



## A Study of the Translation Strategies for Cultural Terms in the Novel

### *Khiao Suea Fai* from Thai into English<sup>1</sup>

## การศึกษากลวิธีการแปลคำทางวัฒนธรรมจากภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ ในนวนิยาย เรื่อง เขี้ยวเสือไฟ

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### Abstract

The purposes of this research were 1) to analyze micro translation strategies applied when translating Thai cultural terms into English across the 15 chapters of the novel *Khiao Suea Fai* (or *The Fang of the Fire Tiger*) and 2) to examine the two translators' macro translation strategies in transferring these cultural terms. To achieve these goals, Aixelá's (1996) and Venuti's (1995) frameworks were applied to investigate 454 cultural terms. The findings displayed the use of 10 micro-level translation strategies: 1) linguistic (non-cultural) translation, 2) synonymy, 3) absolute universalization, 4) orthographic adaptation, 5) deletion, 6) intratextual gloss, 7) limited universalization, 8) naturalization, 9) combined strategies, and 10) extratextual gloss. However, repetition and autonomous creation were not used in the research. At the macro level, it was found that both translators predominantly favored domestication as reflected in the

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micro translation strategies employed. This suggests that the translators prioritized the target readers, aiming to make Thai cultural terms more familiar and accessible to the target culture.

**Keywords:** Cultural translation, Cultural terms, Micro- and macro-level translation strategies,

The Fang of the Fire Tiger

## บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ 1) เพื่อวิเคราะห์กลวิธีการแปลคำทางวัฒนธรรมระดับจุลภาคจากภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ ในนวนิยายเรื่อง *เขี้ยวเสือไฟ* ทั้ง 15 บท และ 2) เพื่อศึกษากลวิธีการแปลคำทางวัฒนธรรมในระดับมหภาคของผู้แปลทั้งสองคน เพื่อบรรลุวัตถุประสงค์เหล่านี้ จึงนำทฤษฎีการแปลในระดับจุลภาคของ Aixelá (1996) และระดับมหภาคของ Venuti (1995) มาเป็นกรอบแนวคิดเชิงทฤษฎีเพื่อวิเคราะห์คำทางวัฒนธรรมจำนวน 454 คำ ผลการวิจัยชี้ให้เห็นถึงการใช้กลวิธีการแปลระดับจุลภาค 10 ประเภท ได้แก่ 1) การแปลตามอักษร 2) การใส่คำเพื่อความหมาย 3) การใช้คำทั่วไป 4) การใช้คำทับศัพท์ 5) การลบทิ้ง 6) การเพิ่มคำอธิบายในข้อความ 7) การใช้คำที่รู้จักมากกว่าในวัฒนธรรมปลายทาง 8) การแทนที่ทางวัฒนธรรม 9) การใช้กลวิธีผสม และ 10) การเพิ่มคำอธิบายนอกตัวบท ตามลำดับ อย่างไรก็ตาม ไม่ปรากฏการใช้กลวิธีการซ้ำคำและการแปลแบบสร้างสรรค์ในงานวิจัยนี้ สำหรับการวิเคราะห์กลวิธีการแปลในระดับมหภาค ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ผู้แปลมีแนวโน้มใช้กลวิธีระดับจุลภาคที่มาจากกลวิธีมหภาคแบบการแปลตามวัฒนธรรมปลายทาง แสดงให้เห็นว่า ผู้แปลให้ความสำคัญกับผู้อ่านเป้าหมายเป็นหลัก โดยพยายามปรับคำศัพท์วัฒนธรรมไทยให้เข้าใจง่ายและใกล้เคียงกับวัฒนธรรมเป้าหมายมากขึ้น

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## Introduction

The incorporation of cultural aspects into translation studies gained prominence in 1990 when Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere first put forward the notion of the “cultural turn” (Tang, 2022). This paradigm shift introduced a new approach to translation studies by integrating the perspective of cultural studies, rather than adhering purely to traditional linguistics, as language is deeply embedded in culture, and meaning extends beyond mere words (Snell-Hornby, 2006). Since then, the influence of their cultural campaign in translation, either directly or indirectly, has reached and motivated other theorists to develop theories and concepts. This evolution underscores that translation can be approached from multiple perspectives, and cultural orientations are one of them.

From the perspective of cultural translation, language is considered a reflection of culture (Güzey, 2018). Different languages spoken by several groups of people can reflect diverse cultures and practices. Thus, language is inevitably a primary tool in transferring intangible culture (beliefs,



traditions, and local wisdom) and tangible culture (artifacts, clothes, and food) between people in a society. This transmission also involves translating the original language into one comprehensible to the receiver (Pinmanee, 2019). The terms used to describe those attributes are called cultural terms (Changprachak, 2023).

