

# The Study of Idiom Translation in Fiction from English into Thai

Chinchira Bunchutrakun

**Abstract**—The purposes of the study are to investigate the problems that the translators encountered when translating English idioms into Thai and study the strategies they applied in solving the problems. The original English version and the Thai translated version of each of two works of fiction were purposively selected for the study. The first was Mr. Maybe, written by Jane Green and translated by Montharat Songphao. The second was The Trials of Tiffany Trott, written by Isabel Wolff and translated by Jitraporn Notoda. Thirty idioms of two translated works of fiction were, then, analyzed. Questionnaires and interviews with the translators of each novel were conducted to obtain the best possible information.

The results indicated that the only type of problem that occurred was cultural problems, and these were solved differently by the two translators

**Keywords**—Translation, idiom translation, fiction translation, problem-solution strategies.

## I. INTRODUCTION

TRANSLATION plays vital role because as people from different countries use different languages, translation is required to transfer the message when communication occurs between two different languages. This is the task of translation. There are various kinds of works of translation, such as news, movie subtitles, magazine articles, and books. Another branch of translation is the translation of fiction, and indeed this is a branch which has become more outstanding in the translation field. The language in fiction is usually colloquial because it comprises both narratives and dialogues. This colloquial language often causes problems in translation, since it usually contains cultural meanings, secondary meanings or figurative meanings. As a result, it is difficult to find equivalents in the target language when translating from one language into another, especially, as [1] states when the cultures of the languages are different.

## II. PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

The first aim of the study was to find the problems in the process of translating idioms in English works of fiction which have been translated into Thai. The second objective was to investigate the solution strategies which were employed in translating idioms from the chosen books.

## III. METHODOLOGY

1. The original English version and the Thai translated version of each of two works of fiction were used for the study. These two works were written and translated by different persons. The first was Mr.Maybe, written by [2] and translated by [3]. The second was The Trials of Tiffany Trott, written by [4] and translated [5].
2. Purposive sampling was used to select the material for the study based on the following rationale: the genre of the story which is a modern English romance fiction and the colloquial language.
3. The data were collected from the original versions of the two novels and their translated versions. In this research, the idioms were chosen on the condition that they were used in dialogue, for it was considered that idioms occur often in colloquial language and that colloquial language is the language of speech, which is represented in the dialogues of these romances. A great number of idioms met the condition, but only 30 idioms from each book were selected for this study. Idioms that occurred repeatedly were firstly considered, and the rest were randomly chosen.
4. To analyze the data, thirty idioms from each book were presented to the translators of the books. The translators were then interviewed using with the first and the second parts of the questionnaire. The researcher also presented the frameworks of the problem suggested by [6] and solution strategies by [1] and [6] to the translators as guidelines for them when the second part of the interview was conducted. The data, therefore, of both problems and solution strategies that the translators underwent when translating the idiomatic problems were based on the framework of two experts—[1] and [6].

## IV. RESEARCH

All of the data from each book were presented to each translator in the interview in order to discover the answers for the questions:

1. What problems occurred when translating English idioms into Thai?
2. Which strategies did the translators employ when translating the English idioms into Thai?

Chinchira Bunchutrakun is with the Lecturer of Business English Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok,10300,Thailand (phone: +66-89-687-2888; fax: +66 2160 1285; e-mail: chinchira.bu@ssru.ac.th).

TABLE I  
NUMBER OF SELECTED IDIOMS AND THE IDIOMS WHICH HAVE PROBLEMS IN EACH NOVEL

Books	Selected idioms	Occurrences of problems
1. The Trials of Tiffany Trott	30	4
2. Mr. Maybe	30	6

Table I shows that the occurrences of problems in translating the idioms in each book were few. In Mr. Maybe, six problems occurred, while in The Trials of Tiffany Trott, there were only four problems. The problems, based on [6] and the solution strategies suggested by [1], found from each book are presented in Tables II and III.

