

A Case Study of Misinterpreting in Korea-US Press Conferences

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1. Introduction

There is a saying that interpreters, like a bundle of bank notes, are known to the world only when they are fakes (Dejean 125). On July 13, 2005, just after the joint press conference of the US-Korean Foreign Ministers in Seoul, Korean reporters raised the problem with the US-side interpreter who worked English into Korean. It was the third of a series of interpreting commotions after the first one in October, 2004 during the visit of then-State Secretary Colin Powell and the second, in March, 2005 with Secretary Rice (Yonhap News, July 13, 2005). Reporters pointed out that procedural mistakes had happened during the last March visit, but this time, substantially, quite a few mistakes and omissions were made.

The US-side interpreter translated Palestinian *authority* as *gwonwi* in Korean, referring to the meaning of 'power', and *agreement* for a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula as *dongmaeng*, or 'alliance'. Articles ran in many newspapers the next morning also criticizing subsequent parts of the interpreting, where Secretary Rice's comments were not fully transferred and some important ideas omitted.

When we listen to the recorded video clips of the conference, such misgivings proved to be true and what is more surprising is the fact that not a single sentence or phrase had been correctly interpreted. In March 2005 also, the press was not happy with the interpreters mobilized by each of the two countries(Yonhap News, March 14, 2005). When the first question was not transferred by either of the two interpreters for about ten seconds, the Korean ministry's moderator of the conference was obliged to convey the gist of the question to the US interpreter. Some of the ensuing questions were not interpreted at all and only the corresponding answers were conveyed.

A US official confessed that they were aware of the seriousness of the issue(Segye Ilbo, March 14, 2005). He suggested the structural nature of the problem by saying, "The State Department makes it a rule that only those interpreters contracted as interpreters by the Department can accompany and interpret the State Secretary." On the other hand, the Korean Ministry diagnosed the repeated misinterpreting incidents by saying that interpreting is an on-going challenge for the Korea-US diplomacy.

Nevertheless, on September 14, 2006, the press conference following the Korea-US summit meeting at the White House was not an exception. A newly employed male interpreter revealed also his inexperience and showed the problem of non-professional interpreting. Fortunately, however, he did not make any headline at that time and was not known to the world.¹⁾

1) 'US Interpreter Disgracing US-Korea Presidents', Kwak, Joongchol, Oct. 10, 2006, Joongang Daily

In less than a year, on September 7, 2007 again, a gaffe arose after the press availability at the White House after the Korea-US summit talks. When President Bush responded to some questions of the journalists, which was interpreted by a new interpreter on his side, President Roh wanted some more specific comments from his counterpart. After the incident, the US side explained that some remarks of President Bush were 'lost in translation'. It was true to some extent, but it was rather a case in which the interpreter played the role of a scapegoat in the diplomatic gaffe committed by his or her boss, as has often been the case in the past diplomatic row on the world scenes.

This paper will analyze the misinterpreting cases and possible causes in the press conferences in March and July, 2005 between the two Foreign ministers and then in September, 2006 between the two heads of state. It will then try to find out ways to prevent misinterpreting and upgrade the quality of consecutive interpreting of press conferences of the two countries.

2. Classification of Misinterpreting Cases and their Causes

Misinterpreting cases were collected from three sources: two Korea-US Foreign Ministers' press conferences on March 20 and July 13, 2005 plus the US-Korean Presidents' press conference at the White House on September 14, 2006. The first two were interpreted by a lady, the last was done by a gentlemen, both Korean-American citizens. For operational purpose of this paper, misinterpreting causes are classified and defined as follows.

2.1. Inexperience

When a person entrusted with interpreting task is not professionally trained as interpreter or has not sufficient work experience, (s)he tends to be very poor in conveying exact messages in interpreting. This kind of would-be

interpreters are not capable of listening deeply and cannot convey the shades of meaning of the speech concerned.

