

On the Translation of Culture-Specific Terms Related to Thai Superstitions and Beliefs

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Abstract

This academic article focuses on the methodology that is most effective in conveying the meaning of a source text (ST) into the language of the translation, the target text (TT). The article looks specifically at the problems in translation that arise from the lack of a one-to-one correspondence between words and concepts used in Thai with words and concepts used in English. The methodology proposed is that of Newmark (1995) which employs eighteen strategies of translation of culturally bound terms. The terms used in this area show very well not only the differences in language but also the differing cultures and world views of the speakers of Thai and those of English. English has developed its own set of culturally specific words and terms for beliefs, which when used in an attempt to convey the words and terms used in Thai generally convey the meaning of the Thai expression inadequately. Newmark's strategies are used in the article to illustrate the particularly difficult task of translating terms expressing Thai superstitions and beliefs into English, a language which embodies a very different culture with its own beliefs and assumptions. Other problems considered include semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic aspects in translating. It was found that translation of culture-specific terms is possible and possible to a certain degree of effectiveness. However, it is imperative that the successful translator possesses the necessary knowledge and skills to translate not only the language of the source text but also the culture of the source text into the language and culture of the target text.

Key words: Translation, Thai-English translation, Culture-specific terms, Thai superstitions and beliefs, Translation strategies

1. Introduction

Language is a tool for humans to communicate with one another. It actually is a part of a culture which has been passed on from one generation to the next. It must be learned, can be changed and generally is recognized by the people in the speech community. Therefore, to convey correct information, stories, issues, circumstances, affairs and businesses through translation, one cannot translate only a language, disregarding the culture that uses the language. A translator's work is concerned with two languages and two different cultures: those of the source text (ST) and those of the target text (TT).

Language reflects the thoughts, feelings and world views of its users and so is closely related to the culture of a specific community. Inevitably a translator has to always include how a society thinks, feels and views the world when undertaking the translation task. When concepts of the two cultures are shared, the task can be easily undertaken. However, problems may arise when concepts are not shared or only partially shared. Strategies are required to translate the culture-specific terms and concepts to help readers of the TT to understand to the fullest what is being expressed.

Thailand and its people possess culture - specific terms and concepts which are not shared or only partially shared with those of other countries. Effort must be made to transfer the unshared concepts with strategies suggested by many theorists around the world, and it is essential to analyze how strategies are matched with the particular items to be translated for a particular purpose. Not only are unshared concepts complicated to translate, but also shared concepts do not always have equivalences and cannot always convey similar mental pictures to the readers of the ST and those of the TT. Words and items usually have special senses or connotations associated with them. Translators thus encounter problems from the perspective of language and concept expression.

Moreover, some concepts cannot be carried over by the words of another language, such as concepts in philosophy and religion. Meanings of words used may not be able to cover the concepts since their meanings are sometimes narrower than the concepts and can only give small pictures of the bigger ones. Languages work within their own schemes and thus restrict communication between users. Besides, languages have principal standards and conventions for users to precisely communicate with one another. When users follow and maintain language conventions abd they have to use a language within its own frame and the more intensely they work within this narrow frame, the more they are compelled by conventions the less they can achieve the desired expression. The reflection of thoughts and culture hidden within a language must be done through language systems: syntax, semantics and pragmatics which are global schemes regulating how humans use a language.

A translator as a transcultural mediator between speech communities must recognize and be able to conceptualize the cultures of both ST and TT and be able to transfer meanings effectively through words. People perceive things differently by means of their world views, experience, knowledge and environment which are deeply embedded in the way of life of each community. What the community acknowledges, recognizes and accepts may not always be written down as rules. They are specific signals known and shared among people in the same community, for example, how people perform religious rituals, how they dress themselves when attending a funeral, how they greet people, what kitchen utensils they use when they eat, etc.

To find ways to express meaning equally between two languages is a challenging process when the author and the translator are from different cultures or in the same culture but are attempting to convey meaning for people in another culture. That is automatically complicated since the translator has to somehow 'read' the thoughts of the writer and then transfer them into another language.

It is crucial for a translator to find translation strategies to cope with the complications of his job when the worldviews of people around the world are different, particularly when the concepts of different cultures do not match and one cannot find equivalences. There are always gaps between languages and a translator needs to fill the gaps to link ideas, or at least to make the readers of the TT aware of the gaps. Take some of the most culturally specific terms in Thai superstitions and beliefs as examples. In Thailand, especially in the remoter areas, beliefs in supernatural powers soak through almost every aspect of daily life. Almost every activity can be linked in some way to external powers and supernatural forces for every life event ranging from birth, growing up, studying, working, getting married, having babies and getting sick to death.

What people do with regard to their beliefs may seem strange and irrational to the outside world, especially to Westerners. Some practices may appear astonishing and noteworthy while some others shameful, contemptible, dubious and terrifying. Some become a laughing stock for foreigners, for example, to sprinkle white powder on a tree's bark, and rub it, hoping to see a lucky number on it. A deformed animal born to a family is auspicious and will bring good luck. Practices reflect the fact that some Thais do not trust bald people, avoid sex on certain days, or do not cut hair on Wednesdays. Girls are advised not to sing in the kitchen, since it is believed that a singing girl will get an old husband or no husband at all. These beliefs are common among Thai people but perhaps sound absurd to the outside world.

