번역학연구
2011년 가을 제12권3호

Translation as Ventriloquy: Recapturing the Narrative Voice in *Song of the Sword**

Jung, Ha-yun
(Ewha Womans University)

I listen. It is simply a human voice
Which passes over the noise of life and its battles
The crash of thunder and the murmur of gossip.
— *"The Voice" by Robert Desnos*
(translated by William Kulik)

1. Introduction: Voice--Concept and Definition

Voice, as defined in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, is "a rather vague metaphorical term by which some critics refer to distinctive features of a written work in terms of spoken utterance (Baldick 2009: 353)." Voice is made recognizable by "the specific group of characteristics displayed by the narrator or poetic 'speaker,' assessed in terms of tone, style or personality (Baldick

* This work was supported by the 2010 Ewha Womans University Research Grant.

2009: 353),” to further quote the dictionary.

The poet Ed Hirsch elucidates that, by its very nature, voice in a written work is metaphorical, and cannot be literal. “The material qualities and acoustic range of voice (tone, timbre, volume, register) can only be invoked, metaphorized, inscribed (Hirsch 1999: 103).” Vague and elusive a concept it may be, voice, at the same time, often functions as a singularly distinct aesthetic element in a literary work, as unmistakable as a person’s face or body. In first-person narratives, especially, the voice of the narrator is what transports the readers to, and keeps them engaged in, lives and worlds other than their own, the events and the inner workings of the story being told.

In literary translation, because voice is all about the spoken quality of the text, it is considered one of the most challenging--if not impossible--elements to recapture. This is all the more true when it comes to English translations of Korean literature, yet to secure a wide readership and still in the early stages of development as a subject of creative practice and critical discourse.

As a translator of Korean literature, I was directly confronted with the challenge of rendering voice in translation when I began work on an English version of Kim Hoon’s 2001 novel, *Song of the Sword,* a deeply interior narrative of one of the most devastating wars in Korean history, the invasion of Chosŏn Kingdom by Japan at the end of the 16th century. Told in the first-person voice of Admiral Yi Sun-sin, who led Chosŏn to victory against all odds, the novel is less a war epic than Yi’s personal monologue on his inner conflicts and pain, giving a new, contemporary voice to the medieval hero. As the Korean critic Kim Yoon-shik has pointed out, the aesthetic core of Kim Hoon’s novel is “the voice of Yi Sun-sin the individual... of the protagonist, the character and his inner world (김윤식 2003: 286).” There was no other way to do justice to the novel as a translator but to find a way to recapture this unforgettable voice in English, which meant that the act of translation needed to take on an aspect of ventriloquy, an attempt on the part of the translator to literally “throw the voice,” as rendered in another language, into

the mouth of the narrator.

According to Antoine Berman in *Toward a Translation Criticism: John Donne,* his "notion of theory, of thinking about a practice, is that of a thinking that states general truths, rather than universal truths (such as those of science and mathematics) (Berman 2009: vii)." Berman's perspective, along with George Steiner's view, as stated in *After Babel,* of translation not as an exact science but "an exact art (Steiner 1998: xvi)," will serve as the premise for this paper, a modest attempt at, rather than a theoretical approach to, addressing the questions--Can narrative voice be translated? If so, how? I hope to offer what Steiner called "reasoned descriptions of processes (Steiner 1998: xvi)" of my own translation of *Song of the Sword*, "to find and seek, in turn, to articulate, narrations of felt experience, heuristic or exemplary notions of work in progress (Steiner 1998: xvi)."

In order to explore the issue further, I will also examine two published English translations of Korean fiction: "Record of a Consummation," a story by iconic colonial writer Yi Sang, and Hwang Sok-yong's contemporary novel *The Old Garden,* two works vastly different in style but both narrated by distinct and recognizable first-person voices. My examination of the translations will adhere to Berman's definition of criticism, as elaborated in the aforementioned book, as "a rigorous analysis of a translation, of its fundamental traits, of the project that gave birth to it, of the horizon from which it sprang, of the position of the translator... fundamentally, bringing out the truth of a translation (Berman 2009: 3)," aimed at listing the common obstacles in translating literary prose from Korean into English.

In the course, this paper will seek to establish the concept of voice as a significant element in the discourse on literary translation and search for creative solutions to the many obstacles in translating voice from Korean into English, two languages not rivalled by many other pairs in terms of the vast distance between them--grammatical, phonological and cultural.

