

# Translator's Mediation in Ideological Issues —A Critical Approach to 'News' Translation

Kim Young Shin  
(Kyungdong University)

## 1. Introduction

Critical approaches to language study have been fruitfully applied to the practice of translation, with the main goal of “revealing how translation is shaped by ideologies and in this way contributes to the perpetuation or subversion of particular discourses” (Olk 2002:101). This critical research tradition has inspired many translation scholars to pay due attention to ideological issues involved in translation.

Following the lead of Olk (2002) and many others, this paper attempts to study ideology in translation. The basic premise for the study is that the news writer exhibits, either explicitly or implicitly, his/her ideological stance in the source text (ST) and consequently the translator has to make a choice as to the acceptability of such ideological posture displayed in the ST. This study is built around two research questions: (1) how ideology manifests itself in the

ST; (2) how the translator mediates such ideological markers. In order to come to terms with these questions, the present study adopts the analytic framework developed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Pinpointing the drawbacks of purely *descriptive* language research tradition, Fowler and Kress (1979) state that linguistic structure is closely intertwined with social structure or even that “linguistic meaning is inseparable from ideology”(1979: 185). The same idea is echoed by Fairclough (1989, 1992) whose main interest lies in exploring how language use is ideological in nature and consequently produces, maintains, and possibly changes existing stereotypes and power relations.

Though there is voluminous literature on the nature of ideology, ideology in this paper is broadly defined as “the propositions or assumptions we hold consciously or unconsciously about ourselves, the others, and the basic make-up of the world” (Abdulla 2001:2) or as “taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs and value systems shared collectively by social groups” (Puurtinen 2000:178). It is hoped that these extended definitions on ideology, rather than narrowly-defined Marxist tradition definitions, will produce more fruitful results on language and translation.

Critical discourse analysis in news analysis is largely concerned with the two successive phases of news production: news selection and news representation. As the question of news selection is beyond the scope of the present study, the main interest in this study is directed to the issue of news representation.

CDA argues that news representation is amply ideological in spite of the general assumption that news should be objective, impartial, and most importantly factual. For instance, Trew (1979) notes that when a piece of news (information) is presented, the choice between 'terrorist' and 'freedom fighters' is an ideological matter, since it entails "an ideological categorization which reflects the reality of things underlying what we perceive"(Trew 1979: 95). Thus the basic postulate which underpins CDA is that "discourse both shapes and is shaped by society" (Teo 2000). This ideological nature embedded in discourse production is aptly captured by van Dijk in what he calls "ideological square" (1988: 33).

1. Emphasize our good properties/actions
2. Emphasize their bad properties/actions
3. Mitigate our bad properties/actions
4. Mitigate their good properties/actions

(van Dijk 1998: 33)

Van Dijk construes the ideological square as "the polarization strategy"(van Dijk 1998) whose employment is principally intended to present our-group (in-group) in a positive light and their-group (out-group) in a negative sense. Against this theoretical backdrop, the ensuing discussion will be devoted to explaining how CDA is applied to translation studies.

## 2.2 CDA and Translation

Venuti (1995, 1998) should represent one of the most often cited researchers with regard to the interface between critical linguistic approach and translation.

With his attention directed to the issue of the formation of cultural identities, Venuti (1998) claims that "translation wields enormous power in constructing representations of foreign cultures"(1998: 67). By citing Fowler

(1992), he observes that the translation of Japanese fiction in English has consistently represented Japan as “an exoticized, aestheticized, and quintessentially *foreign* land” (Fowler 1992:3). According to Venuti, these stereotypes, in turn, have been fed into reader expectations as to Japanese fictions. Mason (1994) is another study concerning the issue of cultural representation. By comparing a Spanish article about Mexican history and its English translation, he finds that the English version is invested with ideological connotations, which represent Mexican culture as inferior. What is involved with these claims is that these ideologically motivated expectations should have normative functions, which lead the translator to tailor the TTs in line with these ostensibly innocuous 'reader expectations', thus perpetuating the stereotypes of the culture in question.

Based on such critical understanding of translation, this study focuses particularly on the translator's mediation in ideological matters, or more specifically, whether such mediation is a conscious process or an unconscious process.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1 Data

The linguistic material used for the present study is drawn from newspaper and magazine articles, such as *Newsweek (NW)* and *Korea Herald (KH)* and their Korean translations. While *Newsweek*, needless to say, enjoys an international reputation and a global readership, *Korea Herald* is a home-based English newspaper whose readership comprises foreign residents stationed in Korea on the one hand and elite locals with reading ability of the English language on the other. Their Korean editions, *Newsweek Korea* and *Korea*

*Herald*, are produced by professional translators.

