

Error Analysis in Thai-English Consecutive Interpreting Among Student Interpreters: Empirical Evidence from a Thai Interpreting Class

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Abstract

This study examines the types of errors in students' consecutive interpreting performances between English and Thai. Using error analysis, it categorizes errors into seven types: literal translation, inadequate language proficiency, register conservation, omission, addition, protocol-procedures-and-ethics, non-conservation of paralinguistic features. Data was collected from audio recordings of students' interpreting exercises, analyzed, and examined using descriptive statistics. The findings reveal a total of 183 errors in English-to-Thai interpreting, with inadequate language proficiency being the most common, followed by literal translation and omission. A similar pattern was observed in Thai-to-English interpreting, with a total of 131 errors, indicating consistent challenges across both language directions. These results highlight the need for targeted training to improve students' interpreting accuracy and fluency.

Keywords: Consecutive Interpreting; Error Analysis

Background and Statement of the Problem

Interpreting refers to the real-time oral translation of spoken messages from one language to another. There are two main types of interpreting: consecutive interpreting, where the interpreter listens to a portion of speech before delivering the translation, and simultaneous interpreting, where the interpreter translates while the speaker is still talking with minimal delay.

Interpreting between English and Thai poses significant linguistic and cultural challenges, often resulting in errors that can impact the clarity and accuracy of communication. Analyzing these errors is essential for understanding their causes and improving interpreter training programs. While errors in interpreting have been widely explored, studies focusing specifically on errors in Thai-English consecutive interpreting are still limited (Manuwong, 2014). Therefore, there is a research gap in the area of error analysis for this specific language pair. This paper aims to address that gap.

Objective

This study aims to examine errors in consecutive interpreting between Thai and English, with a focus on both English-to-Thai and Thai-to-English interpretation. Specifically, it seeks to categorize the types of errors that commonly occur in this mode of interpreting and identify their frequency and patterns.

Expected Benefits

By analyzing these errors, the research aims to provide a clearer understanding of the challenges faced by interpreters and contributes to the improvement of interpreter training and professional development.

Literature Review

Types of interpreting

Interpreting can be divided into simultaneous and consecutive interpreting. Simultaneous interpreting involves real-time translation, where the interpreter conveys the message in the target language while the speaker continues speaking in the source language. This mode is widely used in high-profile multilingual events such as United Nations conferences, international summits, and large-scale business meetings (Pochhacker, 2016).

Consecutive interpreting differs from simultaneous interpreting in that the interpreter listens to a segment of speech before rendering it into the target language. This type is commonly used in legal settings, medical consultations, and diplomatic negotiations (Russell, 2005).

Types of error in consecutive interpreting

Interpreting is a demanding cognitive task that needs processing capacities under time constraints. In consecutive interpreting, interpreters must first understand the source speech, retain the information in working memory or in written notes, then interpret the information into the target language. This is done under significant time pressure and often before a large audience. Successful interpreting thus demands cognitive support such as proficient language skills, strong working memory, and the ability to manage anxiety under pressure and in front of an audience. That's why errors can occur, as they indicate discrepancies in the interpretation. There are several types of errors (Barik, 1994; Gonzalez et al., 1996):

1. **Literal Translation:** Literal Translation occurs when an interpreter directly replaces words from the source language into the target language without adapting for grammatical, syntactic, or cultural differences. This method often leads to unnatural, awkward, or even incomprehensible phrasing because linguistic structures and idiomatic expressions do not always have direct equivalents between languages. According to Barik (1997), this type of error happens when interpreters prioritize word-for-word translation over meaning-based interpretation, leading to misunderstandings or loss of intended meanings. Literal translation is particularly problematic when dealing with idioms, metaphors, and culturally specific expressions, as their direct translation may not convey the intended message in the target language. Tahir and Pinilih (2023) observed that student interpreters often relied on literal translation, leading to awkward and sometimes incorrect renditions of the original message.

2. **Inadequate Language Proficiency:** This refers to the interpreter's inability to accurately predict language patterns, understand expressions, and apply appropriate linguistic structures in both the source and target languages (Barik, 1071). Inadequate language proficiency can lead to various errors, most commonly classified as lexical errors and incorrect translations. Lexical errors occur when an interpreter misinterprets or distorts word meanings, often due to limited vocabulary or unfamiliarity with context-specific terminology. Incorrect translations arise when interpreters fail to convey the intended message accurately, either by choosing inappropriate words, misusing grammar, or omitting crucial details. These errors can significantly impact the clarity and overall effectiveness of the interpreted message, leading to misunderstandings between speakers and listeners. Tahir and Pinilih (2023) further noted that student interpreters struggled with recognizing complex language patterns and producing idiomatic translations. Gonzalez et al. (1996) believe that language proficiency is fundamental in consecutive interpreting, and interpreters must be able to anticipate linguistic structures accurately.

