

Korean-English Differences of Communicative Preferences with Focus on the Subject Position

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1. Introduction

The study of translation, known as translation studies, has seen an exponential growth in the last few decades. Theories and insights in various disciplines, such as linguistics, communication studies, and cultural studies, to name just a few, have been fruitfully applied to translation studies, thus making a significant contribution to the advancement of the study. The advancement of the subject calls for scientific and in-depth theoretical frameworks, which can account for specific problems encountered during the process and suggest strategies for their solution.

Translation is a process which surely goes beyond the level of conveying the semantic meaning of the Source Text (hereafter ST) to the Target

Text(hereafter TT). Among other important considerations, the translator is required to pay attention to differences of communicative preferences between the ST and the TT. What this means is that the translator is expected to abide by stylistic conventions that prevail in the TT and such attention to the textual conventions is one of the many things which distinguish amateur translators from professional ones (Toury 1995; Nord 1997).

Translation studies has contributed a lot in this sense that it helps the translator come to terms with the complexities involved in the process of translation and come up with viable strategies, even though these so-called strategies do not always seem to work as envisioned by the translator.

The present paper starts from the assumption that one of the major challenges facing the translator is what to put in the subject position. With this understanding, the present study aims to reveal differences between English and Korean with regard to the subject position. The specific focus of the study will be put on a different tolerance for inanimate subject constructions between English and Korean.

While there has been a sizable volume of research on how non-animate subjects in the English originals are translated into Korean, research on the other way around, that is out-bound translation from Korean into English, seems to be limited in its sheer volume. It might be a natural outcome since researchers, whose native language is Korean, can resort to their intuition that their mother tongue bestows and should be able to perform a more precise analysis on the final output. In this context, the present study represents an attempt to venture into a less chartered area, which is translation of Korean into English.

In order to identify the communicative differences, the first half of the present study focuses on the personal pronouns in the English texts and Korean translations. In the second half, we turn to translation of Korean into English and look into how non-ACTORS in the Korean originals are transformed into ACTORS in the English translations.

2. Theoretical Background

This paper draws on the basic theoretical building blocks from sentence semantics. One of the important concerns of sentence semantics, when describing a situation, is "how to portray the role of entities involved" in the situation (Saeed 1997). In this aspect, the notion of thematic roles will throw a meaningful light on this question. From the obviously extensive literature on this concept, we borrow such terms as AGENT, THEME/PATIENT, INSTRUMENT and LOCATION. Andrews (1985) and Radford (1988) explains these terms as such

AGENT: the initiator of some action, capable of acting with volition

PATIENT: the entity undergoing the effect of some action, often undergoing some change in state

THEME: the entity which is moved by an action, or whose location is described

INSTRUMENT: the means by which an action is performed or something comes out

LOCATION: the place in which something is situated or takes place.

The following sentence might facilitate the understanding of these terms.

Ursula broke the ice with a pickaxe.¹⁾

Ursula represents AGENT since it is the entity which does the action portrayed in the sentence, while ice represents PATIENT and pickaxe represents INSTRUMENT.

What is especially enlightening with their explanation and has great

1) This concept is drawn from page 145, Saeed (1997).

implications to the practice of translation is that when a person forms a sentence, there is a hierarchical order in terms of the preference for the subject. The simplified hierarchy is presented below.

AGENT> PATIENT> INSTRUMENT> LOCATION²⁾

What the diagram implies is eye-opening in two aspects. Firstly, as mentioned briefly, there is a tendency in which a speaker is likely to put in the subject position the AGENT, which is typically animate and volitional. In other words, normally we expect that the left-most AGENT is the most likely candidate for the sentence subject, while right-most element LOCATION is the least likely candidate for the role. In other words, languages prefer AGENT rather than PATIENT as a subject in the sentences. Another important finding is that if a language allows INSTRUMENT to be the subject, it will allow the other elements to right of INSTRUMENT, namely AGENT and PATIENT, to appear in the subject position, while it is not clear with LOCATION.³⁾ What is crucially important with regard to translation is that the preference pattern for the subject position varies with different languages. With this basic understanding, the present study aims to look into how English and Korean would differ in their preference pattern with regard to the subject.

Before going into the further discussion, however, this study intends to use the term ACTOR (Foley and Van Valin (1984)) instead of AGENT, because the former is more inclusive and pertinent to the current study. Foley and Van Valine define ACTOR as an 'entity which expresses the participant which performs, effects, instigates, or control the situation denoted by the predicate'.

2) This is called as an implicational hierarchy in Fillmore (1968) and Givon (1984).