As a result, they cannot properly interpret even a single sentence uttered by his client. When such persons are supposed to interpret, the general audience may well be misled, while officials or journalists are less so because they know better what it is all about. In other words, interpreters have far less information or knowledge about the issue than the officials concerned and the reporters assigned to cover the function.

Any discourse, subject to interpreting, is a product of information accumulated in years by specialists in the field. It is an object which has a lot of delicate nuances. In particular, discourses in Korea-US relations are alive with ever-evolving nuances day by day. In order to catch delicate differences between words, sentences, phrases and expressions, deep listening and comprehension is a prerequisite. Non professional interpreters are not used to deep listening and they miss delicately different nuances, which leads to misinterpreting.

When press conferences are interpreted consecutively, interpreters take notes²⁾, and efficient note-taking is very important for exact interpreting. Non-professional interpreters may try to take notes, but they are not used to taking advantage of their notes because they have no experience enough to put them back according to the original meaning.

Moreover, amidst the stage fright felt in tense situations like press conferences, only properly-trained interpreters with a certain level of experiences can show expediency or reflex to deal with ever-evolving context of the conference.

2) Note-taking is different from stenography. Stenographers put the speech as it is pronounced, but interpreters put the meaning of the speech with their own symbols, alphabets, etc. Notes can be different from interpreter to interpreter.

2.2. Lack of Vocabulary and Lexical Competence

Non-professional interpreters usually command a very poor level of vocabulary and it leads to misinterpreting incidents, which may be reported by the press. For example, an interpreter for US President Jimmy Carter during the latter's visit to Poland put 'goodwill' in Polish to 'sexual desire' in English, making a headline(Dejean 128). The same went with the interpreter to US State Secretary Rice in July, 2005, who put 'authorities' in English to 'authority' in Korean. Her long stay in the US must have deprived her of the necessary Korean vocabulary. Lexical competence is a prerequisite for professional interpreting.

2.3. Lack of Information or Knowledge

Non-professionals usually do not have at their fingertips information or knowledge which entails special terminology in each field. For example, the above-mentioned interpreter to Secretary Rice put *denuclearization declaration* as *denuclearization alliance*. Either she did not understand the difference between *declaration* and *alliance*, or she was not updated with the situation around the Korean peninsula concerning nuclear arms. Special terminology is usually accumulated and evolved day by day according to ever-developing situation in the field involved. There is also a pool of expressions agreed upon by journalists and used by the media. If interpreters do not come up with those expressions, interpreting often leads to misunderstanding or confusion by the audience. Even a professional Korean interpreter reportedly put *WMD (weapons of mass destruction)* as *nuclear weapons*, inviting a protest of reporters in a press conference.³⁾

It is often related to the *BRIEF*, which refers to specified or suggested

3) An incident provoked by a professor of an interpreting school during the press conference of the former Korean President Kim Dae-jung in January, 2003, which was not reported by the press.

instructions from clients to translators or interpreters for translating or interpreting tasks (Jeong 176). Clients can brief interpreters before interpreting tasks, and even if they do not do so, interpreters are supposed to brief themselves with or without clients' intervention.

In the case of the 6-party talks to solve the problem of North Korea's nuclear program, Korea (South and North), Japan and China reportedly mobilize some of their diplomats for interpreting the talks. They have usually been briefed on ongoing developments of the situation and have no problem with updating themselves with the relevant information or knowledge involved. They can naturally do better interpreting than suddenly mobilized professional interpreters. They are on an advantageous edge than professional interpreters.

On the contrary, since the US does not usually use its diplomats as interpreters, its interpreters should have more problems in getting briefed and actual interpreting. Moreover, when they are faced with stage fright in the historic meeting sites such as the White House, they are more apt to make mistakes or gaffes. The knowledge or information needed for proper interpreting cannot be obtained overnight.

Of course, the above-mentioned three categories are defined for operational and analytical purposes and in fact, they are closely intertwined. It is like the linkage among listening, speaking, reading and writing of a foreign language.