3. **Register Conservation:** This involves maintaining the appropriate level of formality, tone, and style of speech according to the context, such as in legal or social settings. Failing to preserve the correct register can lead to changes in the meaning or appropriateness of the message (Barik, 1997).

4. **Omission:** Omission occurs when an interpreter leaves out parts of the message, which can lead to a significant loss of meaning and impact the accuracy and completeness of communication. Barik (1994) categorizes omissions into several types, including intentional omissions of unnecessary words or phrases, unintentional omissions due to misunderstanding or processing limitations, and structural omissions where the interpreter condenses information by combining sentences while leaving out certain elements. Omission can lead to misunderstandings between the speaker and the audience, which is particularly problematic when key concepts, numbers, or culturally relevant expressions are left out, as this can result in misinterpretations or misunderstandings between the speaker and listener. In high-stakes settings such as legal or medical interpreting, omission can have serious consequences, emphasizing the importance of maintaining faithfulness to the original message. Gile (1995) states that omission can be a deliberate strategy used by interpreters when they do not fully understand a segment of the message. In such cases, rather than risking an inaccurate or misleading translation, the interpreter may choose to skip the unclear portion. This strategy helps maintain the flow and coherence of the interpretation, preventing unnecessary disruptions in communication. However, while omission can sometimes be a practical solution for handling challenging content, excessive or inappropriate omissions may lead to significant meaning loss, especially in contexts where precision is crucial, such as legal or medical interpreting.

5. **Addition:** Addition errors occur when the interpreter includes extra information that is not present in the source message, potentially changing the intended meaning. Barik (1994) identifies several forms of addition, including the insertion of adjectives or adverbs that were not in the original text, unnecessary elaboration that slightly modifies the speaker's intent, the introduction of conjunctions or transitional phrases that change the logical flow of the message, and rephrasing that introduces nuances absent from the source language. When it does not distort the essential meaning, it can serve as a strategy to give the interpreter more time to think, smooth out abrupt phrasing, or help the interpreter complete a sentence more naturally. While minor additions may sometimes enhance clarity, excessive or unwarranted elaboration can distort the speaker's intended meaning, leading to misinterpretation. This type of error is particularly concerning in settings where precise wording is crucial, such as legal, medical, or diplomatic interpreting, where even slight modifications can lead to misunderstandings or unintended implications. Malau et al. (2021) found that courtroom interpreters sometimes added qualifiers or conjunctions, potentially altering legal interpretations.

6. **Protocol, Procedures, and Ethics:** This category covers violations of professional standards. These errors may include the mismanagement of profanity, culturally offensive language, or legally sensitive information, all of which require careful adaptation based on the context and audience (Tahir & Pinilih, 2023). In formal settings such as legal proceedings, medical consultations, or diplomatic meetings, interpreters are expected to maintain neutrality, accuracy, and discretion while adhering to ethical guidelines. Failure to do so—whether by altering the tone of a message, injecting personal bias, or disclosing confidential information—can compromise the integrity of the interpretation and lead to serious consequences, such as legal disputes or ethical breaches.

7. **Non-Conservation of Paralinguistic Features:** This error involves the failure to convey non-verbal elements of speech, such as fillers (e.g., “euu” or “hm”), incomplete sentences due to pressure or vocabulary gaps, and unnecessary repetition of words or phrases, which can disrupt the fluency and clarity of the interpretation. Malau et al. (2021) found that court interpreters frequently failed to preserve key paralinguistic elements such as tone, emphasis, and hesitation, which can alter the perceived meaning of a statement. Similarly, Tahir and Pinilih (2023) identified paralinguistic errors as the most common mistake among student interpreters, with fillers (e.g., “uh,” “umm”) being particularly prevalent.

Types of problems in interpreting

In addition to the above major types of errors in interpreting. Several researchers also discuss other problems in interpreting. Ribas (2012) categorizes problems in consecutive interpreting into listening comprehension issues, note-taking difficulties, decoding errors, and expression-related challenges. Likewise, Chinh (2010) identifies seven key challenges in interpreting, including time constraints, insufficient practice, anxiety, peer influence, speech delivery issues, health concerns, and poor audio equipment quality. Similarly, Pratiwi (2016) outlines seven factors contributing to difficulties in interpreting: nervousness, limited language proficiency, time pressure, inadequate practice, restricted vocabulary, difficulty maintaining focus, and environmental factors. These issues are often interconnected. For instance, a lack of practice can lead to increased anxiety, which in turn diminishes students' confidence and negatively impacts the accuracy and fluency of their interpretation. Tahir and Pinilih (2023) found that student interpreters, in particular, struggled with anxiety, which led to increased use of fillers and incomplete sentences.

