

Grammar and Translation for Thai into German Translation

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Abstract - This qualitative study mainly focuses on the role of grammar for translation. In this regard, the use of grammar in the Fairy Tales *Krai Thong* and *Pha Dāng Nang Ai* translated from Thai into German was examined. It was found that the following key grammatical topics were used and analysed in this study: 1) The use of the present indicative mixed with the past simple; 2) The use of the subjunctive II in German; and 3) The use of the past perfect tense in German, leading to further discussion which roles the use of grammar has for translation and what practical recommendations can be provided to language educators concerning effective language pedagogy.

Keywords - Grammar, Translation

I. INTRODUCTION

WHEN working in a multilingual society and multicultural workplace, it is possible that English is not one of the languages you deal with when translating. We may have to work in more than one language. For instance, we use the information in one language and write the story in another or we may also write a story first in one language and then rewrite in another language. This indicates that we encounter the task of translation. The language which we are translating from is *the source language*, in German *Ausgangstext*, and the language we are translating into is *the target language*, in German *Zielstext*, (Koller, 2011, p. 9). We do not have to be an expert in linguistics to make good translation. If we know our target language well, we can judge whether the sentence sounds correct in our translation. Translation is the transfer of meaning from one language to another. It is not the transfer of words from language to language. You must also transfer the meaning conveyed in the text. Not only do languages consist of different words but they also have different languages, grammar, and even word orders. When translating, one of the major problems of translators is the use of appropriate language patterns to convey the exact or acceptable meaning of the target language. In this regard, grammar as a linguistic device is inevitably required to indicate some specific linguistic functions. Thus, it is worth examining this linguistic tool in the translation work to investigate which roles grammar has for translation and why it is used.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A. Previous Comparative Studies on the Role of Linguistics for Translation in the German Context

Albrecht (2013) discusses the role of linguistics for translation in his German textbook as follows:

Die Beschreibung von Übersetzungsvorgängen und die Analyse von Übersetzungen ist demnach nicht Gegenstand einer neu zu etablierenden Disziplin, sondern allein mit den Erkenntniszielen und Methoden der Sprachwissenschaft und aller ihrer Teilgebiete zu leisten (In English: The translation process and the analysis of translation concern the linguistic methods and all the areas of linguistic studies).

(Albrecht, 2013, p. XIII).

From the citation, it is obvious that describing the translation process and analysing the translation are related with linguistics and all linguistic areas. In other words, the linguistic devices are required when translating. This is because translation process is the language process.

B. Previous Studies on the Present Indicative and the Past Indicative in relation to English and German

According to König & Gast (2012), English and German are both members of the Western branch of the Germanic language family and thus closely related genetically. It is therefore to be expected that there are still features manifesting this relatedness, even though English has considerably moved away from these common roots during the last thousand years. Both languages manifest the distinction between weak (regular) and strong (irregular) verbs (e.g. Engl. wash, washed, washed vs. sing, sang, sung), and both exhibit a gradual reduction of the latter group in favour of the former. Both languages distinguish declarative sentences from interrogative sentences through word order (Engl. *I can hear you - Can you hear me?*) and both languages draw a two-term tense distinction (present vs. past) in terms of inflection (Engl. *he snores - he snored*; Germ. *er schnarcht - er schnarchte*), to give only three examples of such genetically determined similarities. Parallels such as these will not play a major role (König & Gast, 2012, p. 4).