The list of Thai superstitions is massive and seems to be endless. The imagination is so rich whereas scientific reasoning seems poor. There is a Thai saying မှန်စိတ်ခေါ်လေမဲ့ – *If you don't believe in it, don't ridicule it.* Thai superstitions presumably stem from ancient Animist beliefs and are confused with Buddhism which relies heavily on stories and legends. Many ghost stories can terrify people. Fear determines that people believe in things which are uncertain or inexplicable. As a consequence of supernatural forces, things and places can seem powerful and dangerous. People want protection from potential misfortune and calamities. Spirit houses, for example, are set up in a corner of a home for *phra phum* or the Lord of the land who is believed to be able to protect the property and the residents of the house. Flowers, food, incense and candles are regularly offered to the spirit of *phra phum* in almost every house. This is evidence of the beliefs and practices in the country

In addition, there are a number of Thai ghosts, each has different and specific appearances and each performs different activities. One ghost, for example, is described as “a flying head with dangling entrails, eating the insides of victims and frequenting unclean areas to eat filth”. When there are ghosts perceived, what comes with them are spirit doctors, or mediums, and monks or ordinary people helping one get rid of ghosts or curses. These people are believed to have power of mind (พลังจิต) and can contact with the other world, reveal the future as well as bring good luck to a family or business.

Many rituals for different purposes are held each year in the country, personal or individual occasions such as weddings, ordinations, funerals and housewarming ceremonies. Special offerings are made, holy water is prepared to bring good luck and protect people from evil. Rituals to bring good luck and to drive away evil are common. Sometimes, when some unusual things occur such as when a snake, large or small, enters a house, a member of the family has a bad dream of someone losing a tooth or lightning strikes a cow or a tree, people may perform rituals. The purpose, actually, is to relieve them of anxiety.

Rituals are performed not only to remove bad luck, but also to promote longevity, to predict good or bad fortunes, to ask a spirit to accept an apology (ขอโทษ), to win the lottery, to cure an illness, physical or psychosomatic, to guard against evil, and to serve many other purposes. In one murder case, a bunch of bananas was tied to the end of a stick and swung from side to side in a ritual to find out where the body of the victim was hidden.

There are *tattoos*, *Yantras*, *amulets*, *garlands of flowers*, *wooden penises*, *wards*, *Prajied cloth*, *Takrud*; to name but a few. Even trees in the house also have special symbolic meanings, for example, it is not advised to plant certain kinds of tree. They are unlucky. *Lunthom* (ลุนธอม), for example, the name has a sound resembling the word *Rathom* (รัฐอม) which means agony, and is, therefore, taboo.

In addition, Thai superstitions include ones about colors, the day of the week, kinds of gemstones, food and eating, animals, washing, pregnant women, walking, lying down and sleeping, sneezing, etc.

Not just ordinary people, the nation and religion also sustain ceremony and ritual, for example, the *First Ploughing Ceremony*, an auspicious day and hour for the ceremony are advised by royal astrologers. Celebrations and merit-making occur all year round: New Year, *Makha Bucha*, *Songkran*, *Visakha Bucha*, *Asarnha Bucha*, *Buddhist Lent* and so on.

Culture-bound terms, deeply rooted in culture such as Thai superstitions and beliefs, if not carefully dealt with in translation, are doomed to fail to come across in translation. The translated texts may appear senseless, disturbing, or worse, absurd. A translator must aim at maximum success in conveying ideas. Various conceptualizations, connotations, shades of meaning must be transferred while a translator holds an understanding of culture in his mind. To illustrate,

ກໍາມູນຂຶ້ນຂ້ານໄທນີ is the ceremony for moving into a new house. *Kheun ban mai*, is literally “going up into a new house”. “Going Up” is used since in the past Thai houses were built on posts to avoid poisonous animals and flood. One had to climb up a ladder to “go up” to the house. Although today, Thais do not “go up” to the house anymore, the term remains. A translator when translating a cultural specific term as such will have to consider if “housewarming ceremony,” which is an expression for a similar meaning in English is appropriate to be used given such cultural background. For Westerners in cold countries, warmth is good. Warming the house before living in it does not sound the same as going up to a new house. Therefore, a translator may have to find other choices of terms such as making good luck, or making merit for a new house.

No matter how Thai superstitions and beliefs as discussed above may seem senseless or ridiculous, it is no duty of a translator to decide for the reader what is a scientific and logical belief and the opposite. He must be able to extract the content from his attitude and translate accordingly, for example:

ທຸລິງກິນຕືນໄກ່ຈະຄບຮູ້

Women eating chicken feet will have an affair.

If the translator puts in his feeling, attitude or opinion, he will be visible in the translated text.

Women eating chicken feet will have an affair. What a weird idea!

Women eating chicken feet will definitely have an affair, oddly enough.

ທຸລິງໃດນັ່ງບນ້ຳບັນໄຄຈະຄດຄຸກຍາກ

It's funny to say that women sitting on a staircase will have a difficult labor.

ນຶບແຕຣເນື່ອຜ່ານກັນທຳຄາລເຂົ້າກວ່າວິ້ວ່ອໄປ້ງວ່ອຍຄາ

Driving past a shrine or curve where many have been killed in accidents is scary, so you must honk the horn (reason may be added) to show respect to the souls living in that area.

The visibility of a translator is quite obvious. His attitudes towards the subject matter - weird/ oddly enough / funny / scary - are apparent. He overly translated and this can change the focus of the idea. The mocking of the idea is not normally done either unless it is for some special purposes, for example:

ອຍ່າຕັດເລີ້ນກລາງກືນພຣະເທົ່າກຳນົກກະຈຸກປູ່ຢ່າຕາຍາ

Don't cut your nails at night. It will be like breaking the bones of your ancestors. The afterlife must be really boring.

