in their EN-TH and TH-EN translations, this study utilized two sets of translation tests from Wimonchalau (1994) and Pojprasat (2007). The selection of these sets was based on several key reasons. First, these models have been extensively validated through their application in numerous previous studies focusing on translation errors among Thai EFL students (e.g., Duklim, 2022; Kitjaroonchai & Kitjaroonchai, 2023; Wongranu, 2017), demonstrating their robustness and applicability across various contexts. In addition, these frameworks provide a clear and comprehensive classification of errors into syntactic, semantic, and miscellaneous categories, enabling systematic and in-depth analysis of mistakes committed by the participants. Finally,

the frameworks are tailored specifically for examining EN-TH and TH-EN translation, ensuring their direct relevance to the language pair and translation directionality investigated in this study. Consequently, by adopting these classification schemes, the study is well-positioned to conduct a targeted investigation of the translation errors that are characteristic of Thai ELF students' language background and skills.

The test content covers accessible topics and vocabulary for diverse students. Specifically, the EN-TH and TH-EN translation tests, comprising 30 sentences each, were adapted from Wimonchalau (1994) and Pojprasat (2007). In adapting these existing tests for the current study's context, the authors made appropriate modifications to suit the skills and needs of undergraduate-level participants. To ensure the quality of the research instruments, feedback was obtained from experts who assessed the tests and the participants in a pilot study. Based on this feedback, it was suggested that the original numbers of testing items in both tests were too high, which could result in the participants taking an extended period to complete the tests. Moreover, they might perceive potential fatigue and boredom, resulting in a reluctance to participate in the research. To address these concerns, the sentences in both tests were reduced by 10 based on the experts' recommendations and the pilot study's findings. Therefore, the total number of sentences in both tests was reduced to 40, with 20 sentences for each test. In summary, the rigorous validation process involving expert feedback and a pilot study improves confidence in the suitability and efficacy of the chosen research instruments for investigating translation errors among multilingual Thai EFL students.

### **Data collection and analysis**

To commence data collection, the necessary permissions and procedures for telephone and email data collection were acquired from target university administrators. Subsequently, lecturers of translation courses were contacted. This step involved communicating the study's objectives, data collection methodology, and timeframe to ensure they fully comprehend the procedures, particularly those concerning test invigilation. Once it was confirmed that all lecturers were clear on the test-taking protocols, schedules for student appointments were arranged. Before administering the Quizizz online translation tests, which included EN-TH and TH-EN translation items, participants were briefed about the study's purpose, data collection procedures, and their right to withdraw without facing any consequences. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before taking the test after the orientation. To maintain standardization during the hour-long supervised assessment, students were required to keep their cameras enabled. They were permitted to use only paper dictionaries for reference, ensuring that no online translation tools, including AI, were utilized. Anonymity was maintained by using numerical codes instead of personal identifiers.

The online platform used for the test was designed to maximize authenticity. It restricted the time available for responses, prevented participants from revising their answers, and explicitly prohibited the use of any translation tools, except for paper dictionaries. Continuous supervision by lecturers helped control the environment and minimize the possibility of external assistance, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the data collected.



For data analysis, obtained data were stored in password-protected Microsoft Excel files, thoroughly analyzed for translation accuracy, and crosschecked among the researchers. Subsequently, the data were categorized according to the models of translation errors adapted from Wimonchalau (1994) and Pojprasat (2007). These models offer a simple yet comprehensive taxonomy for coding both grammatical and meaning-based mistakes. By employing this taxonomy, the study enabled a thorough examination of the diverse types of errors committed by students, broadly classified as syntactic, semantic, and miscellaneous errors. Semantic errors involve incorrect translation of words, including single words, collocations, and idioms. Syntactic errors refer to mistranslated sentences and structures (Pojprasat, 2007). Miscellaneous errors were those that did not fit into either of these categories. Finally, the data were analyzed to determine the frequency and percentage of each type of error.

## FINDINGS

This section presents the three categories of errors (i.e., syntactic, semantic, and miscellaneous) and their sub-categories identified during the English to Thai and Thai to English translation tests administered to 232 participants from three universities in the Deep South subregion of Thailand.

Table 1 presents a comprehensive overview of the three types of errors, including syntactic, semantic, and miscellaneous errors, found in the participants' translations of English to Thai and Thai to English. When examining the English to Thai translations, it was found that semantic errors (65.02%) were the most prevalent, followed by miscellaneous errors (20.73%) and syntactic errors (14.25%). Conversely, the Thai to English translations had a higher prevalence of syntactic errors (46.88%), followed by semantic errors (40.76%) and miscellaneous errors (12.36%), respectively.

