TIME CHANGES, WORDS CHANGE: DIFFERENCES IN TWO THAI TRANSLATIONS OF A SCANDAL IN BOHEMIA

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ABSTRACT

Retranslation refers to the production of a new translation of a text into a target language in which it has already been translated. It is based on the premise that the subsequent translation(s) differ from the initial one. As retranslation naturally involves change, a key question is what are these changes like? This paper addresses this question through a comparative analysis of two Thai translations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's A Scandal in Bohemia (1891). It specifically examines the differences between two Thai translations and investigates how word use influences translational decisions. The study focuses on two versions published in 1951 and 1993, which, given the significant time gap, allow for a diachronic comparison with the English source text. The analysis identifies three key areas of variation: the use of first-person pronouns, address terms, and selected verbs and noun phrases. The findings indicate that the earlier translation tends to employ more archaic language, whereas the later version adopts a more contemporary and accessible vocabulary.

KEYWORDS: Retranslation, Word Use, A Scandal In Bohemia, Thai Translation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1887, when the detective novel A Study in Scarlet was first published in Beeton's Christmas Annual, the character of Sherlock Holmes has become widely known, alongside his companion and narrator, Dr. John H. Watson. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the British author, went on to create numerous short stories and novels featuring Holmes, collectively known as the Sherlock Holmes canon. These works are therefore worth sharing with readers in other languages.

There is no definitive count of the number of languages into which the Sherlock Holmes has been translated. Sherlockian, an online community dedicated to Sherlock Holmes, states the canon has been translated into 70 languages (2025). In contrast, a sub-headline by the BBC (2012) claims that it has been translated into 98 languages. Wilson (2025) offers a more general statement, noting that there are "a myriad of translations of Holmes throughout the world." In addition to these translations, the canon has also been retranslated in several languages.

The fact that the Sherlock Holmes canon has been retranslated into the same language raises the question of what differences exist between an initial translation and subsequent ones. This interest in comparative analysis is reflected in a growing body of research focused on various aspects of the canon. For example, previous studies have explored translator style in Indonesian (Halim, 2020), translation quality in Italian (Bonafè, 2021), and verbal projection in Chinese (Wang, 2020).

Since Berman (1990) noted that 'language change and the need to update the wording and terminology used in earlier translations,' word use becomes an intriguing area of study. In Translation Studies, this phenomenon is referred to in the Translation Hypothesis as "an issue of ageing" (Hanna, 2006). Moreover, although translations of the Sherlock Holmes canon are available in Thai, the issue of retranslation—particularly the aspect of word use in Thai versions—has received little attention and warrants further investigation.

This paper aims to explore this issue through a comparative analysis of three texts: the English source text A Scandal in Bohemia, the first short story in the Sherlock Holmes canon; the first Thai translation, เหตุอื้อฉาวในโบฮีเมีย (lit. a scandal in Bohemia, 1951); and the second Thai translation, ผู้พิชิตเชอร์ลอค โฮมส์ (lit. the one who defeated Sherlock Holmes, 1993).

1.2. Objectives

1. To investigate the differences in word-level choices between two Thai translations of A Scandal in Bohemia
2. To examine how issues of language ageing influence word use in the two translated versions

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Retranslation

Retranslation involves creating a new translation of a text that has already been rendered into the same language. This is often driven by changes in languages, cultural settings, or prevailing translation norms. New versions are typically produced to align more closely with contemporary linguistic standards, to improve upon earlier translations, or to reflect updated interpretations of the source text. Berman (1990) suggests that retranslation can also serve as a means of revisiting the original, often with the aim of achieving greater accuracy and clarity. Venuti (2008) emphasizes that each retranslation is shaped by evolving translation ideologies and the expectations of its intended audience, making it a product of its particular historical moment. Additionally, Kokinen and Paloposki (2010) argue that retranslation contributes to the formation of literary canons and cultural memory, offering insights into the changing dynamics between source and target cultures.

