

Translation of Idioms in Children Literatures into Thai by Soommana Boonyarattawech

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Abstract

The objectives of this qualitative research are to study idioms classification in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* in *The Chronicles of Narnia* written by C.S. Lewis; and to analyze the techniques of translating English idioms into Thai in the Thai translation version by Soommana Boonyarattawech. According to the findings, there are 9 devices of idioms, as classified by Seidl and McMordie (1988), used. The techniques employed by the translator include free translation, equivalent translation, omission, and literal translation. It is also found that the technique most frequently used is the free translation, which is target-oriented, and the technique least frequently used is literal translation, which reflects differences between idioms used in both languages.

Keywords: translation, idioms, children literature, *The Chronicles of Narnia*

1. Introduction

Idioms used in literary works are quite important in creative writing. Idioms are considered as beauty of a language, and displays identities of meaning of word and culture of a nation. Meaning of each idiom cannot be exposed in each word of an idiom. Each idiom has unique meaning which is not derived from the meanings of every word in an idiom. Therefore, idioms are always used in literary works to imply some meanings, to spice language used, and to affect readers' emotion rather than direct narration.

When translating foreign idioms embedded with cultural and linguistic differences, translator might face many problems. It is because each society has its own language and culture which are difficult to understand for non-native. Thus studying idioms in any languages is significant for learners to understand way of thought, belief, and culture which are rooted in natives' minds. It corresponds with sociologists' approval for a long time that if a study of any nation will be conducted, collecting idioms word spoken by those people should be a part of studying too (Rattanakul, 1997).

Therefore, this thesis was conducted to study idioms, and idioms translation with an aim to gain knowledge and understanding of diverse languages and cultures from different countries. These are an important basis for translators who have to translate idioms from a language into another language with equivalent meanings.

2. Objectives of the Study

2.1 To collect and classify types of English idioms The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe and The Voyage of the Dawn Treader in The Chronicles of Narnia

2.2 To study translation strategies for conveying the meaning of English idioms into Thai

3. Methodology

This study is a qualitative research. The researcher studied types of English idioms appearing in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* written by C.S. Lewis. Afterward, the researcher studied the Thai versions of the two books translated by Soommana Boonyarattawech to analyze the translation strategies used for conveying the English idioms into Thai. The steps were as following:

3.1. Data Selection

The researcher chose children literatures for analyzing the translation strategies. The children literatures possess good qualities in terms of language used, entertainment, and virtue according to Intarakamhaeng (1974) who stated characteristics of qualified children literatures. The children literatures *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* reflect all the qualifications as following:

3.1.1. Qualified Language

The two children literatures have language simply, smoothly, and naturally used. The figurative language is clear and easy to understand. The idioms used are also suitable for young adults. In other words, the language is not too easy or too difficult to understand. Each character uses proper and suitable words in relation to each own status.

3.1.2. Entertainment Value

The story is categorized in fantasy and adventure. Therefore, it can satisfy the creative wants of children. On the other hand, the main characters in the books are in the same age of target readers and attract children to feel as they are those characters. There are settings which are unlike our world including talking beasts and fairy animals. There are many difficult situations which the main characters have to handle with as well. The story can catch the attention of the children to follow through. The story ends happily, while leaving the children feel happy as well.

3.1.3. Qualified Way of Thought

Because the two children literatures are in fantasy and imaginative category, readers attentively follow through the stories. Children will gain ability to concentrate and, it will help them to be ready to learn other new things. In addition, the ending of the two books' stories shows that righteousness can overcome badness by making efforts to get through difficulties. They teach virtue and refine children's mind to focus of righteousness and good deeds.

However, the children literatures "*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*" and "*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*" are only 2 among 7 books in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The researcher chose the two books from this series with consideration of popularity among readers. The popularity has been reflected through more frequent stories adaptation from the two books into play in many kinds of media than other books in the same series.

3.2. Data Studying

The researcher read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* in English version to understand the whole story and English idioms. Afterward, the researcher read the Thai version translated by Soommana Boonyarattawech to study the strategies used for conveying English idioms meanings into Thai version.

