

LOSS AND GAIN IN THE VIETNAMESE TRANSLATIONAL EQUIVALENTS OF ENGLISH IDIOMS USED IN THE 4TH VOLUME OF THE NOVEL SERIES “HARRY POTTER” BY J.K. ROWLING

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Abstract - Owing to their unique semantic and structural features, idioms contribute to the richness of language, enabling language users to express their ideas in concise and sophisticated ways. This study is aimed at identifying and analyzing loss and gain in the Vietnamese translational equivalents of the English idioms used in the 4th volume of the Harry Potter novel serial by J.K. Rowling. The translation shift theory of Catford [1], [2] was employed to clarify the fundamental aspects of loss and gain phenomena. The study reveals that loss and gain in lexis or structure occur frequently in translations of idioms, assisting in preserving the idioms' figurative meanings. It is hoped that the research results can be of some help for teaching, learning and English – Vietnamese translation of idioms.

Key words - Idiom; the 4th Volume of Harry Potter; loss and gain; translation; translation shift theory

1. Rationale

One of the most striking merits of translation is that it helps people enjoy the artistic values of various cultures, especially the masterpieces of world literature. However, translation of novels is always a challenging task as it requires greatly linguistic proficiency and broad general knowledge of translators.

The 4th volume of the famous novel series “Harry Potter” titled “Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire” was one of the most well-known fiction literary works all over the world. In Vietnam, the literary text was translated by the highly prestigious translator Ly Lan. Due to various features of loss and gain in the literary text, such as lexis or structure, the translation of the phenomenal Harry Potter (HP) novel is considered an arduous challenge. Especially, that the Vietnamese translational version is accomplished without the appearance of loss and gain phenomena in translating English idioms is certainly unavoidable, as the sophisticated linguistic elements are always considered to be challenging to convey. It is expected that this research can provide an in-depth insight in using and translating idioms in novels from the English language to the Vietnamese language.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Definition of idioms

Baker [3, p.67] viewed idioms as “frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components”.

Based on the structure, idioms were classified into two kinds by Cowie et al. [4, p.11]. The first type is clause idioms

- the kind which appears in clausal form comprising a subject and a predicate. The second one is phrase idioms which contain a group of words. This group consists of a central word that decides the kind and the function of the phrase, such as adjective phrase or adverb phrase.

2.2. Theories of Translation

2.2.1. Translation Equivalence

Catford [1] states that the main principle of translation is replacing the linguistic material in the original text with the equivalent of that in the translational version. He affirms that the major factors having the influence on finding equivalence in translation are the variables in language and culture.

Bassnett [5] suggests that equivalence should not be approached as seeking for monotony similarities as translation involves far more than the replacement of basic linguistic constituents, such as lexis or grammar.

Catford [1; p.27] divides translation equivalence into two central types which are formal correspondence and textual equivalence. According to Catford [1], [2], these types of translation shifts are considered as the switch from the correlation in language when rendering the source text into the target text. One of these types is called level shifts, which occurs when the equivalent elements of the original text are established in a completely separate rank from the components of the translational text. The change from tenses (grammar) to words (lexis) in translation is a case in point. The remaining type named category shifts which comprise four subtypes which are detailed as:

- Structure-shifts, which concern a switch in terms of grammar from the original text to the translational version.

- Class-shifts are recognized when the items of the original text and the translational text are the members of divergent classes. That a verb phrase may be rendered into a noun phrase is a case in point.

- Unit-shifts concern the modification in rank, which are considered in the case that the certain linguistic units of the SL text and TL text are different in rank.

- Intra-system shifts are recognized when there is the existence of similar correlation between the SL components and the TL items, however, the rendering is not the choice of the correlated term of the system in the TL.

2.2.2. Loss and Gain in Translation

a. Loss in Translation

Bassnett [5] states that the discrepancies between the

source language (SL) and the target language (TL) frequently result in issues of untranslatability. As a result, loss phenomenon largely occurs when the translator has to replace the concepts in SL with the most similar expression in terms of semantic as she/he is unable to find the appropriate substitutes.