While first and subsequent translations may share certain similarities, scholars have traditionally focused more on the differences that arise across various versions of a translated text. These differences are not confined to the translated content itself but also encompass paratextual elements. For example, in a study of multiple Italian translations of J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, Raffi (2022) demonstrated that variations in external features or paratexts such as covers, introductions, and annotations can significantly influence how target readers interpret and engage with the text. In addition to the paratextual features, epitexts also play an important role in shaping the reception of translations. Rattanakantadilok (2024) explored the impact of media-generated epitexts—particularly those circulating in digital spaces, on renewed interest in George Orwell's Animal Farm and its Thai retranslations. The study found that these media texts served multiple functions: they framed readers' expectations, provided interpretive contexts, offered justifications for retranslation, and fostered public engagement. In the Thai context, the "afterlife" of Animal Farm has been closely intertwined with episodes of political unrest and the appearance of new translations. Rather than competing solely on textual quality, these retranslations have strategically

employed epitextual elements to attract attention and assert relevance.

Some studies aim to identify not just the differences between translations, but also the conditions that may have contributed to those variations. For example, Zulkipli and Haroon (2023) examined two Malay versions of Joseph Conrad's Almayer's Folly, seeking to uncover both the distinctions between the translations and the possible factors that shaped the translators' decisions. Their study emphasized the need to consider the historical context of a (re)translation, as only through such contextualization can one recognize that translation decisions may be influenced by external factors beyond the text itself. Osja and Krasniqi (2024) focused on identifying issues in Albanian literary translations. One of the works analyzed in their study was Love in the Time of Cholera by Gabriel García Márquez, which had been translated into Albanian twice—once during the communist era and again during the democratic period. Their analysis indicates that the source text underwent numerous deviations and distortions in translation primarily shaped by ideological and political pressures. These influences resulted in both overt censorship and instances of self-censorship throughout the translation process which led to both censorship and self-censorship during the process.

With a particular emphasis on word choice which is the main focus of this study, Rungtheera and Supanfai (2024) compared two English translations of The Little Prince, one of the most celebrated works in French literature. Their study investigated the translators' stylistic preferences and examined the differences in their translation strategies through a corpus-based analysis. The results revealed that the first translation adheres more closely to the source text, often opting for English terms that closely reflect the original French. In contrast, the second translation adopts more independent approach, showing a stronger tendency to use more old-fashioned vocabulary. Similarly, Ping and Wang (2024) analyzed two English translations of Journey to the West (Xi You Ji), a classic of Chinese literature. Using a stylometric approach, the study employed corpus tools such as word lists, keyword analysis, and function word analysis to investigate the translators' styles. The findings revealed marked stylistic divergence—including variations in lexical density, sentence length, and function word usage pointing to the translators' distinct strategies in rendering this Chinese literary classic.

Examining word use and lexical choice in two translations of the same source text offers valuable insights into the translators' stylistic preferences, ideological stances, and the prevailing translation norms of their respective periods. Such a comparative analysis can illuminate how shifts in language and culture influence the selection of vocabulary, tone, and register, ultimately shaping the way the translated text is received by target audience. As Baker (1992) notes, the translators' lexical choices can reflect not only linguistic limitations but also individual interpretation and socio-political context. Likewise, Munday (2008) underscores the importance of analyzing micro-level features such as word choice to uncover the translator's voice and the strategies employed to navigate the cultural and linguistic space between source and target cultures. In line with this, Saldanha and O'Brien (2013) argue that textual analysis is a fundamental method for uncovering patterns in translation that may otherwise go unnoticed, especially when investigating issues of retranslation or translator style.

In light of this, the present study examines not only the differences between the two Thai translations of A Scandal in Bohemia but also investigates their word in order to explain differences. The texts that are used to study are described in the next section.