TABLE II  
THE PROBLEMS THAT OCCURRED AND SOLUTION STRATEGIES APPLIED IN THE TRANSLATION OF THE TRIALS OF TIFFANY TROTT

Original idioms	Thai translated version	Problems	Solution strategies
Or – worst of all – there’s someone nice just around the corner.’ I had been about t ban Mum from ever saying that again. ‘No there isn’t someone nice just around the corner,’ I usually say in reply to this well-meant, weekly cliché. There’s probably someone nasty just around the corner. In fact, you can bet there’s a right bastard just around the corner who’s going to get me very interested , wasted an awful lots of time and then bugger off,leaving me back at square one.	หรือแย่ที่สุดคือ“มีคนดีอยู่ใกล้ๆใกล้ๆแล้วนะ” ฉันเคยบอกแม่แล้วว่าห้ามพูดอะไรแบบนี้สักอีก “ไม่มีหรอกค่ะแม่ไม่มีคนดีอยู่ใกล้ๆใกล้ๆแล้วนะเลยสักคนเดียว” ฉันตอบแม่แบบนี้เป็นประจำ สำหรับประโยคหลังฉันน่าจะอธิบายสักนิดว่า“มีคนชั่วอยู่ใกล้ๆใกล้ๆแล้วนะ” กับลูกมื่อละว่ามี คนชั่วอยู่แถวๆนี่ก็จะคอยอยู่ให้ลูกไปคนด้วยพ่อแม่ทำให้ลูกเสียเวลาแล้วมันก็ทิ้งลูกให้กลับไปคิดตามอย่างเก่า	Cultural problem - the translator understood the culture of the source language, but couldn’t convey the message.	- doublet
Which is why <i>I’m now firmly on the shelf</i> .	นี่จึงสาเหตุที่ถูกตั้งชื่อ <i>ไม่ได้ดีดังชื่อก่อนไปซักที</i>	Cultural problem - the translator understood the culture of the source language, but could not convey the message	- negating antonyms - modifying with a cultural substitute
And I thought that was really below the belt, Tiffany, because of course I’m not working, I’m an actress, and he knows how devastated I was at not getting that part in Casualty.	พูดอย่างนี้ไม่ยุติธรรมเลยสักนิดจริงมันที่พี่ฟานนี่ถึงแม้ว่าจริงอยู่ตรงที่ว่าฉันไม่ได้ทำงานแต่ฉันเป็นนักแสดงนะเขาอาจจะรู้ว่าฉันคิดหวังอะไรสักอย่างในตอนที่เขาพูดนั้นในแง่ของคดี	Cultural problem - the translator understood the culture of the source language, but couldn’t convey the message.	
I’m really going down the pan. In fact I’m quite ancient now.	วัยสาวกับสิ่งโบราณมาอยู่แล้วตอนนี้อายุกำลังจะกลายเป็นอีก	Cultural problem - the translator understood the culture of the source language, but couldn’t convey the message.	- interpreting the idiom from the context and translating it with a non-idiom