According to Batness [5], loss in translation occurs at different linguistic features, such as lexis, meaning or structure. Besides, the culture-specific items are considered as the aspect frequently suffering the most from loss when rendering.

In general, loss is the absence of certain features in the TL text which are meant in the SL text.

b. Gain in Translation

Bassnett [5] considered “gain” as “the enrichment or clarification of the source language text”. Sometimes, by adding the essential components to the translational text, the translator is able to generate a TL version which is more apprehensible and sophisticated than the original one.

Generally, the loss or gain phenomenon occurs when there is no existence of the complete sameness or equivalent concepts between two languages. The dissimilarities in language and culture are the main causes of the loss and gain phenomenon in translation.

3. Research Methods

Two major methods were employed to conduct the study. The descriptive method was applied to make descriptions and give further details of the idioms used in the 4th volume of the HP (the examined literary work) as well as the loss and gain features in regard to lexical, structural, and semantic aspects. The comparison technique was utilised to explore resemblance and discrepancies between the English idioms in the selected literary work and their Vietnamese translational equivalents. The inductive method was used to draw out conclusions about the features of loss and gain process in translation of the English idioms. With the purpose of preparation for the study, the sample were selected based on three criteria below:

- The sample of English idiom has to be a sentence or a group of consecutive sentences consisting of an English idiom. The theoretical background and definition of idiom function as the foundation for the selection of samples of idiom.

- The sample of Vietnamese expression has to be a translational equivalent of the English sample.

- The English and Vietnamese samples have to be abstracted from the original version by J. K. Rowling [8] and the translational version in Vietnam by the translator Lý Lan [9]. The Vietnamese translation work is the only version to be released in Viet Nam.

After being well-investigated and checked with such criteria, 138 English idioms and 197 samples of English idioms are collected from the examined work for detailed study. The samples of idioms belong to two kinds namely: clause idiom and phrase idiom. All the samples of idiom were translated into Vietnamese with the figurative meaning remaining or gained.

The study was carried out mainly based on Baker’s

view of idioms, Cowie’s classification of idioms, Bassnett’s theories of loss and gain, and Catford’s theory of translation shifts.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Types of the idioms used in the 4th volume of the HP

Based on the structure, it is found in the 4th volume of the HP that the English idioms in the literary work comprise idioms in phrasal forms and clausal form. In the total of 138 idioms found in the 4th volume of the HP, only one idiom is found in the structure of clause, the remaining 137 idioms are recognized to be the members of phrase groups which are classified as the pattern of noun phrase, the pattern of verb phrases, the pattern of adjective phrases, the pattern of adverb phrases and the pattern of prepositional phrases according to Quirk & Greenbaum [6].

4.2. Loss in the Vietnamese translational version of English idioms used in the 4th volume of the HP

4.2.1. Loss in lexis

+ Caused by omission

English	Vietnamese	Omission
(4.1a) Before any of them could say anything else, there was a faint popping noise, and Mr. Weasley appeared out of thin air at George’s shoulder [8, p.52].	(4.1b) Mọi người chưa kịp nhìn thấy thêm gì nữa thì bỗng có tiếng nổ lụp bụp yếu ớt, và rồi ông Weasley đột nhiên hiện ra từ trong không khí , đứng sát vai George [9, p.61].	<i>thin</i>

In the above example, the translator removed the adjective “*thin*” in the Vietnamese translational expression. This leads to Structure shift.

+ Caused by using unrelated words/ phrases

(4.2a) “But Harry set Dobby free, and he was **over the moon** about it!” said Hermione. “And we heard he’s asking for wages now!” [8, p.265].

(4.2b) Hermione nói: “Nhưng Harry trả Dobby tự do đó, nó **lên tiên** luôn! Và tụi con nghe nói giờ nó còn đòi ăn lương!” [9, p.307].

over the moon	lên tiên
Verb phrase	Adverb phrase
Class shift	

+ Caused by replacement of words/ word phrases

(4.3a) Angelina gave Fred an appraising sort of look. “All right, then,” she said, and she turned back to Alicia and carried on chatting with a bit of a grin on her face. “There you go,” said Fred to Harry and Ron, “**piece of cake**” [8, p.394].