C. Previous Studies on the Past Perfect Tense and the Subjunctive II in German

According to Reimann (2012), the past perfect tense or *Plusquamperfekt* in German is not used very frequently. It describes an event A which goes even further back in the past than event B (Reimann, 2012, p. 29). Reimann (2012) also states that the subjunctive II is the Konjunktiv II in German and it is often used for unreal conditions, possibility, and polite request or question (Reimann, 2012, p. 66). In addition, according to König & Gast (2012), it is an interesting question to what extent English can be said to have a grammatical category of “subjunctive mood”. The fact that there still is one genuine subjunctive form (were) might suffice for justifying the assumption of that category for English. Moreover, the use of base forms with a subjunctive implication could be regarded as being indicative of the subjunctive being a grammatical category in its own right, since infinitive base forms can be distinguished from subjunctive base forms on distributional grounds. But then, the very fact that no morphological distinction is made between infinitives and (alleged) subjunctives can be interpreted as being another instance of the tendency for English to abandon the morphological marking of grammatical categories, and to develop into an isolating language. Viewed from this perspective, mood distinctions are on the verge of disappearing in English, since only subjunctive *were* could be regarded as a modal form in its own right (König & Gast, 2012, p, 72).

All these previous studies mentioned in this part are related to what is examined in this study in terms of the conceptual framework.

III. PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

To illustrate which roles the use of grammar has for literary translation and to provide some practical recommendations to language teachers concerning effective language pedagogy.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Based on the conceptual framework of the study, only the following grammatical topics in German: 1) *The Present Indicative*; 2) *The Subjunctive II in German*; and 3) *The past perfect tense in German* were specifically and purposively selected for discussion in this paper. Instruments of the study is the Thai fairy tales *Krai Thong and Pha Däng Nang Ai* which were translated from Thai into German by Watcharakaweesilp (2014) and Watcharakaweesilp (2017). For the data collection and data analysis, sentences in which the use of 1) The Present Indicative used together with the past simple; 2) The Subjunctive II in German; and 3) The past perfect tense in German were collected and analysed.

V. FINDINGS

A. The Use of the Present Indicative

1) Als Krai Thong von dem Angebot des Reichen *erfahren hatte*, **wandte** (past tense) er *sich* an den Phra Kru, ob und auf welche Weise er Chalawan **tötet** (present tense).

(English: After Krai Thong had been informed of this offer, he consulted his master for his advice how to kill Chalawan.)

2) Krai Thong **sah** (past tense) nur Wimala und **drohte** (past tense) ihr mit dem Hok Sattaloha, damit sie ihm das Versteck Chalawans **verrät** (present tense).

(English: Krai Thong only saw Wimala and forced her to reveal the place where Chalawan is hiding.)

From these examples, the present indicative is used to show that the action has not happened at the moment of reading. In relation to translating literary work, especially fairy tales, past tense is the classic way to tell a story. Many fairy tales are all written and told in the past tense. This means that the time of telling the story is separated from the events of the story. However, the use of the present indicative is also found in fairy tales by some writers and sometimes are used together with the past tense according to the intention and the language style of the translator.

B. The Use of the Subjunctive II in German

1) So gab er allen Krokodiljägern bekannt, dass derjenige, der Chalawan jagen und ihn fangen **könnte**, von ihm eine hohe Belohnung bekommen würde. Zu allem Übel **konnte** niemand Chalawan besiegen; stattdessen fraß er die Krokodiljäger auf. (English: It was announced that those who could catch the king of crocodiles would be rewarded. But no one could catch it and was eaten by the crocodile.)

In English, we use only the word *could* for both past tense and unreal conditional. But in German, two words are used, namely *könnte* for the unreal conditional, and *konnte* for the past simple. From this example, the translator used the word **könnte** (could in English for unreal conditional) to convey the meaning that it was impossible for the hunters to kill the king of crocodiles. In contrast, the word **konnte** which is an equivalent word for the word *could* in English was employed to signalize the real event in the past that it has already happened. To sum up, the use of the subjunctive II in German is important when translating to imply and to describe the emotional and exciting scenes in the story to a certain extent while reading. Using this grammatical topic also indicates the hopeless situation that it is hardly possible to achieve something in the story.

C. The Use of Past Perfect Tense in German

1) Da Thau Phang Kii von Nang Ai im vorherigen Leben **verflucht worden war**, kam plötzlich aufgrund seines negativen Karmas ein giftiger Pfeil angefliegen und traf es.

