

ON CATFORD'S MODEL OF TRANSLATION

BÀN VỀ MÔ HÌNH DỊCH CỦA CATFORD

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Abstract - The linguistic approach to translation has aroused interest among translation theorists and language researchers. As one of the very first pioneers of the linguistic model, J.C. Catford, in his volume *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* [2], [3] attempts to bring new lens into the nature of translation by looking at different aspects of translation, and by providing a model to analyse what is involved in the act of translating. In his view, translation is 'the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language' [2, 100]. Catfordian linguistic model analyses language as communication operating functionally in context, basing on different levels and ranks. Catford also distinguishes between formal correspondence and textual equivalence, and identifies deviations from formal correspondents for equivalence in translation as shift. This paper gives a critical evaluation of Catford's linguistic model of translation using bilingual data with source text-target text pairs being analysed to show the relevance of Catford's model.

Key words - translation, translation shift, formal correspondence, textual equivalence, shift of cohesion

1. Synopsis of Catford's Model of Translation

The linguistic approach to translation has been in focus since the introduction of Halliday's linguistic framework in the 1950s. Following this approach, J.C. Catford [2], [3] brings new lens into analysing what is involved in the act of translating. In his view, translation is 'the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language' [2, 20]. This definition can be seen as an elaboration of Jakobson's description of interlingual translation [5] [see also 7, 36].

Catford's model analyses language as communication operating functionally in context, and on a range of different levels (i.e. phonology, graphology, grammar, or lexis) and ranks (i.e. sentence, clause, group, word, morpheme, etc.). In analysing translation from a linguistic perspective, Catford [2], [3] makes an important distinction between *formal correspondence* and *textual equivalence*. In Catford's terms, a formal correspondent is any target category (unit, class, element of structure, etc.) which can be said to occupy, as nearly as possible, the 'same' place in the 'economy' of the TL as the given SL category occupies in the SL whereas a textual equivalent refers to any TL text or portion of text which is observed on a particular occasion ... to be the equivalent of a given SL text or portion of text [2, 27].

Since formal correspondence can only be approximate, as noted by Catford [2], [3], it should be established at relatively high levels of abstraction, or hierarchies of units, or ranks. For example, English and French operate with grammatical units at five ranks – sentence, clause, group, word, morpheme, thus having formal correspondence between two hierarchies of units, each with the same number of ranks. For example, the English statement *I am*

Tóm tắt - Đường hướng ngôn ngữ trong dịch thuật đã thu hút sự chú ý của các nhà lý thuyết dịch thuật cũng như các nhà nghiên cứu về ngôn ngữ. Là người tiên phong theo mô hình ngôn ngữ, J.C. Catford, trong ấn bản *Lý thuyết dịch nhìn từ góc độ ngôn ngữ* [2], [3], đưa ra một góc nhìn mới về dịch thuật, xem xét nhiều khía cạnh khác nhau của dịch thuật. Mô hình ngôn ngữ của Catford phân tích quá trình hành chức của ngôn ngữ trong văn cảnh, dựa trên nhiều bình diện ngôn ngữ cũng như nhiều cấp độ cấu trúc ngôn ngữ. Catford còn phân biệt hai khái niệm *tương ứng hình thức* và *tương đương nội dung biểu đạt*, và dùng khái niệm *chuyển đổi* để chỉ những dịch chuyển khỏi các tương ứng về hình thức. Bài báo này đánh giá mô hình dịch thuật từ góc độ ngôn ngữ của Catford, dùng dữ liệu song ngữ phân tích các cặp ngôn ngữ nguồn – ngôn ngữ đích để chứng minh tính phù hợp của mô hình Catford trong việc lý giải các chuyển đổi trong dịch.

Từ khóa - dịch, chuyển dịch, tương ứng hình thức, tương đương nội dung biểu đạt, chuyển dịch liên kết

an English student' has its French corresponding sentence *'Je suis étudiant d'anglais'* whereby the phrase *an English student* corresponds to its French counterpart *étudiant d'anglais*. Formal correspondence between SL and TL elements of structure is thus said to be operating at 'corresponding ranks' [2, 32].