3.3. Studying Concepts and Theories for Analyzing

The researcher studied many scholars' concepts and theories involving idioms translation in children literatures. The concepts and theories employed include general translation theories, concept of children literatures, children literatures translation, meaning of idiom, idiom categories of Seidl and McMordie (1988), and idioms translation strategies. The researcher also reviewed a number of researches about translation, English idiom characteristics, and methods for conveying English idioms meaning to Thai language.

3.4. Data Collecting

The researcher read source texts in the two books, collected, categorized and compared all English idioms with the translated version. Then the researcher analyzed methods used by the translator for conveying English idioms meaning to Thai version.

3.5. Data Analysis

In this process, the study is divided into 2 parts; English idioms categorization, and analysis of idiom translation from English into Thai. The details are as following:

3.5.1. Analyzing idioms collected from the two books in order to categorize them according to Seidl and McMordie (1988) who categorized idioms by word usage in each one.

3.5.2. Analyzing idioms translation from English into Thai, detecting the translator's strategies, and analyzing cultural terms in each idiom.

4. Findings

4.1. Idiom Categories

According to Seidl and McMordie (1988), there are nine categories of idioms: (1) Key Words with Idiomatic Uses; (2) Idioms with Key Words from Special Categories; (3) Idioms from Special Subjects; (4) Idioms with Nouns and Adjectives; (5) Idiomatic Pairs; (6) Idioms with Prepositions; (7) Phrasal Verbs; (8) Verbal Idioms; and (9) Idioms with Comparisons. This research found that all the idioms used in the two English books could be categorized into the above-mentioned categories.

4.1.1. Key Words with Idiomatic Uses

'Key words,' here, describes adjectives and nouns which are parts of idioms. There are 40 idioms found in this category, such as 'to go bad,' and 'by the way.'

4.1.2. Idioms with Key Words from Special Categories

'Key words,' here, are nouns that are categorized into special groups, such as (1) Animals; (2) Colours; (3) Numbers; (4) Parts of the Body; and (5) Time, for example, 'chicken-hearted,' 'black and blue,' 'one by one,' 'to cry one's eyes out,' and 'from time to time.' There are 27 idioms found in this category.

4.1.3. Idioms from Special Subjects

‘Special subjects,’ here, relate to health and illness. There are only 2 idioms found in this category, which are ‘to catch a cold’ and ‘to drink one’s health.’

4.1.4. Idioms with Nouns and Adjectives

Idioms in this category are noun phrases and can be divided into two sub-categories, namely (1) Nouns Phrases; and (2) Adjective + Noun, for example, ‘a drug in the market,’ and ‘a broken man.’ There are 6 idioms found in this category.

4.1.5. Idiomatic Pairs

Idioms in this category can be divided into two sub-categories, namely (1) Pairs of Adverbs; and (2) Identical Pairs, for example, ‘now and then,’ and ‘on and on.’ There are 6 idioms found in this category.

4.1.6. Idioms with Prepositions

All idioms in this category are led by prepositions. There are 8 idioms found in this category, such as ‘at will,’ and ‘for a song.’

4.1.7. Phrasal Verbs

A phrasal verb is a kind of idiom. Each phrasal verb consists of a verb + preposition or adverb. The meaning of the combination may bear no relationship to the meaning of the individual words. There are 104 idioms found in this category, such as ‘to bring up,’ and ‘to find out.’

4.1.8. Verbal Idioms

A verbal idiom begins with a verb or the verb *to be* and is followed by an adverb or noun(s). The meaning of the combination also bears no relation to the meaning of the individual words. There are 45 idioms found in this category, for example, ‘to catch somebody napping,’ and ‘to turn tail.’

4.1.9. Idioms with Comparisons

Idioms in this category can be divided into two sub-categories, namely (1) Comparisons with *as...as*; and (2) Comparison with *like*. There are 6 idioms found in this category, for example, ‘as bold as brass,’ and ‘to talk like a book.’

4.2. Idioms Translation Strategies

The researcher studied idioms translation strategies in the children literatures *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* translated by Soommana Boonyarattawech, and found out that there are 4 strategies of idioms translation. I would like to present them consecutively according to the frequency of the translation strategies applied in the books.

