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Non-normative Sexuality And Genders Confronted: A Study of Translators-In-Training's Intercultural Competence through English-Thai Translation of LGBTQ+ Texts

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the use of LGBTQ+ language and translator skills as markers of intercultural competence. Informed by queer translation theory and intercultural competence, this qualitative study examines translators-in-training's English–Thai translations and uses interviews to explore the rendering of non-normative sexualities and genders. The first part examines how translators-in-training translated references to non-normative sexualities and gender groups from English into Thai, and the second part presents interviews with the participants about their subjective translation choices in relation to LGBTQ+ knowledge and intercultural competence. Ten undergraduate students majoring in English at a university in southern Thailand were invited to participate on a voluntary basis. The findings indicated that translators-in-training might lack appropriate vocabulary for describing non-normative sexualities and genders, leading some to use omission, misinterpret terms, or rely on traditional pronouns. The interview results showed that participants were receptive to LGBTQ+ characters in the source texts, regardless of gender, demonstrating a certain level of informed social awareness in their translation decision-making. While they might not yet possess the necessary language skills, a positive attitude toward marginalised groups could enable them to engage with and translate similar texts in the future, given their passion for learning through listening, observing, interpreting, and making connections. Intercultural competence encompasses translation competence. Our participants' reflections on their own translations also demonstrated their potential to deepen their understanding of other bodies from the original/source cultures, as well as the ability to read and interpret them with diverse cognitions.

Keywords: translator-in-training; intercultural competence; literary translation; sexuality; LGBTQ+ language

INTRODUCTION

An individual's gender is contingent upon the cultural signals and settings of which they are currently aware (Gherardi, 1995). One's social environment largely determines the selection of one's speaking and thus gender performing, not their biological sex or first language (Butler, 1990, p. 196). Butler posits that language should not be regarded as a tool for self-contemplation, but rather as a medium through which speakers, or gender performers, perceive themselves within specific societal discourses, perceptions that may frequently contradict their previously understood selves.

The present study reflects on the concept of gendered language in translation, whose purpose is to facilitate the smooth transfer of ideas and thoughts. It is therefore pertinent to examine the challenges translators may encounter when translating languages that express non-normative sexualities and genders. Jerome et al. (2016) once opine that the authorial construction

of characters' identities in queer literature can lead to more comprehension of the identity outside the fictional world. However, the discriminatory preference for traditional patriarchal manipulation may reinforce the misrepresentation of dual gender in translation (Moindjie & Rahamatullah, 2024). This study, thus, seeks to examine how translators tackle the source texts replete with queer language and how they can help the target readers understand the true meaning of diverse forms of language. We believe that recognising the dynamic nature of language concerning non-normative sexuality and gender identities is the key to effective intercultural communication (cf. Aboim, 2023; Castillo & Pineda, 2025; Noels et al., 2020; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Roslani & Jamal, 2024), especially in the Thai context (cf. Saejang, 2024; Doungphummes & Phanthaphoommee, 2024; Phanthaphoommee et al., 2025; Doungphummes et al., 2025; Klomkaew & Kanokpermpoon, 2025; Pan, 2025). This study also aims to add the perspectives of Asian scholars to the existing body of knowledge on queer and gender translation, precisely because, according to Baldo et al. (2021, pp. 186–187), a collaborative discussion of queer culture from various viewpoints—not simply Western researchers' influence—will enhance knowledge of queer theory and LGBTQ+ translation. Hostová (2022) argues that translation studies and queer theory can be fruitfully combined to foster an engaged transdisciplinarity. To support this growing subfield within translation studies, various scholars have highlighted the pressing need for research at the intersection of queerness and translation. Baldo et al. (2021) explain that translation for LGBTQ+ communities can help convey the meaningful messages of queer politics to diverse societies, with translators acting as queer activists. According to Gillett (2024), translating queer involves conveying the multiple meanings and implications of a given term across languages and cultures, shaping how queer is understood and how it operates in diverse contexts. Although translation studies are highly interdisciplinary and have applied a range of linguistic and social science theories, we agree with Baer and Kaindl (2018, p. 1) that the interpretation of the translation phenomenon has not fully incorporated queer perspective.

We maintain that a study of how translators-in-training render the language of non-normative identity groups and how they manipulate or negotiate with such language use will encourage integrity and awareness of translators-in-training as intercultural communicators in their future careers. Therefore, this study seeks to advocate for a study on LGBTQ+ language use and translators' skills as indicators of intercultural competence. For the first part, it looks at the strategies that those who want to become translators use to translate the language of non-normative sexuality and gender groups from English into Thai. The second part focuses on interviews with the participants to find out how they relate to LGBTQ+ content and how they view their subjective choices in translation. Therefore, our research questions are: (1) What translation strategies for queer literature are adopted by translators-in-training? (2) What types of intercultural competence do they possess (or lack) that influence their choices when translating LGBTQ+ texts?

LITERATURE REVIEW

RESEARCH ON QUEER AND TRANSLATION

Nearly twenty years ago, scholars of translation studies began examining the subject of queerness through a lens of translation. Harvey (2003), who highlights the role of translation in homosexual politics, was among the first to study how American gay culture is negotiated in translation, including camp culture and paratexts. The edited volume by Epstein and Gillett (2017) is another significant contribution to the translation and application of queer theory. Both believe that the

way we view languages as being able to transfer meaning from one language to another by simply modifying the language while retaining the original sense is simply delusional. It is just as fallacious as the belief that gender is fixed in the teleology of sexuality, because such views contradict the reality of what a human is. According to Epstein and Gillett (2017, p. 3), queer studies and translation embrace seepage and contamination between language and gender. They give examples of gender-neutral pronouns and compare them to those used to install a gender-neutral toilet. If the public truly accepts diversity, it is vital to set guidelines for the regular usage of pronouns and toilets. Similarly, writers or translators, together with readers, should be more attentive to translated works that refuse subordination to the target culture—domestication, in Venuti's (1993) sense.

