

The Translation Problems of English into Mon: A Case Study of Mon Students
at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University,
Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya in Thailand *

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Abstracts

The objectives of this research were 1) to study the translation problems of English into Mon, 2) to analyze the translation problems of English into Mon, and 3) to find out the solutions to translating problems from English into Mon.

The research methodology consists of a mixed methods approach, namely qualitative and quantitative study. The research tools are questionnaires, survey statements, open-ended questions, translation tests, and in-depth interviews. For the population, there are 45 Mon students from Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University at Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya in Thailand. Data analysis using both statistical methods for quantitative data and content analysis for qualitative data.

The findings show that there are four main problems in translating English into Mon: 1) Linguistic problems, including lack of direct equivalents for many English words, phrases, and expressions in Mon language; 2) Structural problems, due to grammatical and sentence structure differences between English and Mon; 3) Cultural problems, arising from cultural differences and lack of corresponding cultural references in Mon; and 4) Limited resources problems, due to the lack of comprehensive dictionaries, grammar reference books, and other types of reference materials in Mon.

The suggestions were that students should 1) prioritize conveying intended meaning over word-for-word translation, using strategies such as paraphrasing and finding closest expressions; 2) attempt for mastery in both English and Mon languages, including linguistic nuances and cultural contexts; 3) collaborate with native speakers, subject matter experts, and experienced translators to improve translation accuracy; and 4) expand linguistic resources for Mon, including comprehensive dictionaries and grammars, while implementing training programs to improve translation skills.

Keywords : Translation Problems; English-Mon; Mon students

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Introduction

In this age of globalization, translation has become imperative for international and intra-national communication, playing a crucial role in understanding our increasingly fragmented world. This is particularly significant for minority cultures like the Mon people, who have a rich historical and linguistic heritage that requires translation assistance for broader understanding.

Translation, as defined by scholars such as Larson (1984), is "basically a change of form" where the meaning of the source language is transferred into the receptor language. Newmark (1988) further elaborates that translation is "a craft consisting of the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language". These definitions emphasize the complexity of the translation process, which involves not just linguistic transfer but also cultural and semantic considerations.

The challenges in translation are numerous and varied. Mona Baker (2018) identifies several types of non-equivalence at the word level, including culture-specific concepts, semantic complexity, and differences in expressive meaning. Newmark (1988) also highlights five problems in cultural differences that can hinder the translation process: ecology, material culture, social culture, social organization, and gestures and habits. Ghazala (1995) further expands on this, arguing that a translation problem occurs when the translator cannot render the source text into the target language easily, without consulting dictionaries or making efforts to retrieve and exploit their linguistic and cultural knowledge and life experiences.

In the context of Mon translation, despite a long history dating back to the 12th century, there is a lack of studies on theory and practice in modern Mon translation. This gap is particularly evident in the translation between English and Mon, which presents unique challenges due to the linguistic and cultural differences between these languages.

This study aims to address this gap by studying the translation problems faced by Mon students when translating from English to Mon. The research focuses on challenges that arise during the translation process, aligning with translation methods namely: literal translation and free translation methods. Drawing on established translation theories and adapting them to the English-Mon context, this study will explore the types of problems Mon students encounter during translation. It will also investigate the strategies and techniques they used to overcome these challenges, considering the seven procedures proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995): borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation.

The significance of this study lies not only in its potential to enhance translation quality between English and Mon but also in its broader implications for preserving and promoting minority languages and cultures in an increasingly interconnected world. As

Duang-ta Suphol (1998) notes, translation problems can be broadly divided into three levels: cultural, language-structural, and semantic. Understanding these issues in the context of English-Mon translation is crucial for developing effective translation strategies.

Through a comprehensive analysis of translation problems and strategies, this research seeks to bridge the gap in existing literature and provide a foundation for future studies in English-Mon translation. The findings of this study will not only benefit Mon students and translators but also contribute to the wider discourse on translation challenges in minority languages, addressing the multiple causes of translation problems as identified by scholars in the field.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the translation problems of English into Mon.
2. To analyze the translation problems of English into Mon.
3. To find the solutions to translating problems from English into Mon.

Research Methodology

The study is a mixed methods approach, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from 34 Mon students at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. In-depth interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data analysis from 11 students. In this research, for quantitative analysis, statistics including Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation (S.D.) were used. Content analysis was used for analyzing qualitative data obtained from open-ended questions and interviews.