### Types of translation errors

**Table 1**  
Types of errors identified in the translations between English and Thai

Types of Errors	EN-TH		TH-EN	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Syntactic	383	14.25	1,020	46.88
Semantic	1,747	65.02	887	40.76
Miscellaneous	557	20.73	269	12.36
	<b>2,687</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,176</b>	<b>100</b>

### Syntactic errors in the English-Thai and Thai-English translations

The analysis of syntactic errors in EN-TH translations revealed that the participants made mistakes in eight sub-categories of syntactic errors. As shown in Table 2, Participle (36.51%), Modifier (31.25%), and Punctuation (12.17%) were the three most frequent error patterns observed, while Determiner (0.33%) was the least commonly mistranslated pattern. In TH-EN translations, the most identified errors were Punctuation (28.33%), Form Error (18.73%), and

Tense (17.75%). Unlike EN-TH translations, the least common syntactic error patterns in TH-EN translations were If-clauses and Participles, with an equal frequency of occurrence (0.10%).

**Table 2**  
Percentage of syntactic errors by pattern

EN-TH			TH-EN		
No.	Patterns	Percentage (%)	No.	Patterns	Percentage (%)
1	Participle	36.51	1	Punctuation	28.33
2	Modifier	31.25	2	Form Error	18.73
3	Punctuation	12.17	3	Tense	17.75
4	Passive Voice	6.91	4	Article	15.78
5	Word Order	6.58	5	Noun Countability	7.65
6	Tense	4.61	6	Determiners	3.33
7	Serial Verb	1.64	7	Serial Verb	2.75
8	Determiner	0.33	8	Passive Voice	1.86
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	9	Subject-Verb Agreement	1.57
			10	Ellipsis/Omission	0.59
			11	Word Order	0.49
			12	Modifier	0.39
			13	Relative Clause	0.39
			14	Topic-Comment	0.20
			15	If-Clause	0.10
			16	Participle	0.10
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	

**Table 3**  
Examples of syntactic errors in English-Thai translations

Error Patterns	Source Texts	Student Translation	Correct Translation
Participle	<b>Bitten by a mad dog</b> , the boy was immediately sent to hospital.	หมาบ้าได้กัดเด็กผู้ชาย ทันทีที่ทันโลกส่งโรงพยาบาล	เด็กชายถูกสุนัขบ้ากัดจึงถูกนำตัวส่ง โรงพยาบาลทันที / เด็กชายที่โดน หมาบ้ากัดได้ถูกนำตัวส่งโรงพยาบาล ทันที
Modifier	When father got drunk, men from the <b>corner saloon</b> would drag him home.	เมื่อพ่อเมา กลุ่มผู้ชายที่อยู่หัว มุมร้านเหล้าต่างลากพ่อกลับบ้าน	ตอนพ่อเมาผู้ชายจากร้านเหล้าตรงหัว มุมหัวพ่อกลับบ้าน
Punctuation	<b>Normally</b> , wild animals are shy.	โดยปกติแล้ว, สัตว์ป่ามักจะชอบ หลบซ่อนผู้คน	โดยปกติแล้วสัตว์ป่าจะขี้อิน

Table 3 highlights the top three syntactic errors in EN-TH translations related to participle, modifier, and punctuation. Specifically, the first example showcases a common error in translating participial phrases, such as “Bitten by a mad dog.” In English, participial phrases function as adjectives, providing additional information about the noun or pronoun they modify. In this case, “Bitten by a mad dog” describes the condition of “the boy” before he was sent to the hospital. However, the student’s translation reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the participial phrase’s role. Instead of capturing the phrase’s descriptive function, the student misinterprets it as an independent, translating as “หมาบ้าได้กัดเด็กผู้ชาย” (the mad dog bit the boy). This mistranslation not only distorts the original meaning but also introduces an



erroneous subject-action relationship, shifting the focus from the boy’s condition to the dog’s action of biting. By treating the participial phrase as the main action, the student’s translation deviates from the intended structure and meaning, resulting in an unnatural and confusing sentence in Thai. To accurately convey the original message, the translation should maintain the participial phrase’s descriptive function, which can be achieved by using Thai constructions such as “เด็กชายที่ถูกสุนัขบ้ากัด” or “เด็กชายที่โดนหมาบ้ากัด” (the boy who was bitten by the mad dog), or at the very least, by preserving the correct subject, as in “เด็กชายถูกสุนัขบ้ากัด” (the boy was bitten by the mad dog). This example vividly illustrates the challenges in translating English participial phrases into Thai, emphasizing the importance of understanding the grammatical function of participial phrases in the SL and finding appropriate equivalents in the TL.

