

Translating Newspaper Thai Into English

A Short Course of Discovery Based on Translation Exercises

By

Scribner Messenger

With the Assistance of Somjai Lab and Tanapong Sungkaew

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Any errors of omission or commission in this text, of course, remain the responsibility of the author.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.	iii
Table of Contents.	v
Introduction.	vii
Background.	vii
Intended Audience.	vii
Philosophy.	vii
Organization of Materials.	viii
Recommended Method of Use.	viii
Additional Comments.	ix
Article 1, รัฐบาลแก้เกม ออกโทรทัศน์ชี้แจงผลงาน.	1-1
Article 2, อเมริกันฆ่ากันตาย ๖ ศพ.	2-1
Article 3, หม่องปล่อยคนไทยแลก 2 ทหารพม่า.	3-1
Article 4, จับเฮโรอีน 500 ล้าน.	4-1
Article 5, อิตาลีแตกคอสหประชาชาติกรณีโซมาเลีย.	5-1
Article 6, ท้าอากาศพร้อมแจงบชี้อาวุธ.	6-1
Article 7, ตัดงบอาวุธหนัก อังกฤษเหน้อยสุด ๆ.	7-1
Article 8, เขมรแดงถล่มหนัก ยึดสนามบินนครวัด.	8-1
Article 9, กต. ร่วม มท. ช่วยคนไทยลอบไปญี่ปุ่น.	9-1
Article 10, เตรียมงานใหม่ให้แรงงานไทย 7 หมื่นจากญี่ปุ่น.	10-1
Article 11, รมช. กลาโหมยื่นพิจารณาขอขบข้าวแลกอาวุธหมี.	11-1
Article 12, ซูฮาร์โตมองจี-7อยู่ข้างนอก.	12-1
Article 13, สหรัฐกดดันให้เวียตนามคลายกรณีทหารหาย.	13-1
Article 14, คลินตันยันไม่ถอนทหารจนกว่าเรื่องคลี่คลาย.	14-1
Appendix A, Principles of Translation.	A-1
Appendix B, Transliteration from Thai to English.	B-1

Introduction

Background

This text has grown out of a number of years of experience in teaching American students, many of whom graduated from the Basic Thai Course at the U.S. Defense Language Institute, how to translate Thai newspapers into English.

Over the years, students have consistently made the same errors in translating the articles presented here. This text is simply an effort to note many of those areas of difficulty in hopes that documenting them will assist others in learning—or in teaching—the translation of Thai newspaper articles into English.

Intended Audience

One intended audience is English-speaking students of Thai who are functioning at Level 2 in reading Thai and who have at least a basic knowledge of English grammar. Even without the help of a Thai teacher, such students should be able to gain some additional skill by using this text.

Another intended audience is teachers of Thai who seek to help their English-speaking students better understand how to translate Thai into good, idiomatic English.

Philosophy

There are three key philosophical points on which this text is based:

- Students learn most and best when they know how to ask the right questions and to think about alternatives, not when they are simply told the right answer. The fundamental purpose of this text, then, is to help students get into the habit of thinking analytically and independently about the myriad choices involved in translation.
- It is a mistake to force rules of English grammar on Thai. However, it is often convenient in describing Thai structures to use terms such as subject, verb, object of a preposition, relative clause, etc., and this text uses such descriptions to facilitate discussion.
- A translation can rarely be perfect. Thus, the suggested renderings and sample translations provided here are simply possibilities; users of these materials might well find ways to improve the translations.

Organization of Materials

This text consists of 14 lessons, each of which consists of:

- a Thai language newspaper article,
- a student handout listing questions for the student to consider in translating the article,
- a reference page for teachers that gives possible responses to the questions in the student handout, and
- a suggested English translation of the article.

The articles and the translations have been printed in relatively large fonts so that they are suitable for copying as transparencies for use in classroom discussions, if desired.

Recommended Method of Use

These materials can be used in a variety of ways, but it is recommended that the teacher follow the nine steps below for each lesson:

- 1 Give a copy of the Thai article to each student, along with instructions to read it through twice without using a dictionary.
- 2 If possible, briefly discuss the article, in Thai, with the students to insure that they have a general idea of what it is about.
- 3 Have each student write a first draft translation, using a dictionary as necessary.
- 4 As each student finishes the first draft, provide a copy of the student handout, along with instructions to (1) make notes as needed in order to be able to discuss answers to the questions, and (2) modify the draft translation, if desired, after considering the questions.
- 5 Collect the first draft and underline any areas that are particularly good or that require additional work. For areas that need work, do not write corrections on the paper. Rather, write questions to encourage the right kind of thinking, such as the following: What other words might you use here? What is the structure of this part of the text? What is the relation between these two words (phrases, etc.)? How might we say that in English? And so on.
- 6 Go over the draft with each student one-on-one, and continue to ask questions to help the student to form the right analytic habits.
- 7 Instruct the student to prepare a final translation.
- 8 Mark the translation for a grade, if desired.
- 9 Convene the class to review the types of errors made and how to avoid making such errors in the future (without, of course, identifying specific errors with the work of specific students).

