



HS003

Manipulation and Influences in the Translation of Erotic Fiction  
“Fifty Shades Trilogy”

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**Abstract**

According to Andre Lefevere, translation is a process of rewriting one culture into another. As a result, translation undergoes some changes when entering into target text. Especially when translating erotic story from two extremely different cultures like American culture to Thai culture, some changes definitely occur. This paper investigated manipulation technique that were applied to translation of erotic story *Fifty Shades Trilogy* from English to Thai and discussed possible factors that influence such manipulation. The influencing factors in translation were also discussed based on Manipulation Theory, proposed by Lefevere in 1980, consisting of four factors, namely ideology, patronage, poetic, and universe of discourse. The study found five manipulation strategies used in the translation of sexual words namely deletion, generalization, alteration, and addition. These strategies were applied to sexually-related words.

**Keywords:** Manipulation Theory, Sexual Language Translation, Taboo words, Fifty Shades of Grey

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## Introduction

Many translation theorists (Itamar Even-Zohar (1978), Hans Vermeer & Katharina Reif (1984), and Lefevere&Bassnett (1980)) view translation as intercultural transfer which means that translators not only convey messages but also culture that attached to it. Due to cultural distinction, social factors like norms, beliefs, rules and regulations, cannot be neglected. Correct linguistic equivalence is not the only focus to be concerned, acceptability of language in particular culture also has to be taken into account. This puts more emphasis on target language which translators have to selectively determine strategies that can be appropriately employed (Bassnett, 2007).

Taboo subjects, like sex and obscene language, have raised concerns in the translation of foreign novels into Thai. These issues have been discussed more in public due to the growing number of social media used. However, in Thai context, sexual topic is still avoided mentioning in public as many people consider it as taboo subject. Even though there are some erotic stories in Thai, the sex scenes are indirectly depicted to tone down the obscenity and to make it accepted to Thai readers.

*Fifty Shades Trilogy* is an American erotic novel that appeared publicly on bookshelves across Thailand despite its explicit sexual description. The sequel was even placed on recommended and best-selling book section following on the success of the Universal Pictures' film version in 2015. However, its sexual explicitness has raised concerns and criticisms among Thai readers on its appropriateness. This put a burden on translators to blend in the erotica into this paradox. To avoid taboo words, many strategies were applied.

## Objectives

This study aims to:

- (1) Investigate manipulation strategies in the translation of sexually-related words in '*Fifty Shades Trilogy*'.
- (2) Investigate factors that influence the translators on the choice of the manipulation strategies.

## Framework and Related Research

Delivering text to another distinctive culture has to undergo some degree of manipulation because exact equivalence between two cultures does not



exist (Bassnett and Lefevere, 2004 cited in Shuping, 2013). The manipulation strategies are influenced by four main factors; ideology, patronage, poetics and universe of discourse (Lefevere, 1992). Ideology refers to norms and values that a particular society holds which also shape the translator's ideas of what is acceptable and unacceptable. Patronage is a powerful agent who can intervene in translation such as editor or publisher. Poetics is common form of literature in that culture. Lastly, universe of discourse refers to acceptable phrases or sentences that are widely used in that culture. One or more of these factors will put an impact on translation process.

Manipulation can be carried out in order to achieve closest natural equivalence of target culture. Three strategies of 'translation adjustment', proposed by Nida (1964), allow translators to modify translated text and fit it to target audience. These strategies include addition, subtraction and alteration. Addition is the strategy that extra message is added to make original text understandable to target readers, while subtraction is the opposite which reduces explicitness of the source text. Alteration is an adjustment made to

original words which can involve changes in grammatical features (e.g. tense, number, or voice), word order, directness of utterance, or actions that equivalent meaning is not found (Cyrus, 2009). Katan also suggested three adjustment methods in manipulation process which included deletion, distortion and generalization. Katan's deletion and distortion resemble Nida's subtraction and alteration, respectively. Generalization is the use of more general term to translate sexual language by maintaining the original meaning.

Manipulation is normally applied to cultural specific expressions or sensitive topic like sexuality. In these modern days, many Thai people still view sexual topic as taboo subject and it is rude to be expressed in public. However, sexuality usually becomes talk of the town and hot debate when it appears to public, mostly criticisms. To write erotic story in Thailand, metaphor and oblique terms are employed because the main concerns of Thai writers are appropriateness and esthetics of written language (Raksamani, 1991). Consequently, explicit sexually related words from Western context have to agree with the Thai norm. For this reason, translator would have to



carefully select translated words related to sex to conform to the norms and Thai writing style.