3) Saeed (1997) notes that sentences with LOCATION as subject are rare, unless we include the following sentences:

- a. This cottage sleeps five adults.
- b. The table seats eight.

Refer to the following example:

The car ran over the hedgehog.

Note that *The car* is an ACTOR but not AGENT, since it is not animate nor has volition to kill.

The difference in communicative preferences have been noted in many previous researches. The difference between English and German has been noted, among others, by House (2005). Let us refer to the following examples.

1)

English ST

Anti-ageing therapies of the future will undoubtedly have to counter many destructive biochemical processes at once.

German TT

Dutch Anti-Altern Therapien der Zukunft muss vielen zerstorerishcen biochemischen Prozessen zweifellos gleichzeitig entgegengewirkt werden"

Back Translation

("Through anti-ageing therapies of the future many destructive biochemical process will be undoubtedly be countered at once').

House argues that a non-animate noun in the subject is marked in German and it is often rendered into something else in the course of translation into English.

There are also a lot of significant works on the difference between English and Korean. Among them, Lee (2000) lends some meaningful insight on the topic. Lee argues that the Korean language does not use non-animate subjects as frequently as the English language and that English inanimate subjects are

marked. The following examples support her argument.

2)

Did the nose frighten you?

? 그 소음이 너를 놀라게 했니?

그 소리 때문에 놀랐니?

In the same vein, it has been noted specifically with translation that many non-animate subjects in English sentences are translated into something other than subjects, often signifying a cause of an event depicted in the sentence. Sung (2006) argues that non-animate subjects are not ACTORS, but rather they are INSTRUMENTS in many cases, in the sense that they work as a cause which will bring out the result depicted in the sentence. Refer to the following examples.

3)

If your leisure or business itinerary calls for a car and a lot of coming and going, the big hotels can be a real pain.

관광이나 업무일정 때문에 어쩔 수 없이 차가 필요하고 많이 드나들어야 한다면 큰 호텔에 투숙하면 골치 아프다.

With reference to translator training, it has been often suggested that the English sentences with non-animate subjects are translated into something signifying the cause. The reason behind such a suggestion is that the literal translation of the English sentences, with their inanimate subject transferred intact into the TT, should sound unnatural to most Korean readers. So the two assumptions that the present work builds on is that the Korean language does not use the non-animate subject as frequently as the English language and, secondly, such a usage might lead the translator to convert English ACTOR

subjects into something other than ACTOR.

3. Data

The linguistic data used in the present study were collected from various sources including research articles, books, magazine articles and their Korean translations. With regard to research articles, the main concern of the paper is to see how ACTORs, especially human ACTORs, in the English ST are translated into Korean. The data used in this research question were drawn from research articles related to linguistics/translation studies and their Korean translations.

In relation to the translation of Korean into English, we will see how non-ACTORs in the Korean originals can be promoted into ACTORs in the English translations. The Korean examples were drawn from the book titled *Hankuksa-sinnon* (한국사 신론) (1967) and its English translation *A New History of Korea* (1984). The translator, Edward Wagner, is professor of Korean studies at Harvard and he is regarded to have a remarkable knowledge of the Korean language and culture. Such a trait makes him, we believe, a competent translator whose work we can use as viable data.

4. Analysis

4.1. Translation of English into Korean: ACTORs to NON-ACTORs

One of the most noticeable differences in translation of English into Korean and vice versa should be a different tolerance for a non-animate subject in respective languages. The problem lies in that the Korean language, in general, has a lower degree of tolerance for the non-animate subject in the

active voice than its English counterpart.

Based on such understanding, we start the discussion on the translation of English into Korean and see how the ACTORS in the subject position in the English originals are demoted and even in some cases deleted, in their Korean translations. The data presented here are drawn from the research articles written in English and their Korean translations.

4)

ST (p. 43)

I will show in Chapter 3, statements - the most fundamental building blocks of discourse - are those utterances or parts of text which have an effect.

TT (p. 45)

3장에서 보게 되겠지만 언술-담론의 가장 기초적인 토대를 이루는 구성자-은 그 자체 효과를 발휘하는 발화이거나 텍스트의 일부이다.

5)

ST (p. 57)

This is because, as I hope to show in this chapter, within discourse theory, questions of agency are less clear

TT (p. 60)

이 것은 이 장에서 보여질 것인데, 담화 이론에서 행위자의 문제는 보다 덜 분명하고

What attracts our attention is the fact that the personal pronoun *I* has been omitted in the Korean translations and especially in the example 5 the passive construction is presented in the Korean translation, thus obscuring the agency of the ACTOR. The question to be raised is what has triggered the "demotion

of the AGENT" (Givón 1990). Part of the answer lies in the fact that unlike English, the Korean language does not necessitate the subject position to be occupied.

