

## The inefficiency of English translation on Signs and Billboards

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### Abstract

This research aims to study the inefficiency of English translation on signs and billboards found in Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon province Campus. In this study, we analyze all possible factors that affect the inefficient translation and give suggestion for further analysis. The data was collected from English signs and billboards in Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus. The analysis focuses on structure, word choices and the appropriate translation from Thai to English. The results of this study show that the inefficiency of English translation on Billboards and signs affect the message meaning conveyed to the readers. The inefficient translation can cause a distorted meaning. The factors affect the inefficient translation are the use of incorrect words, incorrect English sentence structure and the inappropriate translation.

**Keywords:** Direction sign, Persuasion billboard, Advertising billboard, Epigram billboard

### Introduction

The meaning of translation has been widely discussed and defined in literatures. Catford (1965) defines that translation is a process of replacement a text in one language (SL) to a text in another language (TL). He divides translation into three types, *word-for-word translation*, *free translation*, and *literal translation*. In Word-for-word translation, all words are translated literally, regardless of context. The main reason of using this method is to understand the mechanics of the source language. In free translation the translation does not focus on structure or style, but focus on comprehension. And literal translation, a structure of the source language is converted to nearest target language equivalents, but still translates by form a word for word translation.

Nida and Taber (1969) define that translation is to repeat in the target language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, both meaning and style. Newmark (1981) explains that translation consist of the replacement of statement in source language by the same message in receptor language. Larson (1984) mentions that translation is conveying meaning from a source language into a target language.

Sanchawee Saibua (1995) defines translation as a process of conveying meaning, language and communication.

It can be concluded that there are two main types of translation; form-based translation and meaning-based translation. Form-based translation tries to follow the form of the source language, so it is known as literature translation. The meaning-based translation tries to communicate the meaning of the source language in the natural forms, so it is also known as an “idiomatic translation”.

When different contexts can cause people use different language, the translator should be aware that the meaning of words needs to be controlled regarding the contexts. Supanee (2005) explains that contexts definitely affect people’s lives. In different contexts, people use language differently. The components that affect word choice are relationship between sender and receiver of the message, communication context, and cultural meaning.

Robert Lado (1957) suggests that language is also different as it is a part of culture. One action may be suitable in some culture but may not be as suitable and proper in another. In addition, Hatim and Mason (1997) advise that culture is very important factor for translation, so translation in different cultural context should be used free translation, literal translation or translation with commentary. Supanee (2005) claims that the use of “word-for-word” translation is one of the reasons why many translated version could not reach the idiomatic level and sounds “foreign” for the reader and native speaker. The translator needs to study lexicon, grammatical structures, communication situations and cultural context of the source language before he or she translates it. Punya (1999) explains that in effective translation, the translator must follow two steps, preparation, and translation practice.

There are a number of ways to transfer the equivalent meaning. The translator should decide from the context whether to translate using the word for word method, general meaning based or detailed and specific translation. A Good translation happens when the translator has good knowledge and understanding about the source language including its context. Furthermore, they must have the ability to transfer the right meaning into the translated version as well.

This research is studying the translation of English language on billboards and signs in Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon province Campus. It aims to study the ability in translation and to analyze factors which affect the inefficiency of English translation on billboards and signs.

### Scope of Study

1. All data, English billboards and signs, were collected within Kasetsart University Chalemphrakiat Sakon Nakhon province Campus.
2. The data will be analyzed by focusing on the use of English grammar, the use of appropriate words with the contexts.
3. Conclusion and suggestion

### Purposes of the Study

There are three purposes of the study.

1. To study factors affect the inefficiency of English translation on billboards.
2. To analyze ability in translation of translators.
3. To find a solutions to the problems in the English translation.

### Research Method

1. Collect samples of English versions of informative and descriptive signs and billboards in Kasetsart University Chalemphrakiat Sakon Nakhon province Campus.
2. The data were verified. Triangulation method was chosen as an application in this study.
3. Write all context details involved and photograph samples of English version of informative and descriptive signs and billboards.
4. Study all data and focus on English grammar, structure, types of messages transfer, translation and cultural contexts.
5. Analysis of factors influencing the ineffectiveness of English translation on signs and billboards by categorizing into three main factors: the use of word, the use of English grammar and the inappropriate translation.

### Results

**Purpose 1: To study factors affect the inefficiency of English translation on signs billboards.**

The main factors which cause the inefficiency in English translated versions on billboards and signs are an insufficient knowledge of the English and an interference of Thai during translation. These factors convey incorrect and ambiguous meanings on signs billboards.