2. Elements of Narrative Voice

Here is an example of an unforgettable voice in American literature:

> If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages a piece if I told anything pretty personal about them. (Salinger 1978:1)

The passage is J. D. Salinger's famous opening from his 1951 novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, which, more than anything, makes us hear the voice of the teenage narrator Holden Caulfield--colloquial, contradictory, utterly compelling.

In order to render a distinct, instantly recognizable voice like Holden's, a wide range of devices are utilized, organically and extensively, as they are here by Salinger even in just a few lines, by adopting rhetoric and speech patterns that convey tone and attitude ("if you really want to," "occupied and all"); using repetition and controlling rhythm and cadence to add verbal flavor; and revealing the narrator's character through diction.

"Distinctions between various kinds of narrative voice tend to be distinctions between kinds of narrator in terms of how they address the reader (rather than in terms of their perception of events, as in the distinct concept of point of view) (Baldick, 2009 353)," to once again quote the *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms.* And the many different ways a narrator addresses the reader, as quoted earlier, can be assessed in terms of tone, style or personality.

Tone, in literature, can be defined as the speaker's "attitude toward his subject, his audience, or himself... the emotional coloring, or the emotional meaning, of the work (Perrine, 1987 151)." In Holden Caulfield's voice, it is

his cynical yet vulnerable tone that we recognize.

Style, on the other hand, is "the specific way of using language, which is characteristic of an author, school, period, or genre," as defined by *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms.* In contemporary literature, the notion of style has been established "as an expression of individual personality (Baldick, 2009 331)" and "particular styles may be defined by their diction, syntax, imagery, rhythm, and use of figures, or by any other linguistic feature (Baldick, 2009 331)." Salinger, in the above work, adopts a deliberately colloquial style, a rambling, stumbling series of clauses and phrases and conjunctions, peppered with word choices that convey the attitude of a rebellious adolescent.

In discussing personality, it is interesting to note that voice is often used interchangeably with the term persona, which Hirsch defines as "the mask or character--the voice--created by the speaker or narrator in a literary work." He goes on to state that "creating a persona is a way of staging an utterance (Hirsch, 1999 279)." This is very true of Holden Caulfield, for his character is his voice: His voice is what readers equate with him; what they remember most clearly about him after they have finished reading the last lines.

Is there any other way to translate *The Catcher in the Rye* into another language but as an attempt to recapture Holden's voice? It would be unthinkable. The task of the translator, therefore, would be to make the translated Holden "sound" as close as possible to his English voice, rendering the tone, style and personality of the narrative. A daunting yet inevitable task.

3. Translated Voices: Examples and Strategies

Donald Frame, renowned scholar and translator of Montaigne, writes in his essay, "Pleasures and Problems of Translation," that literary translation "requires constant choice by the translator among the author's values and devices as he seeks to recapture them in his own language and finds he can

rarely if ever recapture them all (Frame 1989: 70)" and that the process "demands much of the same sensitivity as [literary creation and analysis] (Frame 1989: 70)." He has to rely on that sensitivity, in other words, to make good decisions about what to compromise.

Among the many values and devices that a translator must consider and try to recapture, voice is an aesthetic element often overlooked because, as mentioned earlier, it is a vague and elusive concept, an organic, almost musical, quality rather than a singular expressive device. But this is also why distinct voice prevails over other lyrical elements in a narrative: Voice can permeate an entire novel, and its impact, even when it is subtle and quiet, can be impossible to ignore--especially for the translator.

The Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset, in "The Misery and Splendor of Translation," attributes the success of his books in Germany to the fact that his translator "forced the grammatical tolerance of the German language to its limits in order to carry over precisely what is not German in my way of speaking (Ortega y Gasset 1992: 112)." He concludes that, "it is clear that a country's reading public do not appreciate a translation made in the style of their own language. For this they have more than enough native authors. What is appreciated is the inverse: carrying the possibilities of their language to the extreme of the intelligible so that the ways of speaking appropriate to the translated author seem to cross into theirs (Ortega y Gasset 1992: 112)."

Ortega y Gasset wrote his essay in 1937, but can we say the same about what the English-speaking readership appreciates, within the current climate of trade publishing? In a recent essay in *The New York Times*, titled, "The Pleasures and Perils of Creative Translation," writer James Campbell revisits the French novels that he was engrossed with in his youth and discovers that the English versions, very "creative" translations indeed, do not "sound" at all like the original works--"what I had been reading were English novels by Gilbert and Lehmann, based on original ideas by French writers (Campbell

2011).” He points out, quoting the critic Tim Parks, that today’s translations, continue to “standardize” and “flatten” the foreign texts, “giving the effect of an ‘internationalist’ translatorese; universally edible but pretty flavorless (Campbell 2011).”