3. Analyses of Misinterpreting Cases according to Categories

3.1. Inexperience

(March 20, 2005)

- (1) SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much. I'm delighted to be back in Seoul. And I have been in office for I think **less than two months now and I was delighted to have a chance to come here**

early to emphasize how much value the United States attaches to the relationship, the alliance with the Republic of Korea, an alliance that is based on democratic values and our shared desire for peace in the region.

MI: Thank you very much. I am back in Seoul and it is **already two months** since I have been in office. About the alliance that the US shares with Korea, I emphasized about the alliance and talked a lot about the values of democracy that we share.

Introductory remarks of a press conference are usually light and ceremonial, alleging the results of the meeting and forecasting the ambiance of the conference itself. Nevertheless, it does not mean that interpreting may be loose. In this case, the speaker said that she came to Seoul for the second time in two months' period and it is because the bilateral alliance is that much important. But the interpreter did not convey the idea that "Korea is still important to the US". Her interpreting is misleading because "it is already two months" and "it is less than two months" can be just the opposite. It may look like a slight difference, but it is a misinterpreting.

- (2) We have, of course, together been able to **maintain peace and stability** in the Asia-Pacific that has allowed the emergence of **economic prosperity** in this region, as well as the emergence of **strong democracies** like the Republic of Korea.

MI: In this region, we enjoyed economic prosperity, both countries enjoyed it, and we continued to **maintain peace and safety** in this region and we know Korea is an **economically powerful country**.

Unstable note-taking may have resulted in putting 'economic prosperity' before its original place. The speaker said that the two countries maintained peace and security together and it resulted in Korea's democratization and economic prosperity. But the interpreter said that the two countries enjoyed economic prosperity together, maintained peace and safety, making Korea an

economic power.

- (3) But, of course, our relationship is **also global** and I wanted to thank the Korean people for their contributions to Iraq and stability there, and to stability in Afghanistan, vital contributions to the war on terror, but **also vital contributions to the spread of democracy** in those difficult places.

MI: I thank the Korea Army which **contributed to the war against terror and democracy** and to the stability of such a dangerous zone, and zones like Iraq and Afghanistan.

This mess also seems to be caused by unstable note-taking. The speaker said that the two countries cooperated also in the international arena, contributing to the prevention of terror and expansion of democracy. That message was changed to the thanks to the Korean army, which was not mentioned at all by the speaker. The interpreter may have heard about the dispatch of the Korean army to the two far-away countries and put the irrelevant information in her interpreting. Professional interpreters must not include his or her own knowledge into interpreting.

(July 13, 2005)

- (4) We agreed that the agreement of the North Koreans to come back to the talks is **a very good step, but only a first step**, and that we look forward to a strategic decision by the North Koreans to abandon their nuclear weapons program.

MI: Though North Korea's coming back to the 6-party talks is **a first step**, the most important thing is whether it will make a strategic decision.

The whole sentence does not make sense. The original message was that although North Korea's return to the talks is welcome, but it is only a first

step and it must make a decision. The speaker may repeat the message time and again, but an experienced interpreter has to sum up the message and clearly convey it. The interpreter must have worked for the meeting with a Korean-side interpreter before the press conference and grasped its context. Why couldn't she put the message in the right context? Probably because she was not experienced enough to do so.

(September 14, 2006)

(5) **Did he ask you a question?**

PRESIDENT ROH: (As translated.) Yes, that was a very good answer. Thank you, Mr. President. (Laughter.)

PRESIDENT BUSH: Hope everybody else agrees with it.

MI: Did I answer rightly to the question?

This sentence is a big misinterpreting, not in substance, but in form. Bush asked if the reporter asked a question to President Roh also, but the interpreter put it as if Bush asked if his own answer was satisfactory for the question. This gaffe led to Roh's answer that Bush's answer was very good, letting the Korean interpreter interpret the same message. Bush continued to say that he hoped everybody else agrees with it. The reporters laughed at this scene and the two heads of state were, in a sense, humiliated. Misinterpreting can well put heads of state to shame.