Moving on to the second error pattern identified is modifier misuse. In the source text "When father got drunk, men from the **corner saloon** would drag him home," the phrase "from the corner saloon" functions as a prepositional phrase modifying the noun "men," indicating their association with a specific saloon located at the corner. The the correct translation should be “ตอนพ่อเมาผู้ชายจากร้านเหล้าตรงหัวมุมหิ้วพอลกลับบ้าน.” Despite “**corner saloon**” being a two-word phrase, its function in the sentence is to modify the noun “men,” specifying the type or location of the men and indicating that they are associated with or from a particular saloon situated at the corner. However, in the student's translation, the phrase “กลุ่มผู้ชายที่อยู่หัวมุมร้านเหล้า” is used to describe the men, which translates to “**the group of men who are at the corner of the saloon.**” This translation is not correct because it misinterprets the phrase "men from the corner saloon" as "men at the corner of the saloon". The student's translation fails to properly convey the modifier relationship between "corner saloon" and "men". The misunderstanding changes the meaning of the sentence, as it implies that the men were simply standing near the saloon, rather than being from the saloon itself.

Lastly, the third error pattern identified is punctuation errors. In the case of the student's translation, a comma was added after the phrase “**Normally,**” “โดยปกติแล้ว.” which is grammatically incorrect in Thai resulting in a punctuation error. In Thai language, commas are used differently from English. Commas are used to separate items in a list or to separate clauses in a sentence, but not to separate introductory phrases or clauses from the main sentence. Therefore, the correct translation of the sentence "Normally, wild animals are shy." should be “โดยปกติแล้ว สัตว์ป่ามักจะขี้อาย” without a comma after “โดยปกติแล้ว.”

**Table 4**  
Examples of syntactic errors in Thai-English translations

Error Patterns	Source Texts	Student Translation	Correct Translation
Punctuation	ห้ามให้อาหารลิง	Don't feed the monkeys	Do not (Don't) feed the <b>monkeys!</b> / Do not (Don't) feed the <b>monkeys.</b>
Form Error	ห้ามให้อาหารลิง	Do not <b>feeds</b> the monkey.	<b>Do not feed</b> (Don't) the monkeys! / Do not (Don't) feed the monkeys.
Tense	ในอดีตครั้งหนึ่งเขาเคยเป็นเศรษฐี	In the past, he <b>is</b> a millionaire.	Once he <b>was</b> a millionaire.

Table 4 illustrates the examples of syntactic errors of three different error patterns namely punctuation errors, form errors, and tense errors in TH-EN translations. Regarding the punctuation

error in the first example, the source text is “ห้ามให้อาหารลิง” (**Do not (Don't) feed the monkeys.**). The student translation, however, involves the omission of necessary punctuation, specifically the full stop or exclamation mark. As punctuation plays a crucial role in conveying the tone and meaning of a sentence, the absence of punctuation in the student's translation may result in the loss of important nuances and impact the clarity of the message. In the correct translation, the exclamation mark is added to indicate a command with a sense of urgency or prohibition. The absence of punctuation in the student's translation diminishes the strength of the command and could lead to a misinterpretation of the intended message. Moreover, in the second example with the same source text, but this time the student translation makes a form error in subject-verb agreement. The student uses the verb **"feeds"** which is not correctly conjugated to match the subject **"you"** (which is implied in this imperative sentence). The correct translation is "Do not feed the monkeys," with the verb "feed" correctly conjugated in the base form to match the subject. In the last example, the source text is “ในอดีตครั้งหนึ่งเขาเคยเป็นเศรษฐี.” The student made a tense error by using the present tense (**"is"**) to describe a past event, failing to match it to the time period being referenced in the sentence. The correct tense in this case is the past tense (**"was"**), which accurately reflects that the person in question was a millionaire at a specific point in the past but is no longer a millionaire. The correct translation should be "Once he was a millionaire."

### Semantic errors in the English-Thai and Thai-English translations

Table 5 reported the frequency and types of semantic errors in translations between English and Thai. In EN-TH translations, Naturalness (27.13%), Lexical Choice (26.22%), and Undertranslation (19%) were identified as the most common error patterns among the eight sub-categories, while Loanword (1.43%) was the least frequently observed. In TH-EN translations, the semantic errors were divided into nine sub-categories, with Lexical Choice (40.70%), Undertranslation (22.77%), and Redundancy (16.46%) being the three most common error patterns identified by the participants. In contrast to the EN-TH translations, the least frequently occurring error patterns in the Thai-English translations were Naturalness (0.56%) and Phrasal Verb (0.56%), which shared the same frequency.