The perils of flavorless translation are even greater for Korean literature, which has yet to be defined and characterized as part of world literature. Because the Korean literary tradition has only been minimally introduced to English-speaking readers, there is great pressure on the translators to smooth out the foreign, both cultural and aesthetic, to make the translated work sound more familiar and domesticated--not much room, in other words, to recapture an element as subtle and elusive as voice. A vicious cycle is in motion, it seems, for how can a literary tradition be appreciated if its aesthetic characteristics are left out in the course of its transfer into another language?

The answer lies in each translator’s individual solutions, I believe, not “a universal, an axiomatic or externally verifiable ‘method of solution (Steiner 1998 310).’” In the examples that follow, of two published English translations of Korean fiction, and of my own unpublished translation manuscript of a novel, I aim to search for such solutions that use the English language in creative ways in order to reflect the aesthetic achievements of the Korean texts, to recapture the voice from a distant, unknown literary tradition.

3.1. “Record of a Consummation (봉별기, Pongbyŏlgi)”

Poet and novelist Yi Sang (1910-1937) was an avant-garde visionary and one of the most distinct voices of his time, during which Korea was caught up in the wave of modernization under Japanese colonial rule. It was during this transitional period that modern Western literature was introduced to Korea, via Japan, as Korean writers made the shift from an outdated writing system using Chinese characters to one adopting the indigenous invention *hangeul*, while at the same time the Japanese language was forced on them by the colonists in

both the communicative and expressive realms. Critic Kim Chul writes in the introduction to *Ventriloquists*, his book on the polyglottal traits of colonial Korean literature, “The Korean language and literature that we read and write today took shape and matured under Japanese occupation (김철 2008: 9),” emphasizing that in order to understand the modern Korean literary tradition, one must recognize the linguistic and stylistic hybridity of colonial narratives.

In the midst of these chaotic developments, Yi Sang found his own compelling voice, one that embraced all the political and cultural confusions of his time. His authorial voice became his persona, most markedly so in his autobiographical first-person narratives, one of which is “봉별기 (Pongbyŏlgi),” published in 1936, a year before his death at age 27, around the time when Japan adopted a more oppressive cultural policy in the Korean peninsula. The story, an account of the author’s tumultuous relationship with his courtesan lover Kŭm-hong, opens with the following paragraphs:

> 1) 스물 세 살이요 -- 3월이요 -- 각혈이다. 여섯 달 잘 기른 수염을 2) 하루 면도칼로 다듬어 코밑에 다만 나비만큼 남겨가지고 3) 약 한 재 지어 들고 4) B라는 신개지 한적한 온천으로 갔다. 5) 게서 나는 죽어도 좋았다.
>
> 그러나 이내 아직 기를 펴지 못한 청춘이 약탕관을 붙들고 늘어져서는 6) 날 살리라고 보채는 것은 7) 어찌할 수가 없다. 여관 한등 아래 밤이면 나는 늘 억울해 했다.
>
> 사흘을 못 참고 기어 나는 여관 주인 영감을 앞장 새워 밤에 장고 소리 나는 집으로 찾아갔다. 게서 만난 것이 금홍이다. (이상 1994: 67)

In just six sentences, precise in both cadence and emotion, Yi Sang establishes a voice that is utterly ironic and sophisticated, in the most self-indulgent, self-deprecating and self-contradictory way, spiced with “period flavor (Steiner 1998: 12)” and “verbal fabric,” to borrow from Steiner. Kim Chul describes the story as “a record of the wretched, woeful interior of a young man, who, at age 20, has witnessed the abysmal void of this world, of

man... the narrative is smothered with dysphemic and masochistic gestures, but paradoxically, it reveals a desperate longing for life and for human connection (김철 2008: 114-115)."

