From Thai Words to English Verses: An Analysis of Translation Strategies and Rhymes in Three Man Down's Songs

Teekawin Disa[*]

Abstract

As music is part of our lives and spreads its reach around the world, the translation of song lyrics plays a significant role in transferring key messages of artists to audiences speaking different languages. Simultaneously, translators are able to include linguistic features in translated lyrics for enhancement purposes. This research thus analyzed strategies applied to the Thai-English translation and rhymes used in the English translations of Thai songs of "Three Man Down" — a Thai musical band whose songs are well-known in several countries for their heart-breaking songs. According to the theory of Vinay and Darbelnet (2000), translation strategies found in the selected songs were mostly oblique ones (modulation, transposition, adaptation, and equivalence). The analysis of position-based rhymes using Pinsky's (1998) theory, on the other hand, suggested the significantly frequent use of end rhymes in the songs. The scrutiny further revealed that adherence to the structure of the source language (herein Thai) was not necessary in translation of Three Man Down's songs, as evidenced by multiple adjustments to the lyrics and occurrences of rhymes more frequently found in obliquely-translated lyrics than literally-translated ones.

Keywords: Translation strategies, Rhymes, Three Man Down

Introduction

Today's world is entwined with music. It is a common scene where people take advantage of music for multiple purposes, which may include but are not limited to entertainment, education, and therapy. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that only music alone is not as impactful as being integrated with lyrics and becoming a song. With such a blend, songs parlay values of music into delivering meaningful messages via their well-composed lyrics (González, 2021). This goes as McCrary et al. (2022) mentioned that rhythms and tones of songs are versatile, allowing human beings a more colorful life. Vigl et al. (2023) added that implementation of

[*]English Department, Faculty of Global Communication, Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology

songs in a pedagogical context could be deemed effective in enhancing student's learning motivation. This is in line with DeAngelis (2020), who opined that songs have conspicuous impacts on the human brain, especially for mental functions. In addition, songs have played a pivotal role in language learning. According to Anglia (2020), language educators have employed songs as their instructional tools to evoke learner's interest. The inclusion of songs in language learning has become ubiquitous, and one among the engaged fields is translation studies, which leads to not merely application of songs to translation teaching but delving into translation strategies outside the classroom.

Numerous research studies on translation strategies have been publicized with different language pairs to investigate how source texts are rendered across languages notwithstanding their morphological and/or syntactical differences, mostly employing ground-gaining materials (e.g., film subtitles, books, and songs) for the analysis. For example, Abdelaal (2019) studied Arabic-English translation strategies of culture-bound terms in an American film. Employing Pedersen's (2011) theory, this study revealed various strategies being used. Halimah and Nuryanti (2023) explored strategies employed to translate Indonesian songs being covered in English. Based on the taxonomy of translation strategies by Newmark (1988), the study revealed the significance in usage frequency of the "free translation", followed by literal translation, idiomatic translation, and communicative translation. In the Thai setting, likewise, Jiemsak and Jiemsak (2022) investigated Thai-English translation strategies using Thai folk songs as the materials, seeking to uncover how the songs could be rendered interlingually. The analysis, having employed Newmark's (2018) taxonomy as the framework, disclosed that the most frequent strategy employed to deliver the Thai folk songs to English was "translation by a more general word".

In the community of translation research, scholars are persistent in exploring the use of strategies as exemplified above, due partly to the proven indispensability of translation tackling barriers of interlingual communication (Wilawan, 2020). Nevertheless, the amount of research on Thai-English translation is perplexingly scarce, regardless of this language pair demonstrating a number of distinctions. Even now that songs are knowingly major players and are often translated from one language to another, there exist only a few studies.

Translation strategies aside, scholars have conducted an analysis on songs in differing aspects. Lying under lyrics, such linguistic features as rhymes, poetic devices, conjunctions, and lexical choices are considered as researchable components for song analysis. Research on linguistic features in songs is relatively great in number. For example, Trichomwaree's (2015) *A Stylistic Analysis in Selected Popular Song Lyrics of Oasis during*

1994-1997 reported the frequent use of "metaphor" as one of the stylistic strategies in songwriting. Nasir et al. (2022) conducted a study titled *An Analysis of Referential Cohesive Devices Used in Songs Written by "Maher Zain"* to examine the use of cohesive devices in songs, revealing various devices being applied to the songwriting process. Having integrated linguistic features with translation, Fitri et al. (2022) analyzed and assessed the quality of rhymes and rhythms in translation of song lyrics. This study presented a significantly higher value of rhymes and rhythms of translated songs than those of the source language, further suggesting that the difference in translation strategies had potential impacts on the selection of rhyming and rhythmic patterns. These studies proved it true that song lyrics are rich in worth-analysis components, fostering the essence of linguistic bridges from academia to entertainment. Furthermore, when linguistic features and translation are interrelated, it amplifies a bond between linguistic features and translation regarding the quality of what is rendered in the target language.

