

LOSS AND GAIN PHENOMENA IN THE ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF “HUMAN STATUS” IN TRINH CONG SON’S SONGS

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Abstract - Basing mainly on the theories of Lakoff and Turner (1989), and Kovecses (2010), this paper investigates the Loss and Gain phenomena of cognitive metaphors (CMs) expressing the concept of “Human status” in the English translations of Trinh Cong Son’s (TCS’s) songs. As a perceptual and conceptualizing tool, CMs can help us perceive the world we live in, conceptualize experience and gives us new perspectives of things around. The findings of the study reveal a fact that both Loss and Gain phenomena take place in the translational versions in terms of Semantics and Syntax. The study can contribute a significant part to the areas of Translation studies, Language studies, Cross-culture, and Literary criticism.

Key words - Conceptual metaphor(s) (CMs); Loss and Gain phenomena; “Human status”; Translation studies; Cross-culture.

1. Overview

In light of Cognitive Linguistics, conceptual metaphors (CMs) have been used in daily language to imply something that is understood by other things. They have been employed so popularly in many areas of art, especially in music and/or poetry as a language device to express poetic images and rhetorical flourish. In addition, CMs have been viewed as a matter of words rather than of thought or action. CMs require translators not only to describe an object in terms of another object but also to have critical thinking skills in criticizing and evaluating one’s taste of art and/or things around. In Trinh Cong Son’s music, CM is the most ideal tool used to describe the concept of “Human status” in life as well as to express the composer’s feelings towards life. Let consider the following example:

Chiều nay em ra phố về

Thấy đời mình là con nước trôi

Nghe Những Tàn Phai

(Go home from town today

Feel life a stream floating)

It Seems the Fade

As shown in the above example, we can see that the fate of a woman is compared to a floating stream (con nước trôi); in other words, the image of a floating stream is similar to a woman’s fate. From this image, listeners can recognize that women’s fate look like a floating stream that is aimless, unknown and lonely in the middle of nowhere. Many CMs related to the concept of “Human status” are employed by Trinh Cong Son (TCS)—a famous composer in the Vietnamese post-modernism music - in his lyric songs which might make people think and act and behave in such a way that makes human life more significant. In this sense, this study investigates the Loss and Gain phenomena in the translational versions of TCS’s music with the hope that it can help people who love and

understand Trinh’s musical language to enhance their appreciation of works of art through CMs.

2. Focus of the study

This study aims (i) to identify the CMs denoting “Human status” in TCS’s songs as manifested in different English translational versions, and (ii) to find out the Loss and Gain phenomena of the CMs related to “Human status” in TCS’s songs through different English translational versions.

3. Theoretical Background

3.1. Theories of Translation

3.1.1. Definition of Translation

Translation has been used to transfer written or spoken source language texts to equivalent written or spoken target language texts. In general, the purpose of translation is to reproduce various kinds of texts in another language and thus making them available to readers.

In this study, the term “Translation” is defined as “the expression in another language (or target language) of what has been expressed in another, source language, preserving semantic and stylistic equivalences” (Marlone, 1988).

3.1.2. Translation Methods

Newmark (1988) points out the difference between translation methods and translation procedures. He refers to the following methods of translation: (i) *Word-for-word translation*, (ii) *Literal translation*, (iii) *Faithful translation*, (iv) *Semantic translation*, (v) *Adaptation*, (vi) *Free translation*, (vii) *Idiomatic translation* and (viii) *Communicative translation*.

3.2. Conceptual Metaphor (CMs)

3.2.1. Definition of CMs

In light of cognitive linguistic view, CM is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain (Lakoff & Johson, 1980). A convenient way of capturing this view of CM is the pattern *TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN*, which is called conceptual metaphor (CM). A CM includes two conceptual domains, in which one domain is understood in terms of another.

3.2.2. Classification of CMs

According to Kovecses (2010), there are three kinds of CMs which are structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors. In structural metaphors, the source domain (SD) provides a relatively rich knowledge structure for the target domain (TD). In other words, the cognitive function of structural metaphors is to enable speakers to understand target A by means of the structure metaphor of source B. Ontological metaphors enable us to see more sharply

delineated structure. Orientational metaphors relate to basic human spatial orientations such as up-down, center-periphery, and the like.

