

# *Text and Translation: The Difficulties and Joys of Cross-Cultural Communication*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The main purpose of the research was to analyze samples between Thai and English to account for the translating process. DeBeaugrande and Dressler's (1981) seven standards of text: intentionality, situationality, informativity, intertextuality, coherence, cohesion and acceptability were applied to the samples. The results revealed that the translators used the original writer's intentionality as the point of departure and the target language audience's acceptability as the end result. In translating an academic text, the situationality of both the original and the target texts was similar. Regarding informativity, the translators adjusted the degree of informativity after the target language genre, register and the translation function. In intertextuality analysis, the form and content of the translation were affected. The result of coherence analysis revealed that there were reader-focused and text-focused shifts in the translated product. Finally, in terms of cohesion, the translated text was found more explicit than the original.

## **INTRODUCTION**

A text of one language community should be translated as a text in another with an assumption that the text quality, or textuality of a translated text should be measured against its original. Therefore, a theoretical framework applicable to translations should be a study that can account

for textual factors both in the original and the target languages.

### **DeBeaugrande and Dressler's (1981)**

#### **Text Linguistics**

In De Beaugrande and Dressler's (1981) framework, a text has standards, or attributes which create its textuality. The attributes are

cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality. Cohesion is defined as grammatical dependencies in a text--the surface linkage between and within sentences. Coherence refers to the conceptual links underlying the surface text. Text receivers discover continuity of senses because their knowledge is activated by the expressions of the text (p. 84). In terms of textual communication between the text producers and receivers, five attributes are involved. In the text production, the text producers have intentionality to produce a cohesive and coherent text, and relay it to the text receivers. By reading the text, the receivers either accept or reject it. The acceptability of a text depends on many other standards. For example, the reader accepts or rejects the situationality, the fact if the text is appropriate to the context. For instance, a road sign is written in simple language and large print so that it can be read by motorists on the street, not in other situations. Another textual characteristic is informativity, the extent to which a presentation is new or unexpected for the receivers. The final attribute is intertextuality: to understand a text, the readers may have to relate it to the knowledge of other texts.

The theory should be able to give a textual account of both the original and the target language texts. Thus the textuality of the translated text could be analyzed against that of the original. Each textual characteristic in the

original and in the target text can be compared and contrasted to see how it is affected by translations.

#### **Purpose of the Research**

The main purpose of the research was to analyze translated sample texts to see how they were affected by translations. In other words, translations were analyzed in terms of intentionality, situationality, informativity, intertextuality, coherence, cohesion and acceptability.

#### **Data of the Study**

The data were collected from various sources in Thai and in English and were divided into three different groups as follows :

1. Translated texts from Thai into English.
  - The novel *Fa Prod (Merciful Sky)* by Lao Kamhom and *Lilit Pralaw*, an ancient Thai poem, presented by Nataya Masavisuth (1991).
  - Letters from Thailand*, a novel by Botan (1992) translated by Susan Fulop (1982).
  - Thai pronoun sample texts by Navavan Bandhumedha presented in Woranath Wimonchalao (1986).
  - Telegraph translations by Lawrence Maund (1991).
  - These Golden Years* by Laura Wilder (1971), translated into Thai by Sukhontharos (1990).
  - The Will*, a Thai novelette by Suwannee Sukhontha (n.d.).
2. English sample texts to supplement the discussion.

*Introduction to Data Communications and Networking*, a textbook by Forouzan (1998).

*The Killer*, a short story by Ernest Hemingway (1938).

*Silent Spring*, a book by Rachel Carson (1962).

3. Samples from a bilingual, English and Thai, magazine *Kinnaree*.

“Message from the President” by Thamnoon Wanglee (May 1998).

“Wat Suthat” by Nataya Chobcharoen (August 1997).

The results are presented and discussed.

### **The Two Languages in Question**

In this research paper, the two main languages studied are English and Thai. Therefore, it would be advantageous for the reader to understand briefly some of the backgrounds of these two languages in terms of linguistic families. English is in the Indo-European family, a big linguistic family which includes all European languages, such as German, French, Italian, Polish and Russian, excepting five languages, such as Basque, Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian and Turkish. In Asia, Sanskrit, Hindi and Persian are probably the widely known Indo-European languages. One salient characteristic of the languages in this family is that their cases are indicated by their inflections.