To contribute to the community of research on linguistic features and translation, the present study sought to explore strategies applied to the Thai-English translation and to examine the rhymes used in the English translations of Thai songs of "Three Man Down" — a Thai musical band songs of which are renowned in many countries for gilt-edged love songs mostly packed with senses of hurtfulness, ruefulness, and reminiscence. This band has its songs released on the global platform YouTube in the form of music videos with English-translated captions (hereafter subtitles) for non-Thai listeners' comprehension. Delving into translation strategies and the use of English rhymes in the songs of such a world-famous band is believed to provide an insightful, two-folded reflection on the cross-language traversal of Thai song lyrics. In addition, educators may find it beneficial to apply popular songs and their translated versions to the creation of learning activities, which would more potentially capture the students' attention than adhere only to the traditional materials.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are twofold:

1. To analyze the strategies applied to the Thai-English translation of Three Man Down's songs;

2. To identify the types of rhymes present in the English translations of Three Man Down's songs.

Research Questions

This study sought to satisfy the following research questions:

1. What are the strategies applied to the Thai-English translation of Three Man Down's songs?

2. What types of rhymes are present in the English translations of Three Man Down's songs?

Literature Review

1. Translation Strategies

To demystify strategies that translators apply to their translation products, scholars have suggested different taxonomies of such strategies, for example, Gottlieb's (1992) strategies for translation of subtitles and Pedersen's (2011) for extralinguistic cultural references. In the present study, Vinay and Darbelnet (2000) strategies were used for analysis because they are applicable to translation of elements both at a word and sentential level, which is feasible for translation of song lyrics. The following are the seven translation strategies of Vinay and Darbelnet, whose taxonomy divides the strategies into two chief types: direct translation and oblique translation.

Under *direct translation* are three strategies, as follows.

1.1 Borrowing is the delivery of words from a source language (SL) to a target language (TL) without translation. It usually applies when translators wish to transfer cultural or sensual originality of texts, or in cases where there are no equivalents of such texts in the TL. Products of borrowing are often words that are commonly accepted and recognized in the TL. Examples of products of English-Thai borrowing are ฟุตบอล (football), พลาสติก (plastic), and แอลกอฮอล์ (alcohol). This strategy works effectively especially on texts to which the original intention of the ST author need be preserved. To illustrate, a subtitle can produce a Thai subtitle of the name "Iron Man" by employing the mentioned strategy and then has "ไอรอนแมน" delivered on screen accordingly.

1.2 Calque is the transfer of phrases from a SL to a TL by translating each SL element into a TL. While borrowing involves taking words directly from the SL and using them in the TL without significant change, often keeping the original form, calque involves translating not just the form of the phrase but also its meaning, often adapting it to fit the linguistic and cultural context of the TL. An example of calque is the English phrase "crime of passion", which is directly translated from the French "crime passional", maintaining both the structure and the meaning of the original expression in the new language. Calques often occur when a phrase or concept

from one language is introduced into another, keeping its original meaning while adjusting the expression to the target language's structure.

1.3 Literal translation is a strategy that involves converting each element of a sentence from the SL to the TL as directly and literally as possible, while striving to preserve the original syntactic structure. In other words, the translator focuses on a word-for-word translation and aims to keep the sentence's grammatical structure intact, replicating the order of words, phrases, and clauses in the target language. This strategy is often used when accuracy and clarity are paramount, such as in technical, legal, or scientific translations, where precise terminology is essential. For example, the English utterance "He died in the accident" can be translated into Thai as "เขาตายในอุบัติเหตุ".

For *oblique translation*, another four strategies are presented below.

