

German Language Education in the Thai Context: Teaching and Translating Idioms for *Thai into German* Translation based on English Language Perspectives

Wassamill Watcharakaweelap

Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand

wassamill@gmail.com

Abstract - The main purpose of this study is to cast light on the concept of how German (L3) can be compared with English (L2) when teaching translation in the context of non-native speakers in South East Asia. In this regard, the following aspects should be considered: 1) What do German teachers have to take into account when designing translation activities in German class based on the language perspectives of English?; 2) What kind of effective *Teaching Materials and Tasks* can be employed based on the efficient language teaching performance?; and 3) What practical recommendations can be provided to FL teachers concerning effective language pedagogy?

Keywords - Translation, Idioms, L2, L3

I. INTRODUCTION

WHY teaching and translating idioms for Thai into German translation based on English language perspectives? English can be understood as the Global language widely used around the globe. In Thailand and in other countries in South East Asia, English is taught as a Foreign Language (L2). This means that English learners in many countries of South East Asia are not in the L2-medium environment. To enhance the English proficiency of students, Khon Kaen University in Thailand has launched the new policy in terms of using English as a means of instruction. This means that some courses taught in English should be offered to students to prepare themselves for workplace. To reinforce this notion and to support the policy, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences as one of the organizations attached to Khon Kaen University also plans to organize a training course for the lecturers to provide insight into the concept of English-medium teaching and how to design a course when being taught in English. Inevitably, the lecturers of the Language Programs (French, German, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean) are expected to provide some courses taught in English to foster the ability of students as well as to develop the competence of students to their fullest potential to enable them to compete with graduates from other countries in the ASEAN and ASEAN Economics Community.

The researcher as a German lecturer has considered the situation of the job search process in Thailand that graduates who majored in German language have to encounter the requirements in the job announcements that they have to possess good command of both English and German. Without English proficiency, the recruiter may not offer a job to them. However, German can be advantageous for their success in terms of job application. In other words, these two languages can complement and complete each other to lead graduates to succeed in their future career.

Hence, this pilot study was conducted to 1) Cast light on and pilot the new teaching approach for the foreign languages in the context of non-native speakers; 2) Suggest the optional methods of language teaching for those concerning Foreign Language Teaching; 3) Provide the basis knowledge of an application of Teaching L3 through L2 as well as pedagogical implications and recommendation for further studies for those interested in this area of study.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

1. Previous Studies on Idioms in the German Context

According to Talašová (2010), the roles of idioms for translation are as follows:

Das Problem beim Übersetzen der Phraseologismen beruht auf Kultur- und Sprachunterschieden. Jede Kultur hat sich anders entwickelt, ist durch verschiedene Phasen durchgegangen, und das alles spiegelt sich in ihrer Phraseologie wider. Das erklärt auch das Phänomen, dass verwandte Kulturen viele gemeinsame Phraseme haben. Die Phraseologismen bezeichnen die Komplexität und Undurchsichtigkeit und sie werden als spezifische sprachliche Einheiten gekennzeichnet. Diese Eigenarten haben bewirkt, dass in der Vergangenheit einerseits die Unmöglichkeit der Übersetzung betont wurde und andererseits wurde pointiert, dass für die Übersetzung der Phraseologismen äquivalent in der Zielsprache

nur die Phraseologismen sind. (Talašová, 2010, p. 17)

This citation implies that in terms of translating idioms, it may be difficult for Thai learners to find appropriate and equivalent German idioms for their translation this is because expressions or expressing feelings in each culture are specific and culturally-bound. Sometimes, it is not an easy task to convey the meaning in another context as the translator needs to find other cultural references.

2. Previous Comparative Studies on English and German

Hufeisen (2010) discusses the role of leaning foreign languages in the German context as the following:

[...] Erfahrungen mit dem Lernen der ersten Fremdsprache können auf das Lernen der zweiten übertragen werden (wenn sie sich z. B. als gut funktionierend und erfolgreich erwiesen haben) oder völlig vermieden werden (wenn sie beispielsweise als ungeeignet empfunden wurden); Vergleiche zwischen den Lernprozessen und/oder den Sprachen können helfen. Der gezielte Einsatz bestimmter Lernstrategien bei typischen Fremdsprachenaufgaben [...] (Hufeisen, 2010, p. 203).

According to Hufeisen (2010), learning L2 requires the experiences from previous languages they learned. Learners may transfer their previous knowledge to the learning process of the new language being learned. They will know on their own what appropriate learning strategies they can apply.