Baer and Kaindl (2018, pp. 3–4) noted that the appearance of queer themes in various languages and cultures alters both the theoretical and experts' understanding of translation. Investigating the regulation of sex and sexuality in monolingual states, Robinson (2019) recommends that translators use forms of address already prevalent in the target culture in their translations to help expose and destabilise the world order that oppresses transgenderism. Awareness of this issue may help change the way translators and target audiences have traditionally viewed translation as always accurate. Looking at Asian-related studies, Bao (2021) found that the import of queer theory from the West into Chinese perception through translation is not a linear transfer but is instead influenced by several factors, including negotiations of translators' ideologies and publishers' marketing strategies. T. Guo and Evans (2020) adopt queer theory to explore the Chinese subtitle of the film *Carol*, proposing the concept of translational freedom to make progress for the LGBTQ+ community through disruptive language in fansub screenplays that defy conventional translation techniques.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: TRANSLATION AS INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

To address the research questions, the study was divided into two parts. The first part analysed the participants' choices in translating LGBTQ+ texts, and the second identified the intercultural competence qualities they displayed when working with the given texts, based on interview data.

As an analytical framework for the first part of the study, we drew on Epstein and Gillett's (2017) model, which is influenced by feminist translation scholars (e.g., Simon, 1996). Epstein and Gillett (2017) propose two specific strategies for reading queer translations: acqueering and eradicalisation. The first strategy centres on the acquisition or highlighting of a character's homosexuality, or of situations that draw attention to it. The second strategy is evident when the translator deliberately omits queer-related terms or contexts, thereby radically erasing forms of gender diversity that diverge from the cultural norms of the target society. Similarly, Baer (2021) argues that the target culture often shapes cross-cultural queer translations by selecting terms or phrases that reveal queer identity ideology, accompanied by explicit framing of paratexts. Such framing, as Rattanakantadilok (2024) notes, undeniably carries political implications.

The above-mentioned studies suggest that translation can be a tool for ideological change, whether it is the meaning of being queer, the role of translators, or LGBTQ+ rights in translation. Aligning with the above aspiration, we adopt Epstein and Gillett's (2017) dichotomy of queer translation to discuss the implications of translating non-normative gender identity groups from English into Thai in the selected LGBTQ+ literature.

For the second part of the analysis, we drew on the intercultural competence framework proposed by Deardorff (2006). In general, intercultural competence is defined as a person's ability to interact in a culturally sensitive manner when they have a myriad of cognitive, affective, and behavioural experiences in multicultural contexts through a continuous learning process (Byram, 1997; Chen & Starosta, 1996). Deardorff (2006) has introduced the intercultural competence model to delineate the essential elements of intercultural competence, encompassing the necessary attitudes, knowledge, comprehension, and skills. The model also incorporates desired internal and external outcomes and organises the elements in a pyramid structure, with individuals ascending the levels until they reach the apex. Intercultural competence is developed at the individual level of intercultural interaction. Five elements comprise Deardorff's (2006) intercultural competency model:

i. Requisite attitudes: respect for other cultures' values, openness, curiosity, and non-judgment, which help expand one's cultural mind and prepare one to learn about other cultures through cross-cultural communication.
ii. Knowledge and comprehension: a mind with cultural self-awareness, a profound understanding and knowledge of culture, culture-specific information, and sociolinguistic awareness.
iii. Skills: ways to manage and process listening, observing, interpreting, analysing, evaluating, and connecting knowledge.
iv. Desired internal outcome: a shift in the person's framework of reference to incorporate adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelativity, and empathy.
v. Desired external outcomes: an accumulation of the previous four elements that are expressed through the appropriate and effective communication behaviour of each individual.

In this study, intercultural competence is regarded as a form of translation competence, and the LGBTQ+ community is conceptualised as a distinct cultural group within a given society (Parmenter et al., 2020). By analysing the data collected from students of translation studies, this framework can help explore the translators-in-training's process of developing "skills, knowledge, understanding, and necessary attitudes" towards LGBTQ+ groups. We used the interview results to analyse the internal and external outcomes that arose from the translation experiences of research participants with this model. To conceptualise the development of intercultural competence as an ongoing learning process for translators, we argue that it is essential to consider what intercultural competence (or its absence) entailed for this group of translators-in-training, alongside the essential professional skills they were expected to possess, such as foreign language proficiency.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study incorporated various techniques for data collection. In the first part, textual analysis was performed to compare components of the selected source texts to the participants' translation of LGBTQ+ language. The second part was the exploration of the qualities contributing to the translators-in-training's choices and intercultural communication competence; thus, a semi-structured interview was employed to explore the translators-in-training's perceptions of

LGBTQ+ language and their reflections on their translation choices. The detailed designs in terms of participants, context for data collection, and analysis are presented below.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis after ethical clearance had been obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Ten B.A. students majoring in English at a university in southern Thailand volunteered to participate. The participants comprised seven individuals assigned male at birth and three individuals assigned female at birth. Most self-identified as Buddhist, with only one participant identifying as Muslim. The campus where the study took place is located in southern Thailand, a region with a higher proportion of Muslim residents than any other region in the country. However, the translators-in-training and their religious affiliations are not the focus of this article. The purpose of including a small group of participants in this study was to give detailed depictions of their experiences—ethnographic miniatures—of their opinions (Geertz, 1973). All participants had been studying English for more than fifteen years, beginning in primary school. They were fourth-year students who had taken two translation courses during their sophomore year and were taking their last translation course when the experiment was carried out. All three translation courses are compulsory; the first course is an introductory course, in the second course, students learn how to translate literary texts, and the third course covers audiovisual translation and business-related and legal texts. All three courses require students to translate from both directions, English into Thai and Thai into English.