2.2. *A Scandal In Bohemia And Its Thai Translations*

A Scandal in Bohemia is the first short story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the British author renowned for creating the Sherlock Holmes canon. The story was first published in 1891 in The Strand Magazine, and later included in the 1892 collection The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. Set in Victorian-era London, the canon centers on Sherlock Holmes, a consulting detective who shares a residence at 221B Baker Street with his friend, Dr. John H. Watson. Dr. Watson frequently joins Holmes in his investigations and thus serves as the narrator of many of the stories.

The short story revolves around the King of Bohemia and Irene Adler, an opera singer who later becomes the only woman Holmes ever holds in high regard. Five years prior, the King and Adler had a secret relationship. Now, as the King prepares to marry a Scandinavian princess, he fears the wedding could be jeopardized if a compromising photograph of him and Adler is revealed. He seeks Holmes's help to recover the photograph. Using his deductive skills, Holmes discovers its hiding place by staging a fake fire to observe Adler's reaction.

The following morning, Holmes, Watson, and the King visit Adler's home, only to find that she has

already fled. Holmes does not retrieve the incriminating photograph but instead finds a portrait of Irene Adler and a letter in which she explains that she has left the country and will not interfere with the King's marriage. In the end, Dr. Watson notes that Holmes always refers to Irene Adler with admiration and respect, calling her simply "the Woman."

Regarding Thai translations, the Sherlock Holmes series has been retranslated more than five times between 1890 and 2015 as proposed by Ninrat (2019). Notably, Panida Lorlertratna (2005) made a significant contribution by studying the development of Thai translations of Sherlock Holmes from the reign of King Chulalongkorn to the present-namely the year 2005 when the research was conducted. In Thailand, this short story was first translated into Thai in 1904 by Nai Kaew Nai Kwan and published by Tawee Panya under the title ความลับแผ่นดิน (lit. The Secret of the Nation), which reflects the story's plot. Subsequently, other translators also showed interest in rendering the story. In 1951, Amporn Saisuwan under the pen name of A. Saisuwan produced a translation published by Prapas Ton, titled เหตุอื้อฉาวในแคว้นโบฮีเมีย, a literal translation of the original title. This version gained popularity among readers and was reissued by various publishers in different editions. Despite the success of A. Saisuwan's translation, some translators continued to challenge themselves to retranslate the canon, including Pitch Magaraphan.

In 1993, A Scandal in Bohemia was retranslated into Thai by Pitch Magaraphan and published by Ploy Publishing. This version is titled ผู้พิชิตเชอร์ลอค โฮมส์ which specifically refers to Irene Adler. It should be noted that the book does not provide bibliographic information, so the publication year is an assumption. According to the study by Lorlertratna (2005), Pitch Magaraphan is credited with only one other translation, His Last Bow, which is also estimated to have been published in 1993. For this reason, the researcher adopts the publication year of His Last Bow as the assumed year for this edition of A Scandal in Bohemia. The next section is to described how this study is conducted.

3. METHODOLOGY

The objective of this paper is to analyze the practice of retranslation through a comparative analysis of two Thai translations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's A Scandal in Bohemia. Specifically, it examines word-level differences between the two versions, เหตุอื้อฉาวในโบฮีเมีย (1951) and ผู้พิชิตเชอร์ลอค โฮมส์ (1993), and explores how the phenomenon of "ageing" may have influenced the translations.

To address the first objective, this study compares the English source text with its two Thai translations. Each sentence in the source text is examined and mapped to its corresponding sentences in the Thai versions. This mapping allows the study to identify where and how the translations differ. The analysis focuses exclusively on differences in meaning at the word level, excluding variations in sentence structure.

Secondly, to examine how the issue of ageing may have influenced the two translations, this study employs the synthetic scheme for translation description proposed by Lambert and Van Gorp (1985). The scheme comprises four categories: preliminary data, macro-level structures, micro-level structures, and systemic context. This study focuses on word use, which falls under micro-level structures, as it relates directly to ageing. The analysis aims to uncover consistent patterns in word choice differences, rather than focusing on one-off or unique discrepancies between the texts. In essence, the study highlights recurring and noticeable variations.