Objectives and Methodology

In the attempt to find possible ways to translate the shared and unshared concepts of a specific culture, namely Thai culture, strategies are investigated and examples of translation are classified and put to the test to verify the possibilities. Examples used to illustrate the problems and proposed solution were drawn from the language used by Thai native speakers in expressing Thai superstitions and beliefs. Units of ideas are observed and collected not only in everyday life situations but also from media, both online and offline. Some of the data obtained is only in Thai while some is in Thai and English; for example, Kinnaree magazine. Some are translated and others with translated versions are parsed and classified as projection and verification of each strategy. All are translated in one way or another to a certain degree of effectiveness which depends largely on the focus of the translation.

Strategies for translation of culture-specific terms (Theoretical framework)

How do we translate the terms when cultural aspects play an important role? In illustrating the crucial interplay between culture and language and emphasizing the role of culture in translation, Akbari (2013: 13-21) found the issue of culture and its complex relationship with language in terms of culture-specific items as analyzed by different translation scholars to be among the most thorny issues that a translator or interpreter may face. The issues are important since “language is an expression of the culture and individuality of its speakers. It influences the way the speakers perceive the world” (13). As Hatim and Mason (1994) maintain, the act of translating takes place within a socio-cultural context, and therefore, it is necessary to judge translating activity only within a social context. Attitudes, thoughts and beliefs of people in one culture may appear alien to people in another culture. However, a correct message must be conveyed as to how they perceive the world and within the specific social context no matter how strange it may seem.

A translator needs to have adequate knowledge of the beliefs, attitudes and values of the community of the ST to be able to transfer those messages to the readers of the TT, who also have another set of values and practices in their culture. Culture is “a complex of beliefs, attitudes, values, and rules which a group of people share” (Larson 1984: 431). Each community has its own culturally specific features and each interprets a message according to its own perspective. This can be taken as a reference to people’s own ways of perceiving the world. Even in the same community, people do not think in the same way. A translator is not only facing the problems of ‘intracultural obstacles’, but also ‘intercultural’ ones where transferring a message to another culture is even more difficult. The differences between cultures pose the most difficult problem in translation.

With the concepts specific to a culture, interrelation to the otherness of another world has to be carried out with scrupulous attention to details. Otherwise, cultural non-equivalences or cultural losses may result.

Non-equivalence at word level is a common problem faced by many translators. To address the problem, theorists propose strategies which assist in transcultural mediating processes to some extent. Harvey's (2000) offers four main methods, which include functional equivalence which means to replace a concept in SL culture with one in TL when the function is similar, formal or linguistic equivalence, such as word-for-word translation, transcription or borrowing, including transliterating the original words, and descriptive or self-explanatory translation which is the use of generic terms to convey the meaning. Baker (2011) suggests seven strategies summarized as translation by using a more general word, a more neutral/less expressive word, cultural substitution, a loan word or a loan word plus explanation, paraphrasing or unrelated words, omission, and illustration. In addition, Vinay and Darbelnet (2004) introduce seven techniques to deal with cultural translation. They are borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation. Other theorists, for example, Hervey and Higgins (1992) come up with procedures when attending to translation of culture-specific terms stating that they diverge between two ends of exoticism and cultural transplantation (naturalization) with calque, cultural borrowing, and communication translation in between. More or less general or specific, these proposed strategies put forward various solutions to the problems of translation. Some are similar methods using different terms whereas some are overlapping. Newmark's strategies (1995) seems to convey the general idea of most of the theories.

In addition to **Literal Translation**, Newmark (1995: 81-93) proposes 18 strategies for the translation of culture-specific terms: 1. **Transference**, the process of transferring a source language (SL) word to a target language (TL) text as a translation procedure, 2. **Naturalization**, adapting the SL word to the normal pronunciation, then to the normal morphology of the TL, 3. **Cultural Equivalent**, SL cultural word is translated by a TL cultural word, 4. **Functional Equivalent**, using a culturally neutral word or deculturalising a cultural word, 5. **Descriptive Equivalent**, explaining the culture-bound term using more words, 6. **Synonymy**, giving the sense of a near TL equivalent to an SL word in a context, 7. **Through-Translation**, also called calque or loan translation, literal translation of common collocations, names of organizations, the components of compounds, 8. **Shift or Transpositions**, a change in the grammar from SL to TL, 9. **Modulation**, a variation through a change of viewpoint, of perspective and category of thought, 10. **Recognized Translation**, using the official or the generally accepted translation of any institutional term, 11. **Translation Label**, using inverted commas for literal translation of a new institutional term, 12. **Compensation**, loss of meaning, sound effect, metaphor or pragmatic effect

compensated by another part, 13. **Componential Analysis**, splitting up of a lexical unit into its sense components, one-to-two, -three or-four translations, 14. **Reduction and Expansion**, narrowing down the meaning of a phrase into fewer words or expanding a few words into a phrase or a sentence, 15. **Paraphrase**, amplification or explanation of the meaning of a segment of the text, 16. Other strategies which Vinay and Darbelnet (2004) call **equivalence** and **adaptation**, 17. **Couplets**, (Triplets or Quadruplets), combining two, three or four of the above-mentioned procedures to deal with a single problem, and 18. **Notes, Additions, Glosses**, supplying additional information when necessary.

Strategies may come forth with more or less similar principles; however, they may be called by different terms by different theorists. More than that, some strategies are overlapping and need to be rearranged in different categories and sub-categories. To sum up, all the strategies and procedures discussed can be gathered together as major principles in four categories as follows:

1. Semantic strategy

Semantic strategies deal with the concepts of lexical components that can be compared between SL and TL based on the semantic relation. They involve replacing a culture-specific item or expression with a TL item. The effect on the TL reader is in focus. These strategies help make the text more natural, comprehensible, and more familiar to the TL audience.