(6) PRESIDENT BUSH: See, **I'll interpret the question for him.**

(Laughter.) "How come you look so beautiful in your blue tie, Mr. President?" (Laughter.)

MI: Well, I will interpret the question **first**...

Bush made a joke, but it was not conveyed at all. Bush listened to the interpreter and joked, "May I interpret?"

He said that my necktie suits me well today." With the ensuing laughter of the reporters, there was no time for interpreting, but even if there has been, there is doubt that the interpreter put it right.

In other words, the inexperienced interpreter did not notice Bush's joke and just let it go. A joke in high-level meeting like this are an important factor that can determine the flow of the meetings. In fact, a reporter designated by Roh asked a question to Roh first and then a different question to Bush. But the US interpreter whispered the question to Bush's ear, and Bush answered the question first. If the interpreter had been experienced, he would not have let Bush answer the question first. Instead, the Korean interpreter should have interpreted the first question first for Roh's answer and then let Bush answer the second question. It may not be easy for interpreters to make order in such a messy situation, but they should at least try to put some order in such a chaos.

(September 7, 2007)

(7) PRESIDENT BUSH: And in our discussions I reaffirmed our government's position that when the North Korean leader fully discloses and gets rid of his nuclear weapons programs, that we can achieve a new security arrangement in the Korean Peninsula, that we can have the peace that we all long for. You and I discussed the Northeast Peace and Security agreement- arrangement, which we support.

MI: And also Mr. President and I exchanged views. There were a lot of reconfirmation concerning North Korea. We announced that there can be a lot of changes in case the North Korean leader fully discloses and gets rid of his nuclear weapons programs. And I think in Northeast Asia also a peace regime will be newly established.

Bush's introductory remarks must have been discussed during the summit

talks just before the press conference. However, the US interpreter could not reproduce them properly in front of the journalists because of his inexperience as interpreter. He must have had some stage fright and taken a very poor notes when Bush was speaking.

He put 'a new security arrangement in the Korean Peninsula' just as 'a lot of changes' and 'discussed the Northeast Peace and Security agreement-arrangement, which we support' as 'in Northeast Asia also a peace regime will be newly established'.

So two messages of <a new security arrangement in the Korean Peninsula> and <the Northeast Peace and Security arrangement> were missing in the interpreting, which was not admissible for a professional interpreter.

This misinterpretation might have caused President Roh to add up two sentences at the end of his own introductory remarks: I think I might be wrong I think I did not hear President Bush mention the a declaration to end the Korean War just now. Did you say so, President Bush? However, we cannot surmise that Roh's add-up questions were provoked by poor interpreting. Rather, Roh was unable to maintain this distinction between public messages and private discussions.⁴⁾ Roh probably did press the President in their private meeting to offer the prospect of a peace treaty to Kim Jong-il. It was a case of an interpreter made scapegoat in a diplomatic row.

(8) PRESIDENT BUSH: I said it's up to Kim Jong-il as to whether or not we're able to sign a peace treaty to end the Korean War. He's got to get rid of his weapons in a verifiable fashion. And we're making progress toward that goal. It's up to him.

MI: What I want to say is that it depends on Chairman Kim whether or not we proceed to peace or not. Getting rid of his weapons in a verifiable way must be his next action. Progress is being made toward such a goal but nevertheless, the decision should be made by his side

4) Cha, V. Chosun Daily, Sept. 12, 2007

Here again, the US interpreter did not reproduce the message of 'sign a peace treaty to end the Korean War', which President Roh wanted to hear from Bush. He just put it as 'proceed to peace or not'. It must have caused Roh to ask a second add-up question: "I believe that they are the very same thing, Mr. President. If you could be a little bit clearer in your message... I think Chairman Kim or the Korean people want to hear the next story..."

