

An Investigation of the Errors made in Thai-Chinese Translation by Thaksin University Students Majoring in Chinese and Remedial Methods

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to investigate what mistakes are frequently made in Chinese grammar and word use by 40 second-year students majoring in Chinese at Thaksin University. This was done by making a comparison of their pre- and post-course translation skills and assessing their errors in the translation process and their causes. The course data were compiled by applying two kinds of research methodologies, specifically a unit of translation exercises and an identical test prior to and following the course. A statistical t-test was used as a tool in the data analysis process. This study showed that there are four main reasons for the common mistakes made by Thai students. First, Thai students tend to apply the structures to which they are accustomed in their mother tongue. Second, they do not categorize Chinese words correctly. Third, there is a difference between the grammatical structures of the two languages. The final factor is the students' carelessness in translating. In addition, it is found that there are five teaching methods to deal with students' translation problems.

Keywords: Errors in Chinese Words, Grammar Usage, Chinese Major Students, Improvements, Teaching Methods

Introduction

As societies in the world have become subject to globalization, there have been many major developments that have moved the world forward. In the context of the expansion of cooperation for the purposes of trade liberalization, regional economic competition in global markets is intensifying, leading to the establishment of ties between countries, such as economic, social, political, technological, trade and investment opportunities opening up for traders. With the rapid growth of communication and data access, languages are coming to play a key role. Among these is Chinese, which is one of the crucial languages in Asia alongside English. Recently China has joined the Asia-Europe Economic Meeting (ASEM), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (ASPEC). In Thailand Chinese businessmen have been investing in various market sectors. Hence, nowadays Chinese education is of considerable interest, especially in terms of communication using correct vocabulary and grammar.

To achieve successful communication, translation skills - which cannot be separated from other proficiencies - are vital. In daily life people need to apply such skills in their quest for knowledge and for entertainment when reading books, magazines, newspapers, and other publications.

River (1970) discusses translation skills. When teaching language so that students can use it as a communication tool, the ability to translate needs to be imparted as an integral part of their instruction. Thus, teachers should have the knowledge, capability and experiences to organize appropriate and suitable teaching and learning activities. In other words, teachers can scarcely develop students' translation skills if they themselves lack knowledge and experience of translation procedures since translation skills are the most difficult competencies to achieve. Phensri Rangsiyagul (1980) claims that there are various skills that are relevant to translation and they are interrelated in a particular sequence, i.e. eye dexterity, knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, the spelling of words, and understanding of the context. Hafner (1977) suggests how the process of translation works. Translation involves not simply seeing characters or words and not only understanding the details. The translator must also be able to interpret what we know and rely on previous experience, and be able to process a concept or thought being considered and reach the appropriate conclusion.

With respect to teaching a new second language, Prapasri Tangbanjedsuk (1983) states that making an appropriate and relevant translation is an important skill, as well as listening, speaking, reading, and writing because effective communication requires documents or publications which can help users translate and impart the knowledge to be gained and to understand the thoughts and concepts of others.

In our efforts to enhance knowledge and promulgate humans' ideas and development, translation is a tool that assists people to effectively recognize, understand and solve problems in society. Studies for any course at any level are considered to play an important role in overall education.

The researcher when studying students learning Chinese observed that the differences between the mother tongue, in this case the Thai language, and the second language, Chinese, is a major cause of errors in the language use of students, especially in the use of words and grammar. Montana Duangrat (1980) states that the major problem encountered in teaching Chinese word use and grammar is that learners often prefer to transcribe verbatim from the original manuscript because of insufficient knowledge of vocabulary, and specifically because of the fact that words can have multiple meanings within the contextual use of structural and cultural expressions in the new language.

According to Sanchawee Saibuo (1982), the problem, which is evident among readers, can be summarized by stating that the language used in the translation lacks the elegance and the natural language of the material read in the original language. Simple word-for-word translation cannot deal with these problems caused by an unclear understanding of the terminology and transcription, which is often incorrectly applied by the student.

A second major error is the construction of incorrect sentences. Because of the ambiguity in the syntax, as Voranat Wimonchalao (1986) states, learners often have difficulties in properly interpreting the fact that elements deriving from English grammar do not exist in the Thai language, and such issues are often found among students who are learning Chinese as well.