According to Aixelà (1996), translating cultural terms bound to a particular culture is one of the translation problems that tend to cause dilemmas for most translators, especially when one has to convey a language to another that does not share a similar cultural value. The more divergences presented in the source and target cultures, the more difficult it will be for translators to transfer the message. Translation challenges arise due to differences in expressive meaning, grammatical constraints, collocation patterns, conceptualization, idioms, cultural norms, and taboo language (Baker, 2018). These factors affect how meaning is conveyed across languages and cultures.

To address this challenge, translators must possess a high level of proficiency and profound knowledge of the target language and culture, including their own, in order to transfer the message as correctly and closely as possible (Pinmanee, 2019). Apart from linguistic and cultural proficiency, translators also need to have an understanding of strategies to overcome cultural barriers effectively. Strategies provide translators with tools to address cultural challenges and ensure smooth transmission of meaning across languages (Kuleli, 2020).

In translation, “strategies” can be described in various ways. This study primarily defined translation strategies into two levels or concepts: macro and micro. Macro translation strategies refer to broad principles that guide translators to effectively achieve the goals of a translation, reflecting their decisions and preferences (Jääskeläinen, 1993). Examples include Venuti’s (1995) foreignization and domestication and Aixelà’s (1996) substitution and conservation. Meanwhile, micro translation strategies focus on specific methods for translating individual structures, ideas, or items (Chesterman, 1997). In other words, it deals with issues at word and phrase levels. Examples include Aixelà’s (1996) eleven strategies and Baker’s (2018) eight strategies for managing cultural terms lacking equivalents in the target language.

Numerous Thai and international researchers have explored strategies applied by translators to overcome the challenge of conveying cultural nuances from one language into another at various levels, especially in a literary translation context (see, e.g., Changprachak, 2023;



Güzey, 2018; Kuleli, 2020; Masong, 2023; Pornwiriyaakit et al., 2023; Tang, 2022). Cultural translation issues are prominent in literary works, where authors embed cultural references, traditions, and values in their narratives. As literature reflects its cultural milieu, translating literary texts requires careful consideration to preserve cultural nuances (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990).

### Problem statement

Conveying terms related to cultural values poses inherent challenges. An in-depth analysis and comparison of previous international and domestic research studies on cultural translation strategies, specifically when translating literary works from a translator's native language to English, revealed varying levels and perspectives in the approaches employed. Most applications of translation strategies in the context of Thai research tend to focus on the micro level (see, e.g., Pornwiriyaakit et al., 2023). For instance, Changprachak (2023) solely investigated strategies used by Lertlah Poopoksakul, the Thai translator, in transferring 158 Thai cultural terms into English in the novel *Chang Samran* (*Bright* in its English translation). The results manifested six strategies, which were 1) cultural substitution, 2) the employment of more general words, 3) paraphrasing with related words, 4) using loan words, 5) paraphrasing with unrelated words, and 6) direct translation.

In contrast, many international studies incorporate both macro- and micro-level strategies, acknowledging that macro-level analysis provides valuable insights into cultural and sociocultural perspectives (see, e.g., Kuleli, 2020; Tang, 2022). For instance, in the work of Güzey (2018), her first objective was to analyze micro translation strategies used by the two translators when they co-translated 375 Turkish cultural terms into English found in the selected short stories of Sait Faik Abasıyanık. As for the second objective, she aimed “to discover how the Turkish culture is represented in the English translation” (Güzey, 2018, p.81), which implicitly reflected the translators' decision whether they chose to preserve Turkish cultural elements or simplify them to facilitate the target readers' comprehension. In other words, the collective use of micro strategies can demonstrate a macro strategy that reflects the translators' choice to either foreignize or domesticate the text (Inphen, 2020, p. 288). Factors such as target readers, cultural context, and ideological considerations may influence their choice of translation strategy (Venuti, 1995). To that end, she applied Aixelá's (1996) micro-level theories alongside Venuti's (1995) macro-level framework. Her findings revealed nine micro translation strategies employed: 1) extratextual gloss, 2) repetition,



3) absolute universalization, 4) linguistic (non-cultural) translation, 5) naturalization, 6) orthographic adaptation, 7) deletion, 8) intratextual gloss, and 9) limited universalization, with no mentioning of two strategies: synonymy and autonomous creation. The analysis also revealed that most micro translation strategies applied to the short stories were subcategories of the macro strategy, “foreignization.” This suggests an effort to maintain cultural authenticity while still ensuring comprehension for English readers.

From the researcher's point of view, after reviewing previous domestic and international studies, translation strategies that focus only on the micro level may offer a limited perspective. Although its benefit is to present micro translation strategies that could help translators overcome cultural term translation, it cannot provide researchers with in-depth insights into the overall decisions of translators on the whole text, whether to preserve (foreignization) or adjust them to the target culture (domestication), particularly when the target readers are non-native speakers.