(English: As Thau Phang Kii had been cursed by Nang Ai in his past life, the poisonous arrow approached him owing to his Karma.)

2) Vessavana wies sie auf das Karma des vorherigen Lebens hin, welches beim Krieg eine erhebliche Rolle **gespielt hatte**. (English: Vessavana explained and related this action to the Karma in their past life which had a great impact on this war.)

In relation to Buddhist belief, people believe in a human past life to compare with life at the present time. To exactly indicate the time specified, the use of the past perfect tense in German is crucial to distinguish the two events in the different time according to the grammatical rules. In this regard, the past perfect tense as a meaningful and purposive linguistic

device is a grammatical topic which should be employed to transfer the religious belief of one culture to the other appropriately.

In conclusion, in the context of translating or even rewriting across different languages and cultures, some of the challenges of translation may occur. Grammatical topics examined in this study are discussed in terms of the roles of grammar for translation as linguistic devices. First, the use of the *present indicative* indicates the action has not happened at the moment of reading. It can describe and arouse the emotion of the readers to simultaneously imagine the picture in mind at the time of reading. The readers can depict as well as anticipate the following possible actions what will happen next while reading. Using the present indicative in the fairy tales can cause the imaginative feeling of the readers. This is because the present simple can indicate the action happening at that moment. Second, the use of the past perfect tense in German is crucial to distinguish the event describing that one event goes even further back in the past than the other event. Or in relation to Buddhist belief, to exactly indicate the time specified, the use of the past perfect tense in German is crucial to distinguish the two events in the different time according to the grammatical rules. The past perfect tense as a meaningful and purposive linguistic device is a grammatical topic to transfer the religious belief of one culture to the other appropriately. Third, the use of the subjunctive II in German is also important when translating to imply and to describe the emotional or exciting scenes in the story while reading. Using this grammatical topic also indicates the hopeless situation that it is hardly possible to achieve something in the story. Additionally, the use of these grammatical topics also shows the intention and language style of the translator depending on which meaning he or she wishes to convey in that particular context. In short, if we have a good command of both languages in terms of grammatical construction, translation should not be difficult. As mentioned earlier, we do not have to be an expert in linguistics to make good translations. We need to know the target language well. Then, we will be able to judge whether the sentence sounds correct in our translation.

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VI. PRACTICAL RECCOMENDATIONS

A. Pedagogical Recommendations

Specific language exercises in terms of the use of the present indicative, the subjunctive II in German, and the past perfect tense for fairy tales should be created for learners in class to familiarize them and to enable them to properly and correctly use these grammatical topics when translating. Apart from this, we cannot translate words in isolation. Words get their meanings from how they are used in each situation or a contextual translation. A bilingual dictionary should be used where one is available. When looking up translations for individual words, dictionaries are useful. Nevertheless, suggestions of native speakers play a vital role for translation in terms of contextual or cultural translating since expressions or expressing feelings in each culture are specific and culturally-bound.

B. Recommendations for Further Studies

Most studies concerning foreign language teaching and translation in Thailand mainly focus on L1 transfer (The process by which the learner's L1 influences the acquisition and use of an L2). As mentioned previously, we may have to work in a multilingual society and multicultural workplace, it is possible that English will not be one of the languages you work in when translating. We may have to work in more than one language. Besides, English can be understood as the Global language widely used around the globe. In Thailand, English is taught as a second and foreign language (L2). Hence, comparative studies between German and English is also necessary and unavoidable when teaching foreign languages to enable the learners to relate their previous knowledge (L2) to what they are learning (L3). In other words, it will be useful if the studies on the transfer from L2 to L3 can be conducted to analysed and compare the similarities and differences from what the previous results suggested. Moreover, there are several teaching and learning aspects in relation to the principles of language education and translation that the researcher has not examined and discussed in this study. It might lead to valuable results and fruitful discussion if other possible aspects can be further studied.

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