The two Thai translations of Sherlock Holmes are clearly produced decades apart and are presumably developed independently, without significant reference to the other. In fact, there is a gap of over 40 years between them. Due to the temporal distance, substantial differences in word choice are anticipated, which forms the central focus of this paper. As Magaraphan did not appear to consult Saisuwan's earlier translation, this study investigates the divergences between the two versions al choices. This issue will be discussed in the following section.

In the discussion, ST refers to the source text (A Scandal in Bohemia), TT1 to the first Thai translation (เหตุอื้อฉาวในโบฮีเมีย), and TT2 to the second Thai translation (ผู้พิชิตเชอร์ลอค โฮมส์). It must be noted that the source text used in this study is the 2013 edition published by William Collins. The first translation is the 2015 edition published by Praew Publishing. As for the second translation, this study uses its first edition published by Ploy Publishing in 1993. All editions used in this study are the researcher's own copies, and subsequent revisions did not make any significant difference. Back translation (BT) into English is followed after each source text, namely BT 1 and BT2. The instances appear in italics, and the page numbers of both source text and translations are provided in parentheses.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

How do the two translations differ in terms of word choice? The source text (ST) was written in the

19th century, and as such, its vocabulary is largely archaic. In general, TT1 occasionally employs older terms, while TT2 tends to use more contemporary language. The most notable difference between the two translations lies in the use of first-person pronouns by the main characters, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson, as illustrated in the first two examples. The next two examples focus on noun phrases used to refer to Irene Adler. The final two examples highlight a verb phrase and a noun phrase, respectively, that demonstrate further lexical differences. Each example is presented with contextual information and an explanation of the specific word choices.

Example 1: I (Holmes)

ST   : I see it, I deduce it. (p.3)

TT1 : กันรู้ซี กันอนุมานเอา (p.11)

BT1 : I know it, I deduce it.

TT2 : ฉันรู้ซี ฉันอนุมานเอา (p.48)

BT2 : I know it, I deduce it.

In Example 1, both instances of the first-person pronoun I refer to Holmes, but they are translated differently by the two translators. A. Saisuwan renders it as กัน, while Pitch Magaraphan uses ฉัน. According to the Royal Institute Dictionary (2025), กัน is a first-person singular pronoun typically used by men and conveys a consistent level of intimacy. In contrast, ฉัน is also a first-person singular pronoun, but it can be used by both men and women. Moreover, ฉัน is generally more informal, often expressing a greater degree of intimacy, and is commonly used by seniors when speaking to juniors. The next example examines the pronoun choice from Watson's perspective.

Example 2: I (Watson)

ST   : "…I had a country walk…" (p.3)

TT1 : "…กันไปที่นอกเมืองมา…" (p.11)

BT1 : "…I had a country walk…"

TT2 : "…ผมไปที่นอกเมืองมา…" (p.48)

BT2 : "…I had a country walk…"

As shown in Example 2, the pronoun I refers to Dr. Watson and is again translated differently by the two translators. A. Saisuwan continues to use กัน for I, while Pitch Magaraphan renders it as ผม. According to the Royal Institute Dictionary (2025), ผม is a first-person singular pronoun used by men and is considered more formal.

Comparing the two examples, both represent conversations between Holmes and Watson. In the first translation, the use of กัน by both characters creates a sense of closeness and familiarity. In contrast, in the second translation, Holmes refers to himself as ฉัน, while Watson uses ผม. This contrast

suggests a difference in social dynamics: Holmes may be portrayed as older or more senior, while Watson appears more reserved or respectful, possibly maintaining a formal tone in their interactions.

In terms of word usage, it is important to note that the pronoun กัน is now less commonly used in everyday Thai conversations. In contrast, pronouns such as ผม and ฉัน—along with others like กระผม (a more formal first-person pronoun used by men) and กู (used by both men and women, though considered impolite and more intimate)—remain widely recognized. It can be assumed that contemporary readers may find กัน somewhat unfamiliar or outdated when reading the first translation, whereas readers of the second translation are more likely to engage smoothly with the text due to its use of more current and accessible language.

