

# The Use of Authentic Materials in Translation Learning: Thai Learners' Perceptions of the Learning Experience

**Chanakant Boonkaew**

Thepsatri Rajabhat University, Thailand

E-mail: Chanakant.boonkaew@gmail.com

\*\*\*\*\*

## Abstracts

Scholars have proved that the authentic learning material was not only beneficial and vital to language classes, but in translation field also perceived such a material provides advantages to the learners. This qualitative study aims to determine the perceptions of Thai students on the use of authentic materials in the translation class emphasizing on the benefits and difficulties in using the materials in learning translation. Ten English major students at one university in Thailand, were participated in the study by their willingness and consent. The authentic materials were used in the conducted class that the participants needed to learn translation with the materials for twelve weeks. They also needed to go through the process of writing the reflective journals to reflect on their own learning, and also attended the semi-structure interview. The data were analyzed using content analysis and open-axial coding techniques. The results suggested the participants perceived the authentic materials could help enhancing their English language and translation skills. They also learned how to use the particular word suitably in the specific context. However, the participants faced the difficulties regarding to some technical terms and the complex sentence structures in the materials. Overall, the participants perceived both benefits and difficulties using the material in translation class.

**Keywords:** Authentic Materials; English-Thai Translation; Students' Perceptions

## Introduction

Authentic materials had been employed to language classrooms, and were deemed to be beneficial to language learners (Ahmed 2017 : 181-202 ; Halim et al. 2018 : 150-161 ; Rao, 2019 : online). The materials could help enhance learners' English language skills when learners practiced the skills corporately with authentic materials. For the non-linguistic benefits, the previous empirical studies had confirmed that students' motivation and self-satisfaction increased after the exposure to authentic texts (Ahmed, 2017 : 181-202 ; Halim et al. 2018 : 150-161 ; Rao, 2019 : online ; Yelubayeva, 2019 : online).

In learning translation, the learners need not only the good command of language skills, but they need the knowledge of related matters which the exploration of authentic materials could provide such a knowledge for them (Suryawan, 2013 : online ; Susendi and Syafei, 2017 : 221-231). Comparing to other English language skills, translation requires more intensity in practice and the good knowledge of both target and mother languages for learners could use language naturally in their translation works. Therefore, learners need to explore to the

language that are used in the real world not the language in the normal classroom (Manas, 2011 : 109-125). Suryawan (2013 : online) indicated that authentic materials brought about the cultures, language usage and motivation to the translators who need all of the knowledge to do their works. Kuscü and Unlu (2015) studied about how authentic materials could be used in the translation class and its' benefit to the learners. They found that the learners learned more about the different language structures, and also level of language usage. Moreover, Rusiana (2017 : 231-242) studied about the students' perceptions on the use of authentic materials in the translation course. She found that the students had positive attitudes toward the materials as it could help them learn how the real language was use in daily life. The knowledge enhanced the students' motivation and confidence in learning translation.

The study emphasizes on the learners' perceptions as Suryawan (2013 : online) and Rusiana (2017 : 231-242) stated that students' perceptions toward their translation learning is important to be studied because they have the first-handed experience on their learning. The study also determines to employ the notion of student's voices which Cook-Sather (2009 : 176-183 ; 2010 : 42-45) and Wesely (2012 : 98-117) stated that language learners certainly possess their perceptions toward themselves and their learning situations. The learners who have positive perceptions toward themselves, toward language learning process and the target language community, will have high motivation. This leads to the success in language learning. Therefore, it is essential to understand how the student participants in this study are aware of their own learning. Moreover, being aware of their own learning, is one of the important qualities for language learners (Boonkaew, 2018 : 65).

Due to the advantages of the authentic materials in translation classes, and the necessity of studying on the learners' perceptions about their learning experience, this research study aims to determine how Thai college students perceived on the use of the authentic materials in English to Thai translation learning. Moreover, despite the advantages of this type of material to translation class, and the importance of the students' perceptions toward their learning, based on the previous empirical research studies, there were limited numbers of research study on the issue especially in Thailand. Therefore, it is believed to be vital and beneficial for translation and language learning fields that this study was to be conducted in Thai context.

