

Pragmatic Failure in Translating Thai Subtitles in Movies: A Case Study of the Barbie Movie

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Abstract

Pragmatic problems in translation occur when translators fail to convey the intended meaning of the source message accurately in the target language, resulting in misinterpretation or a loss of communicative effect (Irodaxon & Munisa, 2025). This research examines pragmatic failures in the English-Thai subtitle translation of the Barbie movie. The study collected data from the Thai subtitles of the Barbie movie, which faced significant criticism on social media for mistranslations in both linguistic and sociological aspects. The samples were six scenes of the Barbie movie that were intentionally chosen using the three-act structure, focusing on pragmatic failure in translation, specifically pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983). The research used descriptive qualitative methods to analyze and describe the failures in the subtitles. The findings revealed 27 instances of pragmatic failures in the subtitles, consisting of 25 pragmalinguistic failures and 2 sociopragmatic failures. The pragmalinguistic failures were mainly related to deixis, with person deixis being the most common. The sociopragmatic failures were found only in request speech acts. Despite the identified failures, this research aims to inform and address how these two types of pragmatic failures can impact the audiences' interpretation and comprehension. Nevertheless, the ideal translation does not exist. While a perfect translation may be unattainable, this research seeks to provide insights that could contribute to the enhancement of translation practices in the audiovisual translation field, particularly for subtitle translation in Thailand.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale of the Study

Nowadays, international films circulate widely across linguistic and cultural boundaries, making subtitle translation a crucial medium for audience comprehension. In audiovisual translation, translators must negotiate linguistic meaning alongside temporal constraints, visual cues, genre conventions, and culturally embedded pragmatic meanings. Among these challenges, rendering pragmatic meaning from the source text (ST) into the target text (TT) remains particularly complex, as it requires sensitivity to context, interpersonal relations, and implicit meaning (Aruna, 2018).

Pragmatics concerns how meaning is constructed and interpreted in context, taking into account linguistic form, speaker intention, and social relations (Yule, 1996). In subtitle translation, inadequate interpretation of such contextual and pragmatic elements may result in pragmatic failure, whereby the intended meaning of the ST is not successfully conveyed to the target audience. Thomas's (1983) concept of pragmatic failure, originally developed in interactional contexts, has been widely adopted in translation studies to examine how misinterpretation of pragmatic meaning leads to misunderstanding in mediated texts.

Although pragmatic failure has been extensively examined in cross-cultural communication and language use (e.g., Ding, 2022), research on pragmatic failure in movie subtitle translation remains limited. Only a small number of studies, such as Mahniza (2020), have addressed pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure in subtitles, indicating a gap in audiovisual translation research, particularly in Southeast Asian contexts. To date, no empirical study has systematically examined pragmatic failure in Thai subtitle translation.

The present study selects *Barbie* (2023) as its case study for several reasons. First, *Barbie* is a globally distributed film in which the dialogues engage audiences in reflection on gender constructions, identity, and prevailing societal expectations (Abdelwahed, 2025). These qualities seem highly dependent on pragmatic interpretation. To make accurate rendering of pragmatic meaning essential for preserving the intended communicative effect. Furthermore, due to its wide audience reach and cultural impact, mistranslation in *Barbie* subtitles could potentially affect large and diverse viewer groups, thereby amplifying the consequences of pragmatic failure.

According to Pjrtsinfin (2023), a user on X, comments on the Thai subtitles of *Barbie* (2023), suggesting that some translated lines may go beyond minor mistranslations or

technical subtitling constraints and potentially alter aspects of the original meaning. The post received notable public attention, with over 2,100 heart reactions, indicating that concerns about the subtitles resonated with a substantial number of viewers rather than reflecting a single individual's perspective. While this engagement does not constitute empirical evidence, it points to a broader audience perception that the Thai subtitle translation may have affected interpretation at the pragmatic level. Taken together, the film's linguistic complexity, cultural salience, and wide reception make *Barbie* a suitable and meaningful case for investigating pragmatic failure in subtitle translation. Accordingly, this study aims to identify and analyze instances of pragmatolinguistic and sociopragmatic failure in the English–Thai subtitle translation of *Barbie*, contributing to the limited body of research on pragmatic failure in audiovisual translation within the Thai context.