3.2.3. Definition of “Human status”

In this article, the concept of “Human status” is defined as the legal position of human beings in society in general in terms of human nature, level of endurance, the physical and mental sufferings and the level of importance of human beings in life.

4. Research design and Methodology

In order to achieve the aims and objectives of the study, the researcher uses qualitative and quantitative methods to carry out the investigation. In addition, the researcher also uses the analytic and synthetic methods to measure the values of the data collected in the study. Besides, the descriptive method is also employed to seek information about CMs in English and Vietnamese during the process of analyzing the collected data.

In order to get that information, the researcher conducts the investigation through two channels: Questionnaire and Interview.

In this study, 100 metaphorical expressions in TCS’s songs are observed and chosen to illustrate important points in the study. The songs are taken mainly from the following websites:

- (i) <http://www.tcs-home.org/songs>,
- (ii) <http://www.nguyenquangthanh.com>
- (iii) <http://www.antiwarsongs.org>

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. CMs of “Human status”

Generally speaking, there are many kinds of CMs denoting the concept of “Human status” in TCS’s songs. In this article, the concept of “Human status” in his music can be understood through many expressions of CMs such as *Human status is impermanence*, *Human status is loneliness*, *Human status is hopelessness*, *Human status is loss*, *Human status is patience*, *Human status is inspiration*, *Human status is pain*, *Human status is sacrifice*, *Human status is compassion*.

“Human status” also can be realized through CMs of *sadness*, *loneliness*, *loss* and *hopelessness*. These negative feelings make people think that although life has its pleasures, it is full of sadness and loneliness. Another expression that can be recognized rather clearly in TCS’s songs through the CM pattern is *Human status is impermanence*. This idea has originated from the philosophy of Buddhism that implies “nothing lasts forever and everything is impermanent”. It can be easily recognized that TCS’s thoughts have been imbued with Buddhist ideas by which he conceptualizes human life as suffering and impermanence. In his eyes, human beings suffer most during war-time. The cognitive metaphorical expressions *Human status is pain*, *Human status is sacrifice*, *Human status is patience* and *Human status is desire* express human beings’ feelings of patience and

sacrifice during the war-time. War may be the most painful experience of the human status. People have to sacrifice everything even their lives for a peaceful homeland. Living in war-time and witnessing human beings’ sufferings caused by war, TCS understood and deeply sympathized with the sacrifice of people in both sides in Vietnam. This made the composer think and express his feelings of hatred for the enemy and the desire for peace of the Vietnamese people towards war. In short, through the metaphorical expressions of “Human status” as *pain*, *sacrifice*, *patience* and *desire* found out in TCS’s songs, listeners can understand more about the pain caused by war that Vietnamese people had to suffer during the war-time.

Table 1. CMs of “Human status” found in the study

COGNITIVE METAPHORS	
HUMAN STATUS	EXAMPLES
<i>Human status is impermanence</i>	Đời người như gió qua <i>Phôi Pha</i> (Life’s like wind passing) <i>Fade</i>
<i>Human status is loneliness</i>	Bỏ tôi hoang vu và nhỏ bé Bỏ mặc tôi ngồi giữa đời tôi <i>Em Đi Bỏ Lại Con Đường</i> (Left me deserted in desert Left me sit inside my life) <i>The Road You Left Behind</i>
<i>Human status is sadness</i>	... Và mái tóc buông lơi Mùa thu úa trên môi <i>Thương Một Người</i> (...And your hair let loose Pale autumn on your lips) <i>Loving Somebody</i>
<i>Human status is hopelessness</i>	Lá khô vì đợi chờ Cũng như đời người mãi âm u <i>Như Cánh Vạc Bay</i> (A leaf dries up from waiting Like a life forever morose) <i>Like A Flying Crance</i>
<i>Human status is desire</i>	Ai có nghe Tiếng nói người Việt Nam Chỉ mong hòa bình <i>Hãy Nói Giùm Tôi</i> (Can anybody hear The voices of the Vietnamese people? Who yearn only for peace) <i>Speak For Me</i>