Additional Comments

Users of this text may find it helpful to keep in mind these additional points:

- One of the purposes of this text is simply to try to make students more aware. In some cases, this means making them consciously aware of things that they subconsciously already understand. In other cases, this means making them aware of things that they did not understand and had not thought about.
- It is impossible to comment on everything in even these relatively simple articles, so the questions and comments focus on the things that students have most often missed or have been confused about in the past.
- Though the articles in this text are over 10 years old and the facts in them are dated, experience over the years confirms that the points regarding translation raised in these articles are still relevant.
- This is a work in progress. The author hopes that the ideas presented here will be corrected, refined, and added to in order to improve this tool for assisting students of Thai to translate into English.

รัฐบาลแก้เกม ออกโทรทัศน์ ชี้แจงผลงาน

1

2 รัฐบาลเตรียมให้แต่ละกระทรวงแถลงผลการทำงานทาง
3 โทรทัศน์หลังจากที่นาย ชวน หลีกภัย นายกรัฐมนตรี กลับจาก
4 การเยือนต่างประเทศในปลายเดือนนี้

5 พล.อ. ชวลิต ยงใจยุทธ รัฐมนตรีว่าการกระทรวงมหาดไทย
6 กล่าวเมื่อวันที่ 21 มีนาคมว่า ต้องให้ความเป็นธรรมกับรัฐบาลใน
7 กรณีที่มีเสียงวิพากษ์วิจารณ์ว่า รัฐบาลยังไม่มีผลงาน

8 “ทุกคนได้พยายามทำงานอย่างเต็มที่แล้วในระยะ 4-5
9 เดือน ที่ผ่านมา ทุกคนเหนื่อยกันมากและทำงานกันอย่างถึงที่
10 สุด” พล.อ. ชวลิต กล่าวหลังกลับจากตรวจราชการที่ขอนแก่น

11 รัฐมนตรีว่าการกระทรวงมหาดไทยกล่าวว่ารัฐบาลได้เตรียม
12 เพื่ออธิบายให้ประชาชนเข้าใจและซักถามเรื่องการใช้งบประมาณ
13 คาดว่าหลังจากที่นายกรัฐมนตรีกลับจากการเยือนต่างประเทศใน
14 ปลายเดือนนี้ก็จะให้แต่ละกระทรวงชี้แจงผลงานทางโทรทัศน์

15 พล.อ. ชวลิต กล่าวว่ารัฐบาลได้ทำงานเต็มที่แล้ว หากทำ
16 เต็มที่แล้วยังไม่มีผลงานอีกก็ต้องพิจารณาตัวเอง

- (line 1) What does แก้วเกม mean literally? How would you translate this phrase as a sports analogy? What is another way to translate the phrase?
- (line 3) Former Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, like most Thai, spells his name in a special way. How would his name be spelled according to the standard transliteration system (see Appendix B)?
- (line 4) Give at least two alternative translations for การเยือนต่างประเทศ. Which do you prefer and why?
- (line 5) General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, like most Thai, spells his name in a special way. How would his name be spelled according to the standard transliteration system (see Appendix B)?
- (line 6) What is the subject of the verb ต้อง in ต้องให้ความเป็นธรรม? What are two ways to handle translation of this phrase? Which one do you prefer and why?
- (line 6) Why would a literal translation of ให้ความเป็นธรรม not be acceptable?
- (line 7) The word ที่ in กรณีที่ can be considered a relative pronoun. Is it sufficient to translate it as “which” or “that”? Why or why not? What is another way to translate ที่ in this situation?
- (line 9) What does the word กัน mean in เหนื่อยกัน and ทำงานกัน? How should you handle it in your translation?
- (line 10) Why might you think that the phrase กลับจากตรวจราชการ is strange? Explain your understanding of the meaning of that phrase.
- (line 12) What is the implied subject of ชักถาม?
- (line 13) The word งบประมาณ is most commonly translated as “budget.” Is that translation appropriate here, when it is used as the object of ใช้? What alternatives would you suggest?
- (line 17) How do you understand the expression พิจารณาตัวเอง? Is a literal translation sufficient? Why or why not?

- (line 1) What does แก้เกม mean literally? How would you translate this phrase as a sports analogy? What is another way to translate the phrase?

Literally, แก้เกม means “to revise the game,” “to correct the game,” “to solve the game,” or some such. If translated as a sports analogy, it might be rendered as, “to change the game plan.” It is an idiomatic expression, however, meaning “adopt a strategy” or “adopt tactics.” In this article, given the fact that the government is going to use a different method of explaining to the public, another—and no doubt better—way to render the expression is “to change its tactics” or “to change strategy.”