1.2 Research Purpose

To investigate the pragmatic failures in the Thai subtitle translation of the *Barbie* movie.

1.3 Research Questions

This study endeavors to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the pragmatolinguistic failures that occur in the Thai subtitles translation of the *Barbie* movie?
2. What are the sociopragmatic failures that occur in the Thai subtitles translation of the *Barbie* movie?

1.4 Research Significance

This research will be beneficial for several groups of people. First, it will benefit pragmatics translation-related enthusiasts and movie subtitle translation enthusiasts by enhancing their understanding of pragmatics in translation. The findings will add to the knowledge of pragmatic failures in translation, especially in English-to-Thai subtitle translation. Second, this research will be valuable for professional translators working in audiovisual translation by providing examples of pragmatic failures and their impacts on audience comprehension. Third, the research will be useful for educators in translation programs by offering case studies that can be used in translation courses. Finally, this research may also benefit film distributors and streaming platforms in Thailand by showing the importance of translation quality in subtitles.

2. Literature review

2.1 Barbie Movie

Barbie movie is an American fantasy comedy film launched in 2023 which has a total duration of one hour and fifty-four minutes, which is about feminism and reflects patriarchy. *Barbie* movie is directed by Greta Gerwig, a multi-award-winning female director (Rueckert,

2018). The Barbie movie was one of her movies that received the Golden Globe Award for Cinematic and Box Office Achievement in 2024 (IMDb, 2024), becoming one of the highest-grossing films of the year.

The plot of the movie begins with Barbie (played by Margot Robbie), the most renowned among all the Barbies residing in Barbieland, finds herself grappling with an existential dilemma. To unravel her identity and unearth her genuine calling, she embarks on a journey to the real world. Her kinda-sorta boyfriend, Ken (played by Ryan Gosling), comes along for the ride because his own existence depends on Barbie acknowledging him. Along their journey, they encounter eye-opening realities and forge new friendships as they pursue enlightenment (Lemire, 2023).

2.2 Pragmatics and Translation

Pragmatic failure has been extensively discussed in the fields of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and English Language Teaching (ELT), where it is primarily understood as communicative breakdowns arising from learners' insufficient pragmatic competence, intercultural differences, or inappropriate use of speech acts in interaction (Thomas, 1983; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). In these domains, pragmatic failure typically occurs in face-to-face communication and is attributed to the language users' inability to interpret or produce contextually appropriate meanings.

In contrast, pragmatic failure in Translation Studies operates within a fundamentally different communicative framework. Rather than occurring in direct interaction, pragmatic failure in translation is text-mediated and arises from translators' decisions when rendering pragmatic meaning from the source text into the target text. Here, the failure does not affect the original interlocutors but instead impacts the target audience, potentially leading to misunderstanding, misinterpretation, or pragmatic mismatch. As Newmark (1988) emphasizes, translation involves transferring meaning as intended by the original author; failure to account for contextual, cultural, and pragmatic factors may therefore result in distorted pragmatic meaning in the target text.

From a pragmatic perspective, such failure may stem from inadequate interpretation of contextual cues, deixis, implicature, or socio-cultural assumptions embedded in the source text. Aruna (2018) argues that translators must identify contextual variables and background knowledge to avoid pragmatic misalignment. Similarly, Al-Eryan (2020) demonstrates that translators with higher pragmatic competence are better able to achieve pragmatic equivalence, producing translations that align with the intended meaning and communicative function of the source text.

Despite growing interest in pragmatics within Translation Studies, pragmatic failure has been discussed far less systematically than in ELT and ELF research. Limited attention has been paid to how pragmatic failure manifests in audiovisual translation, where linguistic

constraints and multimodal context further complicate the preservation of pragmatic meaning. Addressing this gap, the present study examines pragmatic failure in subtitle translation by focusing on instances where the target text fails to pragmatically align with the source text, thereby contributing to a more translation-oriented understanding of pragmatic failure.