(4.3b) Angelina nhìn Fred như định giá rồi nói: “Ừ, cũng được!”. Rồi cô nàng quay lại với Alicia để tiếp tục tán dóc, một nụ cười nhõm trên môi. Fred nói với Harry và Ron: “Thấy chưa. **Đễ ợt**” [9, p.454].

piece of cake	đễ ợt
Noun phrase	Adjective phrase
Class shift	

4.2.2. Loss in structure

(4.4a) But as he had learned **the hard way** that year, time will not slow down when something unpleasant lies ahead [8, p.732].

(4.4b) Nhưng như nó đã học **một cách khôn khổ** trong suốt năm học qua bài học về thời gian: thời gian sẽ không bao giờ chậm lại khi có cái gì đó không vui về gì chờ ở phía trước [9, p.844].

In the above example, it could be seen that there is a modification in terms of order when the adjective “**hard**” and the noun “**way**” are translated into Vietnamese. The consequence of the mentioned process is the occurrence of structural loss of the English idiom “**the hard way**”.

the hard way	một cách khôn khổ
Article + Adjective + Noun	Noun + Adjective
Structure shift	

+ Caused by using modulation

According to Vinay and Darbelnet [7], modulation is the translation technique in which the viewpoint or perception is modified from the SL to the TL. The translation from active form into passive form is a case in point.

(4.5a) “Well, that’s good,” said Harry loudly, his temper is **getting the better of** him, “just as long as it’s not drawn-out. I don’t want to suffer” [8, p.345].

(4.5b) Harry **không kiểm chế được** cơn nóng giận, nói to lớn: “Hay quá, vậy là tốt. Miễn là đừng có kéo dài. Tôi không muốn chịu đựng đau đớn lâu đâu” [9, p.397].

is getting the better of	không kiểm chế được
Positive form	Negative form
Structure shift	

4.2.3. Loss in Meaning

In translation of idioms, the frequent occurrences of the phenomena of loss and gain in lexis or structure are inevitable in order to efficiently convey the metaphorical meaning and writing style of the original version. Therefore, in the rendering process of English idioms found in the selected literary work, it is noticeable that there are loss phenomena in word-by-word meaning of the idioms, however, the figurative meaning of the idioms implied by the author is maintained.

Table 1. Occurrence frequencies of loss in the Vietnamese translation found in the 4th volume of the HP

		Loss	Occurrence	Percent age
Lexis	Unit shift		25	27.8%
	Structure shift		11	12.2%
	Level shift		6	6.7%
	Intra-system shift		18	20%
	Class shift		10	11.1%
Structure	Unit shift		3	3.3%
	Structure shift		15	16.7%
	Level shift		1	1.1%
	Class shift		1	1.1%
Total			90	100%

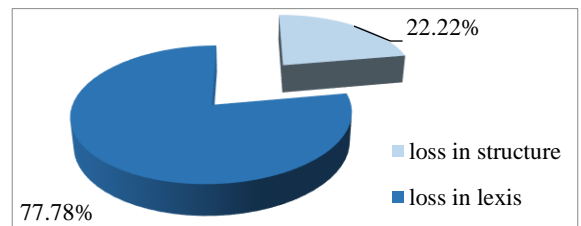


Figure 1. Percentage of loss in translating idioms

In Table 1, it can be seen that all types of shift appear in the loss phenomenon in the process of idiom translation, with the Unit shift accounts for the highest proportion. The occurrence of loss in lexis is approximately triple as much as that of gain in lexis.

4.3. Gain in the Vietnamese translational version of English idioms used in the 4th volume of the HP

4.3.1. Gain in Lexis

+ Addition of Vietnamese Buffer Words

In Vietnamese, the addition of some special words at the final position or the main components of a sentence, for example “nhỉ, nhé, nè, a, etc” are identified as buffer words.