This group was appropriate for the study, given their diversity in terms of gender, sexuality, religious belief, and their developing language and intercultural competence. It allowed us to illustrate how translators with still-developing knowledge approached LGBTQ+ texts. Their translation decisions potentially have implications for the development of inclusive and interculturally sensitive pedagogical practices in Southeast Asian contexts, where research remains limited.

Regarding the procedure, the participants were briefed about the research's objectives, background, and data gathering procedure. These ten volunteers were asked to fill out a demographic profile. One student identified himself as 'non-binary', one as 'still figuring it out', two as 'gay men', three as 'straight male', and three as 'straight female'. After they finished translating the given excerpts, their translations were examined and analysed by the researchers, and five students were chosen for individual interviews, which lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. In reporting the findings, we used pseudonyms to protect their identity.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS AND DATA COLLECTION

There were two sets of data in this study. The first set consisted of the translation outputs produced by the participants. Two samples from two different queer literary works were selected for English–Thai translation experiments. These texts were intended to elicit each participant's intercultural competence; therefore, the selection criteria focused on well-received LGBTQ+ texts that contained a range of LGBTQ+ language elements. Accordingly, the excerpts used as research instruments were selected from two award-winning novels.

The first novel, *Girl, Woman, Other*, by Anglo-Nigerian writer Bernardine Evaristo, was published in 2019 and won the 2019 Booker Prize for Fiction.[1] Twelve narratives in *Girl, Woman, Other* feature multiple strands of black British identity. The chosen excerpt is from Megan/Morgan's narrative. Megan/Morgan is a trans-non-binary-high school dropout-social media influencer. The second novel, *Detransition, Baby*, by Torrey Peters, won the 2021 PEN/Hemingway award for debut fiction. The novel tells the stories of three women–transgender and cisgender–whose lives collide after an unexpected pregnancy forces them to confront their deepest desires around gender, motherhood, and sex. The chosen excerpt represents Ames's point of view. Ames once lived as a trans woman, going by Amy. *Detransition, Baby* has not been included in any of the reading materials in any B.A. courses, but in a literary course during their third year, all ten students read a chapter from *Girl, Woman, Other* (not the chosen excerpt), yet some of them answered in the demographic profile form that they had not read any queer literature before.

In the translation experiment, we selected two out of many possible excerpts that highlight the most critical points related to non-normative sexual identities. To decide which excerpts were most appropriate, we engaged in multiple rounds of reading in the selection process. After much back-and-forth discussion over the language and content of the source texts, we settled on two passages for translation.

The excerpt from *Girl, Woman, Other* is as follows:

> The funny thing is, nothing's changed about Morgan since she became a gender granary *non-binding* whatsit, other than changing her name from Megan to Morgan, which is fine, Hattie can live with that
> At least she didn't name herself *Reginald* or *William*
> Hattie absolutely won't pander to call her *they* instead of *she*, as requested.
> Morgan looks the same (like a boy), acts the same (boyish), and to all intents and purposes is the same (Megan).
>
> (Evaristo, 2019, p. 352, italics added)

The excerpt from *Detransition, Baby* is as follows:

> How many times had he tried to explain his *detransition* to other *trans women*? Tried to assuage the sense of betrayal that their wariness obviously communicated?
>
> In Ames's formulation, trans women knew what *trans women* were, they knew how to be, but they didn't know how to do. All the intra-trans fights online, all the arguments with *cis* people: All of it was just to define what it meant to be a trans woman; to say what she was. But when you're a trans woman, there's almost nothing out there on how to actually live.
>
> (Peters, 2021, pp. 98–99, italics added)

The italicised words in the two excerpts are the target terms used for textual analysis. In terms of data collection for the first part, the participants were asked to translate both excerpts into Thai and were not made aware of the target terms. The time limit was 60 minutes. They had access to online resources in a computer lab, and their computer screens were monitored while they were completing the tasks. They were not allowed to talk to each other or anyone else online or offline while translating the given excerpts.

The second data set was obtained through interviews, which elicited the participants' viewpoints. The research instrument for this phase consisted of interview questions designed to explore participants' translation choices, which were then interpreted within the framework of intercultural competence (as outlined in the previous section). The questions focused on the

[1] *Margaret Atwood and Bernardine Evaristo jointly won the 2019 Booker Prize for Fiction.*

following topics: (1) reflections on the choice of translated terms or phrases for non-normative sexual identities from English into Thai, and (2) competence and creativity in transferring such terms and phrases into Thai. We used interviews to gauge the participants' ideas and viewpoints because, as Böser (2015, p. 243) notes, "interview […] can provide useful contextualization for findings derived from linguistic analysis. With a view to research into face-to-face interpreting". Interviews can help explain linguistic evidence by revealing "regularities of motivated behaviour" (Mason, 2000, p. 230), in our case, those of translators-in-training. From the pool of participants who volunteered to translate the selected texts, five were selected for an interview. Only participants who consented to share their personal information with the researchers were invited to be interviewed.