(September 7, 2007)

(9) PRESIDENT BUSH: In our discussions I reaffirmed our government's position that when the North Korean leader fully discloses and gets rid of his nuclear weapons programs, that we can achieve a new security arrangement in the Korean Peninsula, that we can have the peace that we all long for. You and I discussed the Northeast Peace and Security agreement-arrangement, which we support.

MI: In case the North Korean leader fully discloses nuclear arm program and dismantle it, many changes will occur. A new peace system will be established in Northeast Asia.

Here a male interpreter recruited anew by the US side showed his inexperience. He shortened his boss' remarks by omitting the core message of 'a new security arrangement in the Korean Peninsula' and the US side described it as 'lost in translation'.⁵⁾

This incomplete, albeit not totally mistaken, interpreting might have caused President Roh to say, "I think I might be wrong—I think I did not hear

5) Q. Did the U. S. translator say anything about what was missing, since we were hearing mostly the Korean translator? What was the significant—what specifically happened here? I mean, lost in translation—what?: Press Briefing by Deputy Press Secretary Dana Perino and Senior Administration Officials, Filing Center, Four Points Sheraton, Sydney, Australia (White House homepage, www.whitehouse.gov)

President Bush mention the—a declaration to end the Korean War just now. Did you say so, President Bush?" President Bush answered, "I said it's up to Kim Jong-il as to whether or not we're able to sign a peace treaty to end the Korean War. He's got to get rid of his weapons in a verifiable fashion. And we're making progress toward that goal. It's up to him. And President Roh again uttered an add-up question, "I believe that they are the same thing, Mr. President. If you could be a little bit clearer in your message, I think—", and President Bush responded, "I can't make it any more clear, Mr. President. We look forward to the day when we can end the Korean War. That will end—will happen when Kim Jong-il verifiably gets rid of his weapons programs and his weapons. Thank you, sir."

For this latest gaffe, there could be two possibilities: the incomplete interpreting might have caused President Roh to ask add-up questions or he deliberately pushed President Bush to say a few more words in his (Roh's) favor. If the second possibility had been true, the interpreter was made a scapegoat in the diplomatic gaffe. In any case, the interpreter is to blame because he had done an incomplete interpreting.

3.2. Lack of Vocabulary

(March 20, 2005)

- (9) Rice: Today, the Foreign Minister and I discussed our shared commitment to a **peaceful, denuclearized Korean Peninsula**. We will devote maximum efforts to our work in the Six Party Talks, to the multilateral diplomacy that should lead to an end to North Korea's nuclear ambitions and to its nuclear weapons programs.

MI: Today, the Foreign Minister and I dealt with **North Korea's nuclear problem** and dealt with many pending matters for North Korea to give up its nuclear ambition through the 6-party talks, that is, through multilateral diplomacy.

The interpreter did not know about the essential word, *denuclearize* and put it as a *North Korean problem*. *Multilateral* was changed into *multinational*. The common diplomatic expression *shared commitment* was also totally missing.

(July 13, 2005)

(10) Rice: Mr. Abbas, the President of the **Palestinian Authorities**, has said this is, of course, a crime against the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

MI: President Abbas of **Palestine authority**...

The US interpreter put '*authorities*' as '*authority*' and reminds us of the interpreter to President Carter put the Polish word '*goodwill*' as '*sexual desire*.' This kind of mistaken vocabulary makes non-professional interpreters known to the world. And the head of Palestine is called *Chairman*, not *President*. Professional interpreters do not make such a basic mistake.

(11) We are also very optimistic that our joint efforts, to improve the security situation on the Korean Peninsula, could indeed bear fruit, although, of course, there is **still much more to be done**.

MI: We will jointly make efforts and make great efforts for the security of the Korean peninsula. And we will hope that it will produce positive efforts.