2.3 Pragmatic Transfer

Kasper (1992) defined that the pragmatic transfer in the context of interlanguage is the L2 language knowledge of the L1 learners, whether speaking or writing, which involves grammar, word arrangement, illocutionary acts, and politeness and impoliteness. If the form of L1 is similar to the L2, it will yield identical comprehension. Otherwise, if there are differences in the form or the meaning, there will be differences in the interpretations. Kasper classified the pragmatic transfer into 2 types which are (1) the pragmalinguistic transfer involves the transfer of linguistic structures and patterns from the first language (L1) to the second language (L2) in specific speech acts and particular illocution (lexical, syntactic, and prosodic). And (2) sociopragmatic transfer means the learners' social perceptions and interpretations of linguistic actions in the L2 are influenced by how they access similar situations in the L1. When the pragmatic transfer occurred, there were 2 elements; (1) positive transfer, the L1 and the L2 shared similar pragmatic strategies, learners can effectively apply these familiar forms to improve their communication skills in the target language. (2) Negative transfer, the situations where learners apply the social perceptions and norms from the L1 inappropriately in the L2. This research primarily focuses on the negative transfer due to the inappropriate transfer, whether linguistically or sociolinguistically, can lead to pragmatic failure.

Thomas, a British linguist, first discusses pragmatic failure in the article *Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure* in 1983. According to her article, pragmatic failure happens when the speaker's intended meaning and the addressee's interpretation of the speech diverge, including in translation. Thomas (1983) states that pragmatic failure can be divided into two categories, namely pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure.

2.3.1 Pragmalinguistic Failure

According to Thomas (1983), pragmalinguistic failure is rooted in pragmalinguistic transfer or inappropriate transfer, can result from differences between languages or their interaction, by can occur when people's failure to choose and utilize the correct form of language expression according to the specific context in which they are communicating with others, which is contrary to the principles of linguistic usage and eventually leads to communication errors. Which can be manifested as inaccuracies in lexical, grammatical, speech acts, deixis, or politeness strategies.

In this study, the analysis of pragmalinguistic failure was delimited to deictic expressions. Although deixis is not always treated as a primary focus in pragmalinguistic failure research, inappropriate interpretation or translation of deictic expressions can result in pragmatic misalignment between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT), thereby leading to misunderstanding for the target audience. This is particularly relevant in translation, where meaning is mediated through text rather than negotiated in interaction.

According to Levinson (1983), the term deixis, derived from the Greek word meaning “pointing” or “indicating,” refers to linguistic expressions whose interpretation depends on the contextual parameters of the utterance, such as the speaker, the addressee, time, place, and discourse context. Deictic meaning is thus anchored in grammatical forms that require contextual interpretation in order to be pragmatically understood. Failure to appropriately render these forms in translation may distort the intended referential, temporal, spatial, social, or discourse-related meaning of the original utterance.

For the purpose of systematic analysis, deixis in this study was operationalized through identifiable linguistic features in both the ST and TT. Following Levinson (1983), deixis is classified into five major categories: person deixis, time deixis, place deixis, social deixis, and discourse deixis, each of which is examined based on specific grammatical and lexical markers to identify instances of pragmalinguistic failure.

1. Person deixis encodes participants’ roles in the speech event (Levinson, 1983:68) and is realized through personal and possessive pronouns (e.g., I/we, you, he/she/they; my/our/your). Pragmalinguistic failure is identified when pronoun choice in the target text alters participant reference or perspective established in the source text.
2. Time deixis situates events relative to the time of speaking (Levinson, 1983:73–79) and is realized through tense, temporal adverbials (e.g., now, then, today), and temporal prepositions (e.g., before, after, during). Failure occurs when temporal reference is shifted, neutralized, or misaligned in translation.
3. Place deixis encodes spatial location relative to the speaker or addressee (Levinson, 1983:83) through spatial adverbs (here, there), demonstratives (this, that), and deictic motion verbs (come, go). Failure arises when spatial orientation is altered or omitted in the target text.
4. Discourse deixis refers to parts of the discourse itself (Levinson, 1983:85) and is realized through discourse markers and demonstratives (e.g., this, that, the former). Failure is identified when discourse reference becomes unclear or cohesion is disrupted in translation.
5. Social deixis encodes social relationships and hierarchy (Levinson, 1983:89–90) through honorifics, address terms, and register choices. Failure occurs when the target text misrepresents social distance or formality implied in the source text.

2.3.2 Sociopragmatic Failure

According to Thomas (1983), sociopragmatic failure occurs when there is an improper selection of language structures in cross-cultural communication. This arises from a misunderstanding of cultural disparities in social norms, etiquette, and traditions of the involved parties. In other words, it is related to the social status, roles, and subject matter pertinent to both parties.