**Table 5**  
**Percentages of semantic errors by pattern**

EN-TH			TH-EN		
No.	Patterns	Percentage (%)	No.	Patterns	Percentage (%)
1	Naturalness	27.13	1	Lexical Choice	40.70
2	Lexical Choice	26.22	2	Undertranslation	22.77
3	Undertranslation	19.00	3	Redundancy	16.46
4	Overtranslation	10.99	4	Overtranslation	9.24
5	Preposition	9.16	5	Preposition	4.51
6	Confusing Word	3.66	6	Loanword	3.49
7	Redundancy	2.40	7	Confusing Word	1.69
8	Loanword	1.43	8	Phrasal Verb	0.56
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	9	Naturalness	0.56
					<b>100</b>

**Table 6**  
**Examples of semantic errors in English-Thai translations**

Error Patterns	Source Texts	Student Translation	Correct Translation
Naturalness	It's time for bed, kids.	มันถึงเวลาที่ต้องเข้านอนแล้วนะคะ ลูกรัก	ได้เวลานอนแล้วล่ะลูก
Lexical Choices	After the evening prayer, monks meditate and <b>sleep</b> in their own cells.	พระภิกษุจะนั่งสมาธิและนอนหลับในกุฏิของตนหลังการทำวัตรเย็น	หลังจากสวดมนต์ช่วงเย็น พระสงฆ์ก็จะนั่งสมาธิและจำวัดในกุฏิของตน
Undertranslation	Did you see the pupil near <b>the teacher in the front row in the lecture hall?</b>	คุณเห็นนักเรียนคนที่อยู่ใกล้กับอาจารย์ในห้องประชุมไหม?	เธอ/คุณเห็นนักเรียนที่อยู่ใกล้คุณครูตรงแถวหน้าในห้องประชุมไหม

As seen in Table 6, the findings present examples of semantic errors found in EN-TH translations. The common errors found were grouped into three categories: naturalness, lexical choices, and undertranslation. The first example, under the naturalness category, highlights the importance of creating translations that sound natural and fluent in the TL. However, the student’s Thai translation, “มันถึงเวลาที่ต้องเข้านอนแล้วนะคะ ลูกรัก,” while grammatically correct, lacks the naturalness of the source text. In this example, the use of “มันถึงเวลา..” can be perceived as more formal, less common, or even a bit awkward to native Thai speakers. The correct translation, “ได้เวลานอนแล้วล่ะลูก.” is a more natural way of conveying the message that it is time for children to go to bed.

Shifting the focus to the second error pattern, the lexical choice errors were found. This pattern refers to the selection of appropriate words and terms in the target language that convey the intended meaning of the source text. In the example of "After the evening prayer, monks meditate and **sleep** in their own cells. ." the student translation “พระภิกษุจะนั่งสมาธิและนอนหลับในกุฏิของตนหลังการทำวัตรเย็น” contains a lexical choice error. The student translated the word "**sleep**" in the source text using the word “นอนหลับ” which is a common term for ‘sleep’ in the Thai language. However, this term is not appropriate to use when referring to sleep for a monk. In Buddhist terminology, monks do not "sleep" in the traditional sense. Instead, they engage in a practice called “จำวัด” which refers to a state of deep meditation or contemplation that is similar to sleep. Therefore, the most appropriate translation is “หลังจากสวดมนต์ช่วงเย็นพระสงฆ์ก็จะนั่งสมาธิและจำวัดในกุฏิของตน,” which accurately captures the context by using the term “จำวัด.”

Transitioning to the third type of error, concerning undertranslation; it refers to the omission or insufficient rendering of information in the source text in the target language translation. Specifically, In the student translation “คุณเห็นนักเรียนคนที่อยู่ใกล้กับอาจารย์ในห้องประชุมไหม?” (Did you see the pupil near the teacher in the lecture hall?), the student failed to fully translate the meaning of the source text, resulting in an incomplete and inaccurate translation. The student has omitted the word "**...in the front row...**" which is not as complete in conveying the intended meaning of "...the pupil near the teacher in the front row in the lecture hall".

**Table 7**  
**Examples of semantic errors in Thai-English translations**

Error Patterns	Source Texts	Student Translation	Correct Translation
Lexical Choice	ฉันจะไปเปิดดิกดูก่อนนะ	I'll <b>find</b> it in the dictionary first.	I'll <b>look it up</b> in a dictionary.
Undertranslation	วานนี้ฉันเขียนจดหมายไปหาแม่แล้ว	<b>I wrote</b> a letter to my mother.	<b>Yesterday, I wrote</b> a letter to my mom.
Redundancy	พูดซ้ำอีกครั้งได้ไหม	Can you <b>repeat it again</b> ?	Can you <b>repeat it</b> ?