Catford continues to elaborate that formal correspondence "can only be established ultimately on the basis of textual equivalence at some point" [2, 32]. However, since translation is more than a simple task of straightforward correspondence, exceptions rather than the rule can often be found in the cross-linguistic studies. To show 'deviations' that have occurred via translation [4, 1240], Catford introduces the notion of translation shifts as *departures from formal correspondence*. These include level shifts and category shifts [2, 73].

Level shift, according to Catford, refers to 'a SL item at one linguistic level has a TL translation equivalent at a different level'. By observing the translation of verbal aspects of Russian and English, Catford recognises 'an aspectual opposition' most clearly shown in the 'past' tense: the opposition between Russian *imperfective* and *perfective* (as seen in *pisal* and *napisal*), and between English *simple* and *continuous* (e.g. *played* and *was playing*) [2, 73].

Category shifts are, then, subdivided into four types, namely *structure-shifts*, *class-shifts*, *unit-shifts*, and *intra-system-shifts* [3, 143-7]. A short description of each type will now be presented.

Structure shifts are described by Catford as one of the most frequent shifts found at all ranks in translation. Shifts of this type mostly involves a shift in grammar, or rather, grammatical structure. For example, in the Vietnamese

translation of the English ST *My hobby is gardening* a structural shift is noted since in the TL text *Tôithíchlàm vườn*, different elements (S, V, O) in the structure are found compared with its SL text elements – S, V, C. Besides the clause structure, structure shifts may well occur at other ranks, often lower, e.g. at *group* rank. The English nominal group – *Modifier + Head Noun* – as in *a blue hat*, for instance, can be rendered by its Vietnamese equivalent *chiếc mũ xanh*- *Modifier + Head + Qualifier* structure, thus indicating a structural shift [3, 145].

Unlike shifts in structure, *class shifts* comprise shifts in word class, i.e. a shift from one part of speech in the SL text to another part of speech in the TL text. An example given by Catford is the English *a medical student* and the French *un étudiant en médecine*, where the English pre-modifying adjective *medical* is translated by the adverbial qualifying phrase *en médecine*. With *unit shifts*, Catford wants to mean changes in rank - the hierarchical linguistic units as mentioned earlier.

Intra-system shifts are then shifts that ‘occur internally’ within a system, that is “where the SL and TL possess systems which approximately correspond formally as to their constitution, but when the translation involves selection of a non-corresponding term in the TL system’ [3, 146]. Regarding number and article systems, although similar systems operate between English and French, they do not always correspond (e.g. *advice* - singular and uncountable - in English becomes *des conseils* - plural and countable - in French).

A useful contribution made by Catford, besides his taxonomies of translation shifts, is the notion of ‘the limits of translatability’. Catford, indeed, asserted that translation equivalence depends on communicative features such as function, relevance, situation and culture rather than just on formal linguistic criteria [7, 61-2). In other words, the matter of meaning in the total translation of a text should be considered to ensure that the TL has the ‘same’ formal and contextual meaning [2, 35-42]. However, as Catford himself notes, deciding what is ‘functionally relevant’ in a given situation is inevitably ‘a matter of opinion’ [2, 94], and the intent of the author should be adequately rendered in any act of decoding the text [8, 5]. In this case, Catford [2] is right in ranking *formal correspondence* in second place of importance to dynamic equivalence which, he argues, can be achieved by the ‘appropriate response’ from the TL reader. Blum-Kulka [1] expands from Catford’s model to examine shifts of cohesion and coherence in translation. Shifts in levels of explicitness, for example, are necessary when information is packed in earlier or later portions of the text. Or there are cases when the restructuring of information structure is necessary to produce the equivalent effect of the translation. The movement of theme-rheme structure, especially with the case of pseudo subject (*it + be*)(e.g. *It is very difficult to learn English* → *Học tiếng Anh rất khó*, i.e. ‘Learn English

difficult’) can be found common in the rendition of the text from English into Vietnamese.