Saengaramrueng (2008) gives her point of view in terms of learning German in Thailand based on L1, L2, and L3 as follows:

แนวทางของการเรียนการสอนภาษาที่สาม (L1= ภาษาแม่ ,L2= ภาษาต่างประเทศที่ 1 ,L3=ภาษาต่างประเทศที่ 2) โดยทั่วไปแล้ว ต้องคำนึงสิ่งต่อไปนี้ 1) คำนี้ความรู้ด้านเนื้อหาสาระ (declaratives Wissen) ได้แก่ ด้านศัพท์ โครงสร้างไวยากรณ์ การถ่ายโอน (Transfer) และการแทรกแซงทางภาษา (Interferenz) ในด้านสัทศาสตร์และการสะกดคำ 2) คำนี้ถึงกระบวนการ (prozedurales Wissen) ได้แก่ ประสบการณ์ในเรื่อง วิธีการสอน และประสบการณ์ด้านวิธีการเรียน เทคนิคการเรียนและกลวิธีการสอน ประโยชน์ในการใช้การสอนตามแนวคิดนี้ คือ เป็นการให้หลักการประหยัดในกระบวนการเรียนรู้ โดยให้ผู้สอนกระตุ้นความรู้ภูมิหลังที่ผ่านการเรียนภาษาที่ 1 และที่ 2 ให้เป็นประโยชน์ในด้านต่อไปนี้ 1. ความรู้ด้านศัพท์ 2. ความรู้ด้านไวยากรณ์ 3. ความรู้ด้านการออกเสียงและสะกดคำ 4. การกระตุ้นผู้เรียนทำได้หลายวิธี เช่น ให้ผู้เรียนรู้ว่าตนเป็นผู้เรียนประเภทใด กระตุ้นให้ผู้เรียนนำความรู้ทั้งหมดที่มีอยู่ก่อน แล้วมาใช้ให้เกิดประโยชน์ในการเรียน

(Saengaramrueng, 2008)

From this citation, English as L2 can affect L3 learning. Learners may transfer the previously gained knowledge and relate their learning styles, experience, obstacles or problems to their L3 learning to acquire the third language effectively and efficiently. This leads to the further discussion that, how can learners, as non-native speakers, correctly use idioms when translating? Apart from this, they may find Thai (L1) into German (L3) translation difficult if an idioms they are encountering while translating is specific to that culture. In this regard, relating the knowledge of learners to their previously gained knowledge may enable them to learn successfully.

Prior to German, it is obvious that Thai learners learn English as a first foreign language (L2). It is suggested in this study that comparing their knowledge with what they have learned previously, namely the knowledge of English, can enhance the competence of learners to their fullest potential when learning German. As mentioned earlier that, it may be difficult for Thai learners to find German idioms for their translation this is because expressions or expressing feelings in each culture are specific and culturally-bound. Sometimes, it is not an easy task to convey the meaning in another context because the translator needs to find other cultural references. In this regard, comparing the L3 knowledge (German) with the L2 knowledge (English) can be an efficient learning strategy as these two languages have some language features in common which will cause learners to find some similarities as well equivalences for their translation.

III. PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

Specifically, this study mainly focuses on the following aspects: 1) What do German teachers have to take into account when designing translation activities in German class based on the language perspectives of English?; 2) What kind of effective *Teaching Materials and Tasks* can be employed based on the efficient language teaching performance?; and 3) What practical recommendations can be provided to FL teachers concerning effective language pedagogy?

IV. METHODOLOGY

Instrument of this study is a Thai fairy tale translated (from Thai into German) by Watcharakaweesilp (2014) which was used in this study to illustrate some specific examples of the use of idioms. For data collection and data analysis, only sentences in which each idiom is used were collected and analysed.

V. FINDINGS

The following sentences are found to discuss the use of idioms:

- 1) Thai Sentence: พระยาชาลวันเห็นนางตะเกาทองก็รัก
Translated Sentence in German: Als Chalawan Ta Phau Thong sah, verlor er sein Herz an sie.
(English: to fall in love with someone)

2) Thai Sentence: ชาลวันได้พุดเกี่ยวพาราศินางต่าง ๆ จนในที่สุดนางก็ยอมเป็นภรรยาของชาลวัน
Translated Sentence in German: Er *verdrehte ihr so sehr den Kopf*, bis sie damit einverstanden war, seine dritte Frau zu werden. (English: to turn someone's head)

3) Thai Sentence: พวกเหล่าจระเข้ต่างพากันหนีไปหมด
Translated Sentence in German: Aus großer Angst *machten sich* die anderen Krokodile *aus dem Staube*. (English: to clear off)

The results found in this study indicate that idioms are used in these translated sentences from Thai into German. Explanations in English is intentionally provided to enable readers to understand the meanings of the idioms.

In relation to the research questions in this study (What do German teachers have to take into account when designing translation activities in German class based on the language perspectives of English and what kind of effective teaching materials and tasks can be employed based on the efficient language teaching performance?), the following activities in class are suggested when translating idioms for *Thai into German* translation based on English language perspectives:

1) Suggestion for idiom 1

German: Als Chalawan Ta Phau Thong sah, *verlor er sein Herz an sie*.

(Translation into English: As Chalawan saw Ta Phau Thong, he fell in love with her.)

(Explanation of the idiom in English: *to fall in love with someone or to lose one's heart to someone*)

The word *Herz* in German means *heart* in English. To analyse the semantic function of the word *Herz* in German, the following diagram is illustrated: Herz → heart (in English) → heart → love

This is the reason why this German idiom means *to fall in love with someone* in English. When learners have to translate this idiom from Thai into German. They may rely on their English knowledge and use the key word in this sentence to find a German idiom for their translation.