Human status is loss	Ngày tháng nào đã ra đi Khi ta còn ngồi lại <i>Tình Xa</i> (Day joined day gone away While I stay sitting) <i>Love Away</i>
Human status is patience	Hai mươi năm chờ từng phút giây Hôm nay tiếng hòa bình đã thấy <i>Đồng Dao Hòa Bình</i> (Twenty years waiting every minute and second Today we see the sound of peace) <i>Nursery Rhythm of Peace</i>
Human status is pain	Xác người nằm quanh đây , trong mưa lạnh này Bên xác người già yếu, có xác còn thơ ngây <i>Bài Ca Dành Cho Những Xác Người</i> (Corpses lie around here , in the cold rain Next to corpses of the old and weak We have corpses of the young) <i>A Song Dedicated to All the Corpses</i>
Human status is sacrifice	Anh nằm xuống cho hận thù vào lãng quên <i>Cho Một Người Nằm Xuống</i> (You lay down , so your hatred, can be forgotten) <i>To One Who Lays Down</i>
Human status is inspiration	Em sẽ là mùa xuân của mẹ Em sẽ là màu nắng của cha <i>Em Là Hoa Hồng Nhỏ</i> (I will be mother's spring I will be sunshine for my dad) <i>I Am A Little Rose</i>
Human status is compassion	Đừng tuyệt vọng, em ơi đừng tuyệt vọng Em là tôi và tôi cũng là em <i>Tôi Oi Đừng Tuyệt Vọng</i> (Don't despair, beloved, don't despair You are I and I am you) <i>Dear I, Don't Despair</i>

5.2. Loss and Gain Phenomenon in the English Versions of TCS's Songs

5.2.1. Loss in terms of Semantics

Loss phenomenon also occurs so often in many English translational versions of TCS's songs. Let consider cases of

loss in meaning of words and phrases in the English translational versions as compared with the original versions.

Table 2. Loss phenomenon in terms of Semantics of CMs of "Human status" in TCS's songs

No.	Vietnamese Language	English Equivalents
1	Em đến bên đời hoa vàng một đóa	She turned up here , a yellow flower
2	Như là cơn gió em còn cứ mãi bay đi	A sudden breeze , no sooner here, flies off
3	Một hồn giấy mới	A blank page a new

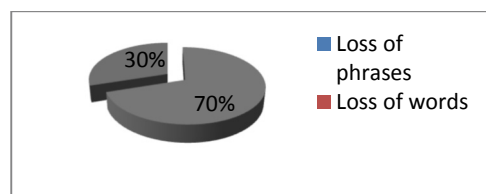


Figure 1. Proportion of Loss phenomenon in terms of Semantics in CMs of "Human status" in TCS's songs

5.2.2. Gain phenomenon in terms of Syntax

5.2.2.1. Pronouns

Table 3. Gain phenomenon in terms of Syntax of CMs of "Human status" in TCS's songs (Pronouns)

No.	Vietnamese language	English Equivalents
1	Cho ta phôi cuộc tình	I would show my love
2	Ngập ngừng lá hôn vai	As bashful leaves kiss your shoulder
3	Bàn chân âm thầm nói	Your quiet footsteps cried out

5.2.2.2. Articles

Table 4. Gain phenomenon in terms of Semantics of CMs of "Human status" in TCS's songs (Articles)

No.	Vietnamese language	English Equivalents
1	Bao nhiêu năm làm kiếp con người	Years into a human life
2	Lạnh lùng như dấu chim	Cold like a bird's footprint
3	Cũng như đời người mãi âm u	Like a life forever morose

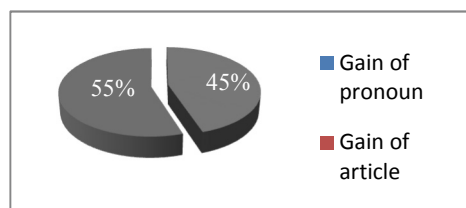


Figure 2. Proportion of Gain phenomenon in terms of Syntax in CMs of "Human status" in TCS's songs

5.2.3. Gain phenomenon in terms of Semantics

Table 5. Gain phenomenon in terms of Semantics in CMs of “Human status” in TCS’s songs