Heinze Insu Fenkl and Walter K. Lew tackle the challenging task of recreating Yi's voice in English under the title, "Record of a Consummation," published in 1995 in the short-lived Korean studies journal, *Muae*. The following is their version of the three opening paragraphs quoted above:

> 1) Twenty-three years old--March--coughed up blood. The beard I had cultivated so carefully for six months 2) I trimmed off with a razor one day, leaving just a butterfly under my nose. 3) With packets of Chinese medicine prepared, I went to a secluded hot-spring called 4) B, which had just opened. 5) And I might as well have died there.
>
> But my yet unfurled youth grabbed hold of the medicine crock and dragged me back with a big fuss 6) about "Saving my life"--7) there was nothing I could do about it. Every night, I brooded resentfully under the cold lamplight of the inn.
>
> Unable to last three days, I had the old innkeeper lead me out to the house where I had heard the sound of drums at night. And that's where I met Kŭm-hong. (Fenkl & Lew 1995: 91)

The opening sentence 1) effectively renders the declarative tone of the original Korean by preserving the fragmented structure and the unconventional use of em dashes. The beginning of the following sentence 2) is equally successful, in that the reversed sentence construction nails the lofty lyricality that is evident in the way Yi Sang arranges the syllables and the images. This dramatic tone packs a punch at the end of the first paragraph, with the perfectly cadenced 5) "And I might as well have died there," which, with its precise rendering of the verb ending "도," is exactly what Yi Sang's sentence would sound like in English. It is evident that Fenkl and Lew, not only scholars of Korean literature but writers of fiction and poetry, have a clear

idea what they want to accomplish in their “project”--to recapture the speech flavor of Yi Sang, as author and narrator, and of his era and culture.

Where they falter, however, are clauses and compound sentences, which require a close reading of intricate conjugations of verbs and their endings, one of the many distinct grammatical traits of the Korean language that pose challenging obstacles when translated into English. Verb endings in Korean determine the tone of the predicate, affecting the pace and flow of entire paragraphs. In 3), instead of preserving the structure of repeated conjunctive verb endings (“...고 ...고,” a structure not much different from Holden Caulfield’s rambling opening with its myriad “and”s), the translators break up the sentence, thus losing the easy, rhythmic flow of the original text that suggests a feigned sense of optimism, which is then quickly abandoned and betrayed in the desperate tone of the second paragraph, in effect establishing the contradictory and unreliable voice of our narrator.

Sentence 4) is an example of how a single relative clause can weigh down the whole sentence, which, in the original, flows much more swiftly, in the optimistic spirit as mentioned above. If 4) was trimmed down to an adjective+noun+prepositional phrase construct without the modifying clause (“which had just opened” does not exist in the original and adds an unnecessary expository touch to the prose), the verbose, over-confident voice of our doomed narrator would be rendered more faithfully, making his contradictions real and visible to the readers as soon as the story opens: “Twenty-three years old--March--coughed up blood. The beard I had cultivated so carefully for six months, I trimmed off with a razor one day, leaving just a butterfly under my nose, after which I headed off, carrying my packets of herbal medicine, to a secluded hot spring in a new development called B. I might as well have died there.”

Further grammatical alterations follow in 6), where indirect discourse is condensed into a paraphrase, and in 7), where a sentence is again cut up with an em dash, which pushes the paragraph to end with a sentence that is

changed structurally and rhetorically, far more assured in tone than the original, designed as a rhetorical twin of the preceding “I might as well have died there” but used in a completely contrasting tone--that of a melancholic, self-indulgent victim.

The story moves forward with the consummation of our ailing narrator’s relationship with Kŭm-hong but their bliss is short-lived, as Kŭm-hong repeatedly leaves him, kicks him out and breaks his heart, while Yi Sang hides his confusion and desperation under sophistry and posture. The following passage is delivered at an emotionally-charged moment when he realizes that his sophisticated talk and nonchalant attitude can no longer mask the inevitable demise of their relationship, but resists, with a bout of self-justification that ends up sounding absurd, almost like gibberish:

> 나는 또 이런 것을 생각하지 않았던 것도 아니다. 1) 즉 남의 아내라는 것은 정조를 지켜야 하느니라고! 2) 금홍이는 나를 나태한 생활에서 깨우치게 하기 위하여 우정 간음하였다고 나는 호의로 해석하고 싶다. 그러나 세상에 흔히 있는 아내다운 예의를 지키는 체 해본 것은 금홍이로서 말하자면 천려의 일실이 아닐 수 없다. (이상, 1994 71)

> And it’s not that I didn’t think such thoughts. 1) I mean, a man’s wife is supposed to guard her virtue! 2) “Kŭm-hong was having well-intentioned affairs in order to wake me from my stupor” is how I want to rationalize it. But for Kŭm-hong, the pretense of maintaining a wifely decorum--with which the world is rife--was her one and only mistake. (Fenkl & Lew 1995: 93)