To conduct a comprehensive study that examines both the strategies employed by translators at the micro level and the underlying decisions at the macro level, this research combined micro translation strategies proposed by Aixelá (1996) with the macro translation strategies outlined by Venuti (1995). The study focused on cultural terms at word and phrase levels found in the bilingual (Thai-English) juvenile novel *Khiao Suea Fai*, written by National Artist for Literature Mr. Mala Khamchan, and its English translation, *The Fang of the Fire Tiger*, co-translated by Dr. Pattiya Jimreivat and Dr. Patsita Charoenrakhiran.

*Khiao Suea Fai* imparts the story of the Karen living along the Thai-Myanmar border. The narrative is presented through the protagonist, Kaewhuan, her family, and her neighbors. Their way of life, influenced and shaped by the specific nature and geography around them, provides readers with insights into Lanna culture, one of the most intriguing subcultures in Thailand, reflected through food, artifacts, beliefs, and norms, especially superstitions (a fang of the fire tiger) throughout the novel. Given the plot's strong cultural foundation, studying the micro strategies used to translate Thai cultural terms (e.g., “บุหรืซี่โย” or *Buri Khiyo*, a Lanna traditional cigarette) is essential. For non-native readers, such as Anglo-Americans, it is crucial to examine whether translators sought to minimize or highlight Thai cultural distinctiveness at the macro level through their choice of micro strategies.

## Research Objectives

1. To analyze the translators' micro translation strategies for overcoming issues in translating cultural terms in the Thai novel *Khiao Suea Fai* into English.
2. To examine the dominant macro translation strategy used in translating cultural terms from the Thai novel *Khiao Suea Fai* into English, as reflected by the frequency and percentage of micro translation strategies employed.

## Research Questions

1. What micro translation strategies do the translators use to overcome issues in translating cultural terms in the Thai novel *Khiao Suea Fai* into English?
2. What macro strategy predominantly plays a significant role when translating all cultural terms in the Thai novel *Khiao Suea Fai* into English?

## Theoretical Framework

In this study, three main theoretical frameworks were applied as follows:

**1. Klingberg's (1986) and Newmark's (1988) categories of cultural terms:** The researcher adopted and combined the cultural term categories proposed by Klingberg (1986) and Newmark (1988) as the approach to identify cultural term types in the novel that may pose challenges in cross-cultural translation. The details on each cultural category are as follows:

1.1 Ecology: It can be further divided into nine sub-categories, namely:

- |                           |               |                                    |
|---------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|
| 1.1.1 Trees and plants    | 1.1.2 Fungi   | 1.1.3 Animals                      |
| 1.1.4 Mountains and hills | 1.1.5 Plains  | 1.1.6 Sources of water             |
| 1.1.7 Forests             | 1.1.8 Valleys | 1.1.9 Season of farming/harvesting |

1.2 Material culture: It can be further divided into six sub-categories, namely:

- |                 |               |  |
|-----------------|---------------|--|
| 1.2.1 Food      | 1.2.2 Clothes | 1.2.3 Houses, villages, buildings, and towns |
| 1.2.4 Transport | 1.2.5 Objects | 1.2.6 Furniture and décor                    |

1.3 Social culture: It can be further divided into five sub-categories, namely:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1.3.1 Occupations                        | 1.3.2 Leisure activities, games, and sports |
| 1.3.3 Music, songs, and instruments      | 1.3.4 Social classes                        |
| 1.3.5 Literature and literary references |   |



1.4 Organizations, customs, activities, procedures, and concepts: It can be further classified into four sub-categories, namely:

1.4.1 Politics and administration

1.4.2 Historical background, religions, mythology, customs, and beliefs

1.4.3 Arts                      1.4.4 Weights and measures

1.5 Titles, personal names of people, and names of domestic animals: It can be further classified into three sub-categories, namely:

1.5.1 Titles                      1.5.2 Personal names of people                      1.5.3 Names of domestic animals

1.6 Gestures and habits

**2. Aixelá's (1996) micro translation strategies:** He proposed translation strategies that can be applied to translate terms related to cultural elements and demonstrated how to translate them from English to Spanish as follows:

2.1 Repetition: Maintaining a source term in its original state

**Example:** "Seattle" --> "Seattle" (p. 61)

2.2 Orthographic adaptation: Transliteration

**Example:** "Kemidov" --> "Kenidof" (p. 61)

**Explanation:** "Kemidov" is a Russian name written in English before it was converted into "Kenidof" to correspond to the Spanish alphabet system.

2.3 Linguistic (non-cultural) translation: Converting terms into a target language version that still retains some characteristics of a source language

**Example:** "Inch" --> "Pulgada" (p. 62)

**Explanation:** "Pulgada" is an uncommon unit of length in Spain. However, the term is still comprehensible and used to refer to "inch," the measurement of the UK and US.