In this case, restructuring is important providing that the meaning is retained, and the translator’s efforts towards normalisation of the SL text into the TL culture - or ‘domestication’ rather than ‘foreignisation’ [11] are worthwhile in that it ensures understanding and acceptability on the part of readership. Every model has its strengths and limitations, and it is important that we evaluate the adequacy of Catford’s model, using corpus data taken from a bi-lingual text.

2. Commentary on the ST/TT Using Catford’s Model of Translation Shifts

In what follows, a commentary is made upon analysing the Vietnamese translation of the English ST - a letter by the Director General - *ADB Private Sector to Stakeholders* [12]. This English source text is 813-word long, and its Vietnamese target text is made up of 1238 words. By analysing the ST-TT pairs, several changes have been recorded via translation. These changes range from morphological, lexical, to structural and other aspects in the linguistic system itself. Below is an analysis of the different types of shift with typical ST-TT pairs taken as examples to illustrate changes that have taken place via the act of translating.

2.1. Level Shift

First of all, by using a lexical item in Vietnamese to replace what is expressed by grammar in English, the TL text shows several shifts of *level* that occur via translation. Example (1) shows the lexicalisation of what is grammaticalised in the SL text. That is, the morphological aspect of plurality expressed by the suffix *-s* in *shareholders* has been shifted into a lexical item – a particle denoting plurality (*các*) added before the Vietnamese noun equivalent – *bên liên quan*.

(1) *Director General’s Open Letter to Stakeholders*

Thư của Tổng Vụ trưởng gửi tới các bên liên quan.

→ *UNIT shift: Prep. TO → VP SENT TO;*

→ *LEVEL shift: -S → plural marker CÁC*

Shifts of this kind can also be found in the translation of English verbal aspects. To indicate the perfect aspect of verb, English has the perfect tenses formed by *have/has + the past participle* of the main verb, or the progressive aspect, realised by the *-ing* form of verb. However, in Vietnamese, there is no such aspect of verb. And since Vietnamese is an isolating language, and new words are formed mainly by compounding [6], meaning is normally conveyed by words and combination of words. For example, to denote the past, the Vietnamese allows the particle *đã* to be added before the verb, *đang* for something in progress, and *sẽ* to mean future. Therefore, the Vietnamese translation of aspects in English verbs would allow *shifts in level* to occur, as can be seen in (2a).

(2) *ADB has adopted a strategy that places us as a unique investment catalyst that can mitigate risks, facilitate regulatory dialogue, and provide technical expertise to our host countries.*

ADB đã thông qua một chiến lược coi mình như là chất xúc tác đầu tư duy nhất nhằm giảm thiểu rủi ro, tạo điều

kiện cho đối thoại chính sách, đồng thời cung cấp chuyên môn **kỹ thuật** cho nước sở tại.

- (a) ***has adopted*** → ***đã thông qua***
 → INTRA-SYSTEM shift: the grammatical word HAS is not translated
 → LEVEL shift: bound morpheme –ED → ***Đã*** - a lexical item indicating past
- (b) ... ***that can mitigate risks, facilitate regulatory dialogue*** ...
nhằm giảm thiểu rủi ro, tạo điều kiện cho đối thoại chính sách
[PURPOSE mitigate risk create condition for dialogue policy]
 → UNIT shifts: Adj clause → To-inf VP; verb FACILITATE → VPCREATE CONDITION FOR
 → CLASS shift: adjective REGULATORY → noun POLICY
- (c) ... ***and provide technical expertise to host countries***
 ... ***đồng thời cung cấp chuyên môn kỹ thuật cho nước sở tại***
 [... simultaneously provide expertise technique for country local]
 → CLASS shift: adjective TECHNICAL → noun TECHNIQUE

2.2. Class Shift

Unlike shifts in level, *class shifts* comprise shifts in word class as is seen in (2b) and (2c) above. Here, the SL adjective *regulatory* is rendered by a noun *chính sách* (i.e. policy) qualifying the other noun *dialogue*. Likewise, the

English *technical* in *technical expertise* has its Vietnamese equivalent as *kỹ thuật*, which is a noun meaning *technique*, as shown in (2c), and also in (3) below.

- (3) ***As a fuller appreciation of this fact has emerged, ADB has organised its operations ..***

Ghi nhận thực tế một cách đầy đủ, ADB đã tổ chức các hoạt động của mình .