Analyzing the research regarding all various errors, it seems as though teachers' shortcuts for allowing students to learn and understand the Chinese language more quickly involve responsive learning of knowledge and skills in terms of intellectual thought processes using systematic analysis, critical thinking and creative thinking to solve problems and to make decisions rationally. Moreover, this is allowing the various health sciences to integrate various applications to make improvements among practitioners and society at large as well. It means students can apply their knowledge and skills to solve various problems in their future employment. It also aims to develop students' characteristics under the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF: HEd)) of the National Commission on Higher Education so that they can achieve the desired learning outcomes.

Research Methodology

This study adopts the following methodology.

1. Population and sample

The target population for this research was a group of learners with a basic knowledge of Chinese higher education, at least for the first year, and who have made errors and experienced problems as learners. Therefore, this study uses 40 second-year students majoring in Chinese who took the Fundamental Chinese Translation course in the second semester of the 2012 academic year.

2. Research instruments

Tools used in the study were a unit of translation exercises related to nouns, pronouns, units of measurement, conjunctions, prepositions, attributes, adverbials, complements and phrases used for students to practice their translation skills - this was called Workshop Translation Lesson "Technically Conquering Thai - Chinese Translation" - and an identical test on 30 items before and after the course.

3. Procedures for data creation and collection

3.1 Studying the Fundamental Chinese Translation course description and creation of the translation exercises and an identical test before and after the course that was checked and approved by the professor of Chinese.

3.2 Taking an identical test before and after the course to test students' abilities to translate prior to learning to determine the student's initial knowledge as a baseline indicator.

3.3 Teaching by the researcher of the students for one semester for four-week periods of 50 minutes' duration for a total of 16 sessions through the use of nine translation exercises.

3.4 Collecting students' exercises to analyze their errors and finally conducting a test of students' translation skills by using the identical pre-study learning test after the period of instruction.

4. Data analysis and statistics

Analyzing the data to prove the hypothesis of this research, the researcher examined the data and statistics as follows:

4.1 Analysis of the quality of the test. The contents' validity was analyzed for confidence throughout the development of the results of the test assessing the translation skills.

4.2 Analysis of innovation performance. The workshop was assessed by means of E1/E2.

4.3 Analysis of errors in the translation of each student with a descriptive analysis. Issues are defined as follows:

- 4.3.1 Translation of nouns
- 4.3.2 Translation of pronouns
- 4.3.3 Translation of units of measurement
- 4.3.4 Translation of conjunctions
- 4.3.5 Translation of prepositions
- 4.3.6 Translation of attributes
- 4.3.7 Translation of adverbials
- 4.3.8 Translation of complements
- 4.3.9 Translation of phrases.

4.4 Analysis of teaching methods applied in the case study.

Analysis and Assessment

The researcher reports on translation errors in three sections: the first is translation skills, the second is the results regarding the analysis of translation errors, and the last one is remedial teaching approaches to deal with these errors.

Translation Skills

The learners' translation skills from the analyses of the identical tests before and after the course are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Basic statistics regarding the students' abilities to translate from an identical translation test before and after the course (n = 40 people)

| Identical test before and after the course | Mean | SD | % | Sum(D) | Sum(D ²) | t-value |
|---|-------|------|-------|--------|----------------------|---------|
| Before the course | 42.18 | 4.19 | 57.50 | 79 | 387 | 32.05 |
| After the course | 44.15 | 4.07 | 75.00 | | | |

From Table 1, it can be observed that before the course (pre-course) the learners had an average score of 42.18 and that after the course (post-course) they obtained an average score of 44.15. After completion of the course, it was found that students had improved their translation proficiency at a significance level of 0.01, especially with regard to aspects of Chinese word use and syntax.

The analysis of translation errors

As regards the analyses of the results of translation errors, the researcher analyzed the results of the identical translation tests before and after the course and found that the learners seem to only have issues in word and grammar use. Some examples are presented below.

Sentence 1: มหาวิทยาลัยของพวกเรามีทั้งหมด 9 คณะ. (Thai)

The correct sentence is 我们大学一共有九所学院。 (Chinese)

The learners' pre-course translation mistakes were:

1. 大学我们有九个系。
2. 大学的我们有九所学院。
3. 大学的我们有九个地方。

The learners' post-course translation mistakes were:

1. 我们大学一供有九所学院。
2. 我们大学都有九所系。

In the above error sample for Sentence 1, we found that students tend to apply the structures to which they are accustomed in their mother tongue. Moreover, the students are likely to use word-for-word translation and do not pay attention to the contextual meaning.

