

The Role of AI Tools in Enhancing Translation Skills: A Case Study of Second-Year English Majors, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai Campus

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Abstract

This study examines the integration of AI translation tools in language learning, focusing on second-year English majors at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai Campus. Using a mixed-methods design with pretests, posttests, questionnaires, and interviews, the research examined both performance outcomes and student perceptions. Results indicate that AI tools enhanced basic accuracy and sentence meaning, particularly in technical and formal texts, while human translators remained superior in tasks requiring cultural awareness, idiomatic fluency, and contextual sensitivity. Students frequently struggled with grammar, tense usage, vocabulary gaps, and figurative language, often relying on borrowed foreign words rather than natural equivalents. To address these challenges, the study proposes a Human-in-the-Loop (HITL) approach in which AI drafts are refined through editing, peer review, and instructor guidance. This method fosters creative vocabulary use, contextual understanding, and cultural sensitivity, while reducing overreliance on machine outputs. Building on these findings, a New Body of Knowledge for AI-assisted translation education is introduced, combining traditional competencies, grammar mastery, vocabulary development, and cultural awareness with modern skills such as technological literacy, structured post-editing, and ethical responsibility. Collaborative learning is emphasized to strengthen student confidence and independence. The study concludes that translation education must evolve toward a hybrid model, ensuring learners achieve technical accuracy alongside cultural and ethical awareness. This balanced approach prepares future translators to meet global communication demands while preserving linguistic diversity and cultural richness.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, translation, English, Myanmar, hybrid approach

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) translation tools are widely used in language education, offering speed and convenience but often lacking cultural and emotional depth. For English majors at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai Campus, translation remains highly challenging. Students frequently struggle with grammar, vocabulary, and cultural meaning, often relying on direct word borrowing rather than natural expressions.

Previous studies have mainly examined the broad role of AI in translation education or its general impact on the translation industry (Oni, 2025). However, few studies have investigated how to effectively integrate AI tools with traditional teaching methods to build students' critical thinking and creativity while preventing technological over-reliance (Oni, 2025). Furthermore, limited research combines quantitative student performance data with qualitative insights to explore how a collaborative, Human-in-the-Loop approach relying on human feedback to correct AI errors in cultural and emotional nuances directly affects translation quality (Xie & Zhan, 2024; Wei, 2024).

Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by testing a Human-in-the-Loop (HITL) approach, where students edit AI-generated drafts with peer and teacher support. Using tests, surveys, and interviews, we measured both student progress and their attitudes toward the tool. The results show that while AI handles formal text well, human translators remain superior in tasks requiring cultural nuance and natural flow.

Based on these findings, we propose a new learning model that blends traditional translation skills (like grammar and culture) with digital skills (like post-editing and AI literacy). Ultimately, this study shows that AI should support, not replace, human translators, helping students work faster while maintaining creative and cultural accuracy.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the main challenges faced by second-year English majors in translating texts
2. To investigate the effectiveness of AI-based translation tool in enhancing students' translation skills in terms of accuracy, fluency, and contextual understanding
3. To explore suitable strategies and the role of AI technology in supporting students' translation skill development

Research Methodology

This research, entitled *Investigating Translation Challenges and the Role of AI Tools among Second-Year English Majors at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University*, adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine key issues in translation learning. It seeks to identify the specific difficulties students encounter when translating texts, assess the effectiveness of AI-based translation tools in enhancing accuracy, fluency, and contextual understanding, and explore how such technologies can be leveraged to strengthen students' overall translation skills.

Research Tools

The tools employed in this study were organized into three categories to ensure a comprehensive investigation. Treatment tools consisted of translation activity modules designed to engage students in practical translation tasks. Data collection tools included pre-tests and post-tests to measure translation performance over time. Perception tools comprised in-depth interviews and questionnaires, which provided insights into students' experiences and attitudes toward AI-assisted translation.

Population and Sample Design

The study's population includes 75 second-year students at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Chiang Mai Campus, during the 2025 academic year. From this group, 40 second-year English majors from Myanmar were chosen using purposive sampling. This method was used to pick the most dedicated students who give the best effort in their studies, ensuring reliable data. To add deeper insights, two English lecturers and five students were also chosen to share their feedback through interviews after the six weeks of translation practice.