Thai is in the Thai Kadai family. It used to be considered a Sino-Tibetan language because it bears many characteristics similar to those

found in the Chinese languages. Like the Chinese languages, Thai is monosyllabic and tonal. It uses a lot of particles to mark, for example, politeness, a question, a topic, etc. The Thai dialect in this study is the one spoken in Bangkok, Thailand.

### **REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

To account for the translating process, the text linguistic and pragmatic models are reviewed.

#### **Text Linguistic Model**

In text linguistics, it is not the transfer of meaning but rather the communicative values which are transferred from the source to the target text. Communicative meaning refers to the global meaning of a text, which includes the expectations of the text users. The translator is a mediator who mentally assesses the source text and transfers it to the target one. The equivalence of the two languages is textual and communicative (Neubert & Shreve, 1992, pp. 24-25). The approach is a further development of the linguistic model, which pulls in register and genre analyses, pragmatics into play with the translating process.

#### **Register Analysis**

Register analysis mainly deals with different formal levels of language employed by participants in different linguistic situations. Its point of departure was the study of language variation.

In language variation, Catford (1965, p. 83) proposes that language should be classified into subcategories of the whole so that varieties of

language can be described. Halliday, MacKintosh and Strevens (1964) provide a different perspective to study language variation. The model proposed concentrates on two dimensions--the user of the language, who the producer of the language is, and the use of language, how the text is constructed (pp. 75-110).

User-oriented factors include geographical, historical and social varieties of the language as well as variations in language standard. User-oriented factors involve the factors of message construction such as field, tenor and mode. Field refers to the area of operation of the language activity, or the subject matter (p. 90). Tenor refers to the level of formality which is appropriate for the participants involved while mode refers to the medium of language activity such as writing and reading (p. 92).

Hatim and Mason (1990, pp. 48-49) further define field as a highly predictable subject matter in a given situation, for example, a physics lecture or a courtroom interaction. In translating and interpreting, fields can be problematic because English has a highly developed technical and scientific culture with abundant technical terms. Therefore, when translators translate English into a third-world language, they face problems of shortage of technical terms in the target language and of the use of loan words, which involves national identities. Many third-world people resent English loan words because they are afraid that their native languages might die, and thus they would lose their identities. On the other hand, when translating from a third world language into English, the translators may face a shortage

of honorific terms in English (Gregory, 1980, p. 464).

With regard to tenor of discourse, Hatim and Mason (1990, p. 50) further define it as “the relationship between the addresser and addressee.” The analysis can be based on a continuum of distinctions ranging from formal to informal. Namy (1979 cited in Hatim & Mason, 1990, p. 50) notes that there is a constant shift of tenor in interpreting American and French trade union officials’ interactions. The French use the formal educated tenor while the American counterparts use working class speech and colloquialisms. The impact on translations may jeopardize negotiation between the two parties. For example, if the French tenor was literally translated into American English, the American audience might assume that the haughty French kept a distance from them. On the other hand, the French might take the translated working-class speech as impolite and might not comprehend the American colloquialisms.

The term mode is further defined as “medium of language activity” (Hatim & Mason, 1990, pp. 49-50). The main distinction is made between writing and speaking. Channel is an important aspect of mode; it is the vehicle through which communication occurs, which includes broader communication types such as telephone conversations, business letters and essays. Distinctions between dialogue and monologue are also observed. In Halliday’s (1978, pp. 144-145) later research, rhetorical modes such as expository, persuasive, narrative and descriptive are also included. It is usually found that the

mode determines the use of language, and accordingly the translators have to observe the notion when translating a text.

As Mason (1998, p. 30) points out, register analysis is a powerful tool to study a text, which is beneficial to translation. In the first place, translators should adjust the target language register when translating. Secondly, register analysis can be used as a measure to evaluate a translation.

In the first instance, Gregory (1980, pp. 464-66) states that the analysis for register equivalence is the major factor in the translation process. In other words, a given language utterance or text is considered appropriate to a certain use within a socio-cultural context. When the utterance or text is translated into another linguistic and cultural context, adjustments to the utterance or text must be made.