Table 7 provides examples of semantic errors in TH-EN translations. The first example is a lexical choice error, where the student translated “ฉันจะไปเปิดดิกดูก่อนนะ” to “I’ll **find it** in the dictionary first.” The correct translation is “I’ll **look it up** in a dictionary.” This error occurred because the student used “find” instead of “look up,” which changes the meaning of the sentence. “Find” is not the appropriate verb to use in this context, and the correct translation uses the more appropriate verb “look up” to accurately convey the intended meaning.

To elaborate on the second example, which involves an undertranslation error, the student translated “วานนี้ฉันเขียนจดหมายไปหาแม่แล้ว” as “**I wrote a letter** to my mother.” The correct translation should be “**Yesterday, I wrote** a letter to my mom.” This error occurred because the student did not translate the word “yesterday,” which is a key piece of information in the original Thai sentence. This undertranslation could change the time frame of the sentence. Furthermore, in the third example, the error found is a redundancy error, where the student translated “พูดซ้ำอีกครั้งได้ไหม” to “Can you **repeat it again**?”. The correct translation should be “Can you **repeat it**?”. This error occurred because the word “again” is redundant, as “repeat” already implies doing something again. The correct translation removes the redundant word to convey the intended meaning more clearly and concisely.

### Miscellaneous errors in the English-Thai and Thai-English translations

According to Table 8, misinterpretation was the most frequent miscellaneous error pattern observed in both EN-TH (71.27%) and TH-EN (82.16%) translations. In EN-TH translations, misspelling and mistranscription were the second and third most common error patterns. The misspelling rate in these translations was about twice as prevalent as the rate in TH-EN translations (28.55% vs 13.01%). On the other hand, the rate of mistranscription was significantly lower in EN-TH translations than in TH-EN translations (0.18% vs 4.83%).

**Table 8**  
**Percentages of miscellaneous errors by pattern**

No.	Patterns	EN-TH	TH-EN
		Percentage (%)	Percentage (%)
1	Misinterpretation	71.27	82.16
2	Misspelling	28.55	13.01
3	Mistranscription	0.18	4.83
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 9

Examples of miscellaneous errors in English-Thai translations

Error Patterns	Source Texts	Student Translation	Correct Translation
Misinterpretation	The author and lecturer is giving a speech in the auditorium at the moment.	นักเขียนและอาจารย์ได้กล่าวสุนทรพจน์ อยู่ตอนที่ห้องประชุม	นักเขียนที่เป็นอาจารย์ด้วยท่าน นั้นกำลังบรรยายอยู่ในห้องประชุม
Misspelling	I'm tired of doing it every day.	ทุกวันนี้ฉันเหนื่อยเหมือเกิน	ฉันเมื่อที่จะต้องทำแบบนี้ทุกวัน
Mistranscription	By the time Jane went to bed, she had finished her homework.	งานทำการบ้านเสร็จเมื่อถึงเวลาเข้านอน พอดี	งานทำการบ้านเสร็จก่อนจะเข้า นอน

Table 9 illustrates examples of miscellaneous errors in EN-TH translations. These errors fall into three categories namely misinterpretation, misspelling, and mistranscription. In the first example under the misinterpretation category, the student's translation misinterprets the source text's meaning. The original text describes a person who is both an author and a lecturer giving a speech in an auditorium. However, the student translation incorrectly separates the roles of the author and the lecturer by saying "นักเขียนและอาจารย์" (**the author and the lecturer**), which suggests that they are different individuals. This is a misinterpretation of the source text, as it fails to convey that the author and the lecturer are the same person.

In the second example of misspellings in this translation, two distinct types of errors emerge. The primary focus is on the use of "ฉัน" instead of "ฉัน" for the first-person pronoun "I". This error likely stems from the student's familiarity with spoken Thai, where "ฉัน" is commonly used in colloquial speech. However, in formal written Thai, "ฉัน" is the correct form. Additionally, while not directly related to the correct translation of "tired of" (which should be "เบื่อ" in Thai), it's worth noting the misspelling of "เหนื่อยเหมือเกิน" instead of "เหนื่อยเหลือเกิน". This appears to be a typographical mistake, possibly due to careless or fast typing or lack of proofreading, rather than a lack of language knowledge. Lastly, in the third example, the error involves a mistranscription of a name. Specifically, the student mistranscribed "เจน" (Jane) as "แจน" (**Jan**) which is a different name in Thai and English. This is a common error in transliteration. The error can lead to confusion for the reader. In addition, if the name is a crucial part of the context, the error could potentially affect the accuracy of the entire translation.