Example 3: the woman (1)

ST   : To Sherlock Holmes she is always the woman. (p.1)

TT1 : สำหรับเชอร์ล็อก โฮล์มส์ แล้ว หล่อนเป็นยอดหญิงเสมอ (p.9)

BT1 : To Sherlock Holmes she is always the excellent woman. (p.1)

TT2 : หล่อนเปนผู้หญิงคนเดียวเท่านั้น สำหรับเชอร์ลอค โฮมส์ (p.4)

BT2 : To Sherlock Holmes she is always the only woman. (p.1)

This excerpt appears at the very beginning of the story, where the woman is used as a term of address for Irene Adler. As previously mentioned, Holmes consistently honors her for being perceptive enough to see through his investigative strategies. In terms of translation, A. Saisuwan renders the phrase as ยอดหญิง (lit. the excellent woman or the noble lady), while Pitch Magaraphan translates it as ผู้หญิงคนเดียวเท่านั้น (lit. the only woman or one woman). It is also worth noting that หญิง is a shortened form of ผู้หญิง in Thai.

In Thai, ยอดหญิง is typically found in literary or poetic contexts and carries a connotation of excellence or exceptional ability. In contrast, ผู้หญิงคนเดียว is more commonly used in everyday language and has a neutral tone. Additionally, the first translation includes the adverb เสมอ (always) to modify the verb เป็น (is), reinforcing the consistency of Holmes's respect. In the second translation, however, the adverb เท่านั้น (only) is used to intensify the adjective คนเดียว (only one), emphasizing Irene Adler's unique status among women in Holmes's view.

Example 4: the woman (2)

ST   : …it is always under the honourable title of the woman. (p.25)

TT1 : เขามักจะใช้คำที่ให้เกียรติแก่หล่อนว่า ยอดสตรี เสมอ (p.37)

BT1 : He always uses the word honouring her as

the excellent woman.

TT2 : เขามักจะใช้คำที่ให้เกียรติแก่หล่อนว่า ผู้หญิง "คนนั้น" เสมอ (p.86)

BT2 : He always uses the word honouring her as "that" woman.

This example, which appears at the end of the story, expresses Holmes's continued admiration for Irene Adler and echoes the tone of the previous example. A. Saisuwan translates the phrase as ยอดสตรี (lit. the excellent woman or noble lady), while Pitch Magaraphan uses the phrase ผู้หญิง "คนนั้น" (lit. "that" woman). The use of quotation marks around คนนั้น ("that one") likely serves to emphasize her singular importance, possibly mirroring the emphasis on the original text, as if italicized.

It is worth noting that หญิง, ผู้หญิง, and สตรี all share the same core meaning—woman. The difference lies in their formality and usage: หญิง is a shortened form of ผู้หญิง, and สตรี is the most formal of the three. Magaraphan's use of quotation marks around คนนั้น suggests an intentional emphasis, possibly highlighting Holmes's lingering impression of Irene Adler.

Considering Examples 3 and 4 together, it is evident that each translator maintains a consistent stylistic approach: A. Saisuwan tends to use more classical or literary expressions, while Pitch Magaraphan favors a more modern and conversational tone.

Example 5: has given her notice
ST   : …my wife has given her notice… (p.3)
TT1 : เมียกันเขาบอกศาลาแล้วนะ (p.11)
BT1 : my wife has given her notice
TT2 : เมียผมเขาบอกเลิกจ้างแล้วละ (p.48)
BT2 : my wife has given her notice

In the beginning of the story, following a long separation after Watson's marriage, he and Holmes are reunited. Watson greets Holmes, who then assumes that Watson has resumed working. This assumption surprises Watson, but Holmes explains that he deduced it from the wear and tear on Watson's clothes. Watson then mentions a maid named Mary Jane, whom his wife had dismissed for not performing her duties properly, which explains why his clothes appeared unclean.