Regarding assessment of translations, House (1997, p. 106) describes how a textual profile of the source text, which involves register analysis and pragmatic theories of the language use, should be used as the norm against which the quality of the translated text is to be measured. According to her, translation refers to the preservation of three aspects of meaning--semantic, pragmatic and textual--across two languages. An "adequate translation text is a pragmatically and semantically equivalent to that of its source text." The requirement for this

equivalence is to identify the function of texts. A translated text should first of all "have a function equivalent to that of its source text" (House, 1994, p. 4702). As a result, register analysis has turned out to be a science of translation and has influenced many textbooks on translation studies. Text analysis has become a preliminary exercise for a translator to translate a text.

In brief, register analysis, which involves the field, tenor, and mode of language, plays a major role in the translating process. It provides a primary exercise for translators to analyze a text. For translation quality, translators should take into account the register and pragmatic equivalence between the source and target languages.

### **Pragmatic Model**

Pragmatics, which is the study of language use, also influences translation. The pragmatics discussed here includes the theory of speech acts and Gricean cooperative principles.

#### Speech Acts

Speech acts refer to the act a speaker performs by speaking. For example, when a judge says to a prisoner, "I hereby sentence you to ten years in prison," the judge is performing the act of sentencing a person by uttering the sentence with the words "I hereby sentence." Other speech acts are, for example, requesting, apologizing, commanding, etc. The theory of speech acts was proposed by Austin (1962) and

further refined and advanced by Searle (1969). Austin classified three different kinds of actions performed in utterances. For example:

1. Locutionary act: the action performed in a meaningful utterance.
2. Illocutionary act: the communicative force accompanied with an utterance.
3. Perlocutionary act: the effect of the communicative force on the receptor of the utterance or the change of the state of mind of the person.

In translation, these three forces play important roles. Translation in pragmatics-oriented models holds that translation is, in fact, a successful performance of speech acts. Translators perform locutionary and illocutionary acts to have the same perlocutionary force in the translated version. Communication breakdown is, in part, due to misinterpretation of speech acts (Hatim, 1998, p. 180).

Hatim and Mason (1990, p. 62) illustrate an analysis of speech acts in the case of court interpreting. For example, “the accused may not order, question, discuss, etc.; a barrister may assert, question, threaten, etc.; while it is the prerogative of a judge to advise, pronounce, adjourn.” Interpreters must interpret appropriate speech acts. A mistake in interpreting a request into a command may cause a communication failure and legal complications.

In communication, for a successful outcome

of speech acts, there must be conditions to facilitate them. According to Grice (1975), speech acts can be accounted in terms of cooperative principles. In a speech event, the speaker tries to satisfy the following maxims.

1. Maxim of quantity: make the contribution as informative as is required.
2. Maxim of quality: make the contribution true.
3. Maxim of relation: make the contribution relevant to the aims of the conversation.
4. Maxim of manner: make the contribution clear and orderly.

Any violation of such maxims, an implicature, in a speech event may cause communication breakdown.

The Gricean maxims are involved in translation because some source texts are found to disregard the cooperative principles. For example, regarding the maxim of quantity, Keenan (1976) has observed that the speakers of Malagasay do not give enough information in their conversations. There are two reasons. First, Malagasay members in a community do personal activities in public. Therefore, information that is not available to public is considered prestigious. Thus, an individual with new information is reluctant to share it with others. Secondly, Malagasay people are afraid “of committing oneself explicitly to some particular claim” (p. 70). For example, if someone broke a glass, nobody would directly

identify the culprit for fear that he/she must be responsible of the guilt of uttering such an explicit claim. The implication on translation is that the translator has to consider the perlocutionary effects of the translated text on the target language audience and find ways to reconstruct the meaning affected by the mismatch of speech acts.

With respect to the maxim of relation, Gutt (1991) posits that both the translation and the original are constrained by the principle of relevance. He describes translation based on the theories of communication. Humans in general can refer to what it is meant in a speech event because they observe the relation maxim. In his theory, he distinguishes two kinds of language use--descriptive, involving reference to entities in the real world, and interpretive, involving reference to entities as well as thoughts and expressions of thought. Translation is viewed as interpretive language use. Good translation must be adequate in terms of relevance to the audience--that is, that offers adequate contextual effects; if we ask how the translation should be expressed, the answer is; it should be expressed in such a manner that it yields the intended interpretation without putting the audience unnecessary processing effort" (pp. 101-2).