Expressions missing in interpreting are as basic as *optimistic*, *joint efforts*, and *bear fruit*. And '*an-bo*', the Korean equivalent of *security* was put as '*bo-an*', which is slightly different from each other.

(September 14, 2006)

(12) The relationship between the United States and South Korea is a **strong and vital** relationship.

MI: Korea-US relations are **strong... such relations**.

The US-side interpreter, though he has a Korean origin, should have said US-Korea than Korea-US. *Vital* was an essential word, not to be missed in interpreting.

(13) My message to the Korean people is that the United States is **committed to the security of the Korean Peninsula**.

MI: The message that I'd like to convey to the Korean people is that the US government is **still responsible for** the security of the Korean peninsula, so would I like to say.

Commit must be an English word that is difficult to translate into Korean according to the context, but it is not to say, 'be responsible for'. A professional interpreter would not have put it that way. If the US is taking responsibility for the security of the peninsula, what is South Korea doing? According to the context, it might have changed the subject of security and can be defined as the greatest mistake in interpreting this press conference. The interpreter may have said that the US still intends to take some responsibility.

3.3. Lack of Information or Common Knowledge.

(March 20, 2005)

(14) We also agreed that the Six Party Talks are the best way for North Korea to receive **the respect that it desires and the assistance** that it needs.

MI: We exchanged the idea that the 6-party talks is the most important method for North Korea **to get what it needs**.

Even before the 6-party talks, North Korea wanted to get respect, not disdain, from the world community. The interpreter was ignorant of that basic

knowledge. 'Respect and assistance' was wrongly summarized as 'what it needs'.

(15) I am sure that over lunch, we will have an opportunity to talk about the **realignment of US Forces Korea** that is now under way, a realignment that will return valuable urban land to the Korean people, while we continue to **modernize the alliance** so that it can maintain peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

MI: And over lunch, we will continue to share ideas on pending matters about the **realignment of US Forces Korea** and through this, our US Forces Korea will return their bases to Korea, and at the same time, it will be **a way to modernization**.

Nobody would have understood what the interpreter was talking about. The interpreter must have had no exact information about the realignment of US Forces Korea with the expected return of their bases to Korea and the necessary scheduled modernization of the Korea army, which was one of the most important matters between the two sides at that time.

(September 14, 2006)

(16) Decisions about the placement of our troops and the size of our troops will be **made in consultation with** the South Korean government. We will work in a consultative way at the appropriate level of government to come up with an appropriate date.

MI: And such matters as the size and dates of moving will be **concluded through consultation with** the Korean government. **Appropriate working staff of our two countries will consult each other and come up with appropriate dates.**

The key factors for the US Forces Korea is its location and size. Once the location is decided, then the moving dates will be decided. But the interpreter was confusing because he talked about the dates without mentioning the

location. And 'the appropriate working staff' is not identical to the appropriate government level.

- (17) I agree with the President that the issue should not become a political issue. I have **talked to our Secretary of Defense** about making sure that the issue is done in a consultative way and **at the appropriate level of government**, and that's how we will end up deciding the appropriate transfer of operational authority.

MI: And what I agree with the Korean President is that this matter should not become a political matter. We decided that about the operation control and its transfer, **the US Defense Secretary and Korea's appropriate partner** will exchange dialogue and consult with each other and then decide on appropriate dates.

For interpreting two heads of state, interpreters must be armed with information on power politics around them. Bush must have instructed Secretary Rumsfeld how to deal with the matter and he said that it will be the way to solve the problem. But the US-side interpreter just said that the US Secretary and his counterpart have decided to set the dates. Of course it can be ascribed to the absence of deep listening of the non-professional. One of the reasons why Korean side interpreting caused less confusion was that she was assigned to the President from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and she had relevant information and knowledge at her fingertips. On the other hand, the US-side interpreter was not aware of the hierarchy and decision-making process between the President and his secretaries. If he had been assigned to the job from the US Defense Department, his interpreting could have been different.