The selection of news articles as data for the present study is motivated by two reasons: (1) news, though considered mostly to be so mundane and taken-as-granted part of life, holds a lot to educate us about such important topics as cultural difference (Scollon 2002, Scollon & Scollon 1997) and ideology (Fairclough 1992), to name a few; (2) news translation constitutes an indispensable part of professional translators' job profile in the global era.

The data for analysis include newspaper items concerning North Korea and its leader, Kim Jong-il on the one hand and magazine articles concerning South Korea and the U.S. on the other. It is expected that ideological features will be more acutely visible and palpable in such conflict-embedded issues.

### 3.2 The Translator's Mediation: Unconscious Mediation

In this section, we investigate how North Korea and its leader are framed in a newspaper article and secondly how such ideological stereotypes are transferred into the target text(TT). The whole news article is represented in the following for easy reference. The underlined parts mark the linguistic features, which will be discussed in detail in this section.

(KH, July 13, 2003)

#### **The North Korean leader comes out of a long seclusion**

[1] North Korea's unpredictable leader Kim Jong-Il has emerged from his longest news blackout since he took power, striding and smiling with army brass, at the height of the U.S.-led war in Iraq. The Korean Central News Agency(KCNA) reported Kim inspected a military medical school in Pyongyang on Thursday, accompanied by Korean People's Army chief of staff Kim Yong-chun, Armed Forces Minister Kim Il-chol and two army generals.

[2] It was the first time in 50 days that the North Korea's propaganda

machine mentioned his activities in public since Feb. 12 when he attended a reception hosted by the Russian ambassador in Pyongyang to celebrate his 61st birthday.

[3] A picture, carried by the official news agency, showed Kim laughing as he walked on the ground of Kim Hyong-jik Military Medical University, flanked by a dozen generals and cadres, many of them also smiling widely.

[4] Wearing a pair of sun-glasses and his trademark work suit, Kim looked robust with his pot belly intact. His face could seem a bit thinner, amid some rumors in Seoul that he has been swimming and dieting at a health farm.

[5] It was his longest absence from media exposure since he became head of the all-powerful Workers Party in 1997, replacing his father Kim Il-Sung who died three years earlier and consolidating his status as the only Dear Leader.

[6] In early 2001, the junior Kim, who also controls the armed forces, went unreported for 35 days after George W. Bush was inaugurated as U.S. president. Kim's mysterious seclusion this time has been attributed to his concerns that his Stalinist state, whose nuclear arms ambitions have caused anxiety for the international community, may become the next target of a pre-emptive U.S. attack.

Let us analyze the article paragraph by paragraph, beginning with the headline.

(1)

The North Korean leader comes out of a long seclusion

김 정일 긴 은둔의 끝에 다시 나타나다

While the news maker of the English news article is identified as North Korean leader, the Korean translation specifies his full name. This is because the name *Kim Jong-il*, when presented without further specification, should not represent familiarity for the international readership, whereas the Korean translation sounds more natural with his name fully given.

(2)

North Korea's unpredictable leader Kim Jong-Il has emerged from his longest news blackout since he took power, striding and smiling with army brass, at the height of the U.S.-led war in Iraq.

언제나 예측불허인 북한의 지도자 김 정일이 집권 이후 가장 긴 은둔을 끝내고 모습을 드러냈다. 김 정일 국방위원장은 미국의 대이라크전이 한창 진행되는 가운데 북한군 지도층을 대거 동행하고 웃는 모습을 보여 주었다.

One of the most frequently cited lexical choices in describing Kim should be *unpredictable*. The general view, which has an increasingly strong currency in the outside world, is that Kim's danger largely stems from his unpredictability: there is no predicting what he will do next and he is a kind of person who would risk a war.

This kind of personal trait is even more accentuated in the Korean translation which states that Kim is *always* unpredictable. Add to that unpredictability the seclusive and defiant nature of the person<sup>1)</sup>, especially when he is the head of a state, and then the picture emerges of a dark evil force, which poses a great threat to the democratic world.

---

1) Kim Jung-il's defiance is alluded in the text by portraying him *smiling with army brass at the height of the U.S.-led war against Iraq*.

(3)

It was the first time in 50 days that North Korea's propaganda machine mentioned his activities in public since Feb. 12 when he attended a reception hosted by the Russian ambassador in Pyongyang to celebrate his 61st birthday day.