1.1 borrowing/ equation/ transference/ transliteration/ transcription

- the use of an equivalent or word with the same meaning by using a loan word, transliterating or transcribing a word without having to translate it, for example, *chef* (Fr.) *chef* (Eng.) *ชefs* (Thai)

1.2 **literal translation/ calque/ substitution** – using equivalence by translating word-for-word, for example, *พญายม* – *Angel of Death*

1.3 **reduction/ deletion/ condensation/ omission/ compression** – cutting down on the use of words or including meaning into a unit of meaning. If it is ideologically or stylistically unacceptable, or it is of little relevance, or too obscure, a translator may choose to drop it in the TL and make a **zero translation**

1.4 **addition/ exploitation/ amplification/ diffusion/ description/ explicitation/ descriptive equivalent** - expanding the meaning of the SL word by describing or paraphrasing it to clarify its meaning. This can be done in **notes or glosses** to add more detailed information, such as history, statistics, reasons, etc. if the circumstances demand.

1.5 **generalization/ functional equivalent** – The use of general words to replace culturally specific words, for example, *ชั้นหมายเลข* – *the primary tray*.

1.6 **Particularization** – the use of culturally specific terms to replace general terms, for example, *พระวันอังคาร* – *the Buddha image* → *the Reclining Buddha image for those who were born on Tuesday*.

1.7 equivalence – using words, phrases, expressions, structures and styles of the TL to transfer meaning equivalently, for example, ໜີ? ຈົງທຽວ? - *Holy cow! / You must be joking. / I'm sorry to hear that.*

1.8 cultural substitution/ cultural equivalent/ adaptation – using cultural items or acts in the TL in place of the ones in the SL, for example, ໄນຊ່າ → *shake hands*

2. Syntactic strategy

Syntactic strategies are mainly grammatical changes from SL to TL. Generally, the strategies involve a change of structure for best grammatical equivalence and understanding of the TL reader.

- **transposition/ shift** – changing in grammar: singular to plural nouns, noun to verb, adding articles, prepositions, subjects of a sentence, reordering words, tenses, sentence reformation, for example,

ໄດ້ກິນໜ້າ *table dining* → *a dining table*

3. Pragmatic strategy

Pragmatic strategies are adaptation of a translated text to convey the implicit meaning into the TL properly with regard to the use of language, ways of expressing, choice of words, level and register of language:

3.1 compensation- to compensate for semantic loss, a translator must find ways to make up for the loss, for example, ທ່ານ, ອຸ່ນ, ມື້ງ → *you* (loss of level of formality and intimacy, and to be compensated for)

ທ່ານ – *you, sir.*

ມື້ງ – *you, old bastard.*

3.2 Variation change – the change of various elements: tone, style, register, jargon, dialect, to give TL readers a deeper perception of meaning, for example,

ດີ່ນີ້ໄດ້ໄວ່ນະເວັບ	- <i>I'm not a fool. --></i>
	- <i>I'll tell you what, I'm not a fool. --></i>
	- <i>Tell ya wad, I ain't no fool.</i>

3.3 modulation– the change of point of view, focus, attitude or a set of thoughts by using words, or phrases or expressions that are different from the SL to convey the same meaning, for example,

นายกผิดสัญญาที่ให้ไว้กับประชาชน – *The promise was broken.* (change of the focus from who to what)

3.4 componential analysis – an analysis of features and special meanings of a word to compare the meanings of a word in the SL and the TL, for example,

ร้องไห้ – *cry* (+general use)
กราบลง – *cry* (+royal word)

4. Two or more strategies – the combination of two or more strategies to deal with one problem of translation of culturally specific terms is common in practice.

A translator cannot select any one of the strategies in advance before he sees the text to be translated or create a strategy out of one of his regular ways of translating. Flexibility is required according to what the specific task demands. Texts to be translated vary in content, style, manner of expression and purposes of the texts and of the translation. Usually a good translator deals with translation problems by using appropriate strategies automatically. He should be able to make decisions and adjust his strategies to correspond with the texts. Discussing the capacity for adjustment, Nida (qtd. in Durdureanu, 2011: 55) reaffirms: "... But the strongest argument for translatability is the very existence of universals in language, thought and culture. Languages are particular cases of 'Lingua universalis', so that human reason can be rendered in all languages". To conclude, universality in languages, thought patterns, and cultures make translation possible. Nida (1964) puts forward the key assumptions related to language and this gives an encouragement to those who undertake the translation tasks: "... Every language has its own genius" (3-4) and "anything that can be said in one language can be said in another" (4).

Strategies and exemplification

The data below provides illustrations of some strategies concerning the translation of culturally specific terms related to Thai superstitions and beliefs. Since this is a portrayal of translation of specific terms, a semantic strategy is in focus.

1. Equivalence: the use of TL components to transfer meaning equivalently, for example, นั่งกตีณ means to meditate deeply while one is sitting and, therefore, นั่งกตีณ is equivalent to *sitting in deep meditation*.

