

# English into Thai Translation Errors of English Prepositions and Prepositional Phrases of Thai Undergraduates

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## Abstract

This study aimed to examine English into Thai translation errors of English prepositions and prepositional phrases of Thai undergraduates. The participants were 10 students who were studying in Department of English as an international Communication, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rajamangala University of Technology Tawan-ok, Bangpra Campus. They were asked to translate the 30-item translation task involving six types of English prepositions and prepositional phrases: preposition for time, preposition for place, preposition for direction, preposition for agent, preposition for instrument, and prepositional phrase. The result revealed that the participants encountered the problem when they translated preposition for time and prepositional phrase whereas they are able to translate preposition for place, preposition for direction, preposition for agent, and preposition for instrument. The result required further study to investigate the factors affecting English into Thai translation abilities of English prepositions and prepositional phrases and the improvement of equivalence between English sourced text and Thai translated texts.

**Keywords:** English into Thai Translation, English Prepositions, Prepositional Phrases

## 1. Introduction

Prepositions and preposition phrases play significant roles in translation since they influence the meaning of both source and target texts as well as the equivalence of the translation quality. Prepositions and preposition phrases can be difficult for the L2 and EFL students (Abdulhay, 2012; Nuryanfar, 2014). They have to determine and select the appropriate and equal vocabulary representing the equivalent meaning between first language (L1) and second language (L2) (Chung-ling, 2012; Yaari, 2013). Six types of English prepositions and preposition phrases have been employed in general in order to convey the meaning. Each of them functions differently as follows:

Preposition for Time	Indicate or specify time (day, month, year, specific time) such as in January, in 2015, on Monday, at 7 O'clock, at noon, etc.
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*Sample sentence:*

Meet me at ten.

The class will be cancelled on Tuesday.

Preposition for Place	Use for specify the different places, indicate a physical or virtual boundary or different places <i>Sample sentence:</i> Writing <u>on</u> the wall. Her house is <u>at</u> the end of the street.
Preposition for Direction	Point the direction or describe the way the action or agent is committed. <i>Sample sentence:</i> She jumped <u>into</u> the river. She walked <u>along</u> the street.
Preposition for Agent	Use for agent of the sentence <i>Sample sentence:</i> This book is written <u>by</u> her.
Preposition for instrument	Indicate or describe devices, instruments or machines <i>Sample sentence:</i> She was travelling <u>by</u> car.
Prepositional Phrase	A combination of a verb and a preposition. The meaning is normally changed from the former meaning of verbs and preposition attached. <i>Sample sentence:</i> <u>Come on!</u> We are late now! I <u>give up</u> doing it.

In order to be a proficiently translator, students are required to develop their translation competency which is, according to Göpferich (2009), the content should use grammatical and communicative, concern extra-linguistic reality in both L1 and L2. Prepositions and prepositional phrases in English and Thai employ different collocations and some English prepositions do not have equivalents in Thai (Defense Language Institute, 1974); therefore Thai students may experience difficulties in translating English into Thai, regarding the differences between these two languages. Thus, this study attempted to examine the ability in translating English prepositions and prepositional phrases into Thai, based on the following research question.

How do Thai undergraduates translate six types of English prepositions and prepositional phrases: preposition for time, preposition for place, preposition for direction, preposition for agent, preposition for instrument, and prepositional phrase?