English	Vietnamese	Addition
(4.6a) “If I can help at all ... a prod in the right direction. I’ve taken a liking to you ... the way you got past that dragon! Well, just say the word ” [8 p.447].	(4.6b) “Nếu tôi có thể giúp đỡ... một gợi ý theo hướng đúng... Tôi bắt đầu thích cậu... các cách mà cậu đã vượt qua được con rồng ấy!... cậu chỉ cần nói một tiếng thôi nhé ” [9, p.516].	Thôi nhé

Say the word	Nói một tiếng thôi nhé
Verb + article + noun	Verb + number + noun + buffer word
Intra-system shift	

+ Addition of Words/ Word Phrases

English	Vietnamese	Addition
(4.7a) When I went back to investigate more closely, I discovered that the room had vanished. But I must keep an eye out for it [8, p.417].	(4.7b) Khi tôi trở lại để xem xét kỹ hơn thì tôi phát hiện ra căn phòng đó đã biến mất rồi. Nhưng tôi vẫn để mắt tìm kiếm nó [9, p.482].	tìm kiếm

keep an eye out	để mắt tìm kiếm
Verb + Article + Noun + Adverb particle	Verb + Noun + Verb
Intra-system shift	

4.3.2. Gain in structure

+ Addition of Verb

English	Vietnamese	Addition
(4.8a) “No,” said Mr. Weasley. “We found Barty Crouch’s elf holding Harry’s wand, but we’re none the wiser about who actually conjured the Mark” [8, p.141].	(4.8b) Ông Weasley nói: “Không. Người ta bắt được con gia tinh của ông Crouch đang cầm trên tay cây đũa phép của Harry, nhưng không ai biết gì hơn về kẻ đã thực sự gọi lên Dấu hiệu Đen” [9, p.169].	biết

In the above example, the translator has modified the negative element from the pronoun “**none**” in the English

idiom to the subject “**không ai**” in the Vietnamese translation. This leads to Structure shift.

+ *Caused by paraphrase using related words*

(4.9a) “Ah, look, boys, it’s the champion,” he said to Crabbe and Goyle the moment he got **within earshot of** Harry [8, p.293].

(4.9b) Ngay khi Malfoy đi tới vừa tầm **đề tiếng nói của nó vang được tới tai** Harry, nó bảo Crabbe và Goyle: “**Ê, coi kia, tụi bây! Thằng quân quân kia!**” [9, p.335].

within earshot of (Harry)	đề tiếng nói của nó vang được tới tai (Harry)
Preposition phrase	Clause
Unit shift	

+ *Caused by paraphrase using simile*

(4.10a) “Barty Crouch keeps saying that” said Bagman, his round eyes widening innocently, “but we really can’t spare anyone at the moment. Oh - **talk of the devil!** Barty!” [8, p.90].

(4.10b) Ông Bagman mở to đôi mắt vô tư nói: “Barty Crouch cứ nói vậy hoài, nhưng mà chúng tôi thực tình không còn ai rảnh trong lúc này. A, **phải chỉ nhắc tiền nhắc bạc linh như nhắc tới ông!** Barty!” [9, p.106].

talk of the devil	phải chỉ nhắc tiền nhắc bạc linh như nhắc tới ông
Verb phrase	Clause
Unit shift	

+ *Caused by paraphrase using an idiom with the similar meaning*

(4.11a) Though Harry asked Professor McGonagall for a note of permission to use the Restricted Section, they found nothing whatsoever that would enable Harry to spend an hour underwater and **live to tell the tale** [8, p.482].