Sentence 2: ฉันรู้สึกว่ามาตรฐานภาษาจีนของฉันไม่ดีพอ. (Thai)

The correct sentence is 我觉得我的汉语水平不够高。 (Chinese)

The learners' pre-course translation mistakes were:

1. 我想出水平汉语的我不好购。
2. 我感觉的汉语水平的我不够好。
3. 我觉得我的汉语不好。

The learners' post-course translation mistakes were:

1. 我觉得我的汉语水平不好。
2. 我觉得我的汉语水平不够好。
3. 我觉得我的汉语水平不够多。

The above error sample for Sentence 2 shows that students do not categorize Chinese words correctly, thereby causing them to use incorrect types of words. It was also found that students are quite careless in translating.

Sentence 3: ฉันเคยมีโอกาสทำงานชั่วคราวสามเดือนที่โรงเรียนที่มีชื่อเสียงหนึ่ง. (Thai)

The correct sentence is 我曾经有机会在一所著名的学校工作过三个月。 (Chinese)

The learners' pre-course translation mistakes were:

1. 我有机会工作三个月又名的学校。
2. 我有机会在三个月著名学校工作了。
3. 我有机会在有名学校工作过三个月了。

The learners' post-course translation mistakes were:

1. 我曾经有机会在所著名的学校工作过了三个月。
2. 我有机会在一所大学工作了三个月。
3. 我曾经有机会三个月在著名一所大学工作了。

The above error sample for Sentence 3 shows that the students have grammatical structure problems. This appears to stem from differences between the Thai and Chinese languages.

It was found that a unit of translation exercises covering nouns, pronouns, units of measurement, conjunctions, prepositions, attributes, adverbials, complements and phrases allow the students to practice their translation skills. This took the form of a translation workshop lesson entitled “Technically Conquering Thai - Chinese Translation” and was efficient in teaching Thai students to translate Chinese phrases and sentences. The effectiveness of the results (E1/E2) is 70/74. It showed a level of effectiveness compared to the standard score of 70/70. Moreover, the average score for the test, at 44.15, was higher after the course than beforehand, when it stood at 42.18, and the number of errors was lower than that made in the first test.

Remedial teaching approaches

Teaching can be best defined as the organization of learning. Therefore, the problem to be mastered in successful teaching is how to organize learning to achieve effective results. Teachers have started to understand how to organize their teaching in terms of specific topics and settings, defined lists of linguistic items, and the division of their teaching into Basic and Higher levels. To deal with students' translation problems, the researcher found that the system of instruction for translation courses should be complemented by four steps: input, process, output, and feedback. The feedback from teachers (Extrinsic Feedback) contributed to students' realization of knowledge (Intrinsic Feedback). Incidentally, the researcher adopted five teaching methods to improve students' translation skills. The first was the grammar-translation method. It was invented as a new, insightful way of approaching language learning that was right in tune with the times. There was much sense in having a system of language learning and language manipulation using a set of grammar rules that brought logic and as far as possible universal applicability to the fore. The relationship between translation and linguistics has never been easy. Support for an interactive view of texts preceded the development of fully-fledged text-linguistic models of the translation process. If second language acquisition were to operate in exactly the same way as first language acquisition, then all second language learners, given sufficient time, should develop bilingual competence in the second language. This, of course, does not materialize in reality.

What direct translation is intended to achieve may be seen against the backdrop of a perennial question in the study of translation: can assumptions intended specifically for a particular audience ever be optimally communicated to a different audience, and if so, how? In mainstream translation studies, this is often dismissed as an issue, on the grounds that, at least in principle, any message or interpretation can be communicated to any audience. Assuming that the contextual problem can somehow be circumvented, the question which needs to be addressed next relates to translation situations where, within certain limits, the students are interested not only in what is said but also in how it is said. It is this area of language use which has often led the students of sacred and sensitive texts to prefer a literal approach, with the predictable consequences. The translation model of relevance insists that the cognitive feat of inference and related mechanisms described above can take place without recourse to typologies of the text, communicative acts and the like (Gutt, 1991).

The second method was the transposition method. It involved replacing one word class with another without changing the meaning of the message. Besides being a special translation procedure, transposition can also be applied within a language.

The third method was the equivalence method. It stressed that one and the same situation can be rendered by two texts using completely different stylistic and structural methods.

The fourth method was the practice method. The researcher gave the students practice with differing levels of assistance: highly structured, semi-independent or guided, and independent. This practice procedure was designed to provide appropriate support until students achieved independence. When students are able to practice their skills accurately, they are ready for independent practice, that is, for practice under conditions when assistance is not available in the environment. Homework is an example of independent practice. This is the mastery level in the practice procedure: students use the skill independently with minimal errors. At the same time, a variety of tensions and problems remain, which mean that changes in classroom practices will continue for the foreseeable future.