이는 북한의 선전 매체인 조선 중앙통신이 50일만에 처음으로 김 위원장의 공식활동을 보도한 것이다. 김 위원장은 지난 2월 12일 러시아 대사관에서 자신의 61번째 생일을 축하하는 파티에 참석한 이후로 공식활동을 중단해 왔다.

Here again, the characterization of the Korean Central News Agency as a *propaganda machine* buttresses the stereotype that the nation is a dictatorship with a state-run news agency, which should cater exclusively to the communicative needs of the regime. The Korean translation, however, has subdued the critical tone, though subtly, to the extent that *propaganda machine* is rendered to *propaganda medium*, with its official name specified.

(4)

Wearing a pair of sun-glasses and his trademark work suit, Kim looked robust with his pot belly intact. (ø). His face could seem a bit thinner, amid some rumors in Seoul that he has been swimming and dieting at a health farm.

선글라스를 쓰고 늘상 입을 업무복을 입은 김 위원장은 건강해 보였고, 불룩 나온 배도 그대로 였다. 그러나 김위원장의 얼굴은 다소 야위어 보이기도 했다. 서울에서는 김 위원장이 수영을 하고 건강 농장에서 식생활을 조절하고 있다는 소문이 돌았다.

The above paragraph portrays Kim Jong-il as a queer mixture of danger and eccentricity, a trait which is not often applied to other dictators like Saddam Hussein<sup>2</sup>). Thus, the hitherto serious tone in the preceding text shifts

into a rather mocking one with the accounts of his appearance marked by *pot belly* and *dieting*. The entertaining and mocking twist in the ST, however, is rendered into a straightforward statement about his physique in the TT. In other words, the picture which evokes from a queer blend of *work suit accompanied with sunglasses, pot belly, and face thinned by dieting*, especially when a head of a so-called 'rogue' state is concerned, gets paled in the TT. This is attributable to the translator's adjustment in the process in maintaining a more matter-of-fact tone in the TT, a tone assumed to be befitting Korean news articles in general.

(5)

It was his longest absence from media exposure since he became head of the all-powerful Worker party in 1997, replacing his father Kim Il-Sung who died three years earlier and consolidating his status as the only "Dear Leader."

최근의 은둔은 김 위원장이 아버지인 김 일성 주석이 사망한지 3년 만에 절대적인 권력을 지닌 노동당의 당수가 되어 "친애하는 지도자"로서의 지위를 굳힌 1997년 이후 가장 긴 것이었다.

This paragraph of the news article is markedly geared to giving background information to the main event in the news story. The political party led by Kim is given a negative description: the party is *all-powerful*, and this statement automatically generates the inference on the part of text receivers that North Korea is a far cry from a democratic nation. Note also that a defining characteristic of a dictatorship is a power succession from father to son. The whole paragraph, which is presumably aimed at providing a background information or more specifically history to the current news, turns

---

2) In fact, news abounds with attention-grabbing stories insinuating Kim's attraction to movies, popular song, and invariably women.

out to be serving an additional function of framing North Korea as a dictatorship. This leads us to suggest that background information can be embedded in the story in order to indicate the ideological frame within which the whole story is interpreted.

(6)

Kim's mysterious seclusion this time has been attributed by diplomats and analysts in the region to his concerns that his Stalinist state, whose nuclear arms ambition have caused anxiety for the international community, may become the next target of a pre-emptive U.S. attack.

이번 김 위원장의 알 수 없는 은둔은 핵무기 보유 야욕으로 국제 사회의 우려를 자아내고 있는 스탈린 주의 국가 북한이 미국의 다음 선제 공격 대상이 될지 모른다는 우려 때문일 것이라고 이 지역 외교관과 전문가들은 관측했다.

In this concluding remark, Kim is again branded as mysterious and his country as a Stalinist state. In addition, Kim's nuclear arms ambitions are presupposed as an established fact, hence going unchallenged in the ST and consequently in the TT. The North Korean nuclear ambitions, once presented as an unquestionable fact, further mark North Korea as a grave threat to the outside world, thereby rendering *a pre-emptive U.S. attack* justified.

The analysis thus far suggests that ideological elements in the ST, when judged by the translator to agree with the TT reader's general assumptions, get transferred without modifications into the TT. The translator's mediation is rather invisible in the sense that he/she faithfully renders the ST's ideology into the TT.

### 3.3. The Translator's Mediation: Conscious Mediation

De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) define mediation "as the extent to

which one feeds one's current beliefs and goals into the model of the communicative situation" (1981: 182). Mason(1994) points out that "the mediation by the translator may largely be an unconscious process" (1944: 33, my emphasis).

