

Analysis of the Techniques Used to Translate Ecological Cultural-Specific Items in a Thai Drama: The Royal Doctor

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were to 1) collect ecological cultural-specific items found in the drama series "The Royal Doctor" based on Nida's (1964) conceptual framework and 2) study translation techniques related to ecological cultural-specific items from the same series based on Baker's (2005) strategy. The data consists of ecological cultural-specific items found in the subtitle that appeared in The Royal Doctor series.

The results found 132 ecological cultural-specific items. These terms were categorized according to Nida's (1964) classification of cultural-specific items into three types: 87 specific plant names, 21 specific medicine names, and 24 specific disease names. The study identified eight translation strategies, ranked from most to least frequently used: 1) Translation by a more general word, 2) using a loan word or loan word plus an explanation, 3) using cultural substitution, 4) using illustration, 5) omission, 6) paraphrasing using related words, 7) paraphrasing using unrelated words, and 8) using a more neutral/less expressive word.

Keywords: Translation strategies, Cultural-specific item, Ecological terms

1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, the translation of cultural content plays a crucial role in bridging linguistic and cultural divides (Al-Sofi & Abouabdelkader, 2019). This study analyses translation strategies employed for cultural terms in the popular Thai drama Mor Luang from Thai to The Royal Doctor in English. The importance of this research lies in its potential to enhance cross-cultural understanding and improve the quality of subtitle translations for international audiences.

Television dramas are powerful mediums for reflecting different regions' stories, lifestyles, and cultural nuances (Ang, 2007). "Mor Luang" is a prime example, garnering significant domestic and international popularity. The drama's success can be attributed to its entertaining storyline and ability to instill a sense of pride in Thai culture and generate interest in traditional Thai medicine and herbal remedies. The drama succeeded remarkably by seamlessly integrating Thai traditional medicine, history, and culture into its narrative. This integration resulted in a phenomenon that sparked widespread interest, evidenced by high

ratings, overwhelming public response to related events, and the drama's translation into multiple languages, including English and Chinese (Atchutmanat, 2023). The popularity of *The Royal Doctor* was further enhanced by its star-studded cast, featuring Mario Maurer and Kimberley Anne Woltemas in lead roles. Their performances and the drama's educational value regarding Thai culture contributed to its international appeal and the subsequent need for high-quality translations.

The challenge in translating such culturally rich content lies in the inherent differences between languages, which can create barriers for non-native viewers (Kunnu, & Darnsawasdi, 2023). Subtitles become a critical tool in facilitating comprehension and enjoyment for international audiences. However, translating cultural terms related to daily life, beliefs, customs, and traditions presents unique challenges that require careful consideration and strategic approaches.

2. Research Objective

This study aims to collect ecological cultural-specific items in the drama series and analyze the strategies used to translate the cultural terms from Thai to English in *The Royal Doctor*.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to analyze the translation of cultural-specific items, specifically in the ecological domain, in the Thai drama *Mor Luang* and its English translation, *The Royal Doctor*.

3.1 Data Collection

The primary data for this research consists of the original Thai script of *Mor Luang* and the English translation of *The Royal Doctor* by Tania Itthiwat and Supanida Piyayotai from Netflix. The study is grounded in Nida's (1964) theoretical framework, which posits that terms related to herbs, medicine, and diseases are culturally loaded and have implications in both scientific and cultural domains. This framework guides the analysis of ecological cultural-specific terms in the medical context of the drama.

3.2 Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis

Identification of ecological cultural-specific terms: Thai script and its English translation will be systematically reviewed to identify ecological cultural terms, focusing on herbs, medical, and health-related items.

Categorization of translation strategies: Each identified term will be analyzed using Baker's (2005) framework to determine the translation strategy employed. The categorization will be based on established translation theories and adapted to fit the specific context of Thai-to-English cultural translation.

Contextual analysis: The context in which each term is used will be examined to understand how the translation strategy affects the conveyance of cultural nuances and scientific accuracy.

Quantitative Analysis

Each translation strategy's occurrence will be counted to determine its frequency of use. The percentage of each translation strategy relative to the total number of analyzed terms will be calculated. Based on the frequency and percentage data, the translation strategies will be ranked from most to least commonly used.

4. Results

This study aimed to collect and analyze ecological cultural-specific terms in the Thai drama *Mor Luang* and examine the translation strategies employed in its English version, *The Royal Doctor*. The analysis was based on Nida's (1964) criteria for categorizing ecological cultural terms. One hundred and thirty-two ecological cultural-specific terms were identified across all twenty-two episodes of *Mor Luang*. Table 1 summarizes the distribution of the 132 ecological cultural-specific terms identified across all twenty-two episodes of *Mor Luang*, categorized according to Nida's (1964) classification.

Table 1: Distribution of Ecological Cultural-Specific Terms in Mor Luang

Number	Category	Number of terms	Percentage
1	Specific plant names	87	65.91
2	Specific disease names	24	18.18
3	Specific medicine names	21	15.91
	Total	132	100

This distribution highlights the prominence of plant-related terminology in the drama, consistent with its focus on traditional Thai medicine and herbal remedies. The analysis of translation strategies based on Baker's (2005) revealed a variety of approaches used to convey these ecological cultural-specific terms in English. Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage of each translation strategy employed in *The Royal Doctor*.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of Translation Strategies in The Royal Doctor.

Rank	Translation Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
1	Translation by more general word	96	72.72
2	Translation by using a loan word or loan word with explanation	21	15.90
3	Translation by cultural substitution	4	3.03
4	Translation by illustration	3	2.27
5	Translation by omission	3	2.27
6	Translation by paraphrase using related words	2	1.51
7	Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words	2	1.51
8	Translation by a more neutral or less expressive words	1	0.79
	Total	132	100

Key Findings:

Generalization was the most frequently used strategy, accounting for 72.72% of all cases. This suggests a tendency to use broader, more familiar terms in English to convey specific Thai ecological concepts, as in the following example.