We also note that the use of personal pronoun *I* followed by the action verb *show* serves the self-promotional purpose in that the author is about to put forward his findings. Harwood (2005) notes that out of the research articles submitted to the well-established international journals, more than 70% of them are rejected in the field of humanities and he argues that authors nowadays feel more compelled to promote themselves by strategically using linguistic devices. He argues that the use of personal pronouns such as *I* and *We* for the self-promotion purpose constitutes such devices.

In this sense, the self-promotional function has been noticeably attenuated in the Korean translations. Related to this observation, the question whether Korean researchers do not use personal pronouns as frequently as English-speaking counterparts when writing research articles in English should be another interesting research topic.

The avoidance of personal pronouns, sometimes coupled with the use of passive constructions in the genre of research articles, seems to be one of the frequently observed phenomena. Related to the observation, the following example shows how personal pronoun *we* is translated into Korean.

6)

ST (p. 14)

If we analyze this quotation a little, we will be able to isolate the range of meanings that the terms discourse has accrued to itself within Foucault's work.

TT (p. 17)

이 인용된 구절의 분석을 통해서 푸코의 작업에서 사용되는 담론이라는 용어가 발생시키는 의미들의 범위를 각각규정해 볼 수 있다.

The personal pronoun *we* is rarely translated into the Korean counterpart *woori*. The use of pronouns such as *we* in the original forms solidarity between interactants, that is the writer and the readers in the case of written texts (Brown and Levinson 1987). By using *we*, the author invites the readers to participate in the process of communication, but such a process seems to be lacking in the Korean translation (Kim 2006). Aside from the solidarity vs. independence consideration and more in relation with the question of agency, we find that the agency of the subject in the original has been deleted all together in the Korean translation.

The following example is collected from a news paper article and we find the same demotion of ACTOR in the Korean translation.

7)

ST (Korea Herald, July 24, 2003)

The infamous "axis of evil" celebrates its first birthday this week with members Iran, Iraq, and North Korea just as menacing, if not more than when President George W. Bush first uttered the phrase.

조지 W. 부시 대통령이 악명높은 "악의 축" 발언을 한 지 이번 주로 일년이 되지만 그 구성국인 이란, 이라트, 북한의 위협은 발언 당시보다 더 하지는 않더라고 줄어 들지 않고 있다.

The underlined sentence in the ST presents an uncomfortable juxtaposition of a non-animate subject and a verb which is construed to go with a human actor. Hence, the literal translation would obviously sound unnatural for the Korean readers. So, the Korean text represents a comprehensive rearrangement by which the original sentence is divided into two sentences, each of which has a more natural subject-verb relation for the Korean language. What is attenuated in the Korean text, however, is the vivid rhetorical force of the combination of a subject and an action verb, which we hope is complemented

by the enhanced naturalness and readability in the TT.⁴⁾

4.2. Translation of Korean to English: NON-ACTORS to ACTORS

The findings we have made thus far indicate that nouns in the subject position in English, whether they are animate or non-animate, tend to be demoted when they are translated into Korean. Building on this understanding, the main research interest in this section is directed to whether non-ACTORS in the Korean originals will be promoted to ACTORS that will occupy the subject position. If so, such a shift will be of great educational importance to would-be translators. As mentioned previously, the data used in this section are drawn from the book *Hankuksa-simno* and its translation.

8)

ST (p. 125)

을미사변으로 인하여 국민의 대일감정이 극단적으로 악화되고 각지에서 의병이 일어나 전국이 소란한 기회를 이용하여, 러시아 대표 웨베르는 공사관 보호라는 명목아래 수병 100명을 서울로 데려왔다.

TT (p. 134)

The assassination of Queen Min roused the hostility of the Korean people

4) The conceptual difference between Korean and English with regard to an inanimate subject is more acutely perceived in the case of translation from Korean into English. I conducted a small-scale experiment on Korean undergraduate students with translation of the Korean idiom into English. The Korean idiom which was given to the students for translation is 인생은 새옹지마, roughly meaning *life has its ups and downs*. To control the experiment, the students were asked to use in their translation the expression *ups and downs*. 17 out of 26 students came up with *There are up and down in life*, while only 3 students opted for *Life has ups and downs*. I interpret this overriding propensity for the first version to mean that the inanimate subject construction represents a marked form for most Korean students.

toward Japan to a fever pitch, and guerrilla bands had risen throughout the country to harass the Japanese troops still encamped on Korean territory. Taking advantage of this turmoil, the Russian minister, Waeber, brought one hundred marines to Seoul under pretext of guarding his legation.