In assessing the speech act analysis, the theory can be applied to diagnose the readability of the original text and to see potential problems

in translation.

In achieving the ultimate effect in translation, especially when the translator is dealing with two remote languages, different pragmatic means should be applied in the target language. The speech act theory, however, cannot account for many problems occurring in the process. For example, if we interpret a speech event in a source text as meeting the cooperative principles and as being appropriate in its context, it does not mean that the whole text is appropriate. Neither can we relate the degree of appropriateness of the text to those in other texts because each text in each culture has its own degree of contextual appropriateness. Finally, a global text is hierarchical governing a series of speech acts. It is not a one-dimensional, linear succession of elements which adhere to one another orderly.

However, with the text linguistic model, deBeaugrande and Dressler's (1981) text linguistics and the pragmatic model, a large proportion of the translating process, if not all, should be accounted for.

#### **Intentionality and Acceptability**

When a text is produced, the text producers want to achieve some effects in the text receiver. Writers usually have a plan to communicate a goal or a set of goals to the projected readers, as shown by Porter (1992, p. 84).

The writers write because they have some particular aims to fill out the gaps which, they

think, exist between them and their audience (Porter 1992). Perhaps they want to contribute to an academic field, sharing research results they have just found with other academics. Perhaps they want to entertain readers with their fiction, so they write novels and short stories. Perhaps they want to express themselves; therefore, they write poetry. Some people may want to persuade customers to buy some particular goods; consequently, they write advertisements. All these aims of discourse are manifested under some social constraints shared by both the writers and the readers. For example, in publishing a research report, the writer has to follow the publisher's guidelines regarding the format, citations of texts, footnotes, references and others. Likewise, novels, short stories and poetry have their own formats and social constraints on them. Advertisement writing is constrained by the type of media, the cost, merchandise and purpose of the advertisement.

Other than the aims of discourse, the subject of the text is also determined by the interaction between the writers and the discourse community. Porter (1992, p. 114) refers to a poststructuralist's view which agrees with that of the social constructionism that sees "audience as a force that shapes and influences the writer and hence the inscribed text." This audience can be identified as "a vital force of beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, existing in writing, in pre-texts that

the willing writer can consult." For example, suppose that James E. Porter himself, in the process of writing a proposal asking for a research grant, "must actually become an administrator." In effect, he has to break down "the artificial division" (p. 115) that separates the administrators' and his roles and become one with the administrators. Considering the tight budget, a problem facing the administrators, the writer may discuss that and propose a way to use the research grant effectively.

In translation, the original writer's intentions as well as the constraints shared by the original writer and the original audience must be shifted to another audience in another linguistic community. The translator's main responsibility is to carry over the original textual goal and at the same time make the translated text acceptable in the target context. Thus, intentionality and acceptability are considered the two poles of the translating process. In between these two goals, the translators would have to take into consideration the textual characteristics such as situationality, informativity, intertextuality, coherence and cohesion as proposed by deBeaugrande and Dressler (1981). For example, they may consider one way to convey the original intentions to the target audience is to have the translation processed in a situation similar to the original one. This is how situationality comes into play with the translating process.



### SUMMARY OF THE STUDY AND FINDINGS

In the translating process, the original writer's intentionality was found to be the point of departure for translators while target language audience's acceptability of the translated text was the end result. The analysis of other standards revealed the following:

1. In terms of situationality, the results showed that the translated situationality involved genre, register and perlocutionary effects of speech acts. Regarding genres, technical texts were intended to be read by the target audience who shared similar concepts and technical terms with the original one. The problems involving technical translations were the issues of using English loan words and the appropriate person to translate the technical text. Some were for English loan words, but others for Thai equivalent terms instead. The other issue is whether a Thai translator or a technician should translate the technical text. With respect to register, a polite register might not be appropriate for the linguistic situation of the translated text. In terms of speech acts, literal translation of a greeting might yield unsatisfactory perlocutionary effects for the target audience and might make the texts unacceptable in the target language context.