2.4 Extratextual gloss: Inserting terms' explanations outside a text

**Example:** "Arnold Rothstein\*" --> "\*Célebre gángster los años 1920. (N. del T.)" (p.62)

**Explanation:** According to Aixelá's (1996) translation, this Spanish phrase means "[American] Famous gangster of the year 1920. (Translator's note)" (p. 62). Provided in the footnote, this Spanish phrase briefly explains who "Arnold Rothstein" is.

2.5 Intratextual gloss: Adding terms' description within a text

**Example:** “St. Mark” --> “Hotel St. Mark” (p. 62)

## 2.6 Synonymy: Applying other terms that share similar meanings

**Example:** “Bacardi” --> “Bacardi” (repetition) --> “aguardiente de caña” (synonymy) (p. 63)

**Explanation:** To avoid repeating the rum brand “Bacardi” throughout the text, “aguardiente de caña” (“liquor of sugar cane”) was applied. In this strategy, if a term is used as a reference for a specific term to avoid repetition, it will be treated as synonymy in all cases without considering that it may belong to another category.

## 2.7 Limited universalization: Replacing exotic terms with something alike but more well-known to target readers

**Example:** “An American football” --> “un balón de rugby” (p. 63)

**Explanation:** Compared to an American football, “un balón de rugby” (“a rugby ball”) is considered more familiar to Spaniards.

## 2.8 Absolute universalization: Rendering original terms into neutral references

**Example:** “a Chesterfield” --> “un sofá” = (a sofa) (p. 63)

## 2.9 Naturalization: Cultural substitution

**Example:** “Dollar” --> “Duro” (p. 63)

**Explanation:** “Duro” is “a currency domination still in use in Spanish” (p. 63).

## 2.10 Deletion: Excluding terms in a source language out of a text in a target language

**Example:** “Casper Gutman, Esquire” --> “Casper Gutman” (p.64)

## 2.11 Autonomous creation: Adding cultural terms in the source language

**Example:** “...shall we go to Constantinople?” --> “...que vayamos a Constantinopla en busca del verdadero **halcón del rey de España**” (p. 64)

**Explanation:** “...shall we go to Constantinople in search of the real **falcon of the King of Spain?**” [back translation] (p. 64).

## 2.12 Combined strategies: Combining two (or more) of the above-mentioned strategies

**Example:** “อำเภอวังน้อย” --> “Amphoe Wang Noi” (deletion + orthographic adaptation)

**Explanation:** Because this strategy is absent in Aixelá’s (1996) book, the term from Masong (2023) was applied to cultural terms that require more than one strategy to translate them. The researcher provided the example above.





According to Inphen (2020), micro strategies are regarded as a subset of macro translation strategies. Thus, the occurrence of specific patterns of micro strategies can reflect certain decisions of translators toward the whole text (known as the macro level). Therefore, in this study, the micro-level translation strategies mentioned above (excluding “combined strategies”) were categorized into two main groups based on Venuti’s (1995) macro strategies. However, due to the complexity of certain Thai cultural terms, multiple strategies may be required for translation into English. To address this, “combined strategies” were incorporated into Aixelá’s (1996) micro strategies. Correspondingly, “mix strategies” were included in Venuti’s (1995) macro-level strategies.

Moreover, certain attributes of strategies at the micro level can be ambiguous in distinguishing between foreignization and domestication. Thus, Aixelá’s (1996) classification of micro strategies was adopted to establish clearer boundaries. He divided his micro strategies into two groups based on “the degree of intercultural manipulation” (Aixelá, 1996, pp. 60), namely, 1) conservation and 2) substitution, which conform to Venuti’s (1995) foreignization and domestication, respectively.

**3. Venuti’s (1995) macro translation strategies:** He classified this strategy level, which reflects translators’ decisions influenced by their preferences or the cultural impact of either the source or target language, as follows:

**3.1 Foreignization:** It is a strategy that aims to maintain the exotic features (the otherness) of the source language and culture, which could hinder the understanding of the target readers. This method makes the presence of translators in the text visible. Aixelá’s (1996) micro translation strategies that can be considered constituents of this macro strategy (ordered from the most to the least degree) are 1) repetition, 2) orthographic adaptation, 3) linguistic (non-cultural) translation, 4) extratextual gloss, and 5) intratextual gloss.

**3.2 Domestication:** This strategy, unlike foreignization, focuses on adapting the source text to align with the target language and culture. This method makes the presence of translators invisible, making it seem like the work originates from the target culture, not a foreign one. Aixelá’s (1996) micro translation strategies, classified under this macro translation strategy in descending order of intercultural manipulation, are 1) autonomous creation, 2) deletion, 3) naturalization, 4) absolute universalization, 5) limited universalization, and 6) synonymy.