Scope of the Study

The research entitled "The Translation Problems of English into Mon: A Case Study of Mon Students at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University at Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya in Thailand" states the scopes of the study as follows:

This research examines the content of translation problems Mon students face when translating from English into Mon. The scope of the population will be shown at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University at Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya in Thailand, focusing on Mon students who utilize English to Mon translation. The number of populations for this research will be emphasized as Mon students.

Therefore, the 45 populations for the study; are Mon students at various levels of study, including both undergraduate and graduate students. The study area is located at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University at Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya in Thailand, where participants can be expressed as Mon and English speakers. This research was limited in the duration of time from August 2023 to August 2024.

Results of Study

The information of the respondents

The research questionnaires survey statements and open-ended questions involved 34 Mon students at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University in Thailand. Most students were male (73.5%) and aged 21-25 (35.3%). Half had completed Dhammadariya studies, while 41.2% came from high school. The majority were studying in the Faculty of Humanities (55.9%), with English (41.2%) and Buddhist Studies (35.3%) being the most common majors. All students were proficient in English and Mon, with many also understanding Burmese (88.2%). Regarding translation experience, 41.2% expressed interest but hadn't translated themselves, while 38.2% had occasionally translated when needed. Only 5.9% frequently engaged in translation work, and 14.7% had no translation experience at all.

Analysis of problems and solutions statements

This section presents an analysis of the problems and solutions statements in English to Mon translation, based on survey responses from Mon students at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. The survey consisted of ten statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The following table summarizes the mean scores and standard deviations for each item:

items	N	Mean	SD
The translation process from English to Mon often presents challenges related to linguistic nuances and cultural differences.	34	1.8824	.64030
Difficulties in finding the exact equivalents in the Mon language for specific English expressions or words are common in translation.	34	<u>1.9412</u>	.69375
The lack of appropriate reference materials or resources significantly hampers the translation process from English to Mon.	34	<u>1.9706</u>	.90404
Deep cultural knowledge of both English and Mon cultures is necessary for culturally appropriate translations.	34	<u>1.5882</u>	.65679
Advanced proficiency in both English and Mon language is crucial for accurate and high-quality translations.	34	<u>1.6176</u>	.88813
Collaborative discussions or consultations with domain experts help resolve translation challenges from English into Mon.	34	1.7941	.76986
Regular training and professional development programs contribute to enhancing translations skills and addressing common challenges in translating from English into Mon.	34	1.6765	.68404
Translators should prioritize conveying the author's original	34	1.6765	.72699

intent over making modifications for the Mon-speaking audience when translating from English into Mon.			
The availability of machine translation technology reduces the need for human translators when translating English into Mon.	34	<u>2.3529</u>	1.04105
Adequate feedback and revisions play a crucial role in refining and improving translations from English into Mon.	34	<u>1.6471</u>	.59708
Valid N (listwise)	34	Level: low	

The table shows that students strongly agree on the importance of deep cultural knowledge (Mean = 1.5882, SD = 0.65679) and advanced language proficiency (Mean = 1.6176, SD = 0.88813) for accurate and culturally appropriate translations. Students also recognized the crucial role of feedback and revisions in improving translations (Mean = 1.6471, SD = 0.59708). Key challenges identified included the lack of appropriate reference materials (Mean = 1.9706, SD = 0.90404) and difficulties in finding exact Mon equivalents for English expressions (Mean = 1.9412, SD = 0.69375). The opinions were more divided on the impact of machine translation technology (Mean = 2.3529, SD = 1.04105), suggesting a complex view of technology's role in the translation process

The findings emphasized the value of regular training programs (Mean = 1.6765, SD = 0.68404) and the importance of preserving the author's original intent in translations (Mean = 1.6765, SD = 0.72699). Linguistic nuances and cultural differences present challenges (Mean = 1.8824, SD = .64030) and collaboration including discussions with domain experts helps resolve translation problems (Mean = 1.7941, SD = .76986). Despite general agreement across most items, the study categorized all responses as having a "low" mean score. This classification shows the nuanced nature of students' perspectives on English to Mon translation problems and solutions.

Analysis of open-ended questions

This section presents findings from open-ended questions about English to Mon translation among Mon students at MCU. There are four questions including the role of translation in language learning, students' confidence in translation abilities, the importance of English to Mon translation in their community, and feedback on the study itself.