Another factor is lack of training and practice. Malau et al. (2021) noted that courtroom interpreters often lacked specialized training, leading to mistakes in technical terminology and legal phrasing. Tahir and Pinilih (2023) emphasized that students had limited exposure to real-life interpreting situations, contributing to their errors. Chinh (2010) highlights the impact of insufficient practice on interpreter performance, particularly for language learners.

Another factor is Environmental and Partner-Related Challenges. Tahir and Pinilih (2023) observed that students faced additional difficulties when their partners had poor pronunciation or unnatural sentence structures. In contrast, Malau et al. (2021) found that external distractions and fast-paced courtroom proceedings negatively impacted interpreters' accuracy. Utami (2016) found that the quality of source material, including background noise and speaker clarity, significantly affected interpreter performance.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, using content analysis to examine patterns of errors in consecutive interpreting between English and Thai. To systematically examine these errors, the study adapts the error classification framework proposed by Malau et al. (2021) and Tahir and Pinilih (2023) and

restructures it to categorize interpreting errors into seven types: literal translation, inadequate language proficiency, register conservation, omission, addition, protocol-procedures-and-ethics, and non-conservation of paralinguistic features. By applying this framework, the research aims to identify the frequency and distribution of these errors, determine patterns in English-to-Thai and Thai-to-English interpreting, and gain insights into the challenges student interpreters face. The findings will contribute to improving interpreter training and developing strategies to enhance accuracy and fluency in English-Thai consecutive interpreting.

The study participants were 15 third-year university students enrolled in an Introduction to Interpreting class. The data comprises recorded interpreting assignments, including two Thai-to-English and two English-to-Thai interpretations. Each assignment involved watching video clips in the source language on various topics, which each clip lasting approximately three minutes, providing ample material for identifying and analyzing recurring interpreting errors. The consecutive Thai-English and English-Thai interpreting recordings of all 15 participants were transcribed, with errors by the author, and the errors were identified. Descriptive statistics were then used to analyze the data.

Table 1 Seven Types of Errors in Interpreting

Error type	Description
1. Literal Translation	Rendering the source text word-for-word, resulting in awkward or incorrect target language output.
2. Inadequate Language Proficiency	Errors stemming from insufficient command of either the source or target language.
3. Register Conservation	Failure to maintain the appropriate level of formality, tone, or style between source and target.
4. Omission	Leaving out essential words or ideas during interpretation.
5. Addition	Inserting information that was not present in the original message.
6. Protocol, Procedures, and Ethics	Breaches in interpreter conduct, such as speaking out of turn, giving personal opinions, or not maintaining confidentiality.
7. Non-conservation of Paralinguistic Features	Failing to convey tone, emphasis, pauses, or other non-verbal cues that carry meaning, including incomplete sentences.

Research Results

The results indicate that among the 183 errors identified in English-to-Thai interpreting, the most frequent were inadequate language proficiency, followed by literal translation and omission. The same pattern was also observed in Thai-to-English interpreting.

Table 2 Errors in English-to-Thai and Thai-to-English Interpreting by Error Type.

Error types	Frequency (English-to-Thai)	Frequency (Thai-to-English)
1. Literal Translation	38	27
2. Inadequate Language Proficiency	84	62
3. Register Conservation	16	5
4. Omission	28	21
5. Addition	6	7
6. Protocol, Procedures, and Ethics	0	0
7. Non-Conservation of Paralinguistic Features	11	9
Total	183	131

Example sentences for each error type

1. Literal Translation

English to Thai

- Source language: Some types of cephalopd can fly.
- Target language (Incorrect): เซฟาโลพอดบางประเภทสามารถบินได้
- Target language (Correct): ปลาหมึกบางประเภทสามารถบินได้
- Explanation: The term “เซฟาโลพอด” should be replaced with ปลาหมึก for clarity.

Thai to English

- Source language: ประเทศสหรัฐอเมริกาพยายามพัฒนาความยากจนมาหลายปี
- Target language (Incorrect): The US has been trying to develop poverty for several years.
- Target language (Correct): The US has been trying to reduce poverty for several years.
- Explanation: The verb "develop" is incorrectly translated too literally because "develop poverty" suggests increasing or enhancing poverty, which is the opposite of the intended meaning. The correct verb should be "reduced", "alleviated", or "combated", as they accurately convey the idea of trying to lessen poverty.