## 2. Research Methodology

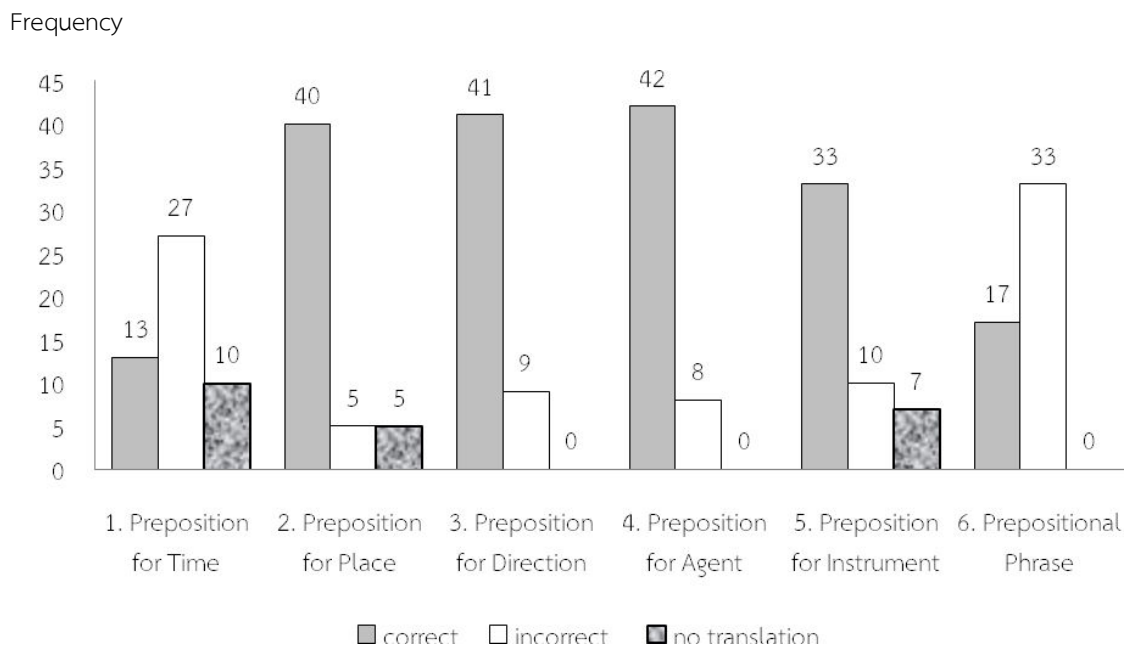
The participants of this study were a group of students who enrolled in Introduction to Translation in the first semester of the Academic Year 2014. They were ten Thai undergraduate students from Department of English as an international Communication, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rajamangala University of Technology Tawan-ok, Bangpra Campus. They were 1 males and 9 females. Considering the results from the screening test required at the beginning of the semester, they all had English proficiency at the lower intermediate level. The instrument employed was in form of 30-item translation tasks, without a permission of dictionary use. Given 60 minutes, the participants were asked to read the given statements and translated them into Thai in the provided space according to the assigned numbers. Then, the tasks were collected and the excerpts of correct, incorrect and no translation categories were categorized, using error analysis. In addition, the English into Thai translated statements were quantitatively analyzed the results in terms of correct, incorrect, and no translation using IBM SPSS Statistics.

## 3. Results

As shown in Table 2, the participants demonstrated their translation of English prepositions and prepositional phrases across six prepositional categories. The result can be classified into three categories: correct translation (CT) (the participants correctly translated the given statement and matched with the expected Thai translation.), incorrect translation (IT) (the participants incorrectly translated the given statement and mismatched with the expected Thai translation.), and no translation (NT) (the participants omitted the preposition in Thai version.). Overall, the participants correctly translated English prepositions and prepositional phrases (n = 186), incorrectly translated English prepositions and prepositional phrases (n = 92), and did no translation for English prepositions and prepositional phrases (n = 22). Differentiated by the prepositional categories, the participants translate preposition for time (13 CT, 27 IT, and 10 NT), preposition for place (40 CT, 5 IT, and 5 NT), preposition for direction (41 CT, 9 IT, and 0 NT), preposition for agent (42 CT, 8 IT, and 0 NT), preposition for instrument (33 CT, 10 IT, and 7 NT), and prepositional phrase (17 CT, 33 IT, and 0 NT).

**Table 1: Participants' translation of preposition**

Prepositions	Correct translation		Incorrect translation		No translation	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Preposition for Time	13	6.99	27	29.35	10	45.45
2. Preposition for Place	40	21.51	5	5.43	5	22.73
3. Preposition for Direction	41	22.04	9	9.78	0	0.00
4. Preposition for Agent	42	22.58	8	8.70	0	0.00
5. Preposition for Instrument	33	17.74	10	10.87	7	31.82
6. Prepositional Phrase	17	9.14	33	35.87	0	0.00
Total	186	100.00	92	100.00	22	100.00



**Figure 1: Comparisons of the correct, incorrect, and no translations of English prepositions and prepositional phrases produced by the participants**

According to Figure 1, the graph compares the frequency of the correct, incorrect, and no translations of English prepositions and prepositional phrases produced by the participants. As shown in the graph, the numbers of correct translation in preposition for place, preposition for direction, preposition for agent, and preposition for instrument are higher than the numbers of incorrect translation. Only two categories that have been reported the outwitted numbers of incorrect translation over correct translation are preposition for time and prepositional phrase. Also, it can be clearly seen that there is no ‘no translation’ category found in preposition for direction, preposition for agent, and prepositional phrase. Considering the ‘correct translation’ category, the participants can translate English prepositions and prepositional phrases rank from the lowest to the highest frequency as follows: preposition for time, prepositional phrase, preposition for instruments, preposition for place, preposition for direction, and preposition for agent, respectively. Regarding the ‘incorrect translation’, the result can be ranked from the lowest to the highest frequency as follows: preposition for place, preposition for agent, preposition for direction, preposition for instruments, preposition for time, and prepositional phrase, respectively.