In the Korean, it is clear that Yi Sang--and the relationship--is falling apart, as evident in the meandering indirect discourse, the repeated use of double negatives, and the paradoxical juxtapositions of high-flown vocabulary like “정조,” “간음,” “호의,” “예의” and “일실,” which all add up to create a precariously over-the-top tone. The translation, again, succeeds in word choice, like “pretense,” “wifely decorum,” and “rife,” but fails to recognize how the

devices of rhetoric and discourse, mostly rendered by verb endings, contribute to the overall tone and attitude. 1) is an example of fragmented indirect discourse (“That a man’s wife shall observe chastity!”) translated as free indirect discourse, while 2) is indirect discourse rendered as an odd form of paraphrase, a similar example of which appears in the second paragraph of the story’s opening, quoted earlier (“about ‘Saving my life’”). Overall, the verbosity in the original has been tidied up, making the prose clearer and more expository, and thus more incomprehensible, logically, for the original Korean only pretended to rely on logic--an existential joke aimed at exposing the vulnerable, almost pathetic, state of mind of a narrator utterly torn between his ideals about himself, his lover, his life, and the impossible, unavoidable reality.

Suzanne Jill Levine points out in her essay “Translation as Sub(Version)” that “music, ‘the universal language,’ is what poetic writing aims to be (Levine 1992: 78),” and the same, of course, would apply to translating poetic writing. “[I]t is at the level of language that the translator can be most creative, inventive, even subversive (Levine 1992: 79),” Levine further elaborates. Fenkl and Lew are clearly translators with a honed sensitivity of language, offering to the English-speaking world a creative, often brilliant, rendering of Yi Sang’s idiosyncratic, beautiful, and important work. The unevenness of their translation, however, resulting mostly from misreadings of minor lexical categories like verb endings and classifiers, and the urge to clean up, rather than to recapture, Yi’s verbose style, get in the way of sustaining the narrative voice as distinctly as in the original. Their accomplishment in this translation is nevertheless significant, for showing that it is possible to maintain this level of fidelity to tone and style in an English translation of a Korean work, to render a singularly unmistakable voice.

3.2. *The Old Garden (오래된 정원, Oraedoen chŏngwon)*

Berman proposed in the aforementioned book that “[translation] evaluation

(should be) based on a double criterion, of an ethical and poetic nature (poetic in the largest sense of the term) (Berman 2009: 74)."

"The poeticality of a translation lies in the fact that the translator achieved a real textual work, that he created a text in a more or less correspondence with the textuality of the original," he elaborates, and that "ethics lies in the respect, or rather, in a certain respect for the original." Ethics and poeticality, according to Berman, guarantee that "there is a creation in the translating language that broadens it, amplifies it, and enriches it, to assume the vocabulary of translation, at all levels, where need be (Berman 2009: 74)."

Hwang Sok-yong's novel *오래된 정원, (Oraedoen ch ngwon)*, published in Korea in 2000, was published in English in 2009 by Seven Stories Press under the title, *The Old Garden*. Hwang is one of very few contemporary Korean writers published by a trade press in the U.S., albeit a small one, which is made more significant by the fact that he is artistically and politically an important writer and a prolific one as well, with a vast body of work, ranging from essays and short fiction to epic novels. Hwang's stature as a writer spurred high expectations for the translation, on both ethical and poetic levels, which would be crucial to the success of the book with a wider readership in the English-speaking world.

The original novel was the first work that the politically outspoken Hwang wrote after years of living in exile and the imprisonment that ensued upon his return, for his unauthorized visit to North Korea. The work, written in the realist narrative tradition that dominated Korean fiction in the 1970s, fully demonstrated Hwang's much-acclaimed mastery of descriptive language, rich in sensory detail and lyricism, to give voice to a generation of Koreans who had fought against political oppression in the 1980s, perhaps the darkest and most traumatic decade in post-war Korea. Critic Wu Chan-je calls the work a "narrative map of hope and memory (우찬제 2003: 293)," "woven together not in a heroic voice that calls for action but in a quietly searching, confronting voice (우찬제 2003: 311)."