2. Inadequate Language Proficiency

English to Thai

- Source language: ... despite my needing his presence as a child as much as my mother's.
- Target language (Incorrect): ถึงแม้ว่าฉันจะต้องการให้เขาอยู่ตอนที่เขาเป็นเด็กเท่ากับของแม่ของฉัน
- Target language (Correct): ถึงแม้ว่าตอนเด็กฉันจะต้องการให้เขาอยู่เคียงข้างฉันพอๆกับที่ฉันต้องการแม่
- Explanation: "As a child" refers to the speaker's childhood, not the other person's. In the incorrect translation, "ตอนที่เขาเป็นเด็ก" (when he was a child) changes the meaning. It should be "ตอนที่ฉันเป็นเด็ก" (when I was a child). In addition, "as much as my mother's" is referring to the speaker needing their father as much as they needed their mother. The incorrect translation "เท่ากับของแม่ของฉัน" is unclear and unnatural in Thai. Instead, it should be "มากพอ ๆ กับที่ฉันต้องการแม่ของฉัน" for better clarity and accuracy.

Thai to English

- Source language: พวกเราใช้ออนไลน์มีเดียเยอะ
- Target language (Incorrect): We use online media hardly.
- Target language (Correct): We use online media a lot.
- Explanation: The word "hardly" in English means "almost not at all", which is the opposite of the intended meaning. The correct translation should use "a lot" to properly convey "เยอะ", meaning frequently or in large amounts. The correct version should be "We use online media a lot."

3. Register Conservation

English to Thai

- Source language: Men – I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation.
- Target language (Incorrect): ผู้ชายทุกคน ฉันอยากถือโอกาสนี้เชิญพวกคุณอย่างเป็นทางการ
- Target language (Correct): คุณผู้ชายคะ ฉันอยากถือโอกาสนี้เชิญพวกคุณอย่างเป็นทางการ
- Explanation: The phrase "Men –" in the source language is a formal or polite way of addressing a male audience. However, the incorrect translation "ผู้ชายทุกคน" sounds unnatural in Thai. The correct phrasing "คุณผู้ชายคะ" better preserves the intended meaning.

Thai to English

- Source language: คุณผู้ฟังคะ วันนี้เราจะมาพูดเรื่องการจัดการความเครียด (Context: Podcast)
- Target language (Incorrect): Audience, today we will talk about how to manage stress.
- Target language (Correct): Hello listeners/ Hi everyone, today we will talk about how to manage stress.
- Explanation: Since the audience consists of podcast listeners, the phrase "Hello listeners or Hi everyone" is a more natural and engaging way to address them. Using "Audience" sounds too formal and unnatural for a podcast setting.

4. Omission

English to Thai

- Source language: About 11% of the budget or \$665 billion goes to economic programs.
- Target language (Incorrect): ประมาณ 11% ของงบประมาณ หรือพันล้านดอลลาร์ใช้ไปกับโครงการด้านเศรษฐกิจ
- Target language (Correct): ประมาณ 11% ของงบประมาณ หรือหกแสนหกหมื่นห้าพันล้านดอลลาร์ใช้ไปกับโครงการด้านเศรษฐกิจ
- Explanation: The interpreter omitted the exact number of dollars, possibly because the number is quite complex in Thai, which led to an incomplete delivery of important information.

Thai to English

- Source language: งานวิจัยนี้เก็บข้อมูลโดยบริษัท Priority Pass
- Target language (Incorrect): This research was conducted by a company.
- Target language (Correct): This research was conducted by a company called Priority Pass.
- Explanation: The source states that the research is conducted by a company called Priority Pass. The interpreter should include the company's name to ensure the listener receives complete information.

5. Addition

English to Thai

- Source language: We don't often talk about gender stereotypes.
- Target language (Correct): เรามักจะไม่พูดถึงการเหมารวมทางเพศที่เหมารวมทางเพศว่าใครต้องเป็นอย่างไร
- Target language (Correct): เรามักจะไม่พูดถึงการเหมารวมทางเพศ
- Explanation: The interpreter repeated the translation, making it redundant.

Thai to English

- Source language: ตัวผมเองก็เคยประสบปัญหาที่มีบ่อยครั้งในช่วงเริ่มต้นของการทำงาน
- Target language (Incorrect): I also faced this problem many times at the beginning of my career when I started to work for the first time for my career.
- Target language (Correct): I also faced this problem many times at the beginning of my career.
- Explanation: The interpreter repeated the same translation, which could make the translation too long and redundant.