The fifth method was the nondirective teaching model. The idea behind this approach was to keep the students' frames of reference in mind, maintain their personal growth as a central feature, and help them solve learning problems. This method nurtures students rather than controlling the sequence of learning. The emphases are more on the development of effective long-term learning styles and of strong, well-directed individual personalities than on short-term instructional or content-related objectives.

In addition, the researcher mixed up the activities in the classroom to produce a recognizable communicative methodology. While many different views have been expressed on this matter, most commentators would agree on the following:

1. Classroom activities should maximize opportunities for the students to use the target language for a meaningful purpose, with their attention being focused on the messages they are creating and the task they are completing rather than on the correctness of the form and structure of the language.
2. The students trying their best to use the target language creatively and unpredictably are bound

to make errors; this is a normal part of language learning, and constant correction is unnecessary, and even counterproductive.

3. Language analysis and explanations of grammar may help some students, but extensive experience of target language use helps everyone!

The relationship between language teaching and translation teaching has thus proved problematic. The researcher, by directly looking at the subject of translation errors, raises the important issue of what is and what is not a translation. Students' success in learning the new material has much to do with the thoroughness and quality of the teacher's initial explanation. Following the explanation comes the discussion, in which the teacher checks students' understanding of the new concept or skill. A common error is simply to ask students if they understand or have any questions and then to assume that if no-one answers or only a few students respond, everyone understands well enough to move on to putting the knowledge into practice.

Because language is a habit, and not an area in which students can get by through simply understanding the general gist of the subject, students must do the things that are needed when learning habits. In general, these boil down to practice. Students also learn from simulations by training and self-training. These are, however, two aspects of practice. One is initiating, while the other is memorizing.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study has attempted to assess the effectiveness of Thai-Chinese translations made by students majoring in the Chinese language. The cases analyzed were a unit of translation exercises and an identical test administered before and after the course. This research resulted in the development of a better understanding of the errors made in Thai-Chinese translations, the reasons for the most common mistakes and the efficiency of the "Technically Conquering Thai - Chinese Translation" course.

In summary, before taking the course, the students scored an average of 42.18 out of the total of 60 for translation skills, while after taking the course they achieved an average of 44.15. Translation accuracy improved, but there continued to be some errors in the examination after the course was taken that were the same as had been made before the course. The students made a considerable number of vocabulary-related errors where the translator had seemingly misinterpreted the meaning of the material being translated and therefore made an inappropriate selection for the unknown word. Minor translation errors consisted of incorrect syntax in Chinese, particularly in translation and the use of predicate verbs.

Furthermore, analyses of the operational performance of the lesson were conducted in a workshop using E1/E2. Based on the effective standard of 70/70, with the performance of the process (E1) accounting for 70 percent of the results and the efficiency (E2) representing 74 percent, an E1/E2 ratio of 70/74 emerged for the performance of practical lessons in this study. It was found that 30 out of the total of 40 students passed the test after the course. Comparing this to previous studies, it was found that 23 students passed a quiz before the class, representing 57.50% of the 40 students in all, with an average of 42.18 points out of the total score of 60 points. The number of students who passed the test after the course was 30, or 75.00% of all the students. The average review score was 44.15 points. This is consistent with the findings of Duangden On-nuam (1993) that exercises can help develop the learning skills of the students.

We found that there were four main reasons for the common mistakes made by Thai students. First, Thai students tend to apply the structures to which they are accustomed in their mother tongue. Second, Thai students do not categorize Chinese words correctly. Third, there are differences between the grammatical structures of the two languages. The fourth and final factor is the students' carelessness in translating. In addition, from the above, the instruction of translation courses consists of four steps. These are input, process, output, and feedback. Five teaching methods, indicating that the process starts with the grammar-translation method using explanation and discussion (a method that was applied together with the transposition method and the equivalence method), are mentioned in the paper. Therefore, when the students understand basic translation skills and know about grammar use, following application of the practice method and the nondirective teaching model to evaluate students' translation efficiency, their proficiency increases. In conclusion, this approach can be applied for not only Chinese translation courses but also other aspects of learning Chinese in future.

Biography

Katematu Duangmanee is a Chinese lecturer at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Thaksin University, Thailand. She completed her Ph.D. in Comparative Education at Southwest University (The People's Republic of China) in 2010. Her major research interests lie in the area of Chinese Language and Culture, Chinese Teaching, and Teaching Chinese as a Second Language.

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