## **Research objectives**

The objective of this study could be divided into three points including;

1. To explore the benefits of using authentic materials in learning English to Thai translation based on the student participants' perceptions
2. To explore the difficulties using authentic materials in learning English to Thai translation based on the student participants' perceptions

## **Research Methodology**

### **1. Participants**

The participants were ten students majoring in English of Arts who were passed the Basic translation course. Firstly, the special translation class was promoted to all student. After two weeks, ten student participants were recruited accordingly to their consents and willingness

to join in the extra translation class after their regular learning hours. The participants were not classified by neither of their background knowledge nor their English language proficiency since the study only focuses on their perceptions on the use of authentic materials on their translation learning.

## 2. Research Tools and Procedures

### 2.1 Translation class

The special English to Thai translation class was conducted at Hopeful University (pseudonym) in Thailand outside the regular classroom. The participants spend time doing their translation assignments with the chosen authentic materials in this class for twelve weeks or twenty-four hours in total. There are two translation classes which the participants could freely choose to join according to their convenience (every Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon). In this translation class, all of the material was authentic material collected from websites (e.g., news websites, educational and research websites and short stories websites). Authentic materials in this study refers to the material that is not produced for the language learning and teaching purposes, and contains the language usage and structures that native speakers use in their real life (Susendi and Syafei, 2017 : 221-231). Six types of authentic materials were as shown on the Table 1.

**Table 1: The Authentic Materials Used in the Study**

Week	Materials
Week 1-2	Articles (General)
Week 3-4	News
Week 5-6	Research Abstracts
Week 7-8	Short stories
Week 9-10	Songs
Week: 11-12	Advertisements

In the class, the research played some roles that was to lead the discussion and analyze on each type of text prior to the translation. The researcher also facilitated the participants when the problems or questions arise during the translation practice.

### 2.2 Reflective Journals

During the study, the participants needed to write a reflective journal after each class. Reflection was, as defined by Dewey (1944 : 172) and Rodgers (2002 : 842-866), is “the process of continued reconstruction and reorganization of learning experience”. Nottingham (1998 : 71-81) stated that reflection is the conscious analysis of ones’ own learning, and it allows learners to determine their strengths and limitations in particular learning environment which influence their learning. Due to the benefit of such a process, the study tended to employ

reflection into the study as one of the tools to determine the participants' perceptions on their learning experience.

The guideline questions adapting from Rusiana's (2017 : 231-242) study were provided for the participants to write their reflection journals about an A 4 length on how they perceived about the learning materials. The journal means to keep track on the participants' learning, and determining the participants' perceptions on the use of materials in their learning. They were twelve journals in total. By this process, the participants had chance to carefully reflect on their learning and the materials they used, so they might have some insightful thoughts about what they learned and how they learned (Boonkaew, 2018 : 65 ; Cheoythong, 2009 : 124). The participants' learning journals were collected week by week, and then were analyzed before developing into the questions for the interview.

### 2.3 Semi-structured Interview

The participants were interviewed after the end of the study (week 13th) at their classrooms, and each interview was last long for 15-20 minutes for each person. To conduct the semi-structure interview questions, the data from the participants' reflective journals were reviewed and analyzed, and later developed into the questions for the interview. The semi-structured interview means to gain more insightful information on how the participants perceived the use of authentic materials in their translation learning, and their experience of using the materials in translation class. It also determines to clarify of what participants wrote in their reflective journals.