4.2.1. Free Translation

This type of translation strategy requires a translator to interpret or clearly understand the meaning of each idiom at the first place. If the translator cannot find an equivalent idiom for a translated version, the translator would opt for the free translation strategy so that the readers can understand the meaning of idioms as much as possible. The free translation strategy includes interpreting, assuming, and adding more explanation due to context in the original text. Here is an example of this translation strategy:

Example 1 Idiom: **Talk the hind leg off a donkey**

But long before Eustace was tired of trying to explain, the slaver simply said, “Well, I’ve had enough of this jabber. The Mouse is a fair treat but this one would **talk the hind leg off a donkey**. Off we go, mates.”

ยุทธาสพชายามอธิบายยังไม่ทันเหนื่อย พ่อค้าทาสก็ขัดขึ้นกลางคันว่า “เอาละ ข้าฟังแกพล่ามมา มากพอแล้ว ไ้หนูตัวนี้สิเข้าทำดี ส่วนไ้หนู**พูดเพื่อจ้อ** พวกเราไปกันได้แล้ว”

The idiom “to talk the hind leg off a donkey” means to talk incessantly (Siefring, 2004, p.286). The translator uses Thai word “พูดเพื่อจ้อ”, which literally means to talk nonsense.

The term is used by the translator due to the conclusion from the context. However, using the Thai word to display the meaning of the English idiom doesn’t give readers a flavor of language as played in the original text. There are some Thai idioms with the equivalent meaning. For example, they are “พูดเป็นต๋อยหอย” (to talk like hitting clam shells), or “พูดคล่องเป็นล่องน้ำ” (to talk like water flows), etc.

4.2.2. Equivalent Translation

If meaning of an English idiom is as same as a meaning of a Thai idiom, the translator will use Thai idiom to express the meaning of the English idiom. This strategy is called equivalent translation. Here is an example:

Example 2 Idiom: **Chicken-hearted**

“... Your Majesty must work by a show of more power than you really have, and by the terror of the King’s name. It must not come to plain battle. Gumpas is a **chicken-hearted** man and can be overawed.”

“... ฝ่าบาทต้องใช้วิธีแสดงแสนยานุภาพให้มากกว่าที่ทรงมีอยู่ รวมทั้งบารมีแห่งพระนามของฝ่าบาทเอง ต้องไม่มีการลงมือต่อสู้กันอย่างเด็ดขาด พระเจ้าค่ะ กัมปัสเป็นคนขลาดใจปลาชิวอยู่แล้ว จะชู่ให้กลัวได้ง่าย”

The idiom “chicken-hearted” means timid, lacking courage; which has the same meaning of a Thai idiom “ใจปลาชิว” (Siv fish’s heart), Siv is a name of a small fish which is vulnerable and easy to die if being taken out of water. Therefore, Thai people compare a Siv fish to a coward person. The original version compares a heart of a coward person to a heart of a chicken, because a baby chicken is a coward animal, and easy to be frightened. When it hears noise or be in a least danger, it will run back to its mother to hide. Thus, westerners compare the nature of baby chicken to coward or alarmed person. This example displays an equivalent translation strategy. Although the meanings of individual words in both English and Thai idioms are different because English idiom talks about a chicken heart and Thai idiom talks about a Siv fish’s heart, the true meanings of idioms in both languages are the same.

4.2.3. Omission

This strategy is a way the translator omits or does not translate idioms in the original texts. According to Baker (2005), a translator can avoid translating an idiom appearing in original version if its meaning is verbose for a translated sentence, or a translator cannot find an equivalent word or idiom. Here is an example of this translation strategy:

Example 3 Idiom: **Every mother’s son**

“What I say,” continued the first voice, “is, get down to the shore between them and their boat, and let **every mother’s son** look to his weapons. Catch’em when they try to put to sea.”