[Appreciate reality full, ADB PAST organise PL operation POSS REFL]

→ STRUCTURE shift: Prephrase → VP

→ CLASS shift: noun APPRECIATION → verb APPRECIATE

→ LEVEL shift (bound morpheme –ED in *organised* → a lexical marker indicating past; and –S morpheme → a lexical marker indicating plurality)

Example (3) embodies a shift in the phrase structure since the Vietnamese translation contains different elements (V + N + Adv) in the verb structure compared with its SL prepositional phrase (Prep + Art +Adj+ N +

Prephrase). As shifts of this type mostly involve a shift in grammar, we can see that the act of translating allows several changes to occur in the grammatical structure, from word, phrase, clause, to sentence.

- (4) *Development and poverty reduction are **impossible without** a healthy private sector.*

Không thể phát triển và xoá đói giảm nghèo **nếu không có** một khu vực tư nhân lành mạnh.

→ CLASS shift: noun DEVELOPMENT → verb DEVELOP; NOUN reduction → verb REDUCE

→ Shift in the structure of the sentence

Many kinds of shifts have occurred in the translation of (4): *class shifts* and shift in the *sentence structure* from a single sentence to a complex one. What lies behind this structural shift is a shift in cohesion where the information has been restructured, encoding the meaning more congruently, and bringing the TL text closer to the TL readership – ‘It is ***impossible*** to develop and to reduce poverty ***if there is no*** healthy, confident, and vibrant private sector’.

2.3. Intra-system Shifts

Intra-system shifts are also seen many when comparing

- (5) *Catalysing Investments in Asia*

Thúc đẩy đầu tư ở Châu Á

the chosen English SL text with its Vietnamese TL text. What has been found is the tendency to omit all aspectual nuances of meaning expressed by English verbs. For example, the gerundial aspect of the verb in *Catalysing investments in Asia* is rendered into the infinitive form – *Thúc đẩy đầu tư ở Châu Á* (Promote investment in Asia) as seen in (5). Also, the meaning realised by the plurality in English (*investments*) has been lost when being translated into Vietnamese (*đầu tư*, i.e. investment), which indicates a shift from something concrete (*investments* – countable, results) to something more abstract (*investment* – uncountable, phenomenon).

→ INTRA-SYSTEM shift: verb-ING → Infinitive

→ CLASS shift: noun INVESTMENTS → verb INVEST

Albeit the fact that some kind of shift has occurred, and that shift is categorised into ‘intra-system’, this classification of shift, however, fails to explain why ‘catalyse’ is rendered into ‘promote’, or whether there is some loss in meaning, or there is a tendency towards simplification in the translation when appropriate.

Besides the clause structure, structure shifts may well

- (6) ... as ADB meets the changing requirements of our member countries ...
 ... khi mà ADB đáp ứng được các yêu cầu đang thay đổi của các nước thành viên
 [... when ADB meet PL require PROG change POSSPL country member]
 → STRUCTURE shift: shift in structure of NP
 → LEVEL shift (plural morpheme -S → CÁC - a lexical item denoting plurality)

2.4 Unit or Rank Shifts

Shifts in unit or rank often involve the movement of linguistic elements up or down the scale. (7), and (8) show

occur at other ranks, often lower, e.g. at *group* rank. The English nominal group – *Modifier (Art+present participle as adj) + Head Noun* – as in *the changing requirements* shown in (6), can be rendered by its Vietnamese equivalent *các yêu cầu đang thay đổi - Modifier (plural marker) + Head + Qualifier (progressive marker - verb)* structure, thus indicating a structural shift.

the move from two opposite directions, from clause to phrase (i.e. a relative clause to a verb phrase in (7); adverbial clause to prepositional phrase in (8), thus being downrank-shifted).