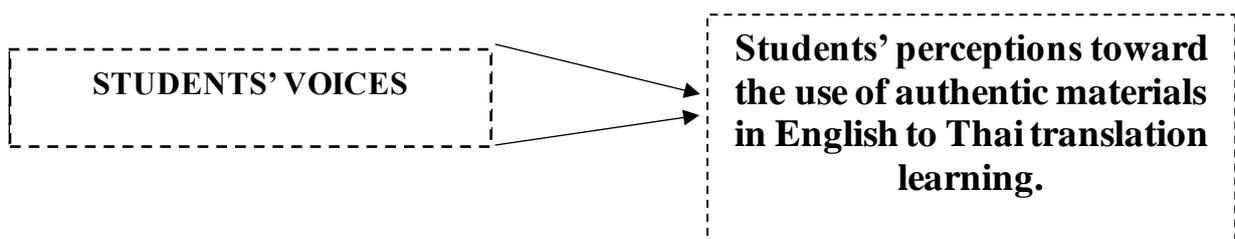
### 3. Data Analysis

3.1 The data from reflective journals would be analyzed using content analysis technique. The written journals from each participant were analyzed and determined the main points to developed into the questions for the semi-structure interview.

3.2 The data from the semi-structured interview were transcribed and then analyzed using open-axial coding techniques. The data were categorized accordingly to the themes, and then it was analyzed to put into the narration which was shown in the results section.

## Conceptual Framework

This study employed the reflective activity and students' voices to gain more insight of the students' perceptions toward the use of authentic materials in learning translation, as shown on the Diagram 1.



**Diagram 1:** Conceptual Framework

## Results

### 1. The Benefits of Using Authentic Materials in Translation Learning

The participants perceived the benefits of using the authentic materials for their translation learning as was narrated in the below sections.

#### 1.1 Improvement on Language and Translation Skills

1.1.1 After exploring to the authentic texts, the participants perceived that they learned a lot about the new vocabularies, idioms and slang words which they have never seen before. They perceived what they learned was beneficial for them to be used in daily life, and they could not learn these words from the normal English classes. Moreover, the participants perceived that learning English vocabularies with authentic materials was natural thing for them than learning on grammatical points in the textbooks. One of participants stated that;

*“I learned tons of new words, idioms and slangs which I would never know it, if I had only studied in the textbook we used in my normal language class. I think this is very useful for my life and my study. I tend to focus on the meaning more than learning only English grammar which I think it is very useful and more natural.”*

1.1.2 As authentic material provided the participants chances to explore to the variety of language usage in real life, the participants learned how one English word might have different meanings or needed to be used in different contexts. They also remarked that they learned how to do some research before choosing some words to use in their translation works. Here is the participant’s remark.

*“I learned that in English there are many ways that one word could be used. So, after I have learned to read the authentic texts and translate it, I learned how words could be employed or mean differently from one context to another. I learned also how the native uses the particular word in the particular context which I may need to do some searching before using a particular word.”*

1.1.3 By exploring to wide-range of authentic texts, the participants gradually learned the sentence structures and writing styles that natives of English use in real life. They also learned how to read text more carefully, and analyzed the sentence structures while reading as they needed to understand them. With the process, the participants found the diversity on how the writers used the sentences and this applied to their writing styles as well. They also perceived that learning about these differences helped them to gain development on writing and reading skills. The participant’s statement could help clearly reflect the issue.

*“When you use authentic text, you can see how the sentence structures are used by the native speakers. And when you practice a lot more, you will excel in reading more complex sentences. And you sometimes, need to face with the very unorthodox writing styles as well especially with the fictions. You would never see such a writing in the normal English classroom. I assume this helped us to improve our English skills on both reading and writing.”*

1.1.4 It is obvious that good translation needs to convey the message adequately and effectively. The participants perceived that by practicing translation using authentic materials, they learned that they need to employ different suitable language styles and strategies to translate the different types of text. The participants suggested that;

*“I found that I used the different ways to translate articles and novels. I tend to find the technical terms before doing the reading for the articles, and then I translate it. For the novel, I will read the whole story first, then try to understand it, and I will search for the vocabs, and translate it. I need to have more focus, and try to understand the whole picture of the story before translate fictions. Unlike the article which is-in my opinion-is more straight forward.”*

### **1.2 Improvement on Creativity**

By practicing translation using many types of authentic materials, the participants found that they had more creativity on forming the words or using the sentences that they never thought they would use it when they were in normal language classes. The participants learned that some types of text needed more creative language usage than others, especially with fictions and songs. They learned that they had to not only translate the meaning, but also to maintain of its mood, tone and convey the pictures. Therefore, they tended to carefully invent or craft the words to express the message suitably and beautifully. With the process, the participants perceived they had improvement on their imagination and creativity. Here is the participant’s remark on the issue.