(4.11b) Mặc dù Harry đã hỏi xin giáo sư McGonagall một giấy phép đặc biệt để tham khảo sách trong khu vực Giới hạn, tụi nó vẫn không tìm ra cái gì có thể giúp cho Harry sau một tiếng đồng hồ ở dưới nước mà **còn sống để ba hoa chích chòe** [9, p.558].

live to tell the tale	còn sống để ba hoa chích chòe
Verb + Infinitive marker + Verb phrase	Adjective + Preposition + Verb phrase (idiom)
Class shift	

4.3.3. *Gain in meaning*

+ *Result of Gain in lexis*

(4.12a) “Look at the time,” Mrs. Weasley said suddenly, checking her wristwatch. “You really should be in bed, the whole lot of you you’ll be up at **the crack of dawn** to get to the Cup [8, p.64].

(4.12b) Bà Weasley đột ngột nói khi xem đồng hồ đeo tay: “Coi giờ nè. Tối giờ các con phải đi ngủ rồi, tất cả các con... **bình minh ngày mai** là các con phải thức dậy để đi coi Cúp” [9, p.76].

the crack of dawn	bình minh ngày mai
Noun phrase	Adverb phrase
Class shift	

+ *Result of Loss in lexis*

(4.13a) I’ll be in touch soon. My best to Ron and Hermione. **Keep your eyes open**, Harry [8, p.226].

(4.13b) Sẽ sớm liên lạc lại với con. Gửi lời chúc tới Ron và Hermione. **Bảo trọng**, Harry! [9, p.266].

That the idiom “**Keep your eyes open**” was substituted by the Sino-Vietnamese word “**Bảo trọng**” results in lexical loss. Nevertheless, a semantic gain is recognized here as the Vietnamese word is used as a formal expression in the writing style of Vietnamese culture when expecting and reminding people to be watchful and protect themselves from danger.

Keep your eyes open	Bảo trọng
Verb phrase	Verb
Unit shift	

+ *Result of Gain in structure and Loss in lexis*

(4.14a) Why would a bath help him to work out what the wailing egg meant? Was Cedric **pulling his leg**? [8, p.432].

(4.14b) Tại sao đi tắm lại có thể giúp nó tìm ra được ý nghĩa của cái trứng vàng đựng tới là khóc la ấy? Liệu Cedric có định **chơi khăm Harry để làm cho nó giống một thằng ngu không?** [9, p.499].

In the translational version, the verb phrase “**chơi khăm Harry**” has not only conveyed the meaning of the English idiom but also given further information to clarify the content, which leads to gain in meaning.

Table 2. Type of shifts and occurrence frequencies of gain in lexis and structure in the Vietnamese translation of idioms found in the 4th volume of the HP

		Gain	Occurrence	Percentage
Lexis	Unit shift		9	14.3%
	Structure shift		6	9.5%
	Level shift		12	20.6%
	Intra-system shift		11	17.5%
	Class shift		3	3.2%
Structure	Unit shift		16	25.4%
	Structure shift		4	6.4%
	Level shift		1	1.6%
	Class shift		1	1.6%
Total			63	100%

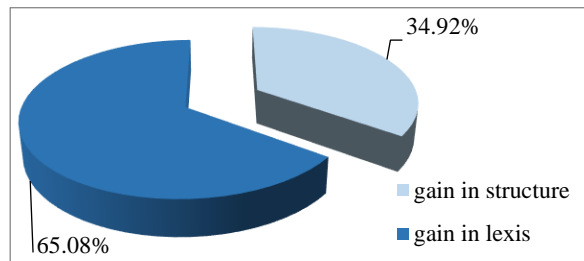


Figure 2. Percentage of gain in translating idioms

In Table 2, we can see that the translation shifts related to the gain phenomenon come in all types, among which the Unit shift is the most popular one. Compared with gain in structure, the phenomena of gain in lexis occur more frequently in translation of the idioms.