1.4 Transposition enables a shift of grammatical function to which a text belongs. It is most helpful especially when translators are confronted with translation of a language pair whose grammatical and syntactic structures are different, and they may have to make changes to the structures across languages to optimize the translation outcome. To exemplify, the English "electrical engineering" is translated into Thai as "วิศวกรรมไฟฟ้า". While the syntactic structure of the English phrase is "adjective + head noun", that of Thai is "head noun + adjective". This is attributed to the fact that English usually places the head of each phrase in the rightmost position, whereas Thai usually the leftmost. Transposing the English (SL) is therefore necessary.

1.5 Modulation is a shift of perspective, not grammatical function. Due to differences in norms across languages, it might be essential to render utterances in a SL by making slight adjustments to wording while retaining the meaning or intention of the ST. To illustrate, the English "Your offer does not sound bad" can be translated into Thai as "ข้อเสนอของคุณฟังดูดีทีเดียว", which, if literally translated backward, is your offer sounds good. The shift applied in translation of the given example paraphrases the English "not sound(s) bad" with the Thai equivalent to "sound(s) good" which both deliver the same intended message.

1.6 Equivalence refers to the practice of finding a TL expression that conveys the same meaning as the SL counterpart, even if it requires adjusting the structure, wording, or form. This strategy allows the translator to interpret and transfer not just the literal meaning of the source text (ST), but also its hidden, contextual, or culturally specific meaning, ensuring that the translation is comprehensible to the target audience. This strategy is especially important when translating elements that are deeply rooted in culture, such as idioms, proverbs, and other extralinguistic references that may not have direct equivalents in the target

language. To instantiate, the English "Strike the iron while it is hot" can be translated by using its Thai equivalent "น้ำขึ้นให้รีบตัก".

1.7 Adaptation is a strategy by which the translator substitutes a ST with a starkly different phrase or expression in the TL to better suit the cultural context or audience expectations of the TL. This strategy is often employed when the aforementioned direct translation strategies may not convey the intended message. One of the most common contexts where adaptation is used is in translating titles of films, songs, books, or other creative works. Given that most of these titles are linked to cultural references, wordplay, or marketing strategies, the translator adapts the title to ensure it is meaningful to the target audience, regardless of the original wording, for example, Inside Out (translated into Thai as "มหัศจรรย์อารมณ์อลเวง"), แค้น (in English "Nobody's Happy If I'm Not"), and ถ้าเราเจอกันอีก (titled in English "Until Then").

2. Rhymes

Rhymes are linguistic features employed to represent the aesthetic resemblance of phonological patterns within pieces of textual forms. They are regarded as one of the most influential propellants in poetry and literary works in the way that individuals rely on them in creating a variety of artworks (e.g. product slogans, advertisements, and songs) (McLaughlin, 1990). Poetic scholars have categorized rhymes into several types according to such criteria as phonological variables, syllabic patterns of corresponding words, and positions in which they occur (Hollander, 2014). In this study, however, only the position-based types of rhymes proposed by Pinsky (1998) were employed as the framework for analysis. The selection was justified over the structural differences between Thai and English, potentially resulting in a significant difference in wordplay in the original and English-translated song lyrics. Below are descriptions and examples of Pinsky's (1998) types of rhymes.

2.1 End rhyme is a type of rhyme in which the final words of each verse share similarities in sound with its corresponding verse. Examples of end rhymes include:

2.1.1 I never knew I loved *you*. All my life now turns *blue*.

2.1.2 The world is *mine*. Here you never see me *cry*.

2.2 Internal rhyme is a type of rhyme in which words within a lyric line share similarities in sound with one another. Examples of internal rhymes include:

2.2.1 We throw a *rope*, so we *hope* you get saved.

2.2.2 The *rain* made me *insane*, bringing me great *pain*.

2.3 Beginning rhyme is a type of rhyme that shares similarities in sound with one another, both of which necessarily occur at the beginning of lyric lines. Examples of beginning rhymes include:

2.3.1 *Bees* are inside. *Keys* are left there also.

2.3.2 *Cats* are here; *rats* thus are there.

Methodology

1. Samples

To reveal Thai-English translation strategies and rhymes, lyrics of 23 songs of Three Man Down were selected for analysis because the success of the band is obvious and can be witnessed over its frequent mentions on social media platforms and over streaming counts, as evident on YouTube, Joox, Spotify, etc. Three Man Down has boasted a global base of listeners from many countries, resulting in the necessity of English-translated lyrics. The selected songs were published on the YouTube channel of GeneLab, which is the affiliation of the band.