*“We need not only to express the meaning, with the text like fictions, we need to express all of details and emotional stuffs, if not perfectly, but at least readers must see the pictures we want them to see. So, I tend to be careful with the words I choose or sometimes, I need to invent the new terms. By doing this, I can’t help, but feeling that I also have the creative side.”*

### **1.3 Preparation for the Translation Career**

After practicing translation with authentic texts for twelve weeks, the participants perceived that the class provided them the opportunity to prepare themselves for being translators. They perceived that by using authentic texts in learning translation, the class equipped them with knowledge and skills that they could use for their career as translators. The participants also gained confidence from what they learned in the class. The participant remarked that;

*“I learned how to translate these texts for a while, and I feel that I can do translation work when I graduate. As I have already learned how to translate various types of text, and I don’t think there are more types of text than those I learned in the class. So, I think I can handle any texts. I have that much confidence!”*

## **2. The Disadvantages and Difficulties of using Authentic Materials in Learning Translation**

The participants perceived the disadvantages and difficulties on using authentic materials in translation class as was presented in the below section.

### **2.1 Use of Complicated Sentence Structures and Technical Terms**

Dissimilar to the materials that were used in general language or translation classes, the translation class in this study employed authentic texts that were perceived to be more challenging and difficult. The participants found the complex sentences, writing styles and technical terms in authentic texts were hard to comprehend, and this hindered their translation. Moreover, in some texts, the participants found some terms which they had no knowledge

about it, and perceived that they needed more knowledge on a particular field to because they cannot search for the meaning from dictionary. With the belief, the participants thought that the knowledge on subject matters had some roles here. The participant stated;

*“Sometimes, I don’t know how to begin? I cannot even understand what I read somehow. The sentences are too complexed and too long and there are words that I cannot even find for the meaning of it from dictionaries. I think it is about my knowledge on the subject matters.”*

### **2.2 Connotation Meaning Because of Cultural Differences**

The participants perceived that the authentic texts contained so much information that were culturally based, and there were some connotation meanings which the people from different cultures such as them could not understand. Especially in fictions, the participants found that they encountered some sentences or words which held connotation meaning or were symbolic. The participants learned how the lack of knowledge on the culture lead them to the difficulties in translation. They perceived that the knowledge on culture of English-speaking countries was so essential for them to do translation more effectively. Here is the participant’s remark.

*“I learned that some words carry the specific meaning that could be varied in many differences contexts and cultures, and I find that culture is the important thing that you need to understand before translating anything. And sometimes it does not make any sense at all.”*

### **2.3 Low Proficiency of Thai Language**

Despite the fact that the participants were Thai, and they used Thai language as their mother tongue, the participants perceived that they could not use Thai language as their command when they needed to translate authentic texts. The participants suggested that they could not use Thai language naturally in their translation works. They found that they knew the meaning of English words, but had difficulties to express what they read or what they were trying to convey in beautiful Thai sentences. Some participants perceived that the lacking of reading and exploration on other types of text or book both in classes and in daily life were the causes of this problem. One of the participants stated that;

*“This is quite sad for me, but it is true that I cannot use my language that naturally. There are some words and sentences in the texts that I cannot translate it correctly in Thai. I think reading could help you to have more vocabs in your head- both in Thai and English. You also can learn how people use particular words or sentences in each context. Now, I learned how reading a lot is important for learning translation of both languages.”*

## **Discussion**

### **1. The Employment of Authentic Materials in Translation Classroom**

In the study, the participants perceived that the authentic materials enhanced their knowledge on new vocabularies, idioms and also the context of using. They also learned more about the various types and styles of sentence structures and writing styles used by the natives. A part from language skills, the participants in this study learned to apply different strategies

to translate different types of text as well as found themselves had more creativity and confidence in translating.