The majority of students (88%) believe translation plays a significant role in language learning, helping with understanding meaning, vocabulary, grammar, and cultural aspects. However, confidence in translation ability, 38% felt confident due to training and experience, while 32% lacked confidence, citing insufficient linguistic and translation knowledge. Translating English into Mon is considered crucial by 91% of students, seen as vital for preserving Mon language, and culture, and promoting education. However, 71% acknowledge it as a challenging task due to cultural differences, linguistic nuances, and the complexity of English.

The study shows several problems in English to Mon translation, including a lack of online resources in Mon, limited access to higher education, and the evolving nature of the Mon language. Despite these challenges, students express interest in further research on translation problems and solutions, recognizing it's possible to enhance communication and understanding within the Mon community.

Analysis translation test

The translation test involved 11 Mon students, translating a short story titled “The Narrative of a Millionaire and a Poor Man” into Mon. The test was administered starting from February 20, 2024, and students were given flexibility in terms of time and resources. The analysis of their translations is shown in the following table:

Translation strategies used by students		Frequency	%
Translation methods	Literal translation (method)	34	19.32%
	Free translation	10	5.68%
Translation techniques	Borrowing	28	15.91%
	Literal translation (technique)	43	24.43%
	Calque	8	4.55%
	Equivalence (reformulation)	38	21.59%
	Modulation	15	8.52%
Total		176	100%

The table shows a total of 176 translation strategies identified across all student translations. Literal translation methods were predominantly used by most students, accounting for (19.32%), while free translation methods were less commonly used by (5.68%) and several students combined literal and free translation approaches. Among the translation techniques, literal translation was most frequent (24.43%), followed closely by equivalence/reformulation (21.59%). Borrowing was also common (15.91%), while modulation (8.52%) and calque (4.55%) were used less frequently.

These findings suggest that students tend to follow closely to the source text when translating from English, often choosing word-for-word or direct/close translations. However, they also determine the ability to reformulate ideas, when necessary, as evidenced by the high usage of equivalence techniques. The significant use of borrowing indicates that students frequently encounter concepts or terms in English that may not have direct equivalents in Mon, requiring them to incorporate English terms into their Mon translations.

Analysis of interviews

This section presents an analysis of the interviews conducted with eleven M.A. students at MCU in Thailand. The interviews aimed to explore the problems these students

face when translating English texts into the Mon language, their strategies for overcoming these challenges, and their recommendations for improving the translation process. The participants, representing various academic years and faculties, provided valuable understandings of the workings of English to Mon translation.

The difficulty of the translation test

The difficulty of translation tests among students reflects their individual experiences and proficiency levels. Ven. Dhamapiya, said, "The story in the test was not very deep or difficult. The vocabulary used was also not too advanced." Similarly, Ven. Haricandana considered it easy due to its historical context. In contrast, Ven. Kheminda viewed it as moderately challenging, while Ven. Indavamsa probably the difficulty at "perhaps around 5% difficulty level," showing the range of perceptions among the students.

Key challenges in translation

The study identified several key challenges in the translation process. A primary issue was the lack of direct equivalents for certain English words or phrases in Mon. Mr. Paing Soe stated that there were some words like 'O fortunate one' and 'brother's share' that were challenging to accurately translate into Mon. structures and grammatical differences between English and Mon posed another challenge. Ven. Pandita said, "I think the main difficulty in translation is the difference in grammar between languages." Ven. Visarada further explained on this point, stating, "I found it challenging to determine which words or phrases should come first when building a Mon sentence because English and Mon sentence structures differ." Cultural nuances and contextual differences also presented difficulties. Ven. Htayrinda emphasized this, "A key difficulty is differences in cultural perspectives and contexts. For example, if the original work is from a country with very different cultural traditions than the Mon community, it can be challenging to translate accurately."

Strategies employed by students

To navigate these challenges, students employed a variety of innovative strategies. Ven. Acara focused on understanding the full context before translating, explaining, "When a direct word-for-word translation was not possible, I tried to utilize an understanding of the full context and meaning to paraphrase and rephrase the idea in natural Mon expressions." Ven. Pamojja said, "I used dictionaries to look up word meanings and sometimes Google Translate to get quick translations to build from." Ven. Mon A shin Pala Dhamma and Ven. Pandita also adopted a creative approach to untranslatable terms, sharing, "If I couldn't find an exact Mon equivalent... I would borrow the word's sound directly into the Mon writing system. Then I would provide an explanation in Mon (in brackets) to clarify the meaning." The importance of natural flow in translation was stated by

Ven. Indavamsa, said, "My main approach was to avoid directly adapting English prepositions into Mon, as that can make the text very difficult to read naturally."