If they need to use an idiom which means *to fall in love with someone*, they may look up an equivalent phrase for this idiom in an English-German dictionary. Then, they will find a German idiom *sich in jemanden verlieben* based on their English knowledge.

In addition, as the word heart and love are semantically related to each other, learners may further think that they should use a German idiom based on the key word *heart* to indicate the semantic relation between the *heart and love*. They may then find the phrase *to lose one's heart to someone* which is an of equivalent idiom in this context leading them to find an appropriate idiom in German, *Herz an jemanden verlieren*.

To sum up, this example shows that how we as language educators can relate the previously gained knowledge of learners to what they are learning.

2) Suggestion for idiom 2

German: Er *verdrehte ihr* so sehr *den Kopf*, bis sie damit einverstanden war, seine dritte Frau zu werden.

(Translation into English: He turned her head until she accepted to be his third wife.)

(Explanation of the idiom in English: *to turn someone's head*)

According to Zentner (2011), *jemandem den Kopf verdrehen* means in English *to turn somebody's head*. (Zentner, 2011, p. 203).

From this example, another possibility for learners to find an appropriate and equivalent idiom for translation is using a specific German-English/English-German dictionary for idioms. The idiom *jemandem den Kopf verdrehen* in German may be difficult for learners to think of when translating at the very first step. But if they know a common idiom *to turn one's head* in English, they can further look up a German idiom with the same meaning and finally find it in their bilingual dictionary.

3) Suggestion for idiom 3

German: Aus großer Angst *machten sich* die anderen Krokodile *aus dem Staube*.

(Translation into English: From sheer fear, the other crocodiles left the place quickly.)

(Equivalent idiom in English: to clear off)

Conversely, learners may not know the idiom *to clear off* in English. But they can use a specific key word in German to find an appropriate idiom for their translation. They may finally find the idiom *sich aus dem Staube machen* in the German dictionary. However, they might not be certain whether the German idiom they use is correct. In this regard, they may use a bilingual dictionary by comparing this German idiom with its equivalence in English. In other words, the knowledge of their English can help them double-check or increase the level of their certainty.

According to Zentner (2011), *sich aus dem Staube machen* in German means *to clear off* in English. Example: Statt Rede und Antwort zu stehen, machte er sich aus dem Staub.= Instead of explaining his actions he cleared off. (Zentner, 2011, p. 203)

In this step, learners know that the idiom in German means *to clear off* in English. They are expected to look up the meaning of this English idioms again. According to Macmillan English Dictionary (2002), *to clear off* means *to leave a place quickly* (Macmillan English Dictionary, 2002, p. 250). If this meaning shares the same meaning with the German one and matches with its Thai meaning, they can use it. This is because using idioms for translation shows the language style of learners by not translating word by word. Instead, they use an emotional idioms for their translation work correctly and purposively.

VI. WHAT PRACTICAL RECCOMENDATIONS CAN BE PROVIDED TO FL TEACHERS CONCERNING EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE PADAGOGY?

In the previous part, the roles and the importance of the comparison between L2 and L3 for translating Thai into

German are discussed. In this part, to enhance the competence of learners at the very first step in class, the following task for designing and creating activities to support the learning concept of comparison between L2 and L3 is recommended for its pedagogical implications:

English: to fall in love with someone = (German: ...?)
Sentence: I fall in love with him. = (German: ...?)

German: jemandem den Kopfverdrehen = (English: ...?)
Sentence: Er verdrehte ihr den Kopf. = (English: ...?)

It is recommended that translators need to know the exact meaning of the idiom when translating. They may refer to bilingual dictionary to examine the meaning of the idioms before using them in the target language. An equivalent idiom is sometimes required when translators cannot find a specific idiom which has the exact meaning in that particular context. If translators cannot find an appropriate or equivalent idioms for their translation, paraphrasing is a possible way to solve this problem but they have to consider whether the idiom used in the original text is devalued in terms of its linguistic features.

In conclusion, as mentioned earlier that English as L2 can affect L3 learning. Learners may transfer the previously gained knowledge and relate their learning styles, experience, obstacles or problems to their L3 learning to acquire the third language effectively and efficiently. In Thailand, Thai learners learn English as a first foreign language (L2) prior to other languages. So, it is suggested in this study that comparing their knowledge with what they have learned previously, namely the knowledge of English, can enhance the competence of learners to their fullest potential when learning German. This paper merely presents some possible ways to apply the knowledge of L2 in the process of L3 learnings. As discussed in this paper that it may be difficult for Thai learners to find German idioms for their translation this is because expressions or expressing feelings in each culture are specific and culturally-bound. Sometimes, it is not an easy task to convey the meaning in another context because the translator needs to find other cultural references. In this regard, comparing the L3 knowledge (German) with the L2 knowledge (English) can be an efficient learning strategy as these two languages have some language features in common which will cause learners to find some similarities as well equivalences for their translation.

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