The results corresponded to the previous study, and it could be indicated from the results how beneficial the authentic materials are for translation classes. Rusiana (2017 : 231-242) and Noowong and Sukseemuang (2017 : 208-215) suggested that authentic materials would help learners to learn new vocabularies, idioms and other words from various types of text. With this exploration, learners could naturally learn how native speakers use words in particular context, and also how they used sentence structures and different writing styles (Kuucua and Unlua, 2015 : 199). This ability is precious, not only for the language learners, but for the translators as well (Rusiana, 2017 : 231-242). Due to the practices on translation with many types of text, the participants in this study and in other study learned how to apply different strategies to translate different types of text. They learned how each type of text-naturally-has its flavor, style and sense of language uses, so that they gained awareness on how they need to find the suitable strategies to translate many types of texts. (Manas, 2011 : 109-125 ; Rusiana 2017 : 231-242; Susendi and Syafei, 2017 : 221-231). In terms of the enhancement of creativity, Manas (2011 : 109-125) and Kuucua and Unlua (2015 : 199) emphasized that authenticity of the texts could help enforce learners to think and analyze not only the meanings, but also the contexts and the beauty of language usage. These elements have sharpened their sense on the use of language. When the participants gained more improvement on language skills, and learned some technique on translation different types of authentic text, they gained confidence in their translating. Kuucua and Unlua (2015 : 199) and Susendi and Syafei, (2017 : 221-231) suggested that learning translation with authentic text could help raise the learners' confidence. As they practice translating with various types of text, learners learned techniques and strategies to translate different texts, so that they gained confidence that they could translate any authentic texts in the future.

The outcomes indicated the benefits which the authentic text could provide for the learners in the way that it could not be acquired in the regular language classes. These elements are not something that could be learned only in the textbook; therefore, the results clearly pointed out how this type of text is essential for the language classes.

## **2. The Lack of Exploring to Authentic Texts in Normal Language Classroom**

After learning translation using authentic materials, the participants found that they encountered difficulties regarding to language elements and cultural feathers. The participants in the study and the student participants in Manas's (2011 : 109-125) and Susendi's and Syafei's (2017 : 221-231) research studies had the similar problems when they used authentic materials in learning translation. They found that this type of material is written with more advance vocabularies and sentence structures that sometimes hinder their translation. The student participants in this study and others also found culture differences also played some roles here. Besides the mentioned issues, one of the surprising results in this study was that the participants perceived themselves lack of Thai language proficiency. This is the only difference the study has among other previous study as their participants did not perceive themselves lack of skills on their mother language.

These results indicated that EFL learners, especially in Thailand, lack of opportunity to use the authentic texts in their language classroom both in translation and in general language classes. Manas (2011 : 109-125) suggested that translator need not only the knowledge of language rules, but also need the experience and knowledge on the subject matters and culture

because authentic texts contain of the languages in daily use and the one which are used in specific fields and context. Beresovaa (2015 : 195-204) and Susendi and Syafei (2017 : 221-231) stated that if EFL or ESL learners need to translate the authentic text, they need to do some research particularly on the subject matters, terms and cultures because these factors could affect or hinder their translation. Boonkaew (2018 : 65) suggested that the exploration to the language outside the classroom is essential for language with the opportunities to practice and use the language in the situations relating to their life. However, in Thailand, the used of authentic texts in the classroom is limited to none. With this limitation, the learners are not equipped with the knowledge or skills to cope with the use of such a type of text when they need to use it in real life or in their learning (Poonsawat, 2017 : 69 ; Hayikaleng, 2019 : 21-27).

Moreover, according to the astonishing result that the participants perceived themselves lack of Thai language skill, it is the indication of how they lack of the exploring to other types of material both inside and outside the classroom, both in academic and non-academic fields and both in Thai and in foreign languages. To the educators and the policy makers on education, these mentioned problems could be served as a warning as well as a challenge to the future of foreign languages education in Thailand.

## Suggestions and Implications

1. This qualitative research study only determines the learners' perceptions on the use of authentic materials in translation classroom. Therefore, the further research design should be employed with the quantitative and more participants to determine more insightful information on how authentic materials could help enhance learners' language proficiency and translation skills.