ฤกษ์ดี	<i>favorite times</i>
ปลั๊กขิก	<i>hand-carved wooden penises / wooden phalluses</i>
ปลง(กับความตาย)	<i>resigned (that death is universal)</i>
มรณะุสติ	<i>realization of death</i>
กุศลกรรม	<i>meritorious acts</i>
เมรุสถาน	<i>crematorium grounds</i>
อุทิศแด่ผู้วายชนม์	<i>a tribute to the dead</i>
พิธี火化ปักกิจศพ	<i>cremation ceremony</i>
บันบานศาลกล่าวพี่บ้านพี่เรือนและเจ้าตามศาลเจ้าต่างๆ	<i>making pledges to the household deities and the spirits of various shrines for protection</i>
เกาชาวยাহีเหลืองฤกษายานีสวารค์	<i>going to heaven on the tail of the son's saffron robe</i>
ทำพิธีบูนนาค	<i>ceremonial blessing of new postulants</i>
พิธีทำวัญ	<i>a propitiation ceremony</i>
ปีนักษัตร	<i>the year a person was born symbolized by an animal</i>
เดินจงกรม	<i>walking meditation</i>
ปลงอาบัติ	<i>casting away one's transgression</i>
โปรดสัตว์	<i>an act of kindness to creatures</i>
คาถอาคมในทางอุ้ยงคงกระพันหรือในทางเมตตา	<i>spells for immortality or for compassionateness</i>
การบอกบุญเรียกสร้างโบสถ์สร้างวิหารหรืออุกฤษิโถดกฐินกอดผ้าป่า	<i>a collection for a new temple or prayer hall or monastery or for giving new robes to monks</i>
เข้ากุฎិบริกรรมปลูกเสกเครื่องรางหรือปลูกเสกตนอง	<i>spending time in a cell sanctifying objects and oneself with magical powers</i>
ทำบุญนาแต่ชาติปางก่อน	<i>made merit in one's previous incarnation</i>
กรรมและผลของกรรม	<i>karma and its fruits</i>
พระหมอมศักดิ์สิทธิ์ซึ่งมีคาถอาคมหมอน้ำมนต์	<i>a holy monk who cures the sick with incantations and holy water</i>
ปล่อยชีวิตให้เป็นไปตามของกรรม	<i>let the course of karma take me where it will</i>
สาบมนต์กรวดน้ำแผ่กุศลให้เปรต	<i>praying, pouring water and giving a ghost blessing</i>

2. Generalization: the use of more general words to replace culturally specific terms, for example, ผี นางตะเกียง is generalized as *a ghost* without specifying that it is a special type of ghost in the iron wood tree.

ความเชื่อศิริงานงาไม่เทวดาเจ้าป่าเจ้จ่า	<i>Animist beliefs</i>
ผีตายทั้งกลุ่ม	<i>a ghost / a dead pregnant woman</i>
บรรดา	<i>a ghost / a hungry ghost</i>
หมอดี	<i>practitioners of black magic</i>
ฤกษ์งามยามดี	<i>an auspicious time (and date)</i>
ดวงไม่ส่วนพงศ์	<i>fortunes not matching</i>
พระเครื่อง(ย่อจากพระเครื่องร่าง)	<i>amulets</i>
พระวินัยบัญญัติ	<i>the code of rules</i>
ทำบุญปล่อยนกปล่อยปลา	<i>making merit by releasing captive animals</i>
(พระ)สวดชั้นโถ	<i>(monks) giving blessings</i>
คู่พานขนมนเสน่ห์เจ้จันทร์, บนมังคล 9 อย่าง, มะพร้าว, หมากพลูเงินสีน้ำเงินสอดทองหม่น, แหวนหม่น, ฐานหม่น, ฐานพีไน แพ, ผ้าไหว, ขาหมู, หมูนองดอง, รุ้งเดือน, ด้านกล้วย, ด้านอ้อย, ถุงถั่วแสลงดึงความเจริญรุ่งเรือง, ขันน้ำพื่อ ความส่งบุญเมียน, ครกแกะนรังก์ที่มั่นคง, มะเขือบอกเชิงวิตสมรสที่เป็นสุข, รูปเมวหลังสำหรับบ้านอันสุขสบาย, รูปไก่เพื่อตีนเข้าฯและด้านอ้อยแกะชีวิตที่เมียน牙 (วงลังเหล็กนี้บันเตียงคู่สมรส)	<i>trays of offerings which have very specific meanings / items symbolizing a good marriage (placing them on the newlyweds' bed)</i>
โถแป้งกระจะ	<i>a jar of powder</i>
ถวายผ้าบังสุกุล	<i>offering robes to monks</i>
สวดชั้นผ้าบังสุกุล	<i>saying a prayer and receiving the robe</i>

3. Cultural substitution: the substitution of SL cultural items or acts with ones in TL, for example, ผีดิบ, the Thai non-dead is replaced by the English *non-dead Zombie*.

(การก) น่าเกลี้ยค่น่าชัง	<i>(an infant) cute and adorable</i>
กุุมารทอง	<i>Casper / demon child</i>
แม่ม่นาคพะโขนง	<i>black magic woman</i>
โถกศ	<i>urn</i>
ทำบุญครบรอบ100วัน	<i>memorial services (on the hundredth days)</i>
เครื่องไทยกาน	<i>benefaction to church</i>
เทศน์	<i>sermons</i>
ครัวทษาราชชานผู้มาฟังเทศน์ฟังธรรม	<i>congregations</i>

4. Literal/ calque/ substitution: a word-for-word or direct translation with adjustment of SL to TL grammar and structure, for example, ຖុនារកែង – ក្បារកែង is a baby boy and កែង means golden, so ក្បារកែង is *golden baby boy* (with TL word order). This strategy may or may not convey the sense of the original whole.