Data Collection

To gather both statistical data and personal insights, five main data collection methods were used throughout the study, with the Gemini AI application selected as the sole tool due to its strong performance in Myanmar-to-English translation.

1. Pre-test: During the first week, students translated 15 sentences to establish baseline data on how they handle vocabulary gaps, idioms, and contextual meanings before using any AI tools.
2. Translation Assignments (Weeks 1–6): Each week, students completed tasks divided into two parts: a human translation done entirely without technology, and an AI-assisted translation using Gemini.
3. Post-test: In the sixth week, students retook the same 15-sentence test. Comparing these results against the pre-test measured their progress in handling meaning, idioms, and context.
4. Weekly Questionnaires: Throughout the six weeks, students answered six reflective questions every week to track their changing views, strategies, and experiences during the translation practice.
5. In-Depth Interviews: After the practical phase, interviews were conducted with two lecturers and five students to deeply explore their personal perceptions, challenges, and how they integrated AI tools into their learning.

Data Analysis

1. Frameworks and Performance Analysis
 - Error Analysis & Translation Effectiveness Frameworks: The Error Analysis Framework categorized and examined the specific types of mistakes students made in their translations. Alongside it, the Translation Effectiveness Framework evaluated the tool's impact on accuracy, fluency, and contextual understanding.
 - Pre-Test and Post-Test Analysis: A line-by-line review of the 15 test sentences tracked changes in student strategies and errors. SPSS software was then used to run statistical analyses on the test scores to measure quantitative progress.

2. Content Validity (IOC)

The translation modules were verified using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) index. Five experts reviewed the tasks to ensure they matched the learning goals, with scores between 0.60 and 1.00 accepted as valid.

3. Questionnaire Data Analysis

- Quantitative: Demographic data and closed-ended items (including a Likert-scale question) were analyzed using SPSS software to generate statistical summaries and find behavioral trends.

- Qualitative: Open-ended answers were grouped into themes to understand student challenges, strategies, and changing views on translation.

4. In-Depth Interview Analysis

- Transcription: Interview audio was transcribed word-for-word and anonymized to protect participant privacy.

- Thematic Analysis: Text was coded line-by-line to identify core themes, including the classroom impact of Gemini AI, student improvement, risks like over-reliance on technology, and teacher guidance strategies.

- Synthesis: The final findings were woven into a narrative report using direct quotes to provide real-world insights for future AI-supported language teaching.

Research Results

General Information

- The general information of respondents shows that 72.5% were female (n = 29) and 27.5% were male (n = 11). All participants were second-year undergraduate Myanmar students majoring in English at the Faculty of Humanities, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University.

Translation Challenges

- Students struggled with idioms, phrasal verbs, and proverbs, often defaulting to literal translation (e.g., *keep an eye*, *bite the bullet*, *blood is thicker than water*).

- Frequent lexical borrowing of terms like *manager*, *budget*, *campaign*, and *party* reduced fluency.

- Persistent grammar and tense errors, especially with modal verbs (*could not*) and past tense usage.

- Limited cultural adaptation, with words like *sugar* translated literally instead of contextually as “sweets.”

- Tone & emotion were difficult to capture, showing gaps in conveying writer intent and emotional resonance.

The Effectiveness of an AI-based Translation Tool

- AI consistently achieved high accuracy (often 100%), particularly in grammar and idioms.

- Translations were fluent but overly formal, sometimes losing headline urgency or natural tone.

- AI often borrowed terms directly, showing precision but reduced fluency.

- Overall, AI outperformed students in accuracy and contextual understanding, but required human post-editing for naturalness.

- Students and teachers noted that AI works best in a human-in-the-loop approach, where AI drafts and humans refine for cultural nuance, tone, and ethical fidelity

Strategies for Skill Development

- Emphasize idiom practice and figurative language training to avoid literal renderings.

- Expand lexical resources to reduce reliance on borrowing and improve fluency.

- Strengthen grammar drills for tense consistency and modal verb nuances.