- (18) His refusal to come back to the six-party talks has really strengthened **an alliance of five nations that are determined to solve this issue peacefully**, but recognize a threat posed by a country in the region armed with a nuclear weapon. If he were to verifiably

get rid of his weapons programs, there is clearly **a better way forward**. And that is the message we've been sending to the North Korean government through the six-party talks

MI: In fact, I can say that North Korea's refusal to resume the talks has strengthened **a certain peaceful alliance among the rest five countries**. While we can confirm (the presence of) nuclear weapons, I think **what I do would be the best method**. I shared this message with the (South) Korean government also and we keep on sending the message to North Korea that the issue should be settled through the 6-party talks.

Here are three big mistakes: '5 countries wishing for peaceful resolution' became '5 countries of peaceful alliance', 'recognition of the threat of a nuclear-armed country' became 'confirmation of nuclear weapon', 'If Kim Jeong-il got rid of his weapons programs, there is a better way' outrageously became 'What I do is the best method'. On top of that, 'the message sent to North Korea through the 6-party talks' became 'the message that it should be solved through 6-party talks. Here again, the journalists must have been bent on the issue of operation control transfer and did not care for the inexact interpreting.

In this part, the interpreter may have put a message mentioned during the meeting, but not in the press conference. What an interpreter must not do is putting his own ideas in his interpreting or a message mentioned in the foregoing meeting not the ongoing conference.

- (19) This is an important program for the security of this country. And we want to **work with Congress to make sure that the program can go forward**. If there's not clarity, if there's ambiguity, if there's any doubt in our professionals' minds that they can conduct their operations in a legal way, with support of the Congress, the program won't go forward and the American people will be in danger.

MI: For my country, for important security procedure, I have put

various bills in the Congress. But with a view to guaranteeing legal transparency, in a way to guarantee legal transparency, I am implementing security laws for our country.

An American journalist asked a question on a domestic issue to President Bush, and the President gave a lengthy answer. Interpreting became more messy, probably because he was not updated with the US issues. After all, he was a Korean-American. A professional interpreter must be updated with issues of the country in which he lives.

(September 14, 2006)

(20) Mr. President, North Korea has refused to engage in the six-party talks for **nearly a year**. What's the incentive to get them back to the table?

MI: Mr. President, it has been a **pretty long time** since North Korea participated in the 6-party talks and it is not going to do so yet. What would be the incentives that could given to them?

'Nearly a year' is quite different from *'a pretty long time.'* It may show that the interpreter is not updated with the history of the talks, such as the date on which the North refused to participate in the talks.

(20) First and foremost, the incentive is for Kim Jong-il to **understand there is a better way to improve the lives of his people than being isolated**; that stability in the region is in his interests, the ultimate interests for the people of North Korea to be able to benefit and for families to be able to have food on the table.

MI: The most important thing is, the most important among the incentives is, **what Kim Jeong-il must understand is**, for the peace of his own people, for them, **he must return to the talks**. That stability in the Korean peninsula is awfully important for the North Korean residents and in order for them to actually put food on their

tables, it is that the stability in the peninsula is important.

The US-side interpreter did not catch the context, "the incentive is to let Kim Jeong-il understand the situation and it will benefit him". He ended up with similar message, but deep transfer from deep listening was not achieved.

4. Conclusion

Mr. Tong Kim (aged 70) worked hard for the US State Department for almost 20 years from the 80's as a self-made interpreter, but he was criticized more often than not by Korean diplomats and reporters for his not-so-fluent interpreting in his not-updated Korean. It is why the Korean side looked forward to the appearance of a new generation of interpreters in Washington D. C. Unfortunately, however, when he retired in June, 2005, the younger interpreters succeeding him proved to be more problematic, due to the absence of proper professional training or experience. As a result, they were branded as fakes by the press. They showed that good English-speaking ability does not guarantee good interpreting, nor does higher education in the US, nor a US citizenship.