3.3 Mixed strategies: This added strategy reflects translators' decisions not to strictly adhere to a single macro translation strategy. Combined strategies are the only micro strategy in this category. Moreover, since this macro strategy is a combination of foreignization and domestication, it is positioned at the midpoint of the scale, as shown in Figure 1.

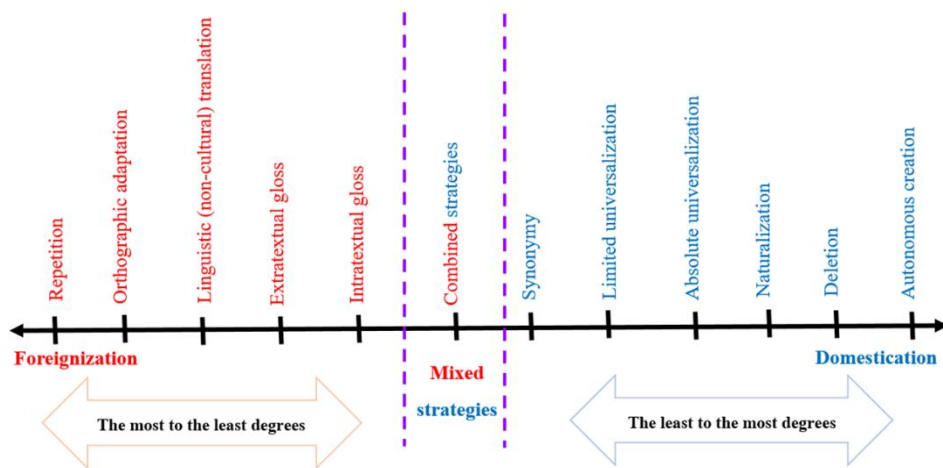


Figure 1 Categorization of micro-level translation strategies based on the scale of their macro-level attributes (foreignization, domestication, and the mixed strategies)

## Methods

This section is organized under three sub-headings: the text, the data collection, and the data analysis, which are presented sequentially as follows:

### Text

Thai-Lanna cultural terms at the word and phrase levels (collectively referred to as "Thai cultural terms") and their English counterparts found in the 15 chapters of the Thai-English bilingual edition of the novel *Khiao Suea Fai*, co-published by Kledthai Publishing and the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Ministry of Culture, served as the source of text data.

To select the cultural terms, the researcher employed the cultural term categories proposed by Klingberg (1986) and Newmark (1988) to systematically identify and arrange the terms into specific groups. Cultural terms that did not fit the concept of Klingberg (1986) and Newmark (1988) were discarded (see the **Theoretical Framework** heading for more details).



Data Collection

With permission from the copyright holders of the novel, the researcher reviewed the text and extracted cultural terms and their English counterparts using the cultural categories proposed by Klingberg (1986) and Newmark (1988). 454 cultural terms were then compiled into a Thai-English comparative list as illustrated in Table 1. To ensure conciseness and avoid redundancy, Thai cultural terms with identical English translations across all 15 chapters were included only once.

Table 1 The comparative list of Thai cultural terms and their English translations, with data analysis.

No.	Thai cultural terms	English translation	Cultural categories (sub-categories)	Translation strategies at the micro level	Translation strategies at the macro level
1.	บัม	bench	Material culture (furniture and décor)	Absolute universalization	Domestication

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to identify the occurrence of patterns of cultural terms and their strategies (research question 1) and to better understand the decisions underlying the translators' choice of specific translation strategies (research question 2).

For the first research question, the researcher analyzed the micro translation strategies applied to each cultural term based on Aixelá's (1996) theory (coding) and presented the results in the form of frequency and percentage. Subsequently, the researcher examined the features of micro strategies to categorize them under Venuti's (1995) macro translation strategies and counted the sum of frequency and percentage in each group to illustrate the translators' choices.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis, 30% of the data were independently examined by an expert in linguistics and an expert in translation (intercoder reliability), initially, each intercoder received a codebook explaining predefined codes (theoretical frameworks) and their definitions as a guideline for categorizing and analyzing the same data set. An intercoder agreement rate of 75-90% is generally considered acceptable and valid (Hartmann, 1977, as cited in Graham et al., 2012). In this study, the intercoder agreement was 99% for the analysis of cultural categories and 98% for the analysis of micro and macro translation strategies. These results demonstrate a high level of reliability and validity in the analysis.

## Findings

The results are divided into two parts and presented respectively according to the sequence of the research questions.

**Findings for the first research question:** It was found that the translators applied 10 micro-level translation strategies in translating 454 cultural terms, as outlined below.