Regarding the data collection procedure for the second part, after the volunteers had been recruited and had given permission for audio recording, we invited them individually into the interview room. Each participant was given 30 to 45 minutes to explain their translation decisions and the underlying reasoning, including why one option was chosen over another and how it felt, at the moment of encounter, to translate the text and allow its meanings to pass through them.

DATA ANALYSIS

Our data analysis was, likewise, divided into two parts. The first one consisted of a comparative study of selected texts that the participants were asked to translate. Following data collection, each translation was compared with the others to identify differences in the participants' translation choices. The translated texts were then compared to the English source texts with special emphasis given to LGBTQ+ language usage and other linguistic constraints. As described in the previous section, the translated terms and phrases by the participants were determined using Epstein and Gillett's (2017) framework. When terms or phrases that reference sex and sexuality are toned down or removed in translation, this falls into 'eradicalisation' (Epstein & Gillett, 2017, pp. 121, 125). An example analysis of the term "non-binding" by the participant who chose the pseudonym "Sanya" is a case in point, as it eradicates the radical nature of queerness (See Table 1). When queer translators of queer texts focus on the queerness of a character, they highlight it in ways that prompt readers to reflect on it (Epstein & Gillett, 2017, p. 121). The translation of 'they'—the preferred pronoun of many people who identify as non-binary—as 'เธา' (a newly coined pronoun by the participant, a combination of 'he' and 'you'), by the participant whose pseudonym was "Booky", represents an instance of 'acqueering' as it brings issues of sexuality and identity to the fore.

The participants were informed of the subject matter of the source texts, but none of the LGBTQ+-related items were labelled. The intention was to allow the participants to identify possible language used by LGBTQ+ characters by themselves.

The second part employed a thematic analysis of relevant perspectives and diverse opinions obtained from interviews with participants. The results were described in terms of the participants' awareness of their understanding of language use by gender identity outside the social norm in both the source and target languages, their choices in translation, and their understanding of LGBTQ+ issues as intercultural competence.

RESULTS

TO QUEER OR NOT TO QUEER: THAT IS THE QUESTION

After conducting the first part of the research, we observed a range of translation choices among the participants, suggesting that gender and sexual orientation may influence their varying levels of text comprehension. The target terms translated by all 10 participants are summarised and back-translated in Table 1. The translations of five participants not chosen for individual interviews are presented first, followed by the translated versions of five participants who were interviewed.

TABLE 1. Translations of target terms

Pseudonym	Sexuality/ Gender	Target terms in translation				
		non-binding	*they*	*detransition*	*trans women*	*cis*
Sanya	Gay man	omission	เขา (he)	การแปลงเพศกลับไปเป็นผู้หญิงของเขา (changing his gender back to being a woman)	ผู้หญิงข้ามเพศ (trans women)	ชายแท้หญิงแท้ (real men and real women)
Anurak	Straight male	ไม่ผูกมัดเรื่องเพศ (not sexually binding)	เขา (he)	การกลับไปสู่เพศสภาพของตัวเอง (going back to one's own gender)	ผู้หญิงข้ามเพศ (trans women)	คนเพศเดิม (people who retain their previous gender)
James	Straight male	ไม่ยึดติดกับเพศวิถีของตน (not fixated on one's sexuality)	คุณ (you)	การแปลงเพศกลับไปเป็นเพศที่เคยเป็น (changing back to previous gender)	สาวๆ ข้ามเพศ (trans girls)	คนที่ไม่เคยข้ามเพศ (those who are never trans)
Annie	Straight female	คนไม่มีสถานะทางเพศ (those without gender)	เขา (he)	การข้ามเพศของคนเอง (one's gender change)	ผู้หญิงข้ามเพศ (trans women)	คนข้ามเพศทั้งหมด (all trans people)
Kannika	Straight female	พวกไม่ระบุเพศสภาพ (those who do not identify their gender)	พวกเขา (they; *plural*)	การกลับตัวกลับใจ (changing one's mind and behaviour)	เหล่าผู้หญิงข้ามเพศ (trans women)	พวกหญิง/ชายแท้ (real men/women)
PP	Straight female	คนที่มีอิสระในการเลือกเพศของตัวเอง (people who have freedom to choose their own gender)	เขา (he)	กลับไปเป็นเพศสภาพเดิม (returning back to previous gender)	หญิงข้ามเพศ (trans women)	คนทั่วไป (common people)
Natalee	Straight male	บุคคลที่ไม่ต้องการระบุเพศ (the person who does not want to identify one's own gender)	แก (they; singular, third-person and gender-neutral)	การแปลงเพศกลับไปยังเพศสภาพตัวเอง (changing back to one's own gender)	เหล่าหญิงข้ามเพศ (trans women)	เพศสถานะสอดคล้อง (those with corresponding gender identities)
Persephone	Gay man	ข้อผูกพันธ์ที่อยู่ใต้ร่มของคำว่าเพศ (binding condition under sexual umbrella)	คนนั้น (that person)	การเปลี่ยนแปลงของเขา (his change)	หญิงข้ามเพศ (trans women)	พวกชายจริงหญิงแท้ (real men and women)
Liza	Still figuring it out	พวกไม่ฝักใฝ่ทางเพศ (those who are not interested in sex)	พวกเขา (they)	การผ่าตัดเปลี่ยนเพศ (gender reassignment surgery)	สาวข้ามเพศ (trans girls)	กลุ่มคนที่ไม่ใช่บุคคลข้ามเพศ (not transgender people)