2. With regard to informativity, the translated texts analyzed revealed that literal translation was not practiced by most translators. The information of the translated texts was reduced, expanded and obscured according to

the target genre and to the function of the translation. It was the translator who adjusted the degree of informativity in the translation. For example, the translators might reduce a translated text to meet the requirements of the target language telegraph. They might expand the translation to make it more explicit to the target audience. Finally, they might deliberately obscure the text to achieve the effects intended by the original writer, for example, to intensify the climax or to create a comic situation.

3. Intertextuality involved the translations of ancient proverbs and poetry. In translating proverbs, it was found that many Thai and English proverbs shared the same meanings. In translating ancient Thai poetry into English, the form of the poem was mostly lost while the content was partially affected.

4. In analyzing coherence of the translated texts, the results revealed that coherence shifts might occur and that Thais held a different concept from English regarding coherence. Two types of coherence shifts occurred in the translated texts--the reader and the text-focused shifts. Without appropriate knowledge of a text, the reader might shift the coherence and misinterpret the text. The text-focused shift involved the choice of word used in a particular text. For example, when a mother uses the word hit with her children in Thai, the word can be translated into beat or spank with a rod. The choice of the

word beat may mislead the English-speaking audience to think about child abuse, which is not true to the original meaning. The mismatch of coherence between Thai and English could also be explained in terms of cultural concepts. The Thais have different concepts concerning coherence regarding the rhetorical pattern and the authority of text. In the Thai context, ideas can be loosely organized. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the readers to make sense from the text.

5. Finally, with regard to cohesion, translated texts seemed to be more explicit than the original. When translating a Thai text into English, the translator supplied pronouns in the place of Thai zero pronouns to make it grammatical as well as cohesive. In translating from English to Thai, the translator tended to use lexical repetitions instead of English pronouns. However, skillful translators would not use too many repetitions and would observe the Thai cohesive system to make the translated rendering more acceptable in the Thai context.

#### **Applications**

The research findings can be applied to many linguistic activities as follows:

1. In accounting for the translation process, the translators use the original intentionality as their point of departure and adjust the translated rendering to make it acceptable in the target language. Mostly the translators translate the

whole meaning of the text. The factors to account for the textuality of the translated text are situationality, informativity, intertextuality, coherence and cohesion. Main problems facing translators are concerned with linguistic incompatibility between the source and target texts. Mostly the translators consider the target genre, register, speech acts and the translation function and adjust the translations accordingly. Some problems concerning coherence such as the text-focused shift may be solved by reconsidering the choice of word in the translated text.

2. In the teaching of translations, the students should be taught to translate the whole meaning of the text. They should be aware of the textuality as well as the target language register, genres and speech acts.

3. As far as universal language is concerned, the results revealed that Thai and English shared many characteristics. For example, in the academic circle, both Thai and English audiences shared the same concepts and technical terms. In terms of intertextuality analysis, Thai and English proverbs made similar comments on human behavior, which is universal. The contrastive concepts found were those in speech acts, register and genres. Therefore, teaching translation can concentrate on a particular academic domain. On the other hand, coursework involving

translations of other genres such as fiction and documentaries should include socio-cultural factors.

In teaching English as a second or foreign language, the practice of translation can enhance the students' study of English. As Cook (1998) points out the following:

*They [students] may be encouraged to translate for gist, to seek pragmatic or stylistic equivalence, to consider the features of genre or to produce different translations according to the needs of the audience (p. 110).*

To conclude, the research results can be applied to account for the translating process. Moreover, in teaching translations per se, the students should be taught to translate the

whole meaning of the text and to be aware of the textual characteristics as well as the conventions of the target language genres, register and speech acts. In terms of universal language, Thai and English share many characteristics, such as in the academic field and in proverbs. Many contrastive concepts were found in register, genres and speech acts. In applications, a translation course can concentrate on one particular academic domain. In translating other genres, such as fiction and documentaries, socio-cultural factors should be included. Finally, in teaching English as a foreign or second language, translation practice can be beneficial to the student's learning process. Students should be encouraged to translate for gist, pragmatic and stylistic equivalence and to observe the conventions of genres and different needs of audience.



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