Sociopragmatic failure is closely associated with Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1983). Both theories are considered necessary in comprehending communication dynamics, especially in the cultural context, which means the politeness theory is a comprehensive theory for understanding how communication can result in sociopragmatic failure.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness theory is a knowledge of how we use language to maintain face in social interactions. They derived the term "face" from Goffman (1963) as a public self-image that has been established for oneself and expects others to be perceived. Face is divided into two elements; positive face and negative face. Positive face is the desire to be interested and accepted by others. On the other hand, a negative face is the desire to be uninterrupted and unimpeded freedom. Brown and Levinson stated that either the positive or negative face can threaten the face of the listener or speaker, namely face-threatening acts (FTAs), which can be found in various speech acts e.g., apologies, requests, complaints, refusals, etc. (1987:313-315). Moreover, FTAs were influenced by three main social parameters:

1. **Social distance (D)** refers to the degree of familiarity or intimacy between the interlocutors.
2. **Power (P)** refers to the relative social status or authority one person has over another in a context.
3. **Ranking of imposition (R)** refers to the perceived severity or intrusiveness of the FTAs (1987:319).

In this research, pragmatic failure was examined in the context of subtitle translation as instances in which the target text did not pragmatically align with the source text, potentially leading to audience misunderstanding. The investigation focused on two interrelated dimensions. First, pragmalinguistic failure was examined through deixis, as deictic expressions played a crucial role in anchoring meaning to participants, time, and discourse. When deixis was misinterpreted or inconsistently rendered in translation, the pragmatic reference of the utterance shifted, resulting in reduced clarity or altered meaning for the audience. Second, sociopragmatic failure was explored through variations in politeness strategies, as subtitle translation needed to account for culturally specific norms governing social distance, power relations, and face considerations. In this study, the speech acts of

request and refusal, which inherently involved face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987), were selected as focal points because of their frequency in the movie's dialogue and their sensitivity to sociocultural interpretation. By limiting the analysis to these specific pragmatic features, the study aimed to provide an operationalized and context-sensitive account of pragmatic failure in English–Thai subtitle translation.

2.4 Related Studies

Ding (2022) conducted research entitled “Analysis of Pragmatic Failure and Strategies in Cross-cultural Communication”. The research discussed that pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication might result in difficulties and conflicts in communication. It focuses on the significance of research pragmatic failure in various kinds of contexts and offers ways to prevent such failures in cross-cultural communication.

Mahniza (2020) conducted research entitled “Pragmatic Failure in the Subtitles of Moonlight Movie”. The aim of the research is to pinpoint the specific kinds of pragmatic failures including pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure that can cause an audience to interpret meaning improperly. The findings reveal that there was a total of 176 pragmatic failures in the Moonlight movie's subtitles, divided into 40 sociopragmatic failures which consisted of failure to transfer the principle of cooperation and 136 pragmalinguistic failures which consisted of failure to transfer speech act and failure to transfer deixis.

Abu Hatab and Al-Badawi (2019) conducted research titled “Cross-Cultural Pragmatic in Jordanian Media Discourse”. This research uncovered the occurrence of cross-cultural pragmatic failure in a Jordanian social drama, specifically homing in on how pragmatic failure can lead to communication breakdown. They aimed to identify and analyze the various aspects and sources of pragmatic failure in both Arabic and English languages within the context of media communication, highlighting the influence of cultural factors on language use by native and non-native speakers. They concluded that pragmatic failure can result in various outcomes, including misunderstandings and conflicts. However, the pragmatic failure that occurred in the discourse can be seen as a humor-creating procedure.

The research conducted by Ding (2022), Mahniza (2020), and Abu Hatab and Al-Badawi (2019) are beneficial for this research for 2 reasons. First, they applied qualitative methodologies which can be taken as a guideline for this study. Second, Thomas's pragmatic failure framework (1983) was one of the frameworks used to analyze the studies. This framework was also be applied to data analysis methodology in this research.

3. Research Methodology

This qualitative research was conducted using content analysis, a non-numerical data collection and analysis method employed to analyze and interpret notions, perspectives, or experiences (Hassan, 2024). This approach was aligned with the objective of the study, which focused on pragmatic translation failures occurring in the Thai subtitles of the Barbie movie.