- (7) Money is currently a commodity that is in excess supply in most countries where we operate
 Nhưng hiện nay tiền là hàng hoá vượt quá cung ở hầu hết các nước thành viên của ADB.
 → UNIT and CLASS shift: relative clause (that is in EXCESS supply) → VP - EXCEED supply
 → LEVEL shift: -S → a lexical item CÁC denoting plurality

- (8) The lack of money is no longer key impediment to economic develop mentas it was decades ago.
 Sự thiếu hụt tiền bạc không còn là cản trở chính cho sự phát triển kinh tế như những thập kỷ trước đây.
 → UNIT shift: adverbial clause (as it was decades ago) → prepositional phrase (as decades ago)
 → LEVEL shift: -MENT in development is lexicalised to become a nominal marker SỰ

Interestingly, more than one kind of shift can be seen in the translation of a three-word English phrase – *Much of Asia* as shown in (9). These illustrations indicate the fact that there can be an overlapping of shifts occurring via translation. Indeed, what is considered a unit shift often

involves a class shift. Another example is how HISTORICALLY is rendered via a variation in the expression of meaning – as observed in ‘*in history*’, which indicates both a class and unit shifts.

- (9) Much of Asia has grown at historically unprecedented rates over the last 2 decades.
 Nhiều nước ở Châu Á tăng trưởng với tỷ lệ chưa từng thấy trong lịch sử trong hai thập kỷ vừa qua.
 [Many country in Asia grow with rate not yet see in HISTORY in two decade past.]
 → STRUCTURE shift: verb in perfect aspect HAS GROWN → verb infinitive GROW; Prep phrase (prep+ adv + adj + n) → Prep phrase (prep + n + adv + verb + prep + n)
 → UNIT and CLASS shift: pronoun MUCH → MANY COUNTRIES (adj+ n); Adv HISTORICALLY → NP (in history)
 → CLASS shift: prep OF (Asia) → IN (Asia)

Although Catford did not use the term ‘shift of cohesion’ as suggested by Blum-Kulka[1], it is indeed what he aimed to say when describing the four sub-types of category shifts, which enable any act of analysing a translation from the linguistic perspective. From the textual perspective, structural changes often disrupt the cohesive whole of a SL text to create a new type of cohesion as perceived by the TL readers. Since languages are not alike in the way it expresses meaning, exceptions other than

rules of formal correspondence and of information structuring often exist. This means, the translator may have reworded the SL text before translating. Example (10) can show the Vietnamese equivalent - ‘*Our present focus is on ..*’ of the TL ‘*Our focus is currently on ...*’. Also, there is a tendency to simplify or clarify some linguistic elements in the TL text.

(10) Our focus is **currently** on two priority sectors: infrastructure and financial systems.

Trọng tâm **hiện nay** của chúng tôi đặt vào hai ngành ưu tiên: hạ tầng cơ sở và hệ thống tài chính.

[Focus present of we lay in two sector priority: infrastructure basic and system finance].

→ CLASS shift: currently → present (hiện nay), financial → finance

→ Shift in COHESION: Adv CURRENTLY → Modifier PRESENT

→ CLARIFICATION: infrastructure → basic infrastructure

3. Conclusions

Since languages of different origin do not share the same hierarchy of linguistic components – or ranks, analysing the changes needed to be made to achieve the ‘equivalent effect’ [10], ‘avoiding ‘translationese’ – formal fidelity (that results in) ‘unfaithfulness to the content and the impact of the message’ [9, 13] is important. In this regard, Catford’s taxonomies of translation shifts can be seen as critical tools to analysing translation.

The model gives quite a systematic explanation to possible deviations from the formal correspondence

between the ST and the TT, shedding light to the complicated task of the translator who needs to decode the meaning conveyed and decide on the language to be used as translation output.

Given the many theories introduced in the 1970s and 1980s, Catford’s linguistic model still assumes its importance for having established the inter-links between linguistics and translation studies. His model has set the stepping stone for other theories to evolve, and is necessary for studies in contrastive linguistics and translation theory, as is in teaching translation and for translation criticism.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADJ	Adjective	PROG	Progressive
ADV	Adverb	SL	Source language
ART	Article	ST	Source text
N	Noun	TL	Target language
NP	Noun phrase	TT	Target text
PL	Plural	V	Verb
POSS	Possessive	VP	Verb phrase
PREP	Preposition		

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