**Table 2** The frequency and percentage of micro translation strategies employed

No.	Translation strategies at the micro level	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Linguistic (non-cultural) translation	116	25.55%
2.	Synonymy	107	23.56%
3.	Absolute universalization	89	19.60%
4.	Orthographic adaptation	43	9.47%
5.	Deletion	31	6.82%
6.	Intratextual gloss	26	5.72%
7.	Limited universalization	14	3.08%
8.	Naturalization	13	2.86%
9.	Combined strategies	13	2.86%
10.	Extratextual gloss	2	0.44%
<b>Total</b>		<b>454</b>	<b>100%</b>

As illustrated in Table 2, linguistic (non-cultural) translation was the most frequently applied strategy, followed by synonymy, absolute universalization, orthographic adaptation, deletion, intratextual gloss, limited universalization, naturalization, combined strategies, and extratextual gloss, respectively. However, two strategies could not be found in the study: repetition and autonomous creation. Details of each translation strategy, including examples, are provided below.

**1. Linguistic (non-cultural) translation:** This strategy involves increasing the comprehensibility of a source term by using a target language version. However, the translated term may still sound foreign, making it less accessible to target readers (Aixelá, 1996, p. 61). For instance, the term “เสือไฟ” (transliterated as Suea Fai) was translated literally as “the fire tiger.” In its native context, “เสือไฟ” refers to the Asiatic golden cat, a species indigenous to Southeast Asia. Non-native



readers, particularly Europeans, might misconstrue the term as referring to a mythical or magical tiger engulfed in flames.

**2. Synonymy:** This strategy involves opting for other similar and equivalent terms to avoid repetition (Aixelá, 1996, p. 63). For example, the translators avoided repeatedly translating “เขี้ยวเสือไฟ” (Khiao Suea Fai), which is a Thai-Lanna sacred talisman, as “the fang of the fire tiger.” Instead, they used a parallel reference, “the sacred fang,” to refer to the same thing.

**3. Absolute universalization:** This strategy employs a more neutral term that does not reflect any foreign implication of the original term (Aixelá, 1996, p. 63). For example, the translation of “ปอยงาน” (Poi Ngan), a celebration where a host holds a feast for people who attend and help the religious event, into “a feast” is considered a neutral reference that cannot be traced back to the atmosphere of a Lanna merit event in the original term, focusing only on the communal gathering and the meal.

**4. Orthographic adaptation:** This strategy involves altering source terms’ alphabets to match those of the target language (Aixelá, 1996, p. 61). For example, transliterating the Thai character’s name “คำแก้ว” into “Khamkaew.”

**5. Deletion:** This strategy omits the original cultural term from the target text if it is deemed confusing or unnecessary for the reader as it does not impact the story (Aixelá, 1996, p. 64). For example, comparing the sentence of the Thai text “ส่วนแม่ฉันเป็นหมาพื้นเมืองดุร้ายของส่างจิ้งพรวนหมา” (Khamchan, 1988/2017, p. 36) and its translated version “His mama was a ferocious native dog owned by a dog hunter whose name was Ching” (Khamchan, 1988/2017, p. 37), the northern title term “ส่าง”<sup>8</sup> (Sang) was omitted from the English text.

**6. Intratextual gloss:** This strategy involves homogenously adding extra explanations to the cultural terms in the target text. It is often used as complementary to other strategies that belong to foreignization strategies: orthographic adaptation, linguistic (non-cultural) translation, and repetition (Aixelá, 1996, p. 62). For example, in translating the Thai cultural term “อยู่ไฟ” as “lain by the fire for a full month after childbirth,” the translators incorporated the added explanation (in the

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<sup>8</sup> It is an addressing term or title (predominantly used by people in the northern part of Thailand) that is commonly put before the name of a person who used to be a novice monk (Rungruangsri, 1999).



underlined phrase) into the phrase “lain by the fire” to clarify this unfamiliar cultural term without disrupting the reader’s experience.

**7. Limited universalization:** This strategy replaces unfamiliar cultural terms of the source language with something “less specific” but more familiar in the target language. However, the substitutional terms still belong to the source language and share some resemblance to the source term (Aixelá, 1996, p. 63), for example, the English translation of “ผ้าถุง” as “sarong.”<sup>9</sup>

**8. Naturalization:** This strategy localizes cultural terms of the source language into equivalents that fully align with the target language culture (Aixelá, 1996, p. 63). For example, the Thai measurement unit “ศอกเศษ” was translated into the English measurement unit “over fifty centimeters.”

**9. Combined strategies:** It involves integrating two or more strategies to address challenges in translating cultural terms. For example, the translation of the term “คาถาวิรุฬหกเขหิ” to “the *Virupakkhehi* spell” indicates the combination of orthographic adaptation (วิรุฬหกเขหิ = *Virupakkhehi*) and absolute universalization (คาถา = spell).