In Thailand, there are only few studies that touch upon translation of sexual topic. One study was by Panida Cheunmanuch (2012) who conducted a research to investigate problem and solutions for the translation of sexual language in the novel 'On Chesil Beach' from English into Thai. In the translation, metaphor, loan words and neutral words were employed for the sexual language. To shed more lights on translation and sexual language in Thai context, the strategies that translators use for sexually-related terms are investigated which could be used as a guideline for novice translators when facing difficulty in translation of cultural language. In this research, the investigation of manipulation strategies follows Nida's and Katan's translation adjustment which includes addition, deletion, alteration and generalization. Lefevere's factors that influence such manipulation are also discussed.

## Methodology

### Samples

The samples in this study include *Fifty Shades Grey* (translated by Nanthaporn Pilay, 2013), *Fifty Shades Darker* (translated by Wiganda, 2013), and *Fifty Shades Freed* (translated by Napajaree Pinya, 2013). The *Fifty Shades Trilogy* is an American erotic story which has been translated and gained interests from Thai readers. The books depict a love story between Christian Grey, a successful businessman, and Anastasia Steele, a college student. Their sexual relationship is known as BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadism, and masochism) where one dominating over the other. Sex scenes are overtly described with sexually explicit words. It is anticipated that sex scenes or sexually explicit words will encounter some alteration in Thai translated version.

### Data collection

Four manipulation strategies applied to sexually related words were investigated in all three books of the *Fifty Shades* trilogy; *Fifty Shades of Grey* (FSOG), *Fifty Shades Darker* (FSD), and *Fifty Shades Freed* (FSF). These strategies were used with words for sexual intercourse, sexual organs, orgasm, and other sexual description.



Influencing factors were also analyzed based on Lefevere's manipulation theory.

### Data analysis

Manipulation strategies from Nida's (1964) and Katan's (1999) translation adjustment were the main principle in this investigation. Factors influenced the manipulation were derived from Lefevere's manipulation theory (1980) which consists of four main factors; ideology, patronage, poetics, and universe of discourse. Thai cultural factors were included in the analysis as well.

## Results

### Manipulation strategies

In this section, the result of the study is presented. Manipulation strategies were found to be exploited with sexually explicit words or sentences containing words related to sexual intercourse, sexual organs, orgasm and other words describing sexual actions. Four manipulation strategies from *Fifty Shades Trilogy* are discussed below.

#### 1. Deletion

Deletion strategy was the most frequently used strategy in the translation of sexually-related words. The strategy

appeared in word level, sentence level and paragraph level. Deletion of words and sentences had little effect on the description of sex scene as readers could understand the scene and the deleted part from the surrounding context. While the deletion of paragraph yielded more impact on the sexual description as some acts of sex were missing. It was also found that some scenes with the use of sexual equipment were deleted leaving only the plain act of sexual depiction. This strategy reduced the explicitness of sex scenes and also toned down the erotic sense of the story.

#### 2. Generalization

Generalization was the strategy that used more general term for the translation of sexual language. This strategy resembled Thai erotic writing style that commonly employed broader term or metaphoric expression to mention sexual action and sexual organs. The generalized term was applied to explicit and detailed sexual description. The motions of sexual intercourse were translated indirectly or only mentioned as 'movement' or 'do'. Sexual organs were alluded to male's strength and female's femininity instead of



nature references as in traditional Thai erotic writing. Other translation for sexual organs was referred to private area, sensitive spot, that part, or there. This strategy was able to convey the original meaning but with softer expression.

### 3. Alteration

Another strategy found in the translation of sexual description was alteration which replaced the original sexual depiction with different translated words. The purpose of this strategy was to convey the original text into acceptable description in Thai. Alteration was mostly used with sexual action that its details sound taboo to Thai readers or explicit words referred to sexual organs. The translated words were somehow distorted from the original text to depict the scene smoothly and appropriately in Thai context.

### 4. Addition

Addition strategy was detected in the translation of sexual organs, orgasm and sexual intercourse. The words were added to provide more information of the original description as direct translation could not transfer clear depiction of sexual words which could lead the readers to misinterpret the translated version. The

addition was also employed to add modifier for aesthetic purpose.