Furthermore, each translated excerpts reflected the errors of English into Thai translation of English prepositions and prepositional phrase as follows.

**1. Preposition for Time**

The participants confused between collocations of Thai and English prepositions for time. In Thai, collocation for time nature of day is ‘in’ while English is ‘on’. So, the participants were found

to produce the Thai sentence using ‘ที่ (at)’ or omitted the translation of English prepositions for time as shown in Excerpt 1 and 2.

#### Excerpt 1

Statement

Our trip will be on Sunday.

Expected English into Thai translation

เราจะไปเที่ยวกันในวันอาทิตย์นี้ (Our trip will be in Sunday.)

Error(s) produced by the participants

*Incorrect translation*

เราจะไปที่วันอาทิตย์ (Our trip will be at Sunday.)

*No translation*

ทริปของเราจะไปวันอาทิตย์ (Our trip will be ... Sunday.)

เราไปเที่ยววันอาทิตย์ (Our trip will be ... Sunday.)

#### Excerpt 2

Statement

Christmas is celebrated on 25<sup>th</sup> of December.

Expected English into Thai translation

เราฉลองวันคริสมาสต์ในวันที่ 25 ธันวาคม (We celebrate Christmas in 25<sup>th</sup> ... December.)

Error(s) produced by the participants

*Incorrect translation*

คริสมาสต์ได้รับการฉลองเมื่อวันที่ 25 ธันวาคม (Christmas is celebrated when 25<sup>th</sup> of December.)

*No translation*

คนฉลองคริสมาสต์วันที่ 25 ธันวาคม (Christmas is celebrated ... 25<sup>th</sup> of December.)

In excerpt 3, it is presented that the participants directly translated the word ‘at’ into Thai word ‘ที่’; however, the Thai word ‘ที่’ is used with a specification of space. Also, some participant chose to avoid translating the preposition for time.

#### Excerpt 3

Statement

I will call you at 10.

Expected English into Thai translation

ฉันจะโทรหาคุณตอน 10 โมง (I will call you at 10.)

Error(s) produced by the participants

*Incorrect translation*

ฉันจะโทรหาคุณที่ 10 โมง (I will call you at 10.)

*No translation*

10 โมง ฉันจะโทรหา (10, I will call you.)

## 2. Preposition for Place

According to the excerpts, it can be seen that the participants did not only deal with the collocations of preposition in Thai, but also the differences between English and Thai sentence structures. For example, the sentence ‘I tuck my son into bed.’ has to be translated as ‘I take my son to bed and cover blanket for him.’ to make a meaningful sentence. However, the participants tried to translate the sentence using the meaning from dictionary so that the Thai sentence is not equivalent to English sentence.

Excerpt 4	
Statement	I tuck my son <u>into</u> bed.
Expected English into Thai translation	ผมส่งลูกชายเข้านอนแล้วห่มผ้าให้เขา (I take my son to bed and cover blanket for him.)
Error(s) produced by the participants	
<i>Incorrect translation</i>	ฉันยัดลูกชายเข้าไปในเตียงนอน (I tuck my son <u>inside</u> the bed.) ฉันจับลูกชายใส่ไปในเตียง (I tuck my son <u>inside</u> the bed.)
<i>No translation</i>	ฉันพาลูกชายไปนอนเตียง (I take my son <u>to</u> ... the bed.)

Excerpt 5 – 6 presented the different use of vocabulary of English and Thai preposition. In context of boxing, Thai collocation employs ‘on’ while English uses ‘in’. Therefore, the participants translated English preposition ‘in’ in the sentence “Two fighters are in the ring.” as ‘ใน (in), which is incorrect.