Booky	Non-binary	ไม่ยึดติดกับอัตลักษณ์ทางเพศ (not fixated on one's own sexuality)	เธา (a newly coined pronoun, a combination of 'he' and 'you')	กลับไปเป็นเพศเดิมที่เขาเคยเป็น (going back to his previous gender)	ที-เกิร์ล (t-girls)	กลุ่มคนข้ามเพศ (trans people)

The first five students in Table 1 stated that they had not read any queer literature before. Of the five interviewed participants, PP, Natalee, and Liza stated that they had not read any queer literature before; only Persephone and Booky read similar queer literature before participating in this study.

After the translations of the first target term, *non-binding*, were examined, given that the translation into Thai of this term has not been officially established in any English-Thai dictionaries, it is evident that all participants, except Sanya, attempted to render this term into comprehensible Thai. Persephone, a gay man, rendered this term as 'binding condition under sexual umbrella', essentially offering the vaguest meaning in comparison to others' translations. Liza, the participant who was still figuring out his sexual orientation, rendered this term as 'those who are not interested in sex'; his was the only translation that placed emphasis on sexual contact, not on sexuality/gender. The translation that offered a rather extreme meaning is 'those without gender' by Annie, a straight female. To this participant, if a person is identified as *non-binary*, that person then has no gender. Three participants gave similar translations; Anurak, a straight male, rendered it as 'not sexually binding', James, another straight male, translated it as 'not fixated on one's sexuality', and Booky, the non-binary participant, also offered a similar choice of 'not fixated on one's own sexuality'. The meaning in their translations draws readers' attention to the sense of 'not being preoccupied with one's sexuality' while the translations by Kannika, a straight female, and Natalee, the straight male participant, 'those who do not identify their gender' and 'the person who does not want to identify one's own gender' respectively, underscore the action of 'not identifying' one's gender. The translation that stood out from the rest is 'people who have freedom to choose their own gender' by PP, the straight female participant. Her translation laid emphasis on 'the right to choose' as if labelling oneself as anything else points to the lack of freedom. Confronted with a relatively new LGBTQ+ term, most participants, who were translators-in-training, attempted to explain 'non-binding' in Thai by drawing readers' attention to the concepts of 'sex', 'sexuality', and 'gender'. By not translating this term into Thai, Sanya used an eradicalisation strategy while others employed an acqueering strategy, with varying degrees of success in terms of accuracy.[2]

As a general trend, the preferred pronoun of those who identify as non-binary is *they*, and in *Girl, Woman, Other*, Morgan wants Hattie, her great-grandmother, to use *they* when Morgan is referred to. The singular gender-neutral use of 'they' is becoming increasingly common in the English language. Typically, the Thai language has many gender-neutral pronouns. The translation of *they* into Thai that can reflect the contestation of rigid gender expectations poses a challenge for all translators, not just translators-in-training. Four participants opted for *khao* (เขา), a third-person pronoun for addressing male individuals, typically corresponding to 'he' in English, and this translation disregards gender non-conformity. Two participants decided to translate this pronoun as *phuak khao* (พวกเขา), a third-person plural pronoun, though *phuak khao* is gender-neutral in Thai, but the plural sense will not vanish and will most likely override the singular use.

[2] Their translations were not evaluated on stylistic or aesthetic grounds, and this is not a reception study in which readers of the English–Thai translations are recruited. Instead, to assess the accuracy of the translators-in-training's lexical choices, the researchers—who are translation studies scholars and freelance translators working in this language pair—judged whether the meanings of the terms were accurately rendered.

Translating *they* as *phuak khao* has the potential to shift queerness to the heterosexual norm. Persephone decided on *khon nan* (คนนั้น), meaning 'that person', which is gender neutral, but the pronoun in English was not replaced by a pronoun in Thai, an inequivalence in terms of part of speech. The following three renderings reflected linguistic politeness. James, a straight male, settled on a gender-neutral second-person pronoun: he rendered it as *khun* (คุณ), the second-person pronoun 'you'. In Thai, the pronoun *khun* is typically considered more polite than *thoe* (เธอ). Natalee, the straight male, rendered this term *kae* (แก). Depending on context, this pronoun can be a second-person or a third-person pronoun. Translating *they* in *Girl, Woman, Other* as *kae*, which is also a third-person pronoun, gender-neutral, and already singular in Thai, seems to be the solution to this translation problem.

Of all renderings, the only participant to coin a neologism is the non-binary participant. Booky, who preferred the pronoun 'he', combined the gender-neutral second-person pronoun *thoe* (you) with the singular male third-person pronoun *khao* (เขา, meaning 'he') and coined a new pronoun *thao* (เธา). Recognising that Morgan is gender non-conforming, Booky developed a neologism whose construction is derived from old graphemes and morphemes. If any Thai translators plan on using this newly coined pronoun *thao* in their translations, they have to intervene paratextually to retain the LGBTQ+ aspect in the translation. Without supplying a footnoted explanation, Thai readers would not comprehend the meaning of this neologism, and the importance of using a gender non-conforming pronoun would be lost.