Regarding Example 5, the verb phrase has given her notice is translated as บอกศาลา in TT1 and บอกเลิกจ้าง in TT2. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2025), give someone notice means to ask someone who works for you to leave their job, usually after a particular period of time. In TT1, บอกศาลา in Royal Institute Dictionary (2025) refers to a declaration of disownment and the withdrawal of all responsibility

and support, as defined in the Royal Institute Dictionary. Moreover, this expression is considered old-fashioned or archaic. In contrast, TT2's use of บอกเลิกจ้าง conveys a literal and contemporary meaning, commonly used in modern Thai. Despite the stylistic differences, both terms effectively convey the intended message—that Watson's wife had dismissed the maid.

Example 6: a lawyer
ST   : He was a lawyer. (p.13)
TT1 : เขาเป็นหมอความ (p.23)
BT1 : He is a lawyer.
TT2 : เขาเป็นทนายความ (p.66)
BT2 : He is a lawyer.

This excerpt is taken from the scene in which Holmes and Watson discuss Godfrey Norton, a man who is romantically involved with Irene Adler. To render the word 'lawyer', A. Saisuwan uses the term หมอความ, while Pitch Magaraphan uses ทนายความ. Similar to Example 5, the former is relatively old-fashioned, while the latter conveys a more literal meaning and is still commonly used today. The word หมอความ is a compound of หมอ (doctor) and ความ (case), referring to a person who handles legal cases. In Thai, several other compound words also use 'หมอ'. For example, หมอแคน refers to a person skilled in playing the แคน (a traditional musical instrument), and หมองู refers to a snake charmer or a person who performs with snakes. Such a compound is formed to refer to someone who is an expert in a specific field.

5. CONCLUSION

The study investigated word usage in two Thai translations of A Scandal in Bohemia. The data for the analysis were manually collected from the English source text, the first Thai translation by A. Saisuwan, and the second by Pitch Magaraphan. The findings suggest that, in terms of word choice, A. Saisuwan tends to use more old-fashioned or archaic terms than Magaraphan. Given that A Scandal in Bohemia is set in the Victorian era and is widely regarded as a timeless classic, it could be argued that Saisuwan intentionally chooses such language to evoke a sense of the historical period.

For example, Saisuwan consistently translates the pronoun I as กัน, an old-fashioned first-person pronoun for males, while Magaraphan opts for the more commonly used ผม. Similar tendencies are observed in other lexical items. For instance, the phrase give notice is rendered as บอกศาลา in Saisuwan's version—a term that is archaic and connotes disownment—whereas Magaraphan uses the more neutral and current บอกเลิกจ้าง. Likewise, the word

'lawyer' is translated as หมอความ by Saisuwan and as ทนายความ by Magaraphan.

In reference to the woman, both ยอดหญิง and ยอดสตรี carry archaic connotations and differ slightly in formality. Magaraphan, on the other hand, appears to make more independent and modern lexical choices, such as ผู้หญิงคนเดียวเท่านั้น or ผู้หญิงคนนั้น. This suggests that Saisuwan adopts a more source-oriented translation approach, aiming to preserve the tone and atmosphere of the original, whereas Magaraphan leans toward a target-oriented strategy, favoring accessibility and naturalness for contemporary Thai readers.

These findings align with Hanna's idea that language evolves over time, necessitating revisions of earlier wording and terminology in translations. The first translation tends to retain older language, whereas later translations favor newer and more modern vocabulary.

It should be noted that this study focused specifically on word usage in the two Thai translations of A Scandal in Bohemia. Therefore, the language observed in these translations may not fully reflect the typical use of language in the original English text. Moreover, the factors influencing word choices in the translated versions remain a compelling area for further investigation.

If future research shifts its focus to the readers, it may explore their perspectives—for instance, which version they prefer and why. Additionally, since the source text in this study represents only one part of the Sherlock Holmes canon, many other stories may also warrant analysis from various perspectives. These could include linguistic components such as the use of modal verbs and descriptive adjectives, or sociolinguistic dimensions such as gendered language and the use of royal honorifics.

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