ពីរីនដីរីន	<i>house ghosts</i>
មោរីកមោកកីឡើម៉ែងកែទ្រ	<i>burning chili and salt to curse enemies</i>
របាយបុរីបិដិកកែង	<i>Buddha image covered in gold leaf</i>
ឱ្យដីកូងរុក	<i>decayed wooden pieces of coffin</i>
ករាជគុកដីតាមពិង	<i>bones from victims who died in violence</i>
គិនជាកវត្តកែង	<i>debris from the ruins of temples</i>
បាតរោតកែង	<i>monk's cracked alms bowl</i>
មនតាំ	<i>black magic</i>
រួយម្មានាគ	<i>footprints of a Naga snake</i>
ខែងគំ ៨ ខែងមូម្រាបរាយ	<i>eight black-colored foods to worship the God Rahu</i>
គោគុណបីនុកី	<i>existence is suffering</i>
កើតិកកៅតីខែងតាម	<i>birth, old age, illness and death</i>
កើតិកឲ្យឱ្យ	<i>reborn</i>
ឲ្យប្រយកត៉ា	<i>scattering ashes</i>
សាគមិនុកី	<i>chanting the Sutras</i>
បរាជកូនបិទិកោ	<i>conducting funeral rites</i>

5. Loan /borrowing words/ transliteration: the use of loan/borrowing words or transliteration without having to translate the words. Information or words which suggest the meaning may be added, for example, មតក is transcribed as *mataka* and the phrase *one who is dead* is added to convey the meaning.

5.1 loan words

និបណា	<i>nibbana / nirvana</i>
មិនុក	<i>Sutras</i>
មនកតិចរុណ	<i>Abhidharma</i>
មងគលុកី	<i>Mangala Sutra</i>
មនុស្សរុណ	<i>dharma</i>
ឲ្យចុងកែង	<i>Bojjhangas</i>
មនបិទិក	<i>Paritta</i>

5.2 transliteration with added information

เจ้าป่า	<i>chao pa, the spirit of the forest</i>
เจ้าเขา	<i>chao khao, the spirit of the hills and mountains</i>
แม่โพสพ	<i>Mae Phosop, the rice goddess</i>
กุนารถอง	<i>kuman thong, the spirit of young children</i>
แม่ชื่อ	<i>mae sue, the female guardian spirits of infants</i>
เทวครรภ์กษา	<i>thewada or guardian spirits</i>
พระภูมิ	<i>phra phum, guardian spirits of a house or house ghost</i>
ผีปอบ	<i>phi pop, a malevolent female spirit that devours human entrails</i>
ผีกระสือ	<i>phi krasue, a woman's head with her viscera hanging down from the neck</i>
ผีกระหัง	<i>phi krahang, a male ghost that flies in the night</i>
เบรต	<i>petra, hungry ghosts / beings suffering torment</i>
พญานาค	<i>king of the Nagas, a highly respected serpent snake</i>
ตะกรุด	<i>takrud, a small sheet of beaten bronze inscribed with mystical symbols</i>
มงคล	<i>mongkon, rope headband for Muay Thai fighters</i>
ผ้าประเจียด	<i>prajied, a piece of cloth worn around the upper arm to induce toughness in Muay Thai fighters</i>
มงคลแฝด	<i>twin mongkol crowns, the traditional string headpieces to be placed on the head of the bride and the groom</i>
นิพพาน	<i>Nibbana with extinction of personal striving (灭度苦)</i>
กุชาโยง	<i>bhusayong, a broad ribbon, attached to the coffin / monks chant from the Abhidharma, sometimes holding it</i>
ชิ ชา รู นิ (จิต เศตสิก รูป) นิพพาน	<i>ci, ce, ru, ni, representing “heart, mental concepts, form and nibbana”</i>

5.3 loan words or transliteration with words suggesting the meaning

ผ้าบังสุกุล	<i>pangsukula <u>robes</u></i>
ลอยอั้งคาร	<i>float angkarn <u>ashes</u></i>
ศาลาพระภูมิ	<i><u>spirit houses</u> for phra phum</i>
แม่นาคพระโพหง	<i><u>spooky Mae Nak</u></i>

มงคลแฝด	<i>twin mongkol <u>crowns</u></i>
ศีล	<i>sila, <u>morality</u></i>
samađhi	<i>samadhi, <u>concentration</u></i>
ปัญญา	<i>panna, <u>wisdom</u></i>

5.4 loan words with their meaning in the parenthesis

โชค	<i>chok (luck)</i>
ดวง	<i>duang (astrological power)</i>
ผี	<i>phi (spirits)</i>
กรรม	<i>kam (karma)</i>
สวรรค์	<i>sawan (heaven)</i>
พรหมลิขิต	<i>phromlikhit (fate)</i>
ฟ้อนดีฟ้า	<i>fon phi fa (phi fa dance)</i>
ฤกษ์ดี	<i>rerk (auspicious time)</i>
สายสิญจน์	<i>sai sin (white string)</i>

6. Reduction / deletion / condensation, etc.: leaving out words and meanings when they are obscure, of little function, or redundant, for example, บวชชีพราหมณ์สะเคะเคราะห์ – *ordain to free oneself from demon* ชีพราหมณ์ is deleted if it is not in focus or not the key term of the text. The existence of it will confuse the reader if not clarified further.

สวดพระอภิธรรมศพ	<i>chanting for the dead (Phra Abhidharma - deleted)</i>
รำมวยไทยไหว้ครู	<i>Muay Thai dance (waikhru - pay respect to the teacher deleted)</i>
บวชณรงค์หน้าไฟ	<i>ordaining a novice (nafai - before the fire - deleted)</i>
พิธีรดน้ำศพ	<i>a bathing ceremony (sop - dead body - deleted)</i>

7. Addition / expansion, etc.: a clarification of meaning by adding more explanation, for example, မตကქัตตา, မตက is the dead and ქัตตา is the food, and for explicitation that it is not a normal meal for anyone but only for monks, more description is added. မตကქัตตา is *food offered to monks in the name of the dead*.