TABLE III  
THE PROBLEMS OCCURRING AND THE SOLUTION STRATEGIES APPLIED IN TRANSLATING MR. MAYBE

Original idioms	Thai translated version	Problems	Solution strategies
‘Jules! You know I couldn’t seriously go out with someone like that. Anyway,’ I say, feeling slightly guilty at admitting all this, ‘it’s not just the money. It’s everything. We’re like chalk and cheese.’ ‘Okay,’ Jules sighs. ‘I don’t think that lust can grow, but I do think that he’s obviously inexperienced, and that can be resolved. But,’ she adds ominously, ‘I also think that you mustn’t try to talk yourself round this one.’ ‘You’re not fat. So you ate a lot, big deal. Anyway, it’s not bad food, it’s healthy.’	“จุลส์! เธอรู้ว่าการคบกับคนแบบนี้จริงมันไม่ได้ดีอย่าง...” ฉันรู้สึกผิดเล็กน้อยที่ต้องยอมรับ“มันไม่ใช่แค่เรื่องเงินหรอกทุกอย่างเลยเราเป็นเหมือนเส้นขนานนะ” “โธเค” จุลส์ถอนหายใจ“ฉันไม่ได้คิดว่าความใคร่จะเกิดตามมาหรอกแต่คิดว่าเขาคงไม่มีประสบการณ์มากว่าซึ่งเราอาจจะแก้ไขได้แต่...” “หลังจากพูดเหมือนเป็นกลาง“ที่สำคัญเธอจะต้องไม่ปล่อยมันไว้แบบนี้” “เธอไม่เห็นอ้วนเลย แต่กินเยอะไปหน่อยคนเดียวเอง แล้วก็ไม่ได้อาหารไม่ดีนี่ มีประโยชน์ออก”	Cultural problem - the translator understood the culture of the source language, but couldn’t convey the message.  Cultural problem - the translator understood the culture of the source language, but couldn’t convey the message.  Cultural problem - the translator understood the culture of the source language, but couldn’t convey the message.	- modifying with a cultural substitute   - interpreting the idiom from the context and translating it with a non-idiom  - interpreting the idiom from the context and translating it with a non-idiom
‘I got a bit lost,’ he says. ‘It’s not really my neck of the woods.’	“ก็หลงนิดหน่อยครับ” เขาว่า“ผมไม่ค่อยได้มาแถวนี้”	Cultural problem - the translator understood the culture of the source language, but couldn’t convey the message.	- interpreting the idiom from the context and translating it with a non-idiom
‘Jesus, Libby!’ she says. ‘He’s going to fall head over heels in love with you! I bet he’s never met anyone like you before!’  mustn’t try to talk yourself round this one.’	“ให้คาดเดาล่ะนี่!” “หลังจากพูดเหมือนเป็นกลาง“ที่สำคัญเธอจะต้องไม่ปล่อยมันไว้แบบนี้” “นั่นนี่” เขาว่า“ที่รู้ๆว่าต้องเป็นไปทุกอย่างจะทำไม”	Cultural problem - the translator understood the culture of the source language, but couldn’t convey the message.	- interpreting the idiom from the context and translating it with a non-idiom
‘Nah,’ he says. ‘You know what Dad’s like. Conversation isn’t exactly his bag.’	“นั่นนี่” เขาว่า“ที่รู้ๆว่าต้องเป็นไปทุกอย่างจะทำไม”	Cultural problem - the translator understood the culture of the source language, but couldn’t convey the message.	- interpreting the idiom from the context and translating it with a non-idiom

The results also show that the only problem that occurred is cultural problem. The data were analyzed based on the theory suggested by [6], which said that the cultural problem could be classified into two groups. The one that emerges from the results is that the translators knew the culture of the source language, but could not completely transfer the meaning of the original message. The two translators explained that they knew the meaning of the idioms well, but they could not find the equivalents in Thai. The reason was the lack of experience in translation. The translator of the book titled *The Trials of Tiffany Trott* has become a translator about eight years so far (2007). This book is her second piece. While another translator of Mr. Maybe has become a translator since 2002.

From the table, there are different ways to solve this only one problem of idioms translation, which each translator applied. The solution strategy that each translator applied the most frequently is interpreting the idiom from the context and translating it with a non-idiom. This strategy was occupied twice with the idioms from the book entitled *The Trials of Tiffany Trott* and five times with the ones from the book entitled Mr. Maybe, as shown in the examples below. This strategy is not based on the theory suggested either by [1] or [6] as mentioned earlier; however, the two translators instinctively applied it when they encountered the problems.

#### Example 1 the idioms from *The Trials of Tiffany Trott*

Original version - below the belt

Translated version - ไม่ยุติธรรม

Original version - I'm really going down the pan

Translated version - ้วยสาวกำลังโบกมือบ้าขายลูกแล้ว

#### Example 2 the idioms from Mr. Maybe

Original version - Big deal

Translated version - ไปหน่อยเสียเอง

Original version - It's not really my neck of the woods

Translated version - ผมไม่ค่อยได้มาแถวนี้

Original version - to fall head over heels in love with you

Translated version - ตกหลุมรักเธอแบบถอนตัวไม่ขึ้นแน่

Original version - talk yourself round this one

Translated version - ปลอ่ยมันไว้แบบนี้

Original version - conversation isn't exactly his bag

Translated version - พูดเก่งซะที่ไหน

Another strategy that both translators used is modifying with a cultural substitute, which is based on the theory suggested by [1]. This strategy was occupied once in the book titled Mr. Maybe.