Source Text: นี่ ขมิ้นชันหุงกับน้ำมันมะพร้าว ทาคลายปวด ลดอาการบวมของแผล

Target Text: Here you go, a paste made of turmeric and coconut oil. It relieves pain and reduces swelling.

ขมิ้นชัน (Kha-min chan) refers to a specific variety of turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) commonly used in Thai traditional medicine and cuisine. The term is translated simply as "turmeric" in English. This translation employs generalization by using a broader, more widely recognized term in the target language (English) to represent a more specific term in the source language (Thai). This translation choice reflects a balance between maintaining the general meaning of the original term and ensuring accessibility for the target audience, which is a common challenge in translating culturally specific terms in entertainment media.

Loan Words was the second most common strategy used in 15.90% of cases. This approach preserves the original Thai terms while providing context for the English-speaking audience, as in the following example.

Source Text: โคลนดินท้องนา กับดินจอมปลวก นำมาผสมผงฟ้าทะลายโจร บอระเพ็ด และลูกกระดอม

Target Text: This is mud from a rice field and soil from a termite mound mixed with kariyat powder, heart-leaved moonseed and kradom fruits.

ลูกกระดอม (luk kradom) refers to the fruit of the kradom tree (*Gymnopetalum cochinchinense*), used in traditional Thai medicine (Medthai, 2020). The term is translated as kradom fruits in English. This translation method combines two elements: "kradom" is a loan word borrowed directly from Thai, and the explanation "fruits" is added to provide context. This translation approach demonstrates a thoughtful balance between introducing the audience to Thai terminology and ensuring basic comprehension. It's particularly suitable for a context where the cultural specificity of ingredients or medicines plays a significant role in the narrative, as is likely the case in "Mor Luang."

Cultural substitution, although less frequent (3.03%), indicates efforts to find culturally relevant equivalents in the target language.

Source Text: ทองอิน: อันนี้อะไรหรือจ๊ะ

ทองแต้: อันนี้เรียกสะค้าน

Target Text: Thong-in: What is this?

Thong-tae: It's called Ming Aralia

In the English translation, สะค้าน (Sakhaan) was translated as Ming Aralia. This translation choice is interesting because Ming Aralia (*Polyscias fruticosa*) is a different plant species unrelated to the Piper genus (Lanna Food, 2015). The translators likely chose this common name to make it easier for foreign audiences to understand or visualize the plant, even though it's not botanically accurate. This translation strategy falls under the category of cultural substitution, where a culture-specific item is replaced with a term more familiar to the target audience. While it aids in comprehension, it does sacrifice some of the botanical and cultural specificity of the original Thai term.

Minimal Omission was used sparingly (2.27%), suggesting a concerted effort to retain as much of the original ecological content as possible, as in the following example.

Source Text: บัว: ยา ยาพิถัลตรีผลาจะ กินแล้วบำรุงธาตุไม่เจ็บไม่ป่วยจ้า

Target Text: Bua: We have medicine for you. It's the Triphala remedy. It can protect you from illnesses.

In this translation, the term พิภค (pikat), which means measurement, quantity, or proportion, is completely removed in the English translation. This omission simplifies the term for the English-speaking audience but loses the specific connotation of precise measurement or formulation. The translator focuses attention on the main component, Triphala, which may be more recognizable or important in the context and avoids potential confusion that might arise from attempting to translate a concept that doesn't have a direct English equivalent. This translation choice reflects a prioritization of general comprehension over preserving every nuance of the original term. It demonstrates how omission can be used to streamline complex cultural concepts for a broader audience, though at the cost of some cultural and technical specificity.

Varied Approaches: The translators' use of multiple strategies, including paraphrasing and illustration, demonstrates their attempts to convey complex cultural concepts through diverse means.

These results highlight the challenges in translating culturally specific ecological terms, particularly in the context of traditional medicine. The predominance of generalization suggests a prioritization of comprehensibility for the target audience, potentially at the expense of some cultural specificity. However, the use of loan words and explanations indicates efforts to maintain a balance between accessibility and cultural authenticity. The findings provide valuable insights into the translation process for culturally rich content and offer a foundation for developing best practices in subtitling and translating Thai dramas for international audiences.

5. Discussion

The most striking finding is the predominant use of generalization as a translation strategy, accounting for 72.72% of all cases. This high frequency suggests a strong preference for accessibility and comprehensibility in the target language. While this approach ensures that the English-speaking audience can grasp the general meaning, it raises questions about the potential loss of cultural specificity and nuance.

Despite the prevalence of generalization, the use of loan words (15.90%) and cultural substitution (3.03%) indicates efforts to retain some level of cultural specificity. This mixed approach suggests an attempt to balance comprehensibility with cultural preservation.

The distribution of ecological terms (65.91% plant names, 15.91% medicine names, 18.18% disease names) and the varied translation strategies used for each category provide insights into the complexities of translating different types of cultural content.

The translation strategies employed in *The Royal Doctor* reflect broader issues in the globalization of media content, particularly for productions deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts.

6. Conclusion

The translation strategies employed in *The Royal Doctor* reflect the complex challenges of cross-cultural communication in media. While prioritizing audience comprehension, these strategies also raise important questions about cultural representation and the role of media in cross-cultural education. This study's findings contribute to our understanding of how cultural

elements are negotiated in the global media landscape and highlight the need for continued research and innovation in translation practices.

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