The data for this study was manually gathered by selecting songs from the band Three Man Down, with specific criteria to ensure consistency and relevance. First, only songs with original content were considered, excluding covers, remixes, or remastered versions, given that these songs do not reflect the band's authentic musical expression. Additionally, the presence of a music video was a key criterion for selection. This was because songs without accompanying music videos typically lack English subtitles, which are crucial for ensuring accurate analysis of the lyrics in their written form.

To maintain focus on the primary lyrics, only the first occurrence of each lyric in the music video was analyzed, thereby avoiding repeated lines or variations that might appear later in the song. This method helped guarantee that the data reflected the initial presentation of each lyric, providing a consistent base for analysis across all selected songs.

2. Data Analysis

Thai lyrics of the 23 selected songs of Three Man Down as well as their English translations were retrieved from the GeneLab YouTube channel and transcribed manually by the researcher. The total number of transcribed lyrics was 604 lines. The transcriptions of both languages, as guided by the strategies of Vinay and Darbelnet (2000) (as in the previous section), were scrutinized to demystify what strategies were applied to the translations. As for their English rhymes, the types of rhymes by Pinsky (1998) were used to guide the

analysis. In response to Research Question 1, the obtained data were delineated in the form of descriptive statistics (percentage) in order of usage frequency. As for Research Question 2, the researcher qualitatively analyzed and explicated the rhymes used in the English-translated lyrics to identify the types based on their positions.

3. Verification of Data Analysis

To gain trustworthiness of the data analysis, the researcher had a panel of four inter-raters reanalyze the data using the frameworks employed in this study. The experts were assigned to complete the task according to their expertise. The first two translation-experienced inter-raters reanalyzed the translation strategies, whereas the others specializing in English linguistics were responsible for the analysis of rhymes. Based on the credibility criteria of Miles and Huberman (1994), the verification results revealed that the analysis results of this study were of inter-rater reliability at the agreement rate of 85.13% and 94.44% for translation strategies and rhyme analysis respectively.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the strategies applied to the Thai-English translation of Three Man Down's songs?

In response to Research Question 1, the strategies applied to the Thai-English translation of Three Man Down's songs include modulation (40.40%), literal translation, (36.09%) transposition (13.24%), adaptation (10.10%), and equivalence (0.17%), whereas borrowing and calque were not found in use (see Table 1).

Table 1 Strategies applied to the Thai-English translation of Three Man Down's songs

Strategies	Lyric Counts	Percentage	Examples
Modulation	244	40.40%	**ST:** บอกฉันหน่อยได้ไหมว่ารักเรายังมีความหมาย **TT:** Can you please tell me that our love can go further? (Three Man Down, 2024)
Literal Translation	218	36.09%	**ST:** ฉันน่าจะรู้ นี่ไม่ใช่รัก **TT:** I should've known, this isn't love. (Three Man Down, 2023)
Transposition	80	13.24%	**ST:** ใครบางคนกอดฉันแล้วก็ทิ้งไป **TT:** I've been loved and left. (Three Man Down, 2023)
Adaptation	61	10.10%	**ST:** ไม่เคยคิด ไม่เคยเขิน เวลาที่มองตากัน **TT:** Not even a friend zone for I felt nothing. (Three Man Down, 2022)
Equivalence	1	0.17%	**ST:** ตัดพี่ตัดน้องเลย **TT:** Let's cut ties. (Three Man Down, 2022)
Borrowing	0	0.00%	-
Calque	0	0.00%	-
Total	604	100.00%	

Note: ST refers to source text (Thai), and TT refers to target text (English).

According to Table 1, usage frequency indicates that in delivery of Three Man Down's songs from Thai to English, the application of oblique translation strategies (modulation, transposition, adaptation, and

equivalence) significantly outweighs that of direct (literal) translation at the ratio of 63.91 to 36.09. Several Thai lyrics were modified and rendered differently in English instead of being translated or transliterated word for word. This is plausibly because the source language (Thai) and the target language (English) are dominantly different in structure, whether morphologically or syntactically (Timyam, 2010), which implies that rendition of some lyrics might have sounded unnatural had they not been modified across languages.

Research Question 2: What types of rhymes are present in the English translations of Three Man Down's songs?

In response to Research Question 2, based on the English-translated lyrics, of all 604 lyric lines, 416 lyric lines (68.87%) of Three Man Down's songs display rhymes. The types of rhymes used include end rhymes (73.08%) and internal rhymes (26.92%), while no beginning rhymes were found (see Table 2).