Table 10

Examples of miscellaneous errors in Thai-English translations

Error Patterns	Source Texts	Student Translation	Correct Translation
Misinterpretation	คนไทยเคี้ยวหมากแบบเดียวกับที่ เคี้ยวหมากฝรั่ง	Thai <b>chews gum</b> like foreigners do.	Thai people <b>chewed Mak or beetle nuts</b> like chewing gum. / Thai people chewed beetle nuts like chewing gum.
Misspelling	วานนี้ฉันเขียนจดหมายไปหาแม่แล้ว	Yesterday i wrote a letter to my <b>mather</b>	Yesterday, I wrote a letter to my <b>mother</b> .
Mistranscription	คนไทยเคี้ยวหมากแบบเดียวกับที่ เคี้ยวหมากฝรั่ง	Thai people chew <b>Mhack</b> the same way as chewing gum.	Thai people chewed <b>Mak</b> or beetle nuts like chewing gum. / Thai people chewed beetle nuts like chewing gum.

Table 10 shows examples of miscellaneous errors in TH-EN translations. As shown in the first example, the first common error found is misinterpretation, where the meaning of the source text is not accurately conveyed in the translation. In the first example, the student translated “คนไทยเคี้ยวหมากแบบเดียวกับที่เคี้ยวหมากฝรั่ง” as “Thai **chews gum** like foreigners do.” However, the correct translation is “Thai people chewed Mak or beetle nuts like chewing gum.” This is a significant difference because chewing gum and beetle nuts are very different things, and the student’s translation could cause confusion or miscommunication.

Furthermore, the second error pattern is misspelling, where words are spelled incorrectly in the translation. The student misspelled the word “mother” as “**mather**” which is a common spelling mistake for non-native English speakers. However, this mistake could also lead to confusion or miscommunication. Lastly, the third error pattern is mistranscription, where the student transcribed the source text incorrectly. They have rendered “หมาก” as “**Mhack**.” which is an incorrect transcription of the Thai word. In the Thai word “หมาก” is pronounced as /màak/. In Thai, the letter “ห” (/h/) can be a prefix consonant that initiates a word’s consonant sound but is not pronounced on its own in this case, so called a silent letter which does not contribute to the pronunciation of the word. However, the student’s translation mistakenly included the letter “h” when transcribing the word, resulting in “**Mhack**”. It seems the student mistakenly thought that adding “h” after “m” would produce the correct transcription. This error can be attributed to a lack of understanding regarding the transcription of Thai words with silent letters. In this case, the silent letter “ห” should not be transcribed, and the word should be correctly transcribed as “**Mak**” and pronounced as /màak/ (Jenny, 2019) without the inclusion of the silent letter, addressing the mistranscription error and reflecting the correct pronunciation of the Thai word for beetle nuts.

## DISCUSSION

Translation is crucial for inter-language communication. Prior research has highlighted challenges faced by translators, including source text clarity, translator knowledge, and cultural differences (Putri, 2019). Despite extensive studies on translation errors, limited research focuses on multilingual students whose diverse backgrounds may contribute to translation problems. This study addressed the gap by investigating translation challenges among EFL university students in the Deep South of Thailand. Unlike previous research, this study specifically targeted students raised in multilingual settings, where Thai may not be their mother tongue, but instead, they may speak Pattani-Malay or Arabic. The findings revealed three categories of translation errors: syntactic, semantic, and miscellaneous. Remarkably, despite the participants’ diverse linguistic backgrounds, the errors observed in their translations closely resemble those reported in studies involving students with Thai as their mother tongue.

From Table 2, it appears that the student translations contain several errors concerning syntactic aspects that differ in the top three of a pair language. In EN-TH translation, the three prominent syntactic errors are participle, modifier, and punctuation, while in TH-EN, punctuation is the most identified error, followed by form errors and tense. It can be said that the students have problems with the grammar of both languages which might be caused



by their understanding of the languages which are not their mother tongue. Venuti (2017) stated that translation is an art that requires equivalent proficiency in both language pairs. Identifying and correcting these types of errors is important for improving the accuracy and clarity of cross-cultural communication. When translating between languages, maintaining the original meaning of the source text while incorporating grammatical elements from both the SL and TL is crucial. This approach enables translators to create high-quality translations that effectively and accurately convey the intended meaning.