No.	Vietnamese Language	English Equivalents
1	Tình thấp cơn sâu	Love illuminates the mournful surge
2	Đường Việt Nam hôm nay có bước chân tự do	The roads in Vietnam today will be the free paths
3	Tình đi qua hồ sâu	Love led by hand past the deep lake

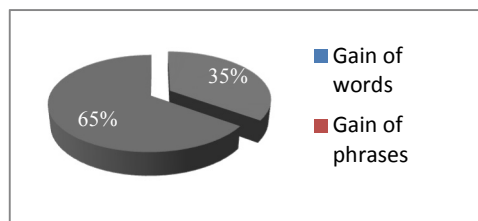


Figure 3. Proportion of Gain phenomenon in terms of Semantics in CMs of “Human status” in TCS’s songs

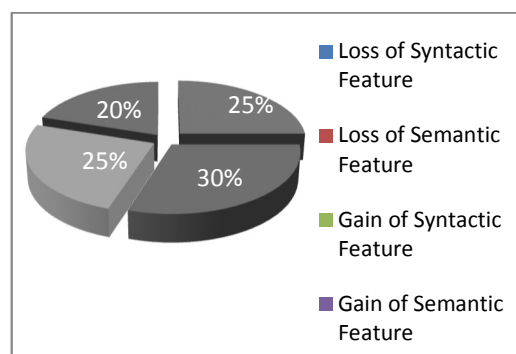


Figure 4. Proportion of Loss and Gain phenomena in CMs of “Human status” in TCS’s songs

6. Implications

6.1. For Language Teachers and Language Learners

Being aware of Loss and Gain phenomena is very important for language teachers and learners. Language teachers should encourage their students to master these phenomena in real teaching so as to better their students learning. Additionally, clearly identifying the loss and gain cases in real setting might help language students avoid misunderstanding of the author’s ideas in real contexts.

6.2. For Translators and Interpreters

Translators and interpreters should master the common cases of loss and gain in meaning and in grammar so as to have better choices for lexis and/or grammatical rules in the process of transferring the message from the STs to the TTs to produce faithful versions. Also, they should pay attention to the differences in language and culture, avoid word-for-word translation and choose the most appropriate approach to make the translational versions more comprehensible and smoother.

6.3. For Critics of works of art

Critics of works of art in various areas such as music, poetry, literature, plays or films might have much benefit

from the findings in this study. Recognizing Loss and Gain phenomena also can improve their skills on criticizing and evaluating works of art, broaden their knowledge of Cognitive linguistics and CMs; thus, widen their viewpoints on the commentary of a piece of music, of a poem, a play, an article or a film. As a result, the readers can benefit from the commentary of the critics as well as appreciate the hidden beauty in the language in various types of works of art.

7. Conclusions

It can be said that the findings of the study can make a small but significant contribution to the modern theory of Cognitive linguistics. The CMs found out in TCS’s music have strengthened the idea of “Human status” which helps listeners have insight into TCS’s language through the way he conceptualizes this concept. According to TCS’s outlook, “Human status” is metaphorically structured and understood in terms of “impermanence, loneliness, sadness, hopelessness, desire, loss, patience, pain, sacrifice, inspiration, and compassion”. This allows us to affirm that the human conceptual system can metaphorically be structured and defined.

Loss phenomenon in the English translations is influenced by many factors. Firstly, understanding the author’s ideas is the key in translation. However, in the translated versions, due to misunderstanding or having unclear understanding on TCS’s lyric, the translators made TTs quite different from STs in terms of Semantics. Secondly, culture has a great impact on the way the translators translate a text. The more culturally different between STs and TTs are, the more loss and gain in meaning occur in TTs. Thirdly, the linguistic disparities that exist between English and Vietnamese are also contributory factors towards Loss phenomenon in terms of Syntax.

Gain phenomenon in the study, on the other hand, mostly can be realized through expansion or explanations. Gain phenomenon is less prevalent than Loss phenomenon in the English translations of CMs of “Human status” in TCS’s music. Linguistic discrepancies between English and Vietnamese are the considerable barrier leading to Gain phenomenon in terms of Syntax.

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