After translations of the gender-neutral pronoun *they* are analysed, we can conclude that four participants who translated *they* as 'he' (เขา) used the eradicalisation strategy, possibly subconsciously. Two participants went for neither the eradicalisation strategy nor the acqueering strategy as their translation of the gender-neutral pronoun *they* is just a literal translation of the term, and their rendering does not bring attention to queerness. It can be said that by translating the gender-neutral singular pronoun *they* as *khun* ('you') and *khon nan* ('that person'), these two participants adopted an acqueering strategy, as they attempted to bring queer identity to a noticeable position, even if the translated pronoun *khun* is an inequivalence since it is not a third-person pronoun. When *they* are transposed by a noun phrase 'that person', another inequivalence is produced, but this rendering is gender-neutral and used to refer to a third person in Thai. Through the use of the third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun *kae*, which can be equated with the singular gender-neutral *they*, the straight male participant revealed his understanding of gender diversity and behaviours and foregrounded queer identity in his translation. The only non-binary participant in this study visibly employed an acqueering strategy because the neologism *thao* (เธา) is a salient feature, thereby highlighting queerness. This neologism lends itself to the possibility of adding footnotes, endnotes, a translator's preface, or other paratextual materials, and this can lead to the discussion of queerness and/or translatorial choices.

The next target term is *detransition*, which has yet to establish its official Thai correspondence. Many participants mistranslated this term, possibly because they did not know what *transitioning* entails, and this unknowing affected their interpretation of *detransitioning*. For instance, Annie translated this term as 'one's gender change'; Kannika rendered this term as 'changing one's mind and behaviour'; Persephone translated it as 'his change'; and Liza ended up with 'gender reassignment surgery'. In fact, *transitioning* is about making changes so that one can live in one's gender identity. Some of these changes include changing one's name or receiving gender-affirming medical care, not just getting 'gender reassignment surgery'. Liza possibly misread the word *detransition*, resulting in a mistranslation. Other participants, on the other hand,

relied on the sense of moving backwards by using 'change back' and 'go back' in their renderings. For instance, Sanya, Anurak, James, PP, and Booky translated this term as 'changing his gender back to being a woman', 'going back to one's own gender', 'changing back to previous gender', 'returning back to previous gender', and 'going back to his previous gender' respectively. The translation by Sanya is the most explicit; however, it is a mistranslation, because Ames, who transitioned to female, has now detransitioned back to male, rather than from male back to female. Explicitation is not employed by other translators-in-training. Natalee's rendering 'changing back to one's own gender' seems to suggest that a person owns only one gender and any other gender a person transitions to will never become his/her/their own. After all participants' translations are analysed, it can be said that all mistranslated versions eradicate queerness as queer representation in the target language is distorted. Other translated versions reveal the participants' attempt to focus on the queerness of the character by making it visible in translation.

Trans women is the only term that has an established Thai translation. Most participants rendered it *phu ying kham phet* or *ying kham phet* or *sao sao kham phet* (ผู้หญิงข้ามเพศ, หญิงข้ามเพศ, สาวๆ ข้ามเพศ). Booky was the only participant who decided to translate this term *t-girls* (ที-เกิร์ล). This non-binary participant explained that he looked up the meaning of this term online, then he found the word *t-girls* and decided to use it in his translation. None of the participants removed this gender identity in the target text; all of the participants adopted an acqueering strategy. Booky, however, brought attention to queerness by using an uncommon term. The translated version 't-girls' stands out because it requires a paratextual material that allows translators to discuss queerness and this translatorial choice. The translation 't-girls' emphasises the queerness of the word itself and the queerness of the characters in the story.

Contrary to the previous term, *cis* has no established Thai translation. Annie and Booky mistranslated it as 'all trans people' and 'trans people'. Three participants, Sanya, Kannika, and Persephone, rendered it as 'real men and women'. Based on the word choice, it can be implied that non-cisgender individuals are then 'fake men and women'. Two participants, James and Liza, came up with an explanation of what 'cis people' are not: 'those who are never trans' and 'not transgender people'. Creating a contrasting effect, these two translators-in-training juxtaposed *cis* against trans individuals, thereby producing a gender dichotomy of cis versus trans identities. Anurak's translation, 'people who retain their previous gender,' seems to suggest that cis individuals will never transition, and this decision allows them to retain their gender that corresponds to what society considers appropriate for their birth-assigned sex. Natalee's translation, 'those with corresponding gender identities,' corresponds with monolingual English-language dictionary definitions of *cis*. PP's rendering of 'common people' puts a label on cis individuals as 'normal' and implies that non-conforming genders are uncommon, therefore 'abnormal'. The translations of this Anglophone term, which required these translators-in-training to adapt it into Thai, showed that the participants must develop a vocabulary to describe sexual and gender identity categories.

Mistranslation occurred not because the participants intended to change the cis identity to a queer one, as the work already foregrounds non-normative sexual and gender identity categories, but rather because they might have misread the term and were in a hurry to complete their tasks. Some translations relied on a dichotomy between normative and non-normative sexuality/genders. Some translations relied on the condition of being appropriate and normal, inherently hinging on a dichotomy of what society considers appropriate and normal versus inappropriate and abnormal for an individual's birth-assigned sex.

For the interview, the framework of intercultural competence was employed to guide the questions pertaining to the translators' thought processes and their decision-making powers in the translated texts and issues of non-normative sexuality and genders. Questions covered life experiences, attitudes, translation knowledge, skills, and values for the target society.