The first half of the novel is told from the point of view of Oh Hyun-woo, a political prisoner in solitary confinement, and the opening scene guides the readers through the closed world of his prison cell. The scene is vivid with rituals and details that only Oh can show us, delivered through finely-wrought sensory imagery, in a voice that is guarded, withdrawn, melancholy. The pace of the prose is hesitant as the narrative distance gradually narrows, slowly zooming into the narrator waking up inside his cell to the sound of distant footsteps, inside this claustrophobic micro-universe where he has been locked up for 15 years, out of reach from the world both physically and emotionally. Then five paragraphs into the book, we learn, only by piecing together subtle revelations, that this is the day he is being released:

1) 앉은뱅이 책상을 **딛고 일어나** 밤이나 낮이나 켜 있는 형광등을 **가려놓았던** 종이를 늘어뜨렸다. 2) 이건 스물네 시간 수인의 행동을 관찰하도록 되어 있는 규칙에 어긋나는 일이다. 언제나 백주 대낮이 계속되는 **셈인데** 어차피 낮에도 햇빛은 들어오지 않는다. 라면박스를 **뜯어서** 보기좋게 편 지지를 **붙이고** 형광등이 **들어 있는** 상자의 플라스틱 창에 테이프를 **붙여서** 건다. 상자의 위쪽에다 나무젓가락을 **꺾어 붙여** 실을 **걸어서** 이 차광판을 **올리고 내리게** 해두었다. 물론 검열이나 감사 때에는 3) 이런 편리한 장치들을 모두 **떼어버려야 하지만**. 이 방안의 물건들은 거의 내가 또는 동료들이 틈틈이 만든 것이다.

이불을 **개어** 모포들과 함께 발치에 **쌓아두고** 세 칸으로 **접게 된** 국방색의 스펀지 매트리스는 네모 반듯하게 **접어** 4) 방석으로 남겨두었다. 오늘은 냉수마찰을 하지 않을 작정이다. 어제 **폐방하고 나서** 세면도구 주머니 두 개에 5) 내가 간직하고 싶은 물건들을 **추려서** 징역보따리를 꾸렸다. (황석영 2000: 8)

1) Standing on a low table, I pulled down the cardboard that, in violation of the rules, shaded the fluorescent bulb that shone day and night. 2) The prisoner had to be observed 24/7. Daylight never ended, daylight with no sun. I'd torn apart a cardboard carton from ramen noodle packets, covered it with writing paper, then attached it to the light fixture with sticky tape. I attached a broken chopstick to this shade to raise and lower

it. Of course, I took it down during every inspection. 3) These little things made my life a little easier. Everything I had in the cell was made by me or my fellow inmates, bit by bit.

I folded the quilt, stacked it with the blankets in one corner, and made a square with the dark green sponge mattress, which folded into three. 4) This was my seat. I decided not to take a cold shower today. Yesterday, I had selected things I wanted to keep and packed them into two small toiletry bags. 5) They were the remnants of my imprisoned life. (Oh 2009: 7-8)

The first thing one notices in the translation is that not only is it quite different from the original--structurally, rhetorically, aesthetically--the narrative distance feels unstable, off-kilter, as in, “The prisoner had to be observed 24/7,” which blurs the first-person point of view so early in the opening pages. In the Korean, the passage is a subordinate phrase modifying “rules,” which, in the translation, has been usurped by the preceding sentence: The readers are left wondering where the narrator is telling us the story from. In 1) and 2), predicates have been squeezed into subordinate clauses or prepositional phrases, or clauses have been rewritten as individual statements and full sentences have been rendered as fragments--all of which should not matter greatly (although these small alterations will eventually affect the overall tone and voice) but the problem here is that the translator’s decisions do not seem to serve a clear purpose or reason.

3) is an entirely new addition, the only trace of correspondence with the original text being the adjective “편리한,” “convenient”: Sentences 4) and 5) are similar examples, constructs that do not seem to have originated from the Korean text but written in by the translator, by impulse rather than design, bringing confusion, more than anything else, to the readers.

What these alterations do have in common is that, as was the case in “Record of a Consummation,” they are directly related to the handling of conjunctive verb endings in the Korean text, marked in bold in the quoted

passage above. Due to Hwang's dense descriptions, of both objects and actions, the two paragraphs are crowded with modifying clauses and phrases and compound sentences, and in order to capture the tone in which the narrator is guiding the readers through his world, it is crucial that the translator recognizes the pace and the flow of the sentences, which in Korean, is controlled mainly by the verb endings. "The novel is not less rhythmic than poetry," Berman writes in his essay, "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign," and asserts that "the deforming translation can considerably affect the rhythm--for example, through an arbitrary revision of the punctuation (Berman 2005