Table 5 shows the errors in the word level of the students' translation. The prominent errors in both pairs are naturalness, lexical choice, undertranslation, and redundancy. The multilingual and multicultural environment of Thailand's Deep South presents unique challenges for EFL learners, potentially contributing to confusion when striving for naturalness in translation. These examples demonstrate the importance of understanding the meaning and context of the original text, having knowledge of the cultural context particularly when translating specialized terminology, and choosing appropriate vocabulary and expressions in the target language. For example, Table 6 illustrates a student's choice of "นอน" (sleep) instead of "จำวัด" (sleep for a monk), reflecting the different vocabulary levels in Thai for addressing monks, who hold a high position in society. This phenomenon suggests that the students might not be familiar with these nuances, potentially due to their background and varying degrees of cultural exposure. A poor knowledge of the culture in both pair languages might lead to a poor translation (Dweik & Suleiman, 2013). The translator's cultural background holds a significant influence on the translation process, as it constitutes a fundamental knowledge base that aids in the natural and accurate conveyance of two languages (Braçaj, 2014; Wongseree, 2021). Students in the Deep South might have diverse exposure to Thai language and culture, influenced by the region's local languages and religious practices. This exposure differs from that of students in other parts of Thailand, potentially leading to variations in their understanding of specific cultural nuances, such as those related to Buddhism, which might be evident in their translations. Accordingly, it is essential to pay close attention to the details of the source text and the nuances of the language being used to ensure an accurate and effective translation. In addition, these errors indicate the challenges involved in accurately translating between languages and highlight the need for translators to have a deep understanding of the source, target language, target culture, as well as the context and intended meaning of the text being translated.

As presented in Table 9 and 10 related to the miscellaneous errors that occurred in Thai-English and vice versa, furthermore, the major errors fall into three categories: misinterpretation, misspelling, and mistranscription. The errors in misinterpretation can lead to a misunderstanding of the intended meaning of the source text, while misspelling and mistranscription can cause confusion or miscommunication. In Table 9, for example, students misinterpreted the word "and" in the sentence "The author and lecturer is giving a speech in the auditorium at the moment." By using "และ" (meaning "and") in the Thai translation, they changed the sentence's meaning, incorrectly implying that the author and lecturer are two different people, rather than referring to the same person with two roles. Mallikamas and Pongpairaj (2004) demonstrated that students misunderstand the meaning of the context, so they make a mistake in translation which leads to miscommunication. The examples highlight the importance

of paying close attention to the details of the text, including its meaning, spelling, and phrasing, Translators must be careful to accurately represent the original text's meaning while also taking into account the nuances and conventions of the target language. In addition, these errors highlight the importance of accurate translation and attention to detail. Small mistakes can have significant consequences, especially in professional or academic settings. This can be counted as an internal factor that the translators must have the knowledge and caution of the language use of the language pairs (Arsairach et al., 2017).

This study went beyond identifying common translation error patterns consistent with previous research by investigating these challenges in the distinct context of EFL students in Thailand's Deep South. This subregion's singular sociolinguistic landscape, characterized by a diverse population and the presence of local languages, enables an examination of the interplay between cultural and linguistic factors and translation competence. Additionally, multi-directional translation among English, Thai, and local languages highlighted the complexity of navigating multiple linguacultural systems. The qualitative analysis of student explanations and perspectives revealed areas requiring pedagogical support, such as offering customized supplementary resources that account for learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and translated texts. This may entail providing students with relevant background information about the source and target cultures, including historical context, social customs, and religious beliefs when relevant. Moreover, supplying resources like glossaries, dictionaries, and online tools that specifically address cultural terms and concepts in the texts can further enrich student understanding. Additionally, fostering cross-linguistic comparisons can deepen comprehension of cultural nuances within the translated content.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of translation errors among Thai EFL university students in multilingual settings. The research examines errors in translating between English and Thai, uncovering three main categories: semantic errors, syntactic errors, and miscellaneous errors. Moreover, the study highlights the crucial role of a translator's linguistic and cultural background in shaping translation competence. Understanding the influence of these factors is crucial for enhancing translation quality and effectiveness (Braçaj, 2014; Wongseree, 2021). While linguistic and grammatical aspects remain important, this study underscores the value of cultivating a deep understanding of one's own cultural and linguistic roots. This shift in perspective encourages a more balanced approach to translation training and teaching, where students not only focus on translating words but also on conveying cultural nuances and intended meanings from the source text. By integrating linguistic and cultural awareness, translation students can better navigate diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, leading to more precise and culturally sensitive translations (Braçaj, 2014; Köksal & Yürük, 2020; Wongseree, 2021).