- (line 3) Former Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, like most Thai, spells his name in a special way. How would his name be spelled according to the standard transliteration system (see Appendix B)?

The first name would be the same. The surname, however, would be Likpai.

- (line 4) Give at least two alternative translations for การเยือนต่างประเทศ. Which do you prefer and why?

This phrase might be translated literally as “travel to foreign countries”; it might also be translated as “travel abroad,” “foreign travel,” or “foreign travels.” The literal translation is accurate, but it sounds a bit awkward. Use of the word “abroad” in the translation might exclude travel to such countries as Burma, Cambodia, and Laos, and thus is not a good choice. Thus the preferred choices are “foreign travel” or “foreign travels.”

- (line 5) General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, like most Thai, spells his name in a special way. How would his name be spelled according to the standard transliteration system (see Appendix B)?

The first name would be Chawalit; note, however, that it is necessary to add “a” after the initial “Ch” transliteration and another “a” after the “w.” As is frequently the case in transliterating Thai names, the transliteration is not simply a one-for-one equation; one must know how the name is pronounced in order to give the best transliteration. The surname would be Yongchaiyut.

- (line 6) What is the subject of the verb ต้อง in ต้องให้ความเป็นธรรม? What are two ways to handle translation of this phrase? Which one do you prefer and why?

There is no explicit subject. The implied subject is “everyone,” “one,” or “you.” One way of handling the translation is to say “One must be fair.” Another way is to use the passive voice: “It is necessary to be fair.”

- (line 6) Why would a literal translation of ให้ความเป็นธรรมกับ not be acceptable?

In English we simply do not say “give fairness” or “give justice” in this situation, and translating the word กับ as “with” is also not idiomatic. An idiomatic translation of this phrase would be “be fair to.”

- (line 7) The word ที่ in กรณีที่ can be considered a relative pronoun. Is it sufficient to translate it as “which” or “that”? Why or why not? What is another way to translate ที่ in this situation?

It is not sufficient to translate ที่ here as “which” or “that.” This is one of those instances in which we might say that ที่ is the object of an implied preposition. In other words, it is best translated as “a case in which” or “a situation in which.” Another translation, though informal and perhaps less desirable, would be “a situation where.” Note that it is also important to realize that here the word มี must be translated as “there is.” A literal translation of กรณีที่มี as “a situation which has” would be very awkward.

- (line 9) What does the word กัน mean in เหนื่อยกัน and ทำงานกัน? How should you handle it in your translation?

The word กัน helps paint a picture that all are working together on the same thing, but it does not add meaning. The phrase ทุกคน makes it clear that everyone is involved, so it is best simply not to translate กัน in either instance.

- (line 10) Why might you think that the phrase กลับจากตรวจราชการ is strange? Explain your understanding of the meaning of that phrase.

The phrase is strange because we would expect that, coming after จาก, there should be the noun marker การ (การตรวจราชการ). The phrase suggests an official inspection of possibly facilities and government workers, but it is not clear just what was inspected.

- (line 12) What is the implied subject of ชักถาม?

The implied subject is ประชาชน. The preparations are being made so that the people can understand and so that they can ask questions.

- (line 13) The word งบประมาณ is most commonly translated as “budget.” Is that translation appropriate here, when it is used as the object of ใช้? What alternatives would you suggest?

No, “budget” is not a good translation here. As with many words that are generally taught as having a single meaning, งบประมาณ sometimes is best translated as “funds” or “funding.” Also ใช้, which is most often translated as “use” is best understood as “spend,” “expend,” or “disburse” when used in a context involving money. Thus, the larger phrase here is best handled as something like “budget expenditures.”

- (line 17) How do you understand the expression พิจารณาตัวเอง? Is a literal translation sufficient? Why or why not?

Literally, the phrase means “examine oneself” or “consider oneself.” It is not idiomatic to render the larger phrase literally as “[the government] must examine itself.” An idiomatic equivalent would be something like “[the government] must do a self-evaluation.”

Government Changes Strategy, To Go on Television to Explain Accomplishments

2 The government is preparing to have each of the ministries televise an
3 accounting of its work after Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai returns from foreign travel
4 at the end of this month.

5 General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, the Minister of Interior, stated on March 21
6 that it is necessary to be fair with the government in cases where there is criticism
7 that the government has not produced results.

9 “Everyone has tried to work to the utmost. In the past 4-5 months, everyone
10 has been very tired and has worked as hard as possible,” said General Chavalit after
11 returning from an official inspection in Khon Kaen.

12 The Minister of Interior stated that the government has prepared to explain to
13 the people and to let them ask questions about budget expenditures. It is expected
14 that, after the Prime Minister returns from his foreign travel at the end of the month,
15 he will have each ministry explain its accomplishments on television.

16 General Chavalit stated that the government has been working to capacity. If
17 it does as much as it can and still does not produce results, then it will have to do a
18 self-evaluation.