While the examples covered in the preceding discussion should typify an unconscious mediation by the translator insofar as the ideological elements in the ST are relayed into the TT without much resistance, we believe that deliberate and thus conscious mediation with regard to ideological markers in the STs is as much likely. The following section explores how and on what grounds the translator's mediation is initiated intentionally and can be justified.

Example (7) draws our attention in the sense that the first sentence in the ST is completely dropped in the TT.

(7) (NW, January 12, 2003)

Bush is right: Saddam and Kim are evil. But now he has to make a more complex case - to Americans, and to an increasingly skeptical world - that each evil must be dealt with on its own terms.

(㉔) 이제 부시는 전후 사정을 고려해가며 북한과 이라크문제가 적절한 시기에 각각의 상황에 맞게 다뤄져야 한다는 자신의 주장을 미국인들뿐 아니라 점점 더 회의적이 되가는 세계를 설득시켜야 한다.

The translator's mediation is performed in such a way that the first sentence in the ST, which constitutes a blatantly unveiled opinion rather than an infallible fact, is dropped all together in the Korean rendition. We interpret this translational shift to reflect the translator's judgment that the statement made in the ST is not comfortably in line with general opinion of the TT readership. Furthermore, the age-old dichotomy of *evil* (represented by Saddam and Kim) and *good* (represented by the U.S.), which is deeply impregnated in the ST and possibly derived from Christianity-based perspective, represents

something difficult for Korean readers to accept. Note in this regard that the expression *each evil* in the second sentence is replaced with *North Korea* and *Iraq* in the TT.

The following example, which concerns the increasingly strong anti-American sentiment in Korean public, displays a comparatively smaller-scale modification by which part of information rather than a whole sentence is carefully weeded out.

(8) (NW, March 10, 2003)

Ignorant of American's role as a savior in the Korean War, they see U.S. troops as an occupying force and believe peace with North Korea could break out tomorrow if only Washington would stop meddling.

한국전쟁을 경험하지 않은 그들은 미국을 점령군으로 간주하며 미국의 간섭이 없다면 당장이라도 한반도의 평화가 실현될 것처럼 생각한다.

Presupposing America as a savior for Koreans is ideologically slanted. Note that example (8) frames Koreans as those who are not only ungrateful but also short-sighted with regard to the situation surrounding their country. The translator's mediating role is thus realized by dismantling this presupposed ideology (US-SAVIOR ideology). This observation leads us to suggest that the mediation by the translator with regard to ideological matters should be not only unconscious but also conscious and deliberate.<sup>3)</sup>

The last example we will look at should pose a challenge for the translator, in the sense that anti-American protests are described in the negative light. The translation, however, dilutes the negative connotations by neutralizing the information.

---

3) Hartman is in line with the view when he states that there is "the translator's mediating consciousness in any representation" (1999: 79).

(9) (NW, January 12, 2003)

Protest fatigue is taking its toll on many of the 37,000 U.S. troops in the South Korea

반미시위는 한국에 주둔한 3만 7천 미군 상당수에게 영향을 미치고 있다.

The underlined part in the Korean text represents a toned-down version of the ST. Aixelá calls this strategy “attenuation”, by which he means “replacement, on ideological grounds, of something “too strong” or in any way unacceptable, by something “softer” (Aixelá 1996: 64).

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper represents a small-scale project to elucidate ideological elements in the creation and subsequent translation of the text. It has been observed that ideology is deeply embedded in each phase of the text creation, which extends from news selection and representation to news translation. The discussion in the present study was launched on the assumption that the news text can convey something other than matter-of-fact information, especially so when politically sensitive issues are concerned. In line with this reasoning, lexical items, which are imbued with the writer's attitude, stance, or belief, have been selected as ideological markers. These markers are to signal the frame within which individuals interpret the news article.

In the first half of the paper, we have seen that the ideological stance taken in the ST has been relayed to the TT, without any notable modifications. We believe that this is largely due to the translator's judgment that the aforementioned ideological stance is in keeping with the expectations and assumptions of the target readers. In this case, the translator's mediation

appears to be unconscious.

The ensuing half of the paper, however, has presented us a different type of challenge, since the ST's ideological stance runs counter to the TT readers' general knowledge. This situation has forced the translator to adopt various strategies such as text omission and attenuation. Claim has been made that the employment of these strategies is motivated at a conscious level by the translator in order to make the TTs coherent with the assumption of their readers.