Furthermore, the findings can directly inform tailored instructional materials and activities targeting common Thai EFL translation errors. For instance, to overcome semantic errors stemming from limited knowledge of collocations, connotations, and idioms, educators can

implement explicit instruction and targeted exercises. These exercises could include matching words with appropriate collocations, analyzing the connotative nuances of words in different contexts, and deconstructing and reconstructing idiomatic expressions to foster deeper understanding (Wongranu, 2017). To tackle syntactic errors, interactive activities like sentence completion tasks focusing on frequently confused verb tenses and prepositions can be employed to solidify grammatical structures (Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007). Additionally, incorporating authentic source texts that reflect the target culture and its nuances can further enhance translation proficiency and bridge cultural gaps by providing real-world context and exposure to diverse perspectives (Cantizano, 2020). Integrating customized resources directly targeting the specific semantic, syntactic, and lexical errors identified in this cohort allows the development of localized curricula and materials tailored to persistent Thai EFL translation gaps. Moreover, this study contributed to the field of translation pedagogy by exploring the translation challenges faced by Thai EFL university students within the specific sociolinguistic context of Thailand's Deep South. Examining these challenges in this unique regional setting allowed for consideration of how factors such as linguistic diversity and cultural influences may impact translation errors. This finding highlights the importance of tailoring translation training to address the specific needs and backgrounds of learners, potentially informing pedagogical approaches in diverse regional contexts.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the translation challenges encountered by Thai EFL university students in the multilingual and multicultural context of Thailand's Deep South. The findings provided valuable insights into common translation errors and highlighted potential areas for pedagogical improvement. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the need for further research to fully understand the influence of learners' native languages (L1) on translation errors, particularly by comparing results between Malay-speaking and Thai-speaking students. Furthermore, future studies should explore the generalizability of these findings to diverse regional contexts internationally. Given the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is recommended that future research conducts tests and interviews onsite to ensure a more controlled and natural testing environment. Comparing results across Thai regions could reveal multilingual context impacts on translation patterns and errors. Overall, this study provides a significant contribution to the field of translation education by raising awareness of common errors in translation, benefiting both educators and students in their pursuit of translation proficiency.

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## Appendix

### English-Thai translation test

1. I'm tired of doing it every day.
2. It's time for bed, kids.
3. His actions are motivated by greed.
4. The weather is lovely today.
5. Normally, wild animals are shy.
6. He usually plays the organ in the church.
7. Crossing the street, he was knocked down by a fast car.
8. The homeless need more help from the government.
9. Computer keyboards are dirtier than toilet seats.
10. The photos of our holidays in Beijing haven't been developed yet.
11. Bitten by a mad dog, the boy was immediately sent to hospital.
12. The author and lecturer is giving a speech in the auditorium at the moment.
13. The 19-year ruler denied any involvement in his rival's assassination.
14. By the end of this year, he will have been teaching in this school for five years.
15. After the evening prayer, monks meditate and sleep in their own cells.
16. By the time Jane went to bed, she had finished her homework.
17. Did you see the pupil near the teacher in the front row in the lecture hall?
18. When father got drunk, men from the corner saloon would drag him home.
19. The women who are much obsessed with their looks try to measure the calories in every diet they have.
20. Heavy fines will be imposed on dog owners who are negligent about controlling their animals.

### Thai-English translation test

1. ห้ามให้อาหารลิง
2. ปีนี้ผมจะปลูกบ้านแล้ว
3. สุนัขตัวนี้น่ากลัวที่สุดเลย
4. มันกินเนื้อเป็นอาหาร
5. พุดช้ำอีกครั้งได้ไหม
6. ฉันจะไปเปิดตึกก่อนนะ
7. ไอ้ต่างเป็นหมาที่ซื่อสัตย์มาก
8. ในอดีตครั้งหนึ่งเขาเคยเป็นเศรษฐี
9. เธอแปลบทภาพยนตร์หลายเรื่อง
10. วานนี้ฉันเขียนจดหมายไปหาแม่แล้ว
11. วิตามินเอรับประทานเพื่อให้อายุยืนยาว
12. โปรตผลึกของมีค่าไว้ที่เคาน์เตอร์ด้านหน้า
13. เมื่อคืนนี้ไฟดับ ตอนฉันกำลังทำการบ้าน
14. ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาสากลภาษาหนึ่งของโลก
15. เพราะฉันไม่ฟังแม่ จึงต้องมานั่งเสียใจแบบนี้
16. ข้าวเป็นอาหารหลักของไทยมาช้านาน

17. คนไทยเคี้ยวหมากแบบเดียวกับที่เคี้ยวหมากฝรั่ง
18. จอห์นแนะนำฉันให้รู้จักกับเจมส์ที่งานวันเกิดของเจนนิเฟอร์เมื่อวาน
19. เชื่อกันว่าอุปสรรคต่าง ๆ ในชีวิตทำให้มนุษย์สามารถพัฒนาตนเองได้เป็นอย่างดี
20. เนื่องจากโควิด 19 กำลังระบาด เราจึงขอเตือนท่านผู้มีอุปการคุณทุกท่านว่าเพื่อความปลอดภัยของท่าน โปรดล้างมือทุกครั้งก่อนและหลังใช้คอมพิวเตอร์