- Encourage cultural sensitivity in translation choices (e.g., interpreting *sugar* broadly).

- Promote creativity in vocabulary, encouraging flexible word choice and paraphrasing.

- Improve contextual understanding, recognizing that meaning depends on tone, emotions, and cultural nuance.

- Prioritize naturalness & ethical fidelity, ensuring authenticity and accuracy.

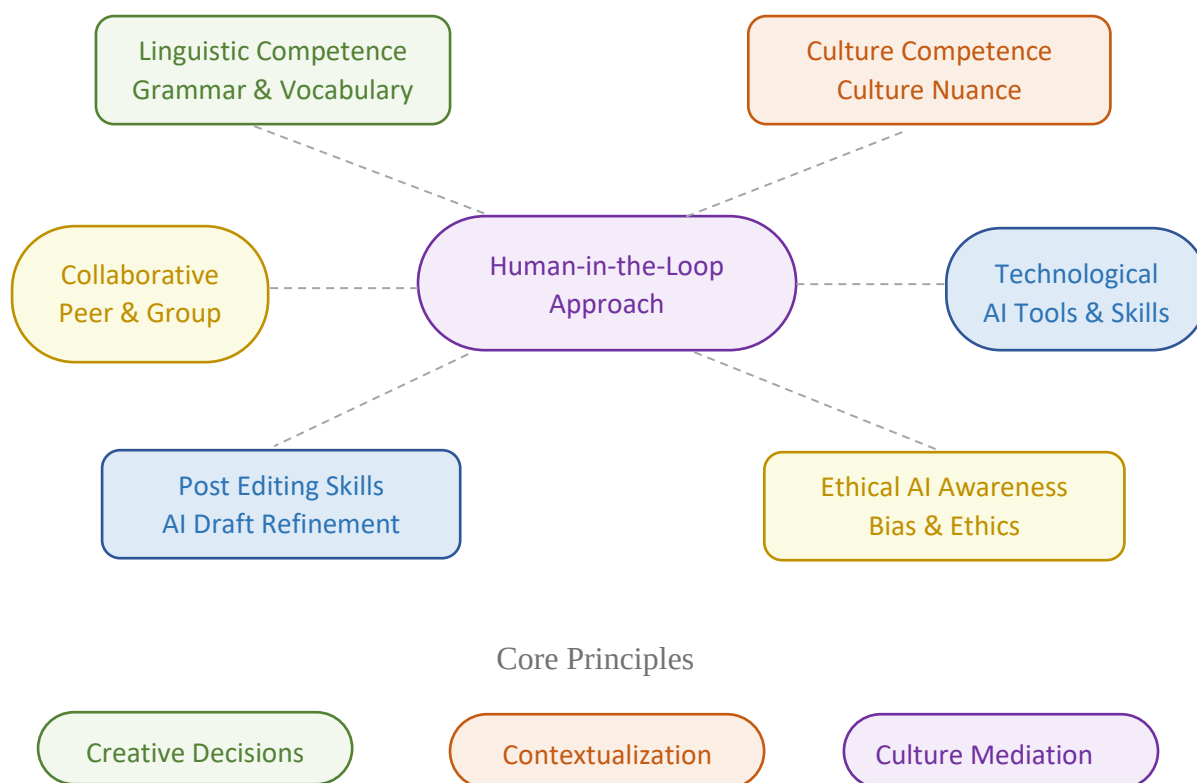
- Adopt a hybrid AI + human approach to balance speed, accuracy, and cultural nuance.

Human-in-the-Loop Approach

Student assignments in this study were designed using a Human-in-the-Loop (HITL) model, where AI served as a drafting tool and learners acted as critical editors and cultural mediators. The process followed a structured cycle: students first generated an AI draft, then annotated errors and alternatives, exchanged drafts for peer review, and finally received instructor synthesis of recurring issues. By embedding HITL strategies into assignments, students practiced creative decision-making, contextualization, and cultural mediation. This approach encouraged critical thinking, ethical responsibility, and balanced skill growth, ensuring that AI support enhanced learning without replacing human judgment.