“ที่ข้าจะบอกให้ทำ” เสียงแรกพูดต่อ “ก็คือ---ลงไปที่หาดทราย ระหว่างพวกมันกับเรือรบของพวกมัน แล้วเตรียมอาวุธให้พร้อม จับพวกมันขณะกำลังจะนำเรือรบตอก”

The idiom “every mother’s son” means everyone (Longman Dictionary of English Idioms, 1984, p. 306). In this situation, the leader of Duffers is telling his followers to prepare themselves to catch the group of King Caspian while the group is about to get on a boat. The idiom “every mother’s son” said by the leader to his followers. He is ordering all his followers to prepare their weapons to confront with the group of King Caspian. In the translated version, the translator did not keep the meaning of this idiom. The sentence in this example is a command. Therefore, it is assumed that the word referring to the command receivers is not necessary. The context in this situation also tells readers whom the speaker talks to, so the translator chose to use this translation strategy.

4.2.4. Literal Translation

This strategy is a way a translator keeps every meaning of words in an idiom, and lets readers interpret the hidden meaning of the idiom. Here is an example of this translation strategy:

Example 4 Idiom: **Be on the tip of one’s tongue**

The Duffers were also very pleased with their new name of Monopods, which seemed to them a magnificent name though they never got it right. “That’s what we are,” they bellowed, “Moneypuds, Pomonods, Poddymons. Just what it **was on the tips of our tongues** to call ourselves.”

พวกคัฟเฟอร์ยังพอใจชื่อใหม่ของตนที่เรียก ‘โมนโนพ็อด’ อีกด้วย สำหรับพวกนี้แล้ว ดูหุหุหุหุที่เดียว แม้จะเรียกไม่เคยถูกสักที “พวกเรานะ เรียกว่ายังงี้---” พวกเขาตะโกนบอกแก่กัน “มันนี่พัด---โพโมน็อด---พ็อดคีม่อน---มันอยู่ตรงปลายลิ้นนี่เองนะ ชื่อเรียกพวกเรานี้”

The idiom “be on the tips of one’s tongue” means be on the point of remembering or recalling something but not able to do so (Seidl & McMordie, 1988, p.230). The

translator keeps the literal meaning of the idiom in the translated version and displays it as this phrase: “อยู่ตรงปลายลิ้น”. However, there is also another Thai idiom having the same meaning like the English idiom. It is “ติดอยู่ที่ริมฝีปาก” (be stuck on one’s lips). The translator chose to use literal translation instead of equivalent translation. It is assumed that the translator thinks that the readers can understand the meaning of the translated idiom because there is the word “tongue” which is an organ to speak as same as the word “lips” in the Thai idiom which refers to an organ for speaking as well.

4.3. *Table of Frequency of Strategies Used for Translating English into Thai*

The researcher collected all idioms appearing in the original versions. It was found that there are 259 idioms in total. They are used in the books for 585 times in frequency. The translator used many idioms translation strategies for the Thai versions. The researcher will display the frequency of the translation strategies from the most to the least frequency.

Translation Strategies	Frequency (Times)	Percent
Free translation	489	83.59
Equivalent translation	38	06.50
Omission	38	06.50
Literal Translation	20	03.42
Total	585	100

5. Conclusion

There are 259 English idioms in the children literatures *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* in total appeared for 585 times. In the translated versions, the translator used free translation strategy the most, 489 times in frequency or 83.59 %. This strategy was applied by the translator when trying to simplify the meanings of idioms. The translator presented them in summary or gave more

explanation due to contexts. The translation strategy which has less frequency is equivalent translation. It was used for 38 times, or 06.50 %. For this strategy, the translator had to understand the meanings of English idioms very well before comparing them to Thai idioms and choosing the equivalent idioms in the translated versions. The equivalent idioms might have the same meanings of individual vocabularies as in English idioms or might not. The other strategy which has equal frequency as the equivalent translation is omission. It was used for 38 times, or 06.50 %. The translator used this strategy when there was no equivalent word in Thai or the meaning of English idiom would make the Thai versions too long. The last strategy is literal translation which was used the least, 20 times in frequency, or 03.42%. The strategy kept direct meanings of individual words in an idiom. However, the difference between English and Thai languages shows that there are not many opportunities to have the same words usage in an idiom and express the same meaning. Therefore, this strategy is occurred for the least frequency.

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