The question we are to raise is what thematic role *the assassination of Queen Min* assumes in the ST and the TT respectively. In the Korean original, *the assassination of Queen Min* is situated in a phrase indicating a cause of the event, while the same expression functions as an ACTOR in the English translation. The same phenomenon is observed in the following examples.

9)

ST (p. 143)

뿐만 아니라, 러시아군은 압록강을 넘어 용암포에 들어와서 토지를 매수하고 막사를 건축하더니 드디어 정식으로 그 조차를 요구하여 왔다. 그러나, 일본의 항의로 인하여 좌절되고 용암포를 개항시키는 정도로 그치게 되었다.

TT (p. 157)

„„A Russian force continued the mouth of the Yalu into Uongamp'o, bought land, and constructed housing, and before long formally requested to lease a port area there. Once again Japanese opposition compelled the Russians to back down, but Russia at least did achieve the opening of Yongamp'o as a trading port.

10)

ST (p. 198)

을사조약의 체결은 온 국민의 맹렬한 분격과 반대에 부딪혔다.

TT (p. 206)

The Treaty of 1905 evoked bitter anger and opposition from the whole of

the Korean people.

In the example 9, *Japanese opposition* in the original is placed in an adverbial phrase denoting a cause, while it fills the subject position in the English TT. *The Treaty of 1905* in the ST have more of agency in the English translation than in the Korean original in the example 10.

The following example also illustrates how a non-ACTOR phrase can be ascended into the subject position.

11)

ST (p. 264)

이 의정서에는 관례에 따라 일본이 한국의 독립과 영토의 보전을 확보할 것이 규정되었다.

TT (p. 279)

This document contained the ritualistic provision that Japan undertook to respect the independence of Korea and the integrity of Korean territory.

A caution should be taken, though, since we are not arguing that all non-ACTOR constituents are promoted or should be promoted into the subject position when translated into English. The point we want to show is that such a difference between English and Korean can be utilized in the classroom and the teacher can encourage students to seek various ways to convey the same meaning. For one thing, students can be reminded how the combination of ACTOR subject and active verb can express the meaning more effectively with its rhetorical force.

5. Conclusion

The present study presents a small-scale experiment to elucidate the difference of communication preferences between Korean and English. We have seen that in the translation of English into Korean, ACTORs in the subject position are demoted to the non-subject positions in the Korean translations. This is because non-animate subjects in the Korean language are more marked than in the English language. Especially with the genre of research articles, we have observed that animate human subjects in the English originals are either omitted all together or replaced with passive constructions.

The second part of the present study is devoted to the translation of Korean into English. One of the main finding is that non-ACTORs in the original texts can be promoted to the subject position in the English TTs. This transformation is, I believe, can be utilized in the classroom in both in-bound and out-bound translation.

The present study leaves many research questions open for future study. Most importantly, with regard to the translation of Korean into English, it would have yielded more fruitful outcome if the native speakers' opinions on the TTs (which were presented in the discussion) and student's translations (which can be drawn from student's translation) had been incorporated into the study. The investigation of this area is left for future study.

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[Abstract]

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The purpose of this paper is to illuminate the differences of communicative preferences between Korean and English, especially with regard to the subject. In order to talk about such differences, we draw on the concept of thematic roles such as AGENT, THEME/PATIENT, INSTRUMENT and LOCATION from sentence semantics. One of the important findings with regard to thematic roles is that the preference pattern for the subject position varies with different languages. Such a finding serves as an important starting point from which to pursue the present study.

First, with the translation of English into Korean, this study has demonstrated that non-animate ACTOR subjects are demoted to something other than subjects, usually denoting the cause of the event. At the same time, personal pronouns such as 'I', 'We', and 'You' aimed at creating personal involvement between the author and readers are generally omitted in the Korean translations. We argue that such a shift is aimed at enhancing naturalness and readability of the Korean TTs.

Second, in regard to translation of Korean into English, we have found the opposite phenomenon in which the noun in the adverbial phrases is promoted into the subject position. Such a promotion of Non-ACTORS into the subject position presents a striking contrast to the demotion of Actors in the translation of English into Korean.

Seeking to incorporate such findings into the translator training, the present paper suggests that the teacher should inform students of such differences and encourage them to seek various way to convey the given meaning.

▶ Key Words: thematic roles, communicative preference, non-animate subject, demotion/promotion of the AGENT.

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논문투고일: 2007년 10월 27일

심사완료일: 2007년 11월 26일

게재확정일: 2007년 12월 15일