#### Example 3 the idioms from Mr. Maybe

Original version - Chalk and cheese

Translated version - เส้นขนาน

The other strategies based on that of [1] are using cultural substitute and then adding the negative form, which occurred once with idiom from the books named *The Trials of Tiffany Trott*. One interesting point about this strategy is that the translator combined two solution strategies in order to translate it.

#### Example 4 the idiom from *The Trials of Tiffany Trott*

Original version - Which is why I'm now firmly on the shelf

Translated version - นี่ไงสาเหตุที่ลูกถึงยังไม่ได้หลุดจากลานไปซักที

Firstly, the translator rendered this idiom by modifying with the target language culture— Thai. Then, the negative form of the cultural substitute was occupied. Though the later strategy is neither based on the theories suggested by [6] nor [1], the translator naturally used it. From this point, it can be said that the strategy used to translate one idiom does not have to be limited with only one item. It can be one or the combination of two or more.

## V. DISCUSSION

The answer to the question of what problems occurred when translating English idioms into Thai

After this study was conducted the researcher found that the only type of problem that occurred was cultural problem even though there are three types of problems in translation: cultural problems, language structure problems and semantic problems, according to [6]. Both of the translators understood the meaning of the idiom, but they could not find an appropriate word or idiom in the target language. After the interviews with the two translators, the researcher thought that the reason might be that they lacked experience at that time; the translator *The Trials of Tiffany Trott* had been a full-time translator for 8 years when the interview was conducted, and the translator of Mr. Maybe had begun her career as a translator in 2002, Mr. Maybe being one of her earlier efforts. The answer to the question of which strategies the translators employed when translating the English idioms into Thai.

In this study, the researcher found that the translators applied different strategies in their work. The most frequently used strategy was interpreting the idiom from the context and translating it using a non-idiom. As mentioned earlier, this method is not among the strategies suggested by [1]; still the translators used it. Another strategy, which was applied twice was modifying with cultural substitute. Both translators used this strategy once in their works. The other strategies employed were negating antonyms and doublets, which were applied in *The Trials of Tiffany Trott*.

One interesting point arising from the interviews was that in order to solve the problems they were encountering, the two translators acted in similar ways. The translators used dictionaries most often when they encountered any problems. They also searched encyclopedias and surfed the Internet for more information. In addition, consulting an expert, such as their editor or a proof reader, was another choice for them. One more important point was that the translator of *The Trials of Tiffany Trott* chose to consult a native English speaker or a

bilingual when facing the difficulties. However, the translator of Mr. Maybe acted differently; she rarely consulted any native English speaker or any bilingual. The reason was probably that her editor, she claimed, was an expert in the translation field.

All of the methods that [6] suggested for translators when encountering word problems: viz., looking up an unknown word in a dictionary, an encyclopedia and a text book or consulting with experts, native speakers or bilinguals, the researcher would not call solution strategies for the problems that considered in this research. The researcher would rather call them ways to assist the translators to interpret the meaning of problematic idioms before being able to render them. Following this, the solution strategies suggested by [1] would be applied. The outcomes would be the translation work.

Regarding the question of solving problems, the researcher would conclude that the translators first tried to understand the idioms and then applied solution strategies in order to translate them. This combination of the two steps makes up the new solution strategy that both translators applied the most frequently that is, interpreting the idiom from the context and translating it with a non-idiom.

After the interviews with the two translators, in contrast, the researcher realized that the translators were not concerned about which strategies they would use to render the message though they both knew about translation theories from their many translation courses. The translation strategy was not their focus. Their focus was the outcome in the target language. This suggests that translation strategies are sometimes neglected, not only by these two translators but also by many translators in the translation market nowadays. If more attention were paid to translation strategies, it may help lessen errors in translation work or at least help translators to do their work more easily when facing difficulties.

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