2. The results of the study indicated how vital and beneficial authentic materials are for the language and translation classes. It also highlighted how policy makers and educators should consider employing authentic materials in language classes.

## References

- Ahmed, (2017). Authentic ELT Materials in the Language Classroom: An Overview. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*. 4 (2), 181-202.
- Beresovaa, J. (2015). Authentic Materials – Enhancing Language Acquisition and Cultural Awareness. *Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 192, 195 – 204.
- Boonkaew, C. (2018). *A Case Study of Thai EFL College Students' Perceptions on an Autonomous Learning Model in Learning English Pronunciation*. Master Degree Dissertation, Mahidol University, Nakornphrathom, Thailand.
- Cheoythong, A. (2009). *Factor Affecting Learner Use of a Self-Access Center*. Master Degree Dissertation, Mahidol University, Nakornphrathom, Thailand.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2009). "I Am Not Afraid to Listen": Prospective teachers learning from students. *Theory into Practice*. 48 (3), 176-183.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2010). Through Students' Eyes: Students offer fresh insights into social justice issues in schools. *JSD*. 31(4), 42-45.
- Dewey, J. (1944). *Democracy and Education*. New York: Free Press.

- Galan-Manas, A. (2011). Translating Authentic Teaching Documents in Specialized Translation Classes. *Jostrans. The Journal of Specialized Translation*. 16, 109-125.
- Halim, A. & Mukminatien, N. & Anugerahwati, M (2018). The Students' Perceptions towards Authentic Materials for Reading and Listening Activities. *Getsempena English Education Journal*. 5 (2),150-161.
- Hayikaleng, N. (2019). The Effects of Using Authentic Materials on Students' Achievement towards English Reading Comprehension among Narathiwat Technical College Students. *International Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences Studies*. 4 (7),21-27.
- Kuucua, S. & Unlua, S. (2015). *Teaching Translation: A Suggested Lesson Plan on Translation of Advertising Through the Use of Authentic Materials*. Social and Behavioral Sciences.
- Nottingham, J. E. (1998). Using Self-Reflection for Personal and Professional Development in Student Affairs. *New Directions for Students Services*. 84, 71-81.
- Noowong, P. & Sukseemuang, P. (2017). Effects of Using Authentic Materials on English Vocabulary Knowledge and Vocabulary Retention of Grade 11 Students. *Parichart Journal Thaksin University, special issue*. 30 (3),208-215
- Poonsawat, U. (2017). *The Use of Authentic Materials Among Thai Teachers in Intensive English Programs*. Master Degree Dissertation, Thammasat University, Thailand
- Rao, S.P. (2019). The Effective use of Authentic Materials in the English Language Classrooms. *Online*. Retrieved December 25, 2020. from <http://www.researchgate.net/publication/334187595>
- Rodgers, C. (2002). Defining Reflection: Another Look at John Dewey and Reflective Thinking. *Teachers College Record. Columbia University*. 104 (4), 842-866.
- Rusiana, (2017). The Students' Perceptions of Authentic Text-Based Translation. *Okara: Journal Bahasa dan Sastra*, 11 (2), 231-242.
- Suryawan, I. N. (2013). Methods of Translation Used in Translating Authentic Text of Obyek Wisata Panelokan into Panelokan Tourist Resort. *Online*. Retrieved December 25, 2020 from: [udayana.academia.edu/NengahSuryawan/Papers](http://udayana.academia.edu/NengahSuryawan/Papers).
- Susendi, Y. A. & Syafei, R. F. (2017). Using Authentic Material to Teach Translation to English Department Students. *Journal of English Language Teaching*. 6 (1), 221-231
- Yelubayeva, P. (2019). Authentic Materials in English Language Classrooms. *Online*. Retrieved December 25, 2019. From: <http://www.researchgate.net/publication/331346201>
- Wesely, M. P. (2012). Learner Attitudes, Perceptions, and Beliefs in Language Learning. *Foreign Language Annals*. 45 (51), 98-117.