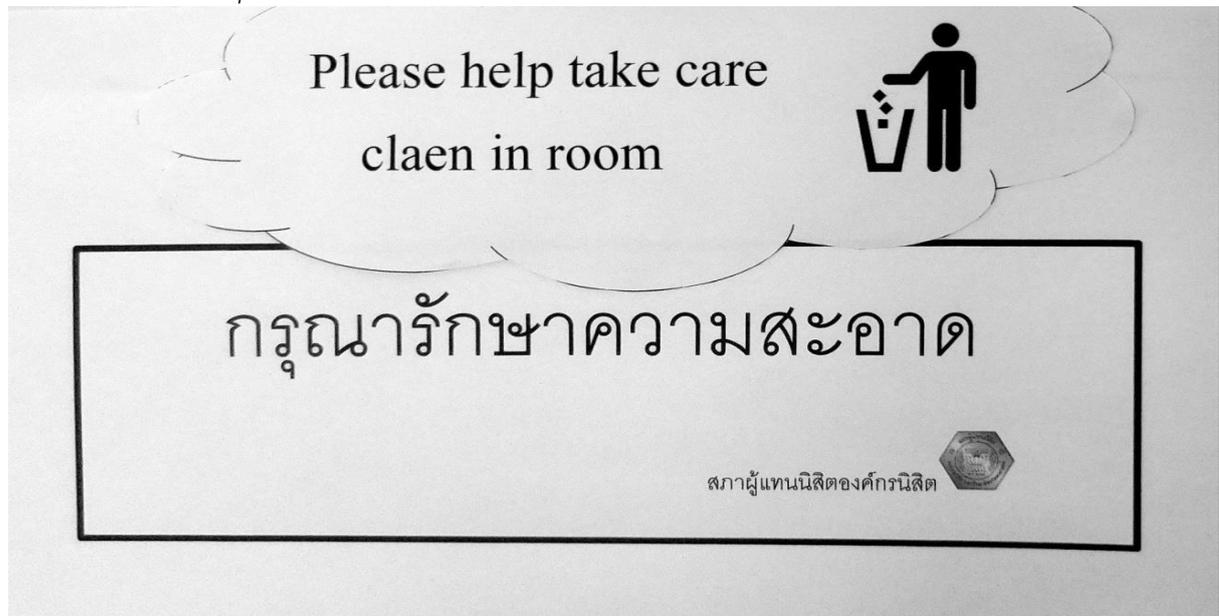
## 1. Using Incorrect words

Word choices are one of an important factor in translation. If a translator chooses to use the inappropriate word in sentence, it can convey incorrect meanings from the intended message.

### 1.1 Misspelling

Misspelling is a mistake that shows spelling mistake of words each sentences such as a word that is pronounced the same way but spelled differently.

**Data 1** *Please help take care clean in room*



There is a misspelling of the word **claeen**. Although a reader may know the correct spelling of this word, but the message has a lot of interference of Thai. In addition, there are many mistakes in term of structure such as verb *take care (of)*.

In Thai, there is no different between main clause and infinitive, hence there are mistakes of infinitive and noun that follows.

### Suggestion

Please help us to take care of the cleanness in this room.

### 1.2 Wrong word choices

Usually, a word of English can convey many different meanings. In different context, word choices were chosen in many different way. Using the appropriate words with right meanings are very important tool in translation.

Data 1 FREE! Delivery



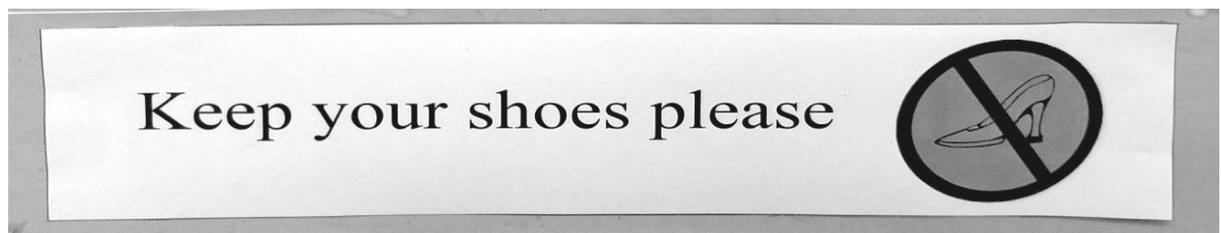
In Thai, this sentence means *get it for free*. You can take it by yourself if you like it. However, the English translation means the items will be sent to your home for free. The wrong choice of word can happen when the translator does not know the meaning of the word.

**Suggestion**

*For free*

*Get it free*

Data 2 *Keep your shoes please.*



In this sentence the writer wants to tell the reader that *you have to take off your shoes* as a sign shown that shoes are not allowed. However, the writer is confused the meaning of the word *keep* in English with the Thai pronunciation *kep*. The writer wants to say that “the shoes need to be taken off and kept it on shelf nearby”.