6. Protocol, Procedures, Ethics: No errors were found in this category in this study.

7. Non-Conservation of Paralinguistic Features

English to Thai

- Source language: A number of families were already vulnerable for various reasons.
- Target language (Incorrect): หลายครอบครัว เอ้อ เอ้อ (หยุดคิด) อ่อนแอด้วยสาเหตุที่หลากหลาย
- Target language (Correct): หลายครอบครัวมีปัญหาอยู่แล้วด้วยสาเหตุที่หลากหลาย
- Explanation: The interpreter used fillers to pause and think of the right words to say.

Thai to English

- Source language: การได้นั่งๆ อยู่เองกับตัวเอง เพื่อเรียบเรียงอะไรบางอย่างในชีวิตอาจจะเป็นสิ่งที่ดี
- Target language (Incorrect): Uh. Still and uh quiet with oneself to organize uh something in life might be good.
- Target language (Correct): Being still and spending quiet time with oneself to organize certain things in life might be good.
- Explanation: The interpreter paused and used fillers to think of words, making the translation incomplete and lacking fluency.

Discussions

The results indicate that errors are more frequent in English-to-Thai interpreting, with 183 occurrences, compared to 131 in Thai-to-English interpreting. The most common error in both directions is inadequate language proficiency, followed by literal translation as the second most frequent. Omission ranks third in both English-to-Thai and Thai-to-English interpreting.

The most frequent type of error, inadequate language proficiency, may be due to the fact that students are learning interpreting for the first time. These results reflect findings from earlier studies that identify errors as stemming from insufficient practice among beginner interpreting students (Chinh, 2010; Malau et al., 2021; Thair & Pinilih, 2023). Under time constraints and pressure, it can be challenging for them to construct grammatically correct sentences and choose the appropriate vocabulary. Similarly, for literal translation errors, since the students are new to interpreting, when they cannot think of the correct translation, they tend to translate word-for-word based on what they hear in the source language. This is similar to the findings in Utami's (2016) study, where the research found that beginner interpreting students tend to translate word-for-word.

Another interesting finding is that these types of error occur more frequently in English-to-Thai interpreting than in Thai-to-English (see Table 1). This may be because some students perceive Thai sentence

structures and vocabulary as more complex, as shown in Puthikanon's study (2024), in which Thai interpreting students reported greater difficulty in selecting appropriate Thai vocabulary compared to English.

The third most frequent error type is omission, which occurs significantly more often than addition errors in this study. This finding is consistent with Manuwong (2014), who examined errors in simultaneous interpreting among Thai interpreting students and found that omission errors occurred at a higher rate than addition errors. However, this result contrasts with Barik's (1994) research, where omission errors were less frequent. The discrepancy between these findings may be due to differences in interpreter experience, language pairs, or interpreting conditions.

The type of error that did not appear in this study is Protocol, Procedures, and Ethics. This category includes violations of professional standards, such as using profanity, culturally offensive language, or disclosing sensitive information. The absence of this error in the study may be due to the classroom setting, where students have little to no opportunity to encounter or use such language.

Recommendations

The results of this study suggest that interpreting courses should place greater emphasis on strategies for improvement to minimize errors. Training programs should focus on practice. For example, increased exposure to real-world interpreting situations, such as mock interpreting, can help student interpreters build confidence and improve accuracy. In addition, students should work on language proficiency development. Regular language exercises targeting grammar, idiomatic expressions, and lexical accuracy can help reduce errors related to vocabulary and sentence structure. Finally, cognitive and psychological preparation is also essential. Teaching relaxation and concentration techniques can help interpreters manage stress and reduce nervousness. Training programs should also include strategies for handling time pressure, enabling interpreters to perform efficiently under challenging conditions. Researchers should also use the results of this study to further explore the errors made by interpreting students, identify the factors that contribute to each type of error, and investigate ways to reduce or improve them.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this study is the limited number of students, which makes it difficult to generalize the findings to other contexts. Additionally, the error coding was conducted solely by the author, which may lead to subjectivity in the analysis. Furthermore, no interviews were conducted due to time constraints, limiting the exploration of the underlying reasons behind the errors in greater depth.

Future studies should address these limitations by incorporating interviews with students to gain insight into the reasons behind these errors. Including multiple coders could also enhance the accuracy and reliability of the error coding process. In addition, future studies could include a larger number of students to enhance the generalization of the findings. Lastly, future research can explore factors that may influence errors, such as students' language proficiency, as well as the speed, clarity, and quality of the source language.

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