Excerpt 5	
Statement	Two fighters are in the ring.
Expected English into Thai translation	นักสู้สองคนอยู่ <u>บน</u> สังเวียน (Two fighters are <u>on</u> the ring.)
Error(s) produced by the participants	
<i>Incorrect translation</i>	นักมวยสองคนอยู่ในเวทีมวย (Two fighters are in the ring.) นักมวยทั้งสองอยู่ที่สนามมวย (Two fighters are at the ring.)
<i>No translation</i>	พวกนักมวยสองคนอยู่เวทีมวย (Two fighters are ... the ring.)

Vice versa, in the context of football field, Thai collocation employs ‘in’ while English uses ‘on’. So, the participants mistakenly translated the English preposition ‘on’ as ‘บน (on)’. (See Excerpt 6)

Excerpt 6	
Statement	The football players were <u>on</u> the soccer field.
Expected English into Thai translation	นักฟุตบอลอยู่ในสนาม (The football players were in the soccer field.)
Error(s) produced by the participants	
<i>Incorrect translation</i>	นักบอลวิ่งบนสนาม (The football players were <u>on</u> the soccer field.)

### 3. Preposition for Direction

‘To’ can be translated into various Thai words. The participants showed their confusions in Thai word choices of ‘to’ as shown in Excerpt 7 – 8.

## Excerpt 7

Statement

The stage manager shouted to the heroine.

Expected English into Thai translation

ผู้จัดการเวทีตะโกนใส่นักแสดงหญิง (The stage manager shouted ... the heroine.)

Error(s) produced by the participants

*Incorrect translation*ผู้จัดการเวทีตะโกนไปที่ดารานักแสดงหญิง (The stage manager shouted to the heroine.)ผู้จัดการเวทีตะโกนไปยังดารานักแสดงหญิง (The stage manager shouted to the heroine.)

## Excerpt 8

Statement

She arrived at the hotel.

Expected English into Thai translation

เธอมาถึงโรงแรมแล้ว (She arrived ... the hotel.)

Error(s) produced by the participants

*Incorrect translation*เธอมาถึงที่โรงแรม (She arrived at the hotel.)เธอมาอยู่โรงแรมแล้ว (She arrived at the hotel.)**4. Preposition for Agent**

It is noticeable that the participants had the highest frequency of correct translation in this category. It may be a result of the similar structure between English and Thai preposition for agent. However, the participants still demonstrated the difficulties in Thai word choices as presented in Excerpt 9 – 10.

## Excerpt 9

Statement

I am upset with the way some people behave.

Expected English into Thai translation

ฉันไม่ชอบอารมณ์กับวิถีปฏิบัติของคนบางจำพวก (I am upset with the way some people behave.)

Error(s) produced by the participants

*Incorrect translation*ฉันอารมณ์เสียในเรื่องทางของคนบางคน (I am upset in the way some people behave.)

## Excerpt 10

Statement

The pond is filled with water.

Expected English into Thai translation

มีน้ำเต็มบ่อ (There is water full the pond.)

Error(s) produced by the participants

*Incorrect translation*บ่อน้ำมีน้ำใสในกับบ่อ (The pond is filled with water.)

น้ำใสในบ่อน้ำ (Water filled in the pond.)

## 5. Preposition for Instrument

The preposition for instruments was found to be difficult for the participants, especially the sentence 'Please leave message at the tone.' for the participants did not familiar with leaving message at the telephone so that they did not have Thai collocation for this situation as shown in Excerpt 11.

Excerpt 11

Statement

Please leave message at the tone.

Expected English into Thai translation

กรุณาฝากข้อความหลังสัญญาณเสียง (Please leave message after the tone.)

Error(s) produced by the participants

*Incorrect translation*

กรุณาทิ้งข้อความที่เสียงเรียกเข้า (Please leave message at the tone.)

กรุณาฝากข้อความที่เสียง (Please leave message at the tone.)

*No translation*

กรุณาฝากข้อความเสียง (Please leave message ... the tone.)

The rest of preposition for instruments were not found to be collocation problem, but a word choice as presented in Excerpt 12.

Excerpt 12

Statement

I come here by motorbike.

Expected English into Thai translation

ฉันขี่รถจักรยานยนต์มาที่นี่ (I ride the motorbike to here.)

Error(s) produced by the participants

*Incorrect translation*

ฉันมาที่นี่โดยมากับรถจักรยานยนต์ (I come here by coming with motorbike.)

ฉันมาโดยรถมอเตอร์ไซด์ (I come by motorbike.)