3.1 Samples

The sample in this research was a movie entitled *The Barbie Movie*. It was an English-language film directed by Greta Gerwig and released in 2023. The total duration of the movie was one hour and fifty-four minutes. The movie was selected due to heavy criticism of its translated subtitles on social media.

Significant scenes were exclusively selected by the researchers using the three-act structure, namely Act 1 (the setup), Act 2 (the confrontation), and Act 3 (the resolution) (Cavannah, 2021). In this research, two scenes from each act were selected, including the exposition and inciting incident scenes for Act 1, the rising action and midpoint scenes for Act 2, and the pre-climax and climax scenes for Act 3, resulting in a total duration of approximately 17 minutes. However, only dialogue between characters was considered, and songs occurring within the dialogue were not analyzed.

The three-act structure (Cavannah, 2021) was recognized as the most common technique for plotting a story. This framework was employed to select scenes in order to pinpoint essential moments in the narrative. Additionally, it provided a systematic and comprehensive approach to examining how translation impacted different parts of the narrative, ensuring that key moments were accurately conveyed to the audience.

3.2 Research Instrument

This research instrument included the pragmatic failure categorizing form, which was used to compare the language in the original text with that in the translated subtitles and to categorize instances of pragmatic failure. The categorization was based on three frameworks.

First, Thomas's (1983) framework of pragmatic failure was adopted, in which pragmatic failure is divided into two main types: pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure. Second, Levinson's (1983) framework of deixis was employed to identify and distinguish pragmalinguistic failure. Finally, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory was applied to the analysis of sociopragmatic failure.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure consisted of several steps. First, the researchers watched *The Barbie Movie*. Next, selective sampling was employed to choose scenes based on the three-act structure—setup, confrontation, and resolution (Reedsyblog, 2021). Both English source-text subtitles and Thai target-text subtitles were then retrieved from Subdl. Finally, the selected subtitles were recorded in the pragmatic failure categorization form for analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved categorizing pragmatic failures in the Thai subtitles (TT) through a sentence-by-sentence comparison with the English source text (ST). Both the ST and the identified pragmatic failures in the TT were color-coded for systematic examination. The categorized data were then analyzed using Thomas's (1983) pragmatic failure framework to identify instances of pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure occurring in the TT.

4. Findings

The failures were found and described by utilizing Thomas's pragmatic failure framework (1983), which are divided into pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure. Deixis was employed to analyze the pragmalinguistic failures, while the speech act was utilized to examine the sociopragmatic failures.

In this research, both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure were found in the Barbie Movie subtitles.

Table 1 Pragmalinguistic Failure

Deixis (n=25)	Person deixis	Time deixis	Place deixis	Discourse deixis	Social deixis
Percentage	68%	12%	-	16%	4%

Table 1 shows the frequency of the pragmalinguistic failures that occurred in the target subtitles. The results showed 25 failures, which can be divided into 5 major categories of deixis; (1) person deixis, (2) time deixis, (3) place deixis, (4) discourse deixis, and (5) social deixis. The category of deixis with the highest rate of failures is person deixis, at 68%. This is followed by discourse deixis at 16%, time deixis at 12% and social deixis at 4%. However, place deixis did not occur in the target text.

4.1 Person Deixis

(5) At least that's what the **Barbies** think. → อย่างน้อยก็ในความคิดของบาร์บี้

(23) Where do the **Kens** stay? → แล้วเคนอยู่ที่ไหน

The examples of No. (5) and (23) are the failures of nouns. The plural noun was used to refer to more than one person, place, thing, or idea. According to the source text No. (5) and (23), the plural noun was used. Meanwhile, both of the target texts were translated into a singular noun which does not indicate the number of people and can confuse the audiences.

(26) What is wrong with **them**? → พวกเขาเป็นอะไรไป

(27) **One lady**, she even asked me for the time. → ผู้หญิงคนนี้ เธอถามขอเวลาจากผม

Examples (26) and (27) illustrate potential pragmatic ambiguity in personal pronoun reference. In example (26), Barbie's utterance "What is wrong with them?" employs a third-person plural pronoun referring collectively to the Barbies whose personalities have been

altered. Although the Thai translation uses “พวกเธอ,” which can function as a third-person pronoun in Thai, its frequent use in spoken interaction as a second-person form may introduce ambiguity regarding the intended referent. As a result, the translated subtitle may weaken the clarity of the original third-person reference in this context.