Recommendations for improvement

The students offered possible recommendations for improving English to Mon translation. As Ven. Pandita said, "To be a successful translator, you must have equal expertise in both the source and target languages." Ven. Visarada stated the importance of continuous learning through extensive reading: "The more you read, the more vocabulary, word usages, and sentence structures you absorb." Ven. Dhamapiya recommended focusing on conveying true meaning rather than literal translation, and said, "Do not rely strictly on word-for-word or literal translations. Focus on grasping and conveying the true intended meaning and naturalness in the Mon language." Ven. Pala Dhamma recommended collaboration and formal training, suggesting "learning from and collaborating with experienced translators and pursuing formal training in translation methodologies."

This case study shows that while Mon students at MCU face various linguistic and cultural challenges in English to Mon translation, they used various and creative strategies to overcome these problems. The limited availability of comprehensive Mon language resources also mentioned, further compounds these challenges. Nevertheless, the students' perceptions and innovative approaches provide valuable direction for enhancing translation practices. Their experiences highlight the need for developing more comprehensive resources for Mon language learners and translators, as well as the importance of cultural competence alongside linguistic proficiency in the field of translation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study on translation problems English into Mon, from Mon students at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University identified four main Problems: linguistic problems, structural differences, cultural gaps, and limited resources. Students primarily used literal translation methods, along with techniques such as borrowing and equivalence. Key strategies included contextual understanding, use of dictionaries, and focusing on natural flow. The research emphasized the importance of cultural and linguistic proficiency in both languages for effective translation. Students underlined translation's significance in language learning and preserving Mon culture. The study shows a need for more comprehensive Mon language resources and formal translation training. These findings provide precious concepts for improving English to Mon translation practices and contribute to preserving and promoting the Mon language and culture in an increasingly globalized world.

Discussion

These findings are along the previously discussed general translation theories and suggest the essential descriptions of the specific challenges in the English into Mon

translation. The discussion by identify the key translation problems encountered by the students, which are categorized into four main areas as following:

7.1 Linguistic problems primarily the lack of direct equivalents for many English words and phrases in Mon, as a significant challenge. This concept of non-equivalence be explained by Mona Baker's (2018) at the word level. Students often used to borrowing or equivalence techniques to address this problems, showing the need for creative solutions when direct translations are not possible.

7.2 Structural problems: Structural differences between English and Mon presented another major problem. The predominant use of literal translation methods (19.32% for methods, 24.43% for techniques) suggests students struggle with adapting English sentence structures to Mon. This challenge highlights the importance of understanding not just vocabulary, but also the grammatical nuances of both languages.

7.3 Cultural problems: cultural gaps posed a third significant challenge, resonating with Newmark's (1988) highlighting of cultural differences in translation. Students faced the difficulty in translating concepts deeply rooted in one culture to another, particularly when dealing with texts from cultures very different from Mon. This challenge shows the need for translators to have a deep understanding of both source and target cultures.

7.4 Limited resources: the fourth main challenge is particularly relevant to Mon as a minority language. The lack of comprehensive dictionaries, grammar references, and other materials significantly hampers the translation process. This problem shows the broader challenges faced by minority languages in the context of globalization and the urgent need for resource development.

These four problems interchange in complex ways, often compounding the difficulties faced by translators. For instance, the lack of resources intensifies the problems posed by linguistic and cultural differences. The study's findings underline the need for a multifaceted approach to improving English to Mon translation, one that addresses not only linguistic skills but also cultural competence and resource development.

Suggestions

1. Develop comprehensive Mon language resources, including dictionaries and grammar guides, to address the challenge of limited resources.
2. Implement formal translation training programs focusing on both linguistic and cultural aspects to grab structural differences and cultural gaps.
3. Encourage collaborative translation projects involving experienced translators and language experts to address complex linguistic issues.
4. Promote extensive reading in both languages to enhance vocabulary and understanding of sentence structures.

5. Adopt a balance between preserving linguistic fidelity and ensuring natural expression in the target language.
6. Explore the potential of technology in translation while maintaining critical evaluation of its outputs.
7. Conduct further research on translation strategies specific to Mon and other minority languages to continually improve translation practices.

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