*No translation*

ฉันใช้รถจักรยานยนต์มาที่นี่ (I use motorbike to here.)

## 6. Prepositional Phrase

This category is found to be the second problematic for the participants. Even though the participants were aware of the linguistic feature of prepositional phrases, they encountered the interpretation of the meaning of that prepositional phrase and the selection of word choices as shown in Excerpt 13 - 17.

Excerpt 13

Statement

I asked around but nobody has seen my book.

Expected English into Thai translation

ฉันเที่ยวไล่ถามคนโน้นคนนี้ แต่ไม่มีใครเห็นหนังสือฉันเลย (I asked many people about my book, but nobody has seen it.)



Error(s) produced by the participants <i>Incorrect translation</i>	ฉันถามไปรอบ ๆ แต่ไม่มีใครเห็นหนังสือของฉัน (I <u>asked</u> around but nobody has seen my book.)
Excerpt 14	
Statement	Vivian <u>called on</u> you last night.
Expected English into Thai translation	วิเวียนไปหาคุณเมื่อคืนนี้ (Vivian <u>visited</u> you last night.)
Error(s) produced by the participants <i>Incorrect translation</i>	วิเวียนโทรไปหาคุณคืนก่อน (Vivian <u>called</u> you last night.) วิเวียนร้องเรียกคุณคืนก่อน (Vivian <u>called</u> you last night.) วิเวียนขอให้คุณช่วยเมื่อคืนก่อน (Vivian <u>asked</u> you for help last night.)
Excerpt 15	
Statement	She <u>got away</u> for a week.
Expected English into Thai translation	เธอไปเที่ยวเป็นเวลาหนึ่งสัปดาห์ (She <u>went on a vacation</u> for a week.)
Error(s) produced by the participants <i>Incorrect translation</i>	เธอหนีไปหนึ่งสัปดาห์ สัปดาห์ (She <u>fled away</u> for a week.) เธอได้ออกไปหนึ่งสัปดาห์ (She <u>went away</u> for a week.)
Excerpt 16	
Statement	Mary has <u>kept</u> her best friend <u>from</u> her parents for nearly two years.
Expected English into Thai translation	แมรีปิดเรื่องเพื่อนสนิทไม่ให้พ่อแม่รู้ อยู่เกือบสองปี (Mary has <u>not told</u> her parents about her best friend for nearly two years.)
Error(s) produced by the participants <i>Incorrect translation</i>	แมรีป้องกันเพื่อนที่ดีที่สุดเธอจากพ่อแม่เกือบสองปี (Mary has <u>protected</u> her best friend <u>from</u> her parents for nearly two years.) แมรีเก็บเพื่อนสนิทเธอให้พ้นจากพ่อแม่เกือบสองปี (Mary has <u>preserved</u> her best friend <u>from</u> her parents for nearly two years.) แมรีดูแลเพื่อนเธออย่างดีที่สุดเกือบสองปีไม่ต่างจากพ่อแม่ (Mary has <u>taken the best care</u> of her friend, not different from her parents for nearly two years.)

## Excerpt 17

Statement

Jerry passed away last month.

Expected English into Thai translation

เจอรี่ตายเมื่อเดือนก่อน (Jerry died last month.)

Error(s) produced by the participants

*Incorrect translation*เจอรี่เดินผ่านไปเดือนก่อน (Jerry walked pass through last month.)เจอรี่หมกมุ่นเห็นห่างไปเมื่อเดือนก่อน (Jerry quarantined himself last month.)เจอรี่สอบผ่านเมื่อเดือนที่แล้ว (Jerry passed the test last month.)เจอรี่เปลี่ยนไปมาก ต่างจากเดือนก่อน (Jerry had changed. He was different last month.)เจอรี่ก้าวข้ามไปไกลแล้วจากเดือนที่แล้ว (Jerry stepped across from last month.)

#### 4. Conclusion

The result revealed the participants' ability in translating English prepositions and prepositional phrases of Thai undergraduates that they still encountered the difficulties as a result from the differences between source and target text, background and cultural knowledge of the topics involved in the text, and their inadequacy of English and Thai proficiency. Also, they should have been enhanced their sense of language use, lexical banks in both Thai and English in order to improve their ability in English into Thai translation. As many errors were caused from the non-equivalents between Thai and English, the future study should be included the aspects of contrastive analysis or interlanguage in order to investigate the effects of translator's interpretation of sentence's meaning based on his or her linguistic knowledge.

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