Similarly, in example (27), “One lady” refers to a third-person individual Ken encountered in the Real World. While the Thai demonstrative “คนนั้น” can grammatically refer to a third person in discourse, its deictic nature typically implies spatial or situational proximity. In the absence of visual or contextual reinforcement in the subtitle, this choice may shift the focus from a general third-person reference to a more immediate or context-dependent one, potentially altering the pragmatic nuance intended in the source text.

(21) Destroy **Barbie**. → ขยี้ช๊ะ

Additionally, the failures in person deixis we found included a loss in target text translation. The translator has chosen to omit the translation of some pronouns. This might be due to the fact that in Thai, parts of speech can be omitted. However, in certain movie scenes, omitting translation words can result in incomplete or misunderstood sentences. The example No. (21), the translation “ขยี้ช๊ะ” omits “*Barbie*,” causing a failure because it lacks the clear reference to who is being destroyed which can lead to ambiguity.

4.2 Time Deixis

(11) You're malfunctioning. → เธอจะเสียแล้ว

The present continuous tense was employed in the source text to describe the circumstances that existed at that specific time. However, it was translated as “จะ” in the target text, which is a future tense used to describe an event that will occur in the future.

(24) What have you done? → คุณทำอะไร

The failure of translating present perfect tense is shown in example No. (24) “what have you done?” was used to address past events that still affect the present situations. In this case, Barbie mentioned about the variation of Barbie Land when she came from the Real world. However, the translator altered the tense in the target text into present continuous tense “คุณทำอะไร”, resulting in the meaning “what are you doing?”

(29) And **now** you're making it permanent with a special election to change the Constitution. → และคุณจะทำให้ถาวรด้วยการเลือกตั้งพิเศษเพื่อเปลี่ยนรัฐธรรมนูญ

The example No. (29) showed that the word “now” was used in the source text to convey the present situation. However, in the target text, it was translated as “จะ,” a future tense term used to describe an event that will happen in the future.

4.3 Discourse Deixis

(9) Yeah, I just **fell** → ฉันเพิ่งตก, (10) **fell?** → ตก

The examples No. (9) and (10) are failures of discourse deixis. According to Cambridge Dictionary, the word “fell” means to suddenly go down onto the ground or towards the ground without intending to or by accident. In this context, Barbie’s feet were flat, which made her fall off her heels. But in the target text, the translator translated the word as “ตก” in the other meaning (to come down onto the ground or from a high position to a lower position) which summarized that the translator selected the meaning that was not suitable for the context.

(12) You know, you’re gonna have to visit **Weird Barbie**. → รู้มั๊ย เธอต้องไปหาเวียร์ดบาร์บี้

(13) I have never had to visit **Weird Barbie**. → ฉันไม่เคยต้องไปหาบาร์บี้เพื่อน

The translator's inconsistent use of different terms to refer to a single character can cause confusion for audiences. The examples No. (12) and (13) showed that the translator used both “เวียร์ดบาร์บี้” and “บาร์บี้เพื่อน” to refer to “Weird Barbie,” which may cause confusion for the audience regarding the character.

4.4 Social Deixis

(28) Call me **Mister** Ken President Prime Minister, ma’am → เรียกผมท่านนายก ประธานาธิบดี
เคน

The example No. (28) revealed how social status was mistranslated. In the source text, “Mister” refers to a name title when it is used with male without a higher honorific or professional title. On the other hand, the translated text was higher in social status than the original text since the target text translated it as “ท่าน,” which is the title used to indicate respect for a person who has higher social status.

Table 2 Sociopragmatic Failure

Speech acts (n=2)	Request	Refusal
Percentage	100%	-

Table 2 shows the frequency of sociopragmatic failures of speech acts in the target text, specifically request and refusal. The results indicated that the failure of speech acts in the target text only occurred in the requests.