**10. Extratextual gloss:** This strategy adds further explanations to cultural terms. It is similar to the intratextual gloss strategy, but the extra information is placed outside the main text (e.g., footnote) (Aixelá, 1996, 62). For example, “\*local fruit” was exerted at the bottom of the book’s page 39 (Khamchan, 1988/2017) outside the text to explain what the English-translated term “makmoon” (“หมากหมูน” in Thai) is in brief.

**Findings for the second research question:** Based on the total frequency and percentage of micro-level strategies within the same scale category of each macro strategy group (see Figure 1 and Table 2), it was found that most of the micro-level translation strategies applied were associated with the macro translation strategy, “domestication,” followed by “foreignization” and “mixed strategy.” The results are presented in Figure 2.

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<sup>9</sup> Sarong is a general term widely used by Westerners to mention a long piece of cloth worn around the waist by men and women in several Asian cultures (Singmichiwit, 2021). However, in the Thai context, “ผ้าถุง” (phathung) and “sarong” are two different entities since the former is a garment worn by women while the latter is for men.

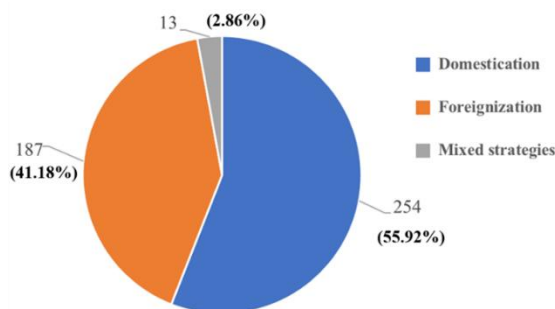


Figure 2 The frequency and percentage of strategies at the macro levels

Figure 2 shows that most micro translation strategies employed by the two translators fell under the macro translation strategy of domestication. Foreignization and mixed strategies were found less than the domestication strategy. More information on these three macro translation strategies is provided below.

1. **Domestication:** This strategy accounted for 55.92% of the data, indicating that the translators primarily aimed to adapt cultural terms from the source language to conform to “the linguistic and cultural norms of the target culture” (Güzey, 2018, p. 20). Synonymy, a micro sub-strategy of domestication, is the most frequently applied strategy, followed by absolute universalization, deletion, limited universalization, and naturalization, respectively. The only strategy not employed by the translators was autonomous creation.

2. **Foreignization:** Compared to the previous strategy, this is the second most frequently employed approach, accounting for 41.18%. It reflects the translators’ intention to preserve the cultural foreignness of certain terms rather than simplifying all Thai cultural elements for the target readers. Four micro translation strategies under foreignization were used: linguistic (non-cultural) translation, orthographic adaptation, intratextual gloss, and extratextual gloss. Repetition is the only sub-strategy of the macro translation strategies that was not used.

3. **Mixed strategies:** This macro strategy is the least employed approach, accounting for 2.86%. This approach combines micro translation strategies from domestication and foreignization. For example, the term ‘ลุ่มน้ำเมย’ (Lumnam Moei) was translated as ‘Moei River,’ demonstrating a combination of orthographic adaptation (‘Moei’) from foreignization and absolute universalization (‘River’) from domestication. Combined strategies were the only subordinate micro strategy under this category.



## Discussion

According to the first research objective, which aims to analyze the translators' micro translation strategies for overcoming issues in translating cultural terms in the Thai novel *Khiao Suea Fai* into English, the results revealed that the translators resorted to 10 strategies, namely, 1) linguistic (non-cultural) translation (116 occurrences or 25.55%); 2) synonymy (107 occurrences or 23.56%); 3) absolute universalization (89 occurrences or 19.60%); 4) orthographic adaptation (43 occurrences or 9.47%); 5) deletion (31 occurrences or 6.82%); 6) intratextual gloss (26 occurrences or 5.72%); 7) limited universalization (14 occurrences or 3.08%); 8) naturalization (13 occurrences or 2.86%); 9) combined strategies (13 occurrences or 2.86%); and 10) extratextual gloss (2 occurrences or 0.44%). The following three sub-sections are the discussion and observation from this part.

1. Linguistic (non-cultural) translation—a strategy proposed by Aixelá (1996) that changes the source language term into a denotatively familiar form in the target language while retaining its connotative foreignness—emerged as the most prominent strategy in the study. Its employment has also been mentioned in several works. For example, Tang's (2022) study discovered that it was the primary strategy for translating Chinese cultural terms into English. Similarly, Kuleli (2020) found that this strategy was listed as one of the top four strategies for conveying Turkish terms to English.

2. Repetition and autonomous creation were the two unemployed strategies in this study. One possible reason the translators did not use repetition was its unreadability. Considering domestication is their main decision at the macro level, transmitting Thai terms directly into English could disrupt the flow of thoughts and reading processes of non-natives. Thus, apart from domestication's micro strategies, the translators tended to apply micro strategies that have a lesser degree of foreignization when transferring some Thai cultural terms into English to improve readability. For example, “สมศักดิ์” (name of Thai people) -> “Somsak” (orthographic adaptation). Changprachak (2023), Masong (2023), and Pornwiriya et al. (2023) also found no evidence of repetition strategy in their studies of Thai-to-English literary translation.