All four manipulation strategies by Nida and Katan were found in the translation of sexual description in *Fifty Shades Trilogy*. The following section discusses factors that influence the use of these manipulation strategies and the conclusion.

### Manipulation influences

There are three main factors influencing the choice of manipulation strategies for sexual scene translation. The factors that influence translator's decision to manipulate the translation of sexually-related words by using different terms and less coarseness are Thai cultural value (ideology), publisher and Government Act (patronage), and appropriate word choice (universe of discourse). According to Nanthaporn Pilay, the translator of *Fifty Shades of Grey (FSOG)*, she stated that in the translation of erotic novel, selection of appropriate sexual words is very crucial; they have to be able to convey equivalent meaning but not too obscene. This means that sexually explicit words had undergone some modification when translating into Thai to make it less obscene and conform



to the norm of Thai culture. In the same vein, the translators of *Fifty Shades Darker (FSD)* and *Fifty Shades Freed (FSF)* had held similar principle and translated using the manipulation strategies for the sexual description. The translator of *FSOG* was aware that Thai readers are not familiar to overtly description of sexual topic because it is deemed as immorality. Therefore her selection of vocabulary for sexually related words was not to directly translate but to find other appropriate words which comply with moral and regulation as Nanthaporn stated:

“The difficulty in translating erotic novels lies in the selection of (sexual) words that can convey equivalent meaning of their original words and at the same time they have to conform to Thai morality. The violation of the morality might cause in violation of Printing Registration Act (B.E. 2550) as well. However, those selected translated words have to be able to express romantic sense and fantasy imagination to readers.” [Personal interview, Dated March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015, (My translation)]

By mentioning the Printing Registration Act, it means that the translator was influenced by patronage when

translating sexually related words. This is in accordance with Lefevere’s Manipulation theory that translation can be intervened by powerful agent, which in this case is the Printing Act and the editor. Nanthaporn continued her statement saying that:

“To translate some scenes, for example when the two main characters went to the ‘Red Room of Pain’ or the scenes containing sexually related words and sexual torturing equipment, the editor had cut out quite a lot of sexual words. Frankly speaking, translated version cannot use as erotically strong words as in the original version. This may upset some readers. Moreover, there is no clear cut in criteria on how explicit erotic depiction can be according to the good morality stated in the Act.” [Personal interview, Dated March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015, (My translation)]

From this point of view, it affected the translator to avoid breaking the law and the good morality of Thai people which led to a careful selection of translated word. This showed the influence of Universe of discourse. Therefore, translator had to choose appropriate words that can deliver both erotic sense and good morals.



## Discussion

The results showed that when there are sexually explicit terms that are not conform to Thai social norms, translators will try to maintain the erotic sense of original text by rendering translated words with more acceptable and esthetic terms. Even though the erotic description might be toned down or lost in some cases, manipulation strategies are the choices for rendering taboo language to compromise what could become a controversy issue. Manipulation helps to present sensitive topic and details in a more pleasant way. Equivalent sexual words between Thai and English do exist but it is a question of appropriateness in each culture. Translated words have to be carefully selected in order to remain closest erotic tone and maintain its original meaning. What translators should be aware is that the sense of erotic depiction could be lessened or lost which could affect the overall story. Translation is not only about transferring equivalent words into another language, but also conveying the right and acceptable messages for particular culture.

## Conclusion and Suggestion

These strategies follow Nida's "techniques of adjustment" and Katan's adjustment methods. Translators have to make some changes during the process of translation (Nida, 1964); in other words, translators need to manipulate the text before conveying to target language. Moreover, the factors that influenced the use of manipulation strategies are in accordance to Lefevere's four manipulation factors. These factors are relevant and influence each other which translators and editor have to work together in order to transfer the translation in acceptable way. The strategies found in this study yielded a similar translation strategies as Cheunmanuch's investigation that neutral words and metaphors were the main choices used in the translation.

The variety of strategies for translating sexual description provides alternative methods to translators who have to deal with sensitive topics. These strategies are not only beneficial to the translation of sexuality but also other sensitive topics such as politics and religion. However, the study of sexual translation could be further explored by investigating other erotic novels that were translated into



Thai to gain more insight information and other strategies for the translation of such topic.

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