**Suggestion**

*Please take off your shoes.*

Data 3 *Buddhist Temple*



In English translation, this sign means the direction to the Buddhist Temple, but the meaning in Thai refers to the name of building in the campus. The choice of word *temple* should be replaced by *building* instead.

**Suggestion**

*The Buddhist Scruple Land Building*  
Or, *Buddhist Building*

Data 4 *Ban Chieng Krua Residential Area*



The meaning in Thai of this sign can be literally translated as *Hotel of Ban Chieng Krua Park*. However, the word *Residential Area* is used for *hotel*, and *park* instead. The choice of words which should be right for this meaning is suggested as follows.

**Suggestion**

*Ban Chieng Krua Park Inn*  
Or, *Ban Chieng Krua Park Hotel*

Data 5 *Nonghan Residence 2*



This sign shows the different meaning between Thai and English in term of word choices. In Thai, the sign means the direction to the staff residence 2. However, in English, it refers to the name of the residence hall, as *Nonghan* Residence.

### Suggestion

#### Staff Residence 2

## 2. Incorrect English grammar usage

In the effective translation, a translator has to know and understand a target language. If he/she has an insufficient knowledge about grammatical structures or lexicon, he/she cannot convey the meaning of the message in English effectively and naturally.

### 2.1 Tenses

This type of mistake shows the ability in English grammar of a translator. Different tense transfers different meaning. If the translators choose the correct use of tense in the sentence, it can help them sending the right meaning to readers.

**Data 1** *Life isn't about finding yourself... But life was about creating yourself.*



The first sentence in this billboard was written in present simple tense form, but the second sentence was in past simple form. This can make a different meaning of in sentence.

### Suggestion

*Life isn't about finding yourself, but life is about creating yourself.*

### 2.2 Parts of speech

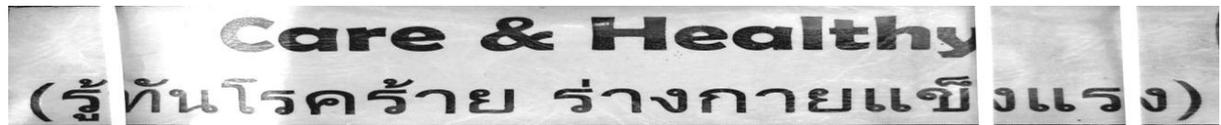
The parts of speech consists Noun, Pronoun, Verb, Adjective, Adverb, Preposition, Conjunction, and Interjection. Selecting to use parts of speech in sentence depends on the context.

#### 2.2.1 Adverbs and Adjectives

This part will show an incorrect use of adverbs and adjectives. Adverb is a word which describes or gives more information about a verb, adjective, adverb or

phrase. Adjective is used to modify a noun. It is a word that describes a noun or pronoun.

**Data 1** *Care & Healthy*



*Care* is verb, but *Healthy* is Adjective. When they have the marker ‘&’ (and) between two words, these words have to be in the same word class that is Verb & Verb or Adjective & Adjective

**Suggestion**

*Careful & Healthy*

**2.2.2 Noun**

Noun is a word that refers to a person, place, thing, event, substance or quality. It is divided four types. Those are Common Noun, Proper Noun, Collective Noun and Abstract Noun. This mistake to refer incorrect selecting used noun.

**Data 1** *Gentlemen / Man*



Gentlemen are a plural noun, but Man is a singular nouns. It is in different word class, so it is the incorrect in term of numbers.