วิญญาณผีตายโหง	<i>the spirits of people who died violently or accidentally or suddenly</i>
ผีหลอกแอบลื้นปลื้นต้า	<i>a ghost possessing a long, slithering tongue, haunting people</i>

ໂຮຍແປ່ງຄູດັ່ນໄມ້ຫາເລຸດເຕື່ອ	<i>sprinkling white powder on a tree's bark and rubbing it, hoping to see a lucky number on it</i>
ເປົກ	<i>a hungry ghost with a mouth as tiny as the hole of a needle</i>
ທຸນ 2 ຫົວ 6 ຂາໃຫ້ໄສຄ	<i>a two-headed and six-legged pig which is unusual and seems auspicious</i>
(ກາຮກ)ນ່າງເກລືຍຄນ່າສັງ	<i>(an infant) literally ugly and unpleasant but actually a compliment for a cute and adorable infant (One should never say a baby is cute because a ghost will come and take it away. One should say the opposite to deceive a ghost.)</i>
ພຣະເຄື່ອງ	<i>amulets believed to possess a variety of sacred powers such as the ability to protect the wearer from accident or illness</i>
ຮອຍສັກຍົງໄມ້ອອກແທງໄມ້ເຂົ້າ	<i>tattoos, believed to be able to protect the wearer against bullets and knives</i>
ຕາຍແລ້ວໄປໄຫນ	<i>death and the hereafter</i>
ໄປຮຍເຕົ້າ	<i>scattering ashes which are the remains from the cremation of the deceased onto a river or the sea</i>
ເກີດໃໝ່	<i>rebirth in another form of existence</i>
ໄປກິດບນສວຣັກ	<i>rebirth in the heaven of Indra</i>
ນຳເພື່ອງຖຸຄລົພ	<i>making merit as the last service for the deceased / engaging in a meritorious act for the dead</i>
ຂອອໄຫສິກຣມ	<i>asking for forgiveness for past misdeeds</i>
ນັດຕາຕັ້ງຄພ	<i>a sacred sai sin (white string) tied around the ankles and wrists of the dead whose hands are held together in a prayer-like gesture holding a lotus flower and incense sticks</i>
ຄອກໄມ້ຈັນກົນ	<i>sandalwood flowers, for cremation of the dead made from wood shavings to be placed under the coffin or in a tray</i>
ແກ່ຄພເວີຍນ້ຳຍ	<i>walking anti-clockwise in a funeral procession</i>

8. Notes: the full form of addition when lengthy details are required

ແມ່ນາກພຣະໄຂນ້າ *Mae Nak **

*Mae Nak: In Thai folktales, she is the best known spirit who died along with her baby during childbirth when her soldier husband was away to fighting in a war. But she still loved her husband, and

wanted to stay with him, so the dead Mae Nak manifested as a human. When her husband returned from the war, he did not realize that she was a ghost. She frightened her neighbors and they complained to him and tried to chase her away. She then became malicious, until a monk exorcised her spirit from the body and put it into a sealed clay pot to be floated away on the river.

ไทย

*sleeping to death**

*Literally “sleep and die”: It is believed that some female ghosts can kill a man in his sleep. Some men wear women’s clothing to bed to deceive the ghost into believing that they are women. Some men paint their fingernails red so that they resemble those of a woman. These ghosts are believed to be widows and they want men.

ភាគិក

*wooden phalluses**

*Wooden phalluses or hand-carved wooden penises are collected by superstitious people who believe that they can help them in many ways, for example, men seeking a sperm-boosting symbol, women hoping to get pregnant, prostitutes wishing for customers, and playboys wanting to charm girls, businessmen seeking commercial luck and anyone wishing for success in their activities. Sizes are varied: from small keychain-sized danglers to eight-foot-tall statues.

កុមារទុង

*Kuman Thong or Golden Boy**

*Kuman Thongs are dried out fetuses from abortions. They are turned into Kuman Thongs in a black magic ceremony. The spirit of the unborn child is believed to be able to protect people, keep them safe from any approaching danger and bring good luck and fortune by revealing lucky lottery numbers.

9. Particularization: the use of culturally specific terms to replace more general terms, for example, ឈិនអន្តោកន ក៉ែងក្បែតគោយ ឬ ដៀង anointing both with powder. However, កណក ក៉ែងក្បែត ឬ ដៀង which are general terms can be particularized if required – anointing the foreheads of the bride and the groom with wedding powder. The foreheads, also, is particularized to specify where to anoint.

ปล่อยนกปล่อยปลา

granting animals their freedom, by releasing a bird from a cage, or releasing a fish or turtle back into the water

พระสาวกทำน้ำมนต์

monks chanting and saying prayers while a lit candle is placed in a bowl of water.

(words boldfaced are particular details.)

Discussions

These culturally specific terms are translated according to various strategies and syntactic and pragmatic strategies are also used to adjust the translated terms to make them grammatically correct and natural sounding to the reader of the target text. However, one particular word can be translated by various strategies and which strategy to choose depends largely on one's purposes and what requirement is demanded, for example:

หงส์ร่อนมังกรรำ

- *hong ron mungkorn ram* (transliteration)
- *hong ron mungkorn ram, Thai superstitious ritual*
(transliteration with words suggesting the meaning)
- *gliding swan and dancing dragon* (calque)
- *Thai superstitious ritual* (generalization)
- *love-potion / magic potion* (equivalence)
- *enticing spell performed by wives who want their husband to be infatuated with them and not to leave home to have minor wives* (equivalence with explanation added)

Using transliteration with no added information can be confusing since it may well be just a strange sound which renders no meaning to the reader of the target text. A calque or literal translation can cause misunderstanding as it can also seem like a reference to animal behavior. A generalization gives only a big picture of what it is whereas an equivalent provides more focus though it may remain unclear and without any depth to the ritual. As for equivalents with explanation, more details and a vivid mental picture can be given but this can become a lengthy translation and cannot be placed in the slot where it is supposed to be. If the task demands clear information as it is an important key term, a translator can use a note.