The ability to interpret others as if their message were yours, in the presence of stage fright, cannot be gained overnight. Interpreters should be trained as such, with a variety of information and knowledge in various fields, and a wide range of specialized terminology. Since they usually work for world-level specialists, they should overcome stage-fright and dare to get their messages across. In particular, when it comes to interpreting for high officials like the President or Secretaries in the White House and the Departments, the task can be more demanding or even frightening. So it is not easy to find eligible candidates for interpreting.

After the interpreting gaffe during Rice's visit to Seoul in 2005, the Korean

Foreign Ministry confessed that interpreting for the US officials is a permanent homework. The problem comes from the fact that the US government does not consider it serious. Their absentmindedness resulting from the US-first, English-first mind would continue to cause similar problems in the future. If they cannot find any good interpreter among Korean-Americans living in the US, they would rather give up their principle of sticking to American citizens as their official interpreters. Instead, they had better mobilize, for example, interpreters working for the US Embassy in Korea, who graduated from interpreting schools in Seoul. Only then, there would be no diplomatic row in the Korea-US diplomacy.

In conclusion, measures to upgrade the quality of consecutive interpreting for the Korea-US official meetings can be summarized as follows.

- 1) Mobilize graduates from interpreting schools in Korea or professionally trained interpreters in the US.
- 2) When such resources are not available, secure resources that can be made interpreters in a short period of time, through an intensive course. For example, the Korean Foreign Ministry mobilize some of their good English-speaking diplomats and send them to the Presidential Office for interpreting. For non-English foreign languages, the Korean Ministry employ some good graduates of Korean interpreting schools and mobilize them for interpreting important meetings such as the 6-party talks.
- 3) In a longer term, the US State Department can employ good resources in the US and send them to interpreting schools in Korea for proper professional training and then, mobilize them for important meetings.
- 4) Those resources should be given enough time to update themselves with diplomacy and pending matters between the two or more countries. They should of course be given enough data and information concerned.
- 5) When actual interpreting is finished, the results should be examined

thoroughly, so that the same problems or mistakes are never repeated again in next occasions.

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[Abstract]

A Case Study of Misinterpreting in Korea-US Press Conferences

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In South Korea, interpreting between Korean-English has been most common due to the long bilateral relations and contacts of more than 60 years between the two countries. However, mistakes made in interpreting top US officials' remarks into Korean have been nothing new. The reason is quite simple: interpreters from the US side, mostly Korean-Americans, are not professionally trained. While all interpreters affiliated with the US State Department are required to be US citizens, it is not easy to find American citizens professionally trained as an interpreter for Korean and English languages.

On the contrary, Korean-side interpreters are usually either professionals trained hard at a master-degree interpreting school, or diplomats who made themselves semi-interpreters with their own linguistic talents and through self-training. Those diplomats have an advantage in that they interpret their usual tasks at the Foreign Ministry. It is why diplomats sometimes sound better than professional interpreters, because they know what they interpret better than anyone else including freelance interpreters.

Reports or critics on the US-side interpreting of English into Korean have become more active with live TV coverage of press conferences between the two countries. After the flawed performance of Secretary Rice's interpreter in 2006, Korea's Foreign Ministry had lamented that the US-side interpreting remains a great challenge to be solved. The fundamental problem, however, lies in the fact that Washington does not regard the issue as serious. Similar

cases of misinterpreting will continue to happen as long as the US does not change its attitude of indifference, which seems to be rooted in its sense of superiority over other countries and other languages than English. If Washington cannot find US nationals with Korean background who have necessary skills and experience in interpreting, it should break tradition and instead, call on professional interpreters, for example, those working for the US Embassy in Korea, who received proper training at graduate schools of interpreting in Seoul. Only then will the shameful history of poor interpreting end.

▶ Key Words: consecutive interpreting, misinterpreting, note-taking, press conference, professionalism

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