4.4. Loss and Gain in the same sample in the Vietnamese translational versions of English idioms used in the 4th volume of the HP

4.4.1. Loss and gain in lexis

English	Vietnamese	Omission	Addition
(4.15a) “And they must’ve done that for a reason, Harry. Snuffles is right. Maybe they’ve been biding their time ” [8, p.573]	(4.15b) “Mà họ làm vậy là có dụng ý. Harry à. Chú Khụt khịt nói đúng đó. Có lẽ họ đang chờ một cơ hội tốt ” [9, p.665]	their	tốt

have been biding their time	đang chờ một cơ hội tốt
Grammar (present perfect continuous)	Lexis (đang)
Level shift	

4.4.2. Loss in lexis, gain in structure

(4.16a) “Of course,” said Moody, taking a swig from his flask. “**Took a leaf out of your book**, Potter. Summoned it from my office into the forest” [8, p.570].

(4.16b) Thầy Moody hóp một ngụm từ cái be sành, nói: “Đĩ nhiên rồi. **Thầy đã bắt chước con**, Potter à. Dùng bùa chú Triệu tập để triệu nó từ văn phòng thầy bay vô rừng” [9, p.661].

Took a leaf out of your book	Thầy đã bắt chước con
Grammar (Past simple tense)	Lexis (đã)
Level shift	

4.4.3. Gain in lexis, loss in structure

(4.17a) “Should be **right up your street**, this one,” said Moody, looking up at Harry and scratching his scarred and stubbly chin [8, p.571].

(4.17b) Thầy Moody ngược lên nhìn Harry và gãi cái cằm đầy sẹo của thầy: “Bài thi này **gãi đúng sở trường** của con đó” [9, p.663].

right up your street	gãi đúng sở trường của con
Prepositional phrase	Verb phrase
Class shift	

4.5. Loss and Gain in the same sample in the Vietnamese translational versions of English idioms used in the 4th volume of the HP

Due to their various contexts, some English idioms were rendered into various translational versions which leads to loss and gain in different levels.

(4.18a) “Known it for years, Harry. Knew he **was out there, biding his time**” [8, p.719].

(4.18b) “Bác đã biết từ lâu rồi Harry à. Biết là hấn vẫn còn ngoài kia, **đang câu giờ**. Chuyện hấn hỏi sinh tất phải xảy ra” [9, p.828].

While the idiom was rendered into a verb phrase in (4.18b), it was translated as a noun phrase in the example below:

(4.19a) “Pretended that he had never really gone over to Dumbledore, that he **had been, like Voldemort himself, biding his time**?” [8 p.721].

(4.19b) “Như lâu nay ông giả bộ như vậy, mà chỉ là **kế sách câu giờ**, như chính Voldemort vậy...” [9, p.830].

was biding his time	đang câu giờ
Grammar (past continuous)	Lexis (đang)
Level shift	

has been biding his time	kế sách câu giờ
Verb phrase	Noun phrase
Class shift	

5. Conclusion

The study reveals that there are 138 idioms used in the 4th Volume and it is realized that a few idioms were applied more than one time in similar contexts and different conversations. The idioms appear in various types of phrasal patterns which are the forms of noun phrase, verb phrase, adjective phrase, adverbial phrase, prepositional phrase and also in the form of clause.

It is found that the occurrences of loss and gain exist in a total of 197 samples of idiom in the process of examining. This study shows that the loss in lexis phenomena occur the most in the translation of idioms, which provides evidence to the unique lexical features of idioms as Baker [2, p.67] suggested, that idioms often “carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components”. Besides, the frequent occurrences of the lexical or structural loss or gain in the translation process serve to preserve the metaphorical meaning of the idioms and various other aspects, such as culture-specific items and communication style, rather than just the reproduction of meaning.

During the data analysis process, it is noticeable that the happening of the translation shifts of Catford is partly responsible for the phenomena of loss and gain in the translation process of 197 samples of idioms, namely: Intra-system shifts, Unit shifts, Class shifts, Level shifts, Structure shifts. That the occurrences of Unit shifts are the most frequent among the mentioned shifts may be the consequence of the discrepancies of linguistic elements between the ST and the TL.

The discovery and discussion of the study are expected to offer reference for teaching and learning English idioms as well as the process of English – Vietnamese translation of idioms. It is also hoped that the students of the English language would have an awareness of the basic concepts of loss and gain and enhance their translation skill by applying Catford’s translation shifts.

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