หงส์ร่อนมังกรรำ – *Thai superstitious ritual**

* *Ritual performed by the wife as an enticing spell to cause the husband to be infatuated with her only and not to leave home for other women. Two ways to perform this ritual are:*

1. **Hong ron** (*gliding swan*) is done when the wife prepares food for her husband. She must sit astride the food freshly cooked, letting the hot steam from the food reach her genitals until drops of water are formed and drop onto the food. Then the food is served to her husband.
2. **Mungkorn ram** (*dancing dragon*) can be done by collecting for seven days the wife's body dirt from the basin where she washes herself, and then by drying the lump of body dirt in the sun and putting it into the *casealpinia crista* fruit (a kind of herb). Next, the wife swallows the fruit and waits until she defecates. The fruit with the body dirt inside will be sorted out to dry again without washing. Then, she casts a spell over it, mixes it with various herbs and powders it. Finally, when the "dancing dragon" is ready, she sprinkles it on the food for the husband.

Of all the various strategies, not every single one can be used to serve all the intended purposes of the text and the uses of the text. A generalization can give only a general idea and that means one has to sacrifice the culturally specific meaning. A translator must be aware of the ambiguity and semantic loss which may occur by the use of the strategy, for example, ถวายกัตตาหารแด่พระสงฆ์ – *feeding the monks*. This translated phrase can only convey the idea of what one does for the monks but not the sense of respect and humbleness of the alms giver. Furthermore, a generalization sometimes gives the same picture of different things, for example,

หวดนึ่งข้าว	<i>bamboo basket</i>
ชามล้อม	<i>bamboo basket</i>
กระดัง	<i>bamboo basket</i>

The use of transliteration shows what the word is and how it sounds in its original language but it may leave the reader of the target text baffled about what is being discussed unless enough context is provided. Added information can help clarify the transliteration but it uses more space and sometimes cannot fill in the particular slot. Moreover, too many loan words can cause frustration for a reader when he has to spell out the words, for example, "Chian maak, maw thanon, krok kabue, ngob, mawn kwan and kradong are things commonly found in the Thai home in the past." A loan word should only be used for emphasizing the gap between the source language and the target language when no word can capture the exact nuances of meaning.

Additions and notes or glosses which expand background knowledge can make a concept more explicit. However, the strategies should be used only when necessary because too much amplification can interfere with the concentration of the reader and can distract him. On the other hand, a deletion strategy is normally used not without special purposes, for example, when the source text is

poorly written, shows repetition of the same thing over and over again but does not give more meaning beyond the meaning already stated, when words need reduction and when meanings of words, phrases or sentences have already been included or synthesized into the contexts. The omission of words may be done when the use of a word can cause ambiguity and dullness.

A calque or literal translation portrays the elements of concepts and language use of the original: how words express the way people use their language. However, one has to adjust grammar and structure to be in line with those of the target language.

Ideally, every translator hopes to find an equivalent for the words he is translating. Unfortunately, not all terms have an adequate equivalent and between languages there are always some gaps. It may be too idealistic to expect a perfect match for every word, especially for culturally specific terms.

As one can see from the above mentioned data, in using particularization strategy, the translator must have a more extensive knowledge beyond what he translates since he has to provide specific elements or change some information in the text for better understanding on the part of the reader.

Lastly, cultural substitution is used in cases where a cultural specific item to be translated is not the key term of the text. To find a cultural equivalent, for example, ไหว้ – *shaking hands* is done for the sake of easy comprehension. Even though the acts are different, the function is the same, namely to greet people. The translator must be aware of the loss of the original culture in the substitution.

Conclusion

All the strategies discussed above make it possible to translate culture-specific terms to a certain extent. Given the possibilities, these strategies have their pros and cons. A translator needs to maintain a balance between what is gained and what is lost. One strategy may be suitable for one given situation but not for others. Therefore, analysis of the text, the meaning, the context, the language, the reader and knowledge of the purposes of the text as well as the use of the text is required before the task is undertaken. One cannot simply choose one strategy as his own favorite method to cover the whole task nor should he select any one of the strategies before he sees the text. Even in one text, various strategies will be demanded for an appropriate and adequate translation. A good translator is not the person who is skilled at English or Thai but the one who picks up the correct strategy for the correct text.

It is impossible for a translator who plays the role of a cross-culture mediator to translate only the language and not the culture. In translating culturally specific terms for Thai superstitions and beliefs, it is hard to find terms for some concepts to convey messages as clearly as one may wish. Languages live within their own schemes and sometimes they are narrower than

the concepts. In the case of translating Thai superstitions and beliefs, it is harder to explain in words because basically the views of the world of Thais and Westerners only partially correspond to each other. Thais sometimes use more imagination rather than facts whereas Westerners tend to favor scientific reasons. Despite the limitations of language, the strategies proposed may help render meaning in a translation to the fullest possible extent.

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Note: The author has taken notes on what ordinary Thai people talk about with regards to their superstitions and beliefs and formed the ideas from extensive reading of the media. Some of the concepts found were extraordinarily intricate, while some others were obscure and so specific to the Thai speech-community that it seemed impossible to translate them adequately into English. In the attempt to find the answers to the questions of what was possible and what was impossible to translate, the author investigated the media both online and offline. Of the stories and articles related to Thai superstitions and beliefs found, the author tried out various experiments in translating, parsing, modifying, altering and adjusting words and expressions to obtain the closest meaning to the Thai concepts and to verify the translation strategies. The following are the sources out of which words and expressions have been collected.

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