When asked how they viewed translators' queer life experiences, many participants (e.g., Booky, PP, Persephone) agreed in tandem that such experiences brought them an advantage in selecting more appropriate vocabulary. Since they might have a chance encounter with related topics and acquire them in their own language repertoire, such translators could effectively apply a broader range of lexicon in their translation. These experiences might also enable them to draw upon their own anecdotes when rendering the queer contents. Some participants stated that,

> The translator's [gender] identity affects the translation because people whose gender identity is different from the character's in the novels [texts used in the experiment] may be confused and decide to use the wrong words in their translation, maybe due to a lack of understanding of the LGBTQ+ group's preferred pronoun.
>
> (Liza)

> Male translators may not be able to choose translation strategies that can convey feminist themes as deeply as female or feminist translators.
>
> (Persephone)

One essential component for accurately translating LGBTQ+ writings from English into Thai is an awareness of LGBTQ+ existence in society and an appreciation for other cultures (Persephone). Additional important qualities include awareness of gender issues, an updated lexicon (PP), proficiency in both English and Thai, and awareness of LGBTQ+ concerns (Liza). Specifically, Booky stated that,

> Ability and knowledge in Thai and English are the most important because we must use the language to present the story of the original text. We must understand and know it well, both in terms of language structure and witticism.

In addition, interviewees had identified other factors, such as the extensive consumption of LGBTQ+ media, including audiovisual content and literature, in both English and Thai. This exposure would allow translators to become familiar with language styles and subcultural slang. To improve one's understanding of translation strategies, it would be beneficial to read extensive studies, analyse different examples, and engage in regular translation practice. Several participants considered critical thinking and interpretation skills as important skills for translators when the message concerns non-conforming genders.

As mentioned, intercultural competence attitudes are essential for developing awareness and achieving goals. Our case study demonstrated that translating LGBTQ+ works from English into Thai required this expertise.

> You should be open-minded. If closed-minded, translators may be biased towards LGBTQ+ people, and the translation may lack LGBTQ+ sensitivity.
>
> (PP)

Many agreed that translating this type of work required expertise into Thai and English, experience with LGBTQ+ culture, including language usage and vocabulary, and a deep grasp of the source material. Natalee wisely observed,

> Diversity in society – it is the first thing we need to recognise. There are more than just men and women in this world. If you can't accept this, then translating any LGBTQ+ work is not for you.

It is worth noting that the interviewed participants identified key skills required for effectively analysing LGBTQ+ texts, including the ability to seek new knowledge and an understanding of cultural diversity (Persephone). Natalee further commented that,

> The necessary skills also include analysing the social context, characteristics, and personality of the characters in the society in the source language to facilitate the understanding of the target readers, along with using critical thinking to consider what is intended to be conveyed in the original text.

This raised the question of whether the translation was intended to influence Thai readers in any specific manner. Booky observed that,

> At first, I joined this research project just because I wanted to see how I could help and what kind of texts I'd be translating. While I was working on the translations, I kept telling myself to try to be as accurate as possible. I was really just focused on my own work and didn't think about the bigger picture or how it might affect readers. But after I finished, I realised that translation really requires a lot of learning, especially about things I wasn't familiar with.

This statement represented all participants' views. They seemed to concur that a translator must be aware of the diversity in both the narratives and real-world contexts when rendering queer literature. It was essential to select language that was inclusive and respectful to all characters and even readers in the hope that the latter would develop a greater awareness of specific LGBTQ+ terminology and could serve as a basis for engaging appropriately with the target LGBTQ+ community. PP noted that,

> I tried to translate in ways that readers can understand as much as possible because it is very difficult to understand the sentence structure and vocabulary, and translating the texts right away is hard. It requires more depth, such as careful consideration of words and the selection of pronouns.

These reflections illustrated all intentions of the translators-in-training, both before and after undertaking the translation experiment. Each sought for their translated works to have some effects on target readers, albeit being motivated by the background and purposes of this research project.

Nonetheless, we may need to carefully parse the participants' opinions a bit further. While their responses implied their wish to promote inclusiveness and equality in the translation, which might allow target readers to connect with the original characters' experiences, each participant's opinion might not yet reflect that they fully grasped the underlying causes, rationales, or background of LGBTQ+ advocacy due to their limited firsthand experiences. Their responses might simply reflect the viewpoint of an observer or a bystander. Having said that, with an open mind of their own, further development of critical thinking on these issues may increase their true understanding as they lead a compassionate social life and accumulate more professional experience.

DISCUSSION: OPENING SPACES FOR BECOMING

As the findings reveal, the necessary skills for the translators-in-training and their attitudes toward the subject matter are clearly highlighted in the translation experiment and during the interviews. This could be especially seen when these participants were asked to choose just one literary work to translate. Of the five interviewed participants, the majority chose *Detransition, Baby*, and the reason given was that reading *Girl, Woman, Other* was more difficult. Evaristo uses disrupting conventional paragraphing and punctuation, allowing direct and indirect speech to bleed into each other and sentences to run on without full stops (Bucknell, 2019). The participants felt that this technique hampered their reading flow. Another reason given by one participant who was still figuring out his sexuality was that the sexualities of characters in *Girl, Woman, Other* were not as clear as the sexualities of characters in *Detransition, Baby*. To this participant, transgenderism was explicit, whereas homosexuality/lesbianism was not as easy to understand.