(1) I thought I might stay over tonight. → ผมอยากจะนอนค้างคืนนี้

The source text of the example No. (1) illustrates the sentence “I thought I might stay over tonight” where Ken has already considered staying with Barbie. The purpose of Ken's speech was to save his face, which is aligned with the face-threatening acts (FTAs) in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory. Nevertheless, the target text was translated as “I would like to stay with Barbie tonight,” altering both the meaning and context which was more impolite than the source text.

(2) TV remote. → รีโมททีวี

In addition to pronoun-related issues, omission and mistranslation were also observed in the Thai subtitles, which may hinder the audience's comprehension of the intended message. For instance, in example No. (2), "TV remote" was translated as "รีโมททีวี" without any particles. Although particles are absent in the source text, the audiovisual context shows that Ken is making a request to another Ken, a situation involving face-threatening acts related to social distance and power. In Thai, request particles such as *หน่อย* or *ด้วย* are commonly used to soften requests and indicate politeness (Punya, 2024). The omission of such particles results in a more direct and potentially impolite utterance compared to the source text.

5. Discussion

This qualitative study aims to investigate pragmatic failure in the subtitles applying Thomas's (1983) framework. This research is with two research questions including 1) What are the pragmalinguistic failures that occur in the Thai subtitles translation of the Barbie movie? and 2) What are the sociopragmatic failures that occur in the Thai subtitles translation of the Barbie movie? The analysis of the pragmalinguistic failure focused on how the translator rendered English deixis into Thai employing from Levinson's (1983). Meanwhile, the sociopragmatic failure in two speech acts; refusal and request were analyzed using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory.

In response to the research questions, the findings revealed 27 failures in the target text, including 25 pragmalinguistic failures related to deixis, and two sociopragmatic failures related to request and refusal speech acts. Regarding pragmalinguistic failure, person deixis failures were the most frequently observed in the target text, accounting for 68% of the cases. This finding suggests that personal pronouns and character references posed particular challenges in the subtitle translation of the Barbie movie. This was followed by discourse deixis at 16%, time deixis at 12%, and social deixis at 4%, while no place deixis failure was discovered. Furthermore, both sociopragmatic failures were identified in the speech act of request. The research also revealed omissions and mistranslations that impacted the subtitle translation.

The three previous research used the qualitative method and applied Thomas's (1983) framework for analysis, which is relevant to this research. The first research entitled "Analysis of Pragmatic Failure and Strategies in Cross-Cultural Communication" by Ding (2022) focused on pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication between English and Chinese languages. The findings revealed that the failures that arise from foreigners or Chinese people can occur due to different cultural backgrounds, values, living habits, or cultural norms. The

research is related to the occurrence of movie subtitle failures due to cross-cultural communication between English and Thai.

The second research is titled “Cross-Cultural Pragmatic in Jordanian Media Discourse” by Abu Hatab and Al-Badawi (2019). The research analyzed cross-cultural pragmatic failure in a Jordanian comedy show in both Arabic and English used by native and non-native speakers. The analysis of Abu Hatab and Al-Badawi (2019) has similarities with this research, misunderstanding cross-cultural backgrounds can result in communication breakdown. Furthermore, the research conclusion explained that the director and scenarists used pragmatic failure to make the audiences laugh.

The last research entitled “Pragmatic Failure in the Subtitles of Moonlight Movie” by Mahniza (2020) analyzed the pragmatic failures that cause an audience to interpret the meaning improperly between English and Indonesian subtitles. The research analyzed pragmatic failure in speech acts, deixis, principles of cooperation, and politeness. This aligned with this research that analyzed pragmatic failure in deixis and politeness of speech acts. Moreover, the findings were similar to this research, revealing that pragmalinguistic failures occurred more frequently than sociopragmatic failures.

6. Limitations and Recommendations

This study focused exclusively on pragmatic failure in deixis and politeness within the speech acts of requests and refusals in the Thai subtitles. Nevertheless, additional pragmatic failures, as well as numerous omissions and mistranslations, were identified beyond the original scope.

Future research could examine a broader range of pragmatic phenomena, including implicature, presupposition, and other speech acts, and conduct comparative analyses across films or genres to identify recurring patterns in Thai subtitle translation. Further studies may also investigate the causes of pragmatic failure through interviews with professional subtitlers and propose practical guidelines or training to improve subtitle quality in the Thai audiovisual translation context.

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