Table 2 Rhymes present in Three Man Down's songs

Rhyme Types	Times of Occurrence	Percentage	Examples
End rhyme	152	73.08%	(1) You already knew I was too young. (2) The song of my life had never been sung.
Internal rhyme	56	26.92%	If it was easy, it wouldn't be as bad.
Beginning rhyme	0	0.00	-
Total	208	100.00%	

According to the revelation of rhyme types, most of the rhymes present in Three Man Down's English-translated songs occurred sentence-finally and sentence-internally, both at the word level, and some words rhyming at a certain position (e.g. sentence-internal and sentence-final) can also rhyme with those at another position. For example, the pair of words *killer* and *filler* in "I'm just a time killer, a time filler" rhyme internally

with each other, and these words extensively rhyme with the word *thriller* in the subsequent line "When that one's out, I'm in for a thriller" (Three Man Down, 2023) to form an end rhyme.

Discussion and Conclusion

1. Analysis of Thai-English Translation Strategies

The two-folded analysis of this research uncovered the distinctive usage of oblique translation strategies in Thai-English translation of Three Man Down's songs. That is to say, as Thai and English share differences in not merely structure but cultural aspects (Timyam, 2015), the dominance of such strategies in translating Three Man Down's songs is logical, according to the characteristic that oblique translation makes it possible for translators to freely create translation products either with a few or a lot of adjustments to the texts. The results of this study resemble that of Nuryanti (2023), revealing the significantly frequent use of "free translation" (Newmark, 1988) in translation of Indian songs into English. Conceptually, free translation and oblique translation are interchangeable terms sharing common characteristics (Vinay & Darbelnet, 2000).

Additionally, instead of adhering strictly to some constraints of the language pair, translators selecting oblique (free) strategies can make a shift in perspective of texts to render them across languages with a different point of view while maintaining as much originality of structure as they need (Newmark 1988 & Wilawan, 2020). This could also be feasible for translation of songs in other language pairs that belong to unrelated families.

2. Analysis of English Rhymes

As for the analysis of rhymes, the study presented the greatest usage frequency of end rhymes, occurring and encouraging resemblance of sounds at the end of each lyrical line. Furthermore, it was unveiled that most of the rhymes applied are more similar in vowel sounds than in consonants. For instance, the sound of mid back rounded tense vowel [o] in "Don't rush into love, you told me *so*" rhymes with the one in "It's a big deal, a long way to *go*" (Three Man Down, 2023). This is most likely because vowels are regarded as the fundamental sounds of syllables, carrying the main pitch and intensity. When rhyming, the similarity of vowel sounds creates a strong auditory link between words, making the rhyme more noticeable and satisfying. Consonants, on the other hand, are less prominent and can vary more widely without affecting the overall rhyme scheme. This allows for more flexibility in rhyming, as long as the vowel sounds remain consistent (Robinson, 2018).

Scrutinizing the translation strategies and the rhymes, the researcher discovered that rhymes were hardly applied to literally-translated song lyrics (over the strategy of literal translation) and that most of the rhyming English-translated lyrics (82.69%) deviated from their source language structure using such oblique translation as modulation, transposition, adaptation, and equivalence.

The results revealed through this study could benefit those who seek to explore the linguistic bridge across languages. As previous research did not place an emphasis on the interplay between the interlingual shift (translation) and phonological pattern (rhyming), the present study dealt with it and was expected to yield some new insight. By learning how songs of a renowned band Three Man Down were transferred from the Thai language to the English one, new-face subtitlers and translators can predict possible guidance on translation and creation of rhyming patterns when encountering words to which they are accustomed, especially ones related to senses of hurtfulness, ruefulness, and reminiscence, which are considered highlights of the band's songs.

Recommendations for Further Studies

This research investigated translation strategies applied to Three Man Down's songs and analyzed rhymes present in their English-translated lyrics. The results indicated that the oblique translation strategies held the highest usage frequency and that end rhymes were most frequently applied. Nonetheless, further studies may explore Thai-English translation strategies of Thai songs of other artists and/or draw a comparison with another for delving deeper into potential differences that may arise. Besides, with regard to rhymes, researchers who seek to analyze translation of songs are recommended to study other linguistic features than rhymes, which may include but should not be limited to meaning-focused figurative language and cohesive devices.

Acknowledgements

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