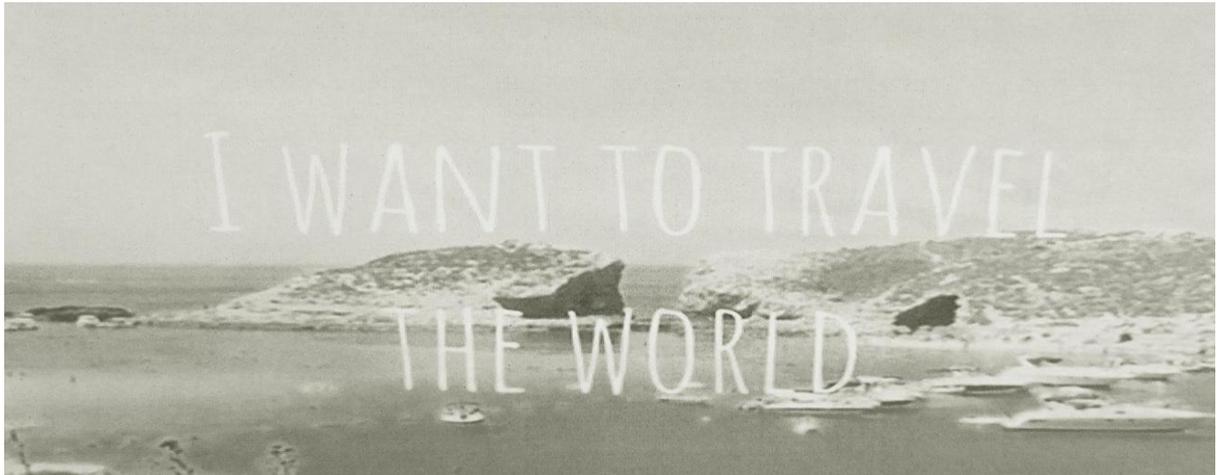
**Suggestion**

*Gentlemen / Men*

**2.2.3 Prepositions**

Preposition is a word which is used before a noun, a noun phrase or a pronoun, connecting it to another word. And it is a word that links a noun, pronoun or gerund to other words.

Data 1 *I want to travel the world*



The verb *travel* is intransitive verb. It does not require any noun to be an object. The noun *the world* needs to be assigned function by function word i.e., preposition in order to make sentence grammatical. Thus, a preposition such as *in* or *around* should be added to complete the sentence.

**Suggestion**

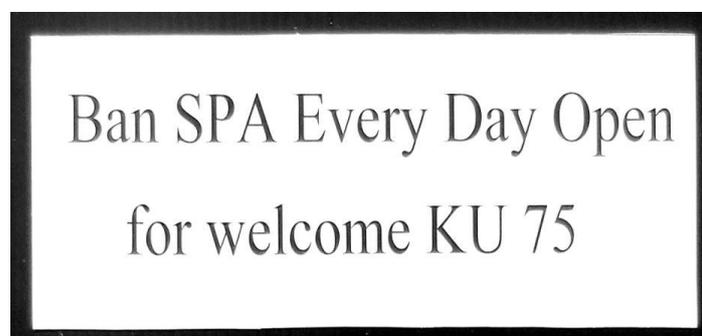
*I want to travel in the world*

Or, *I want to travel around the world*

**3. Incorrect Sentence Structure**

English Sentences are divided four types. There are a simple sentence, a compound sentence, a complex sentence, and a compound-complex sentence. This part shows the confusion of sentence structure.

Data 1 *Ban SPA Every Day Open for welcome KU 75*



The word order in this billboard is incorrect. The subject of the first sentence is *Ban SPA* where the verb is *open*. The second sentence the subject is omitted, while the

verb is *welcome* and the preposition *for* is not necessary. The sentence is in compound type.

### Suggestion

*Ban SPA Open Every Day – Welcome KU 75*

### Purpose 2: To analyze ability in translation of translators.

The translator needs to know and be proficient about word choices, relationship between sender and receiver of the message, communicative situation and cultural context to achieve the effective translation. If this mistake happens, it will show the lack of the attention of the translator during the process of translation.

#### 1. Interference of Thai language

The influence from mother tongue is the main problem in translation. If the translator cannot detach himself from the influence of mother tongue, it causes an ineffective in his translated version.

**Data 1** *Day Aom Kod Nontri E-San No.3 on 2015*



This message shows the interference of Thai language. The writer uses word by word translation from Thai to English without the understanding of the target language. Thus, it is incorrect both in terms of grammar and meaning.

### Suggestion

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> Aom Kod Nontri E-San day, 2015*

**Data 2** *Football 7 Khon Nontri E-san Mini Cup 4*



The interference of Thai language is used for the translation of this sentence to English. The translator does not know what the correct sentence in English is. Although the sentence seems is not complete, the reader can somehow understand the meaning.

### Suggestion

*The Football of 7 Players, The 4<sup>th</sup> Nontri E - san Mini Cup*  
Or, *The 4th Nontri E-san Mini Cup, 7 players Football*

### Conclusion and Suggestion

The main factors affect the inefficiency of the English translation of signs and billboards are not only the translator's insufficient knowledge of English language but also the interference of Thai language during translation. In this study, translation problems were divided in two ways. There are incorrect meanings and ambiguous meanings.

The inefficiency of English translation is categorized into three types; first, the usage of incorrect word consists of misspelling and wrong choice of wording, second, the usage of incorrect English grammar consists of tenses, parts of speech and incorrect English structure and lastly, the inappropriate translation consists of the interference of Thai language.

For further research on translation of English signs and billboards, data can be collected from people who create these signs and billboards. This will provide another insight. The knowledge that gets from the study can help in comprehending in the processes of English translation and can also be used as a means to gain a better understanding of translation from Thai to English language as well.

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