For autonomous creation, despite the fact that it belongs to domestication, the translators likely avoided local target-language terms in the text because they could distort the original messages. This finding aligns with previous works like Güzey (2018), Kuleli (2020), and Tang (2022), who used Aixelá's (1996) as the framework for studying the translation of literary works'





cultural terms in different languages into English, as this work also did not find the employment of this strategy. Aixelá (1996) himself considered this strategy rare, positioning it at the very bottom of his taxonomy since it can be found only in a particular context, for example, “the translation of film titles in Spain” (p.64).

3. Combined strategies, an added approach, are considered a standard strategy for managing cultural terms that are too complex to resolve (Newmark, 1988). It utilizes the existing strategies in the taxonomy and enhances the completeness of a translation. In this case, combined strategies also increased the intelligibility of Thai cultural terms, even though not completely. For instance, instead of using only orthographic adaptation to translate the term “วันราหู” into “Wan Rahu,” the translators integrated strategies of orthographic adaptation and absolute universalization and conveyed it as “Rahu Day.” Masong (2023) also found combined strategies when translating cultural terms from Thai into English in his study. However, there was no mention of this micro strategy in the research of Güzey (2018), Kuleli (2020), and Tang (2022).

The second research objective examined the dominant macro translation strategy used in translating cultural terms from the Thai novel *Khiao Suea Fai* into English. It was found that domestication (55.92%) is the most dominant macro translation strategy in comparison with foreignization (41.18%) and mixed strategies (2.86%). This suggests that the translators prioritized making Thai terms more accessible to the target readers, reflecting the influence of the readers’ cultural perceptions. The following two sub-sections discuss and analyze these findings.

1. As stated, domestication was the primary macro translation strategy guiding the translators’ decisions. This aligns with Venuti’s (1995) assertion that “all translation is fundamentally domestication and is initiated in the domestic culture” (as cited in Güzey, 2018, p. 21). Moreover, given English is an international language “that consecutively plays an important role in every country” (Methitham, 2017, p. 42), it is understandable why the translators decided to make most Thai cultural terms reachable to English readers. Nevertheless, the outcomes contradict previous studies, such as those by Güzey (2018), Kuleli (2020), and Tang (2022). Their works indicated that translators were likely to maintain the exoticness of the original language so that the target readers could feel the presence of cultural otherness as they were reading. This divergence highlights the complexity of translation strategies and suggests that factors such as audience expectations, linguistic context, and cultural significance play a crucial role in shaping translation decisions.



2. The concept of mixed strategies, which is not explicitly addressed in Venuti's (1995) domestication and foreignization framework, was introduced in this study to align with the micro strategy termed "combined strategies." However, in this study, mixed strategies do not refer to the cumulative application of micro strategies from both domestication and foreignization. Güzey (2018), for example, found the coexisting usage of micro strategies from foreignization (73%) and domestication (27%) when translating Turkish cultural terms into English. Her study did not mention mixed strategies in the sense of combined strategies at the word and phrase levels), which suggested that the Turkish translators in her study were inclined to use one micro strategy, either domestication or foreignization, per culture term, without combined micro strategies, unlike this study. The mixed strategies were probably not prevalent in translating cultural terms from Turkish into English. This finding highlights the possibility that factors such as translators' decision-making processes and cultural and linguistic differences between societies may influence the adoption of such strategies.

## Conclusion

This study explored the strategies for translating Thai cultural terms at the lexical level (micro translation strategies) into English, using the novel named *Khiao Suea Fai* (or *The Fang of the Fire Tiger*) as a case study. Moreover, it investigated the macro translation strategy that can reflect the co-translators' decision-making process by identifying whether most applied micro strategies belong to domestication, foreignization, or a mix of both.

Based on Aixelá's (1996) theory, the findings disclosed that 10 strategies (see Table 2) were adopted to transfer cultural terms from Thai to English. While linguistic (non-cultural) translation, a micro strategy associated with Venuti's (1995) foreignization, was the most frequently applied strategy, the overall results showed that domestication strategies were more prevalent. This suggests that the translators intended to minimize the otherness of Thai cultural terms, ensuring that non-native readers unfamiliar with Thai culture can read the text without much difficulty.

This study examined the macro translation strategies of Venuti (1995) at the surface level. Future research could delve deeper into translation as a tool for crafting identity and soft power in the target language. Also, they can study the differences in translation strategies used by Thai and foreign translators when translating the same literature into English. Such research would enrich



cultural translation studies and serve as a guideline for future translators when they encounter this kind of terms.

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