New Body of Knowledge

The new body of knowledge developed in this study presents a balanced framework for AI-assisted translation education that combines traditional linguistic competence with modern technological skills. At the centre is the Human-in-the-Loop approach, where AI produces initial drafts, and students refine them through editing, peer review, and instructor guidance. This process strengthens accuracy and fluency while also encouraging creativity, contextual awareness, and cultural sensitivity. The framework emphasizes grammar mastery, vocabulary development, and the interpretation of figurative language, while also introducing technological literacy, structured post-editing, and ethical responsibility. Guiding this model are the core principles of creative decisions, contextualization, and cultural mediation, which train learners to evaluate AI outputs critically, correct mismatches, refine tone, and ensure cultural fidelity. Collaborative learning builds independence and confidence, and ethical awareness helps prevent overreliance on machine-generated texts. Ultimately, this body of knowledge positions translation education within a hybrid model that values human creativity alongside AI efficiency, preparing future translators to achieve technical precision with cultural and ethical responsibility in global communication.

Figure 1*New Body of Knowledge for AI-Assisted Translation Learning*

Discussion

The results of this study highlight both the progress and persistent challenges in translation learning with AI support. Pre-test and Post-test scores showed significant improvement (mean +0.55, $p < .001$), confirming that AI-assisted practice enhanced students' accuracy and grammatical control. Students became more confident in handling sentence meaning and basic structures, yet idioms, phrasal verbs, and cultural nuance remained problematic. For example, expressions like *bite the bullet* or *keep an eye* on were often mistranslated literally, and words such as *manager* and *budget* were borrowed rather than adapted.

Questionnaire findings reinforced these issues: 67.5% emphasized creativity in vocabulary, 60% highlighted contextual understanding, and 57.5% identified cultural nuance as a challenge. Students also noted difficulties in capturing tone (25%) and emotion (15%), showing that translation requires more than technical accuracy. Interviews revealed that learners valued AI for speed and precision but recognized its limitations in naturalness and cultural fidelity.

Importantly, the study confirmed that AI tools cannot replace human judgment in tasks requiring sensitivity to tone, ethics, and cultural meaning. The Human-in-the-Loop (HITL) approach emerged as a promising strategy: AI provides drafts, while students refine them through peer review and instructor feedback. This

process fostered creativity, independence, and ethical responsibility. Collaborative activities further strengthened error detection and contextual awareness, aligning with global trends that emphasize hybrid models combining human expertise with AI support.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that AI translation tools play a valuable role in language education, but their integration must be carefully balanced. AI proved effective in improving technical accuracy and efficiency, yet human translators remain essential for cultural nuance, idiomatic fluency, and natural expression. The findings underscore the importance of a hybrid model that combines grammar mastery, vocabulary development, and cultural sensitivity with technological literacy and structured post-editing.

At the centre of this model lies the HITL approach, ensuring students refine and contextualize AI drafts rather than depend on them passively. This balanced framework prepares learners to meet the demands of global communication while preserving linguistic diversity and cultural richness. More broadly, the study contributes to translation pedagogy by showing that AI should support, not replace, human translators. Education must evolve to cultivate both technological competence and human creativity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed for educators, institutions, and future researchers:

For Practical Implications:

Pedagogical integration: Incorporate AI tools into curricula as supportive aids, ensuring students develop both technical and creative skills.

Human-in-the-Loop practice: Train students to critically evaluate AI drafts, refine tone, and ensure cultural fidelity through structured post-editing.

Vocabulary development: Use targeted exercises to reduce reliance on lexical borrowing and expand natural equivalents.

Idioms & figurative language: Provide focused practice to improve sense-for-sense translation and avoid literal misinterpretations.

Cultural sensitivity: Emphasize contextual meaning, cultural nuance, and ethical responsibility in teaching strategies.

Collaborative learning: Expand peer review and group translation activities to build confidence and independence.

Ethical awareness: Guide students to recognize AI's limitations and avoid overreliance on machine-generated texts.

For Future Research:

Specialized domains: Investigate AI integration in medical, legal, and news translation.

Pedagogical models: Examine hybrid approaches across different cultural and educational contexts.

Ethics in AI translation: Study the long-term impacts of AI reliance on translator independence and creativity.

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