### References

- Abdulla, Andan. 2001. "Aspects of Ideology in Translating Literature", *Babel* 45:1, 1-16.
- Aixelá, Javier F. 1996. "Culture-Specific Items in Translation", In Romn Alvarez and M. Carmen-Africa Vidal (eds.), *Translation, Power, Subversion*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 52-78.
- Beaugrande, Robert de and Wolfgang Dressler. 1981. *Introduction to Text Linguistics*. London and New York: Longman.
- Bell, Allan. 1991. *The Language of News Media*. Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1989. *Language and Power*. Harlow: Longman.
- Fairclough, Norman (ed). 1992. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fowler, E. 1992. "Rendering Words, Traversing Cultures: On the Art and Politics of Translating Modern Japanese Fiction", *Journal of Japanese Studies* 18, 1-44.
- Fowler, Roger. 1991. *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. London & New York: Routledge.

- Fowler, Roger, Gunther Kress, and Tony Trew. 1979. *Language and Control*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Kress, Gunter and Robert Hodge. 1979. *Language as Ideology*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Mason, Ian. 1994. "Discourse, Ideology and Translation", In Robert de Beaugrande, Abdullah Shunnaq and Mohamed Heliel (eds.), *Language, Discourse and Translation in the West and Middle East*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Olk, Harald. 2002. "Critical Discourse Awareness in Translation", *The Translator* 8:1, 101-116.
- Puurtinen, Tina. 2000. "Translating Linguistic Markers of Ideology", In Andrew Chesterman, N. Gallardo San Salvador and Yves Gambier (eds.), *Translation in Context*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Scollon, Ron. 2002. "Generic variability in News Stories in Chinese and English: A Contrastive Discourse Study of Five Day's Newspapers", *Journal of Pragmatics* 32, 761-791.
- Scollon, Ron and Suzie Scollon. 1997. "Point of View and Citation: Fourteen Chinese and English Versions of the 'Same' News Story", *Text* 17:1, 83-125.
- Trew, Tony. 1979. "Theory and Ideology at Work." In T. Fowler *et al* (eds.), *Language and Control*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Van Dijk, Teun A. 1998. "Opinions and Ideologies in the Press", In A. Bell and P. Garret (eds.), *Approaches to Media Discourse*. Blackwell.
- Teo, Peter. 2000. "Racism in the News: a Critical Discourse Analysis of News Reporting in Two Australian Newspapers", *Discourse & Society* 1:1, 7-49.
- Venuti, Lawrence. 1995. *The Translator Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Venuti, Lawrence. 1998. *The Scandals of Translation*. London & New York:

[국문초록]

## 이데올로기적 요소와 번역사의 중재 양상 연구

김 영 신  
(경동대)

본 논문에서는 원문에 나타난 이데올로기적인 요소가 번역문에 어떻게 전이되는지를 분석 연구하였다. 비록 뉴스는 의견이 아닌 사실을 전달할 것이라는 사회적 기대에도 불구하고 많은 이데올로기적 요소들이 뉴스 텍스트에 내재하여 있다는 것을 알 수 있었다. 본 논문에서는 이런 이데올로기적인 요소가 단어나 문장 차원에서 어떻게 표시 되고 이것이 번역문에 어떤 방식으로 전이 되는지에 분석의 초점을 두었다.

논문의 첫 부분에서는, 원문 작가의 이데올로기적 입장이 별다른 변화없이 번역문으로 전이 되는 것을 보았다. 이것이 가능한 이유는 원문의 이데올로기가 번역문을 읽게 될 독자들의 일반적인 믿음체계와 일치한다는 번역사의 판단이 있었기 때문이다. 이런 경우 번역사의 중재는 무의식적으로 일어나며 원문의 이데올로기에 대한 저항없이 원문의 입장을 전이하게 된다.

그러나 원문에 나타난 이데올로기적 입장이 번역문 독자의 일반적인 지식이 나 믿음 체계와 심각할 정도로 상충된다고 번역사가 판단할 경우 번역사의 중재는 의도적 차원에서 발생한다. 이를 뒷받침하는 증거로서, 번역사는 원문의 일부를 삭제하거나 원문에 나타난 이데올로기의 수위를 낮추는 전략을 쓰고 있는 것을 알 수 있다. 결론적으로 번역사가 원문의 이데올로기를 수용하느냐 배척하느냐 하는 문제는 과연 번역문의 독자가 어떤 믿음체계를 있으며 이 믿음체계와 원문의 이데올로기가 어느정도 일치하는가에 영향을 받는다고 볼 수 있다.

▶주제어: ideology, Critical Discourse Analysis(CDA), translator's mediation, attenuation