The results also revealed that translators-in-training might lack sufficient vocabulary to effectively handle LGBTQ+-related topics. When the participants did not have vocabularies for describing non-normative sexuality and genders, some resorted to omission; some misinterpreted the meanings of certain terms; some relied on traditional meanings of pronouns; and some turned to established dichotomies. Interestingly, when we compared our findings to those of En and En (2019), who also studied volunteer translators in the context of LGBTQ+ migrants, we found a similar trend: most participants did not see themselves as "activists." A key difference, however, is that En and En (2019) noted that participants with LGBTQ+ backgrounds explicitly claimed an understanding of LGBTQ+ issues as a form of authority in translation. In contrast, our study found that cisgender male translators also demonstrated much sensitivity towards the cultural diversity of this subculture; one of them asserted that he could translate with care and effectively if he could engage in more research and have conversations with individuals of different genders. It can be inferred that the translators' openness to the subject matter may be influenced by their daily experiences and peer relationships (e.g., Baker, 2000; Lu, 2024).

When translators present such openness, regardless of gender, it can be implied that translation skills are strongly linked to the translators' self-concept. Even if they are not yet linguistically proficient, their social awareness and understanding of themselves evidently play an important role in their translation decision-making. This awareness in translation aligns with Kiraly's (1995, p. 100) assertion that self-concept can show in "a sense of the purpose of the translation, awareness of the requirements of the translation task, self-evaluations of capability to fulfil the task, and a capacity to monitor and evaluate translation products for adequacy and appropriateness." To varying degrees, the self-concepts of the five interviewees reflected their perceived role as mediators, as they recognised that, although they might not yet possess the necessary language skills, a positive attitude toward the marginalised group would enable them to further develop and, in the future, translate texts on similar topics.

Moreover, this result chimes in with the claim that intercultural competence is an ongoing process (Deardorff, 2006). The participants seemed to show that they adhered to life-long socialisation, with necessary attitudes of appreciation for other cultures and a willingness to refrain from judging different cultures. Many participants who struggled to understand the terms in the given texts expressed a desire to seek further knowledge through skills, such as listening, observing, interpreting, and making connections. Our research revealed that although these translators had not yet acquired strong translation skills, with further practice and a positive attitude toward translating LGBTQ+ texts, they could show opposite and pertinent performance

in intercultural communication. We maintain that intercultural competence, in this sense, is one aspect of translation competence. This finding is in line with the research finding of Lenkaitis et al. (2020), who found that one may develop intercultural communication skills by means of cultivating mindfulness of one's own culture while being inclined to learn new ones. Based on our interviews, having a positive attitude and a desire to convey the essence of LGBTQ+ issues to the target readers are similar to "preparing students to live in a global world and empowering them professionally" (Pinto, 2018).

Our participants' reflections of their own translations during the interview, likewise, revealed the potential to "increase [...] understanding of 'other bodies' from multiple cultural perspectives" (Yep, 2013, p. 121). Our participants expressed their willingness to engage in reading and interpreting "other bodies," which is always tied to the cultural context from which it originates (Chávez, 2009, p. 24). By using their own interpretive cultural lenses, we contend, the participants took part in an embodied translation process as they decoded, encoded, and represented the communication of "other" groups. This illustrated that although their linguistic and translation knowledge remained limited, these translators-in-training were able to explore the complex gender and sexuality identities in the original texts. Despite limited time and some mismatched lexical choices, they showed an understanding of the source texts' sociocultural milieux and personhood as the interplay between individual subjectivity, self-concept, and cultural forces (Yep, 2010, p. 173). The translators-in-training's attitudes seemingly reflected a clear understanding of how they inhabited and interpreted their own identities. This, in turn, helped create a new lens for seeing "other bodies" and for conveying "other" experiences in the source text in an appropriate way. This study also supports Lacayo's (2014, p. 228) proposition for global literary translation that we should "queer the act of translation as a mode of possibility toward an ever-opening, ever-unfolding space of becoming via language".

Given the meaningful findings and interpretations yielded by this study, we also acknowledge its limitations, particularly the small number of participants. Despite this, the study's focus on translators-in-training enabled a deeper understanding of their intercultural competence in handling queer-related and other politically sensitive texts, as well as their willingness to translate LGBTQ+ materials. Another limitation is the narrow selection of texts used in the translation experiment. Future research could therefore broaden the scope to include a wider range of materials beyond literature, such as films or series, whose audiovisual components may further enhance translators-in-training's awareness and engagement.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that it is possible to gauge intercultural competence in undergraduate translators-in-training, even when their linguistic proficiency is still developing, particularly in terms of vocabulary acquisition. This foundational training has the potential to increase awareness of LGBTQ+ issues (or other critical issues) by fostering skills and a sincere desire to comprehend "others." This awareness has the potential to inspire additional research and the development of translators' understanding of inclusiveness as they advance in their professional journey. To contribute to broader scholarship, we argue that the study of queer scholarship should also commence with translators-in-training. This echoes Chávez's (2013, p. 85) recommendation to "address [...] interlocking violences, the silences that enable them" in the source text, while also indicating the potential for agency and shifts in mentality in the target culture.

In future research, the approach used in this study could be extended by comparing professional translators with translators-in-training to examine how intercultural competence develops over time. In addition, the use of different materials, such as audiovisual and multimodal texts, could further illuminate how queer identities are negotiated through diverse modes of translation. Furthermore, comparative research across Southeast Asian languages and sociocultural contexts is a desideratum, so that scholars in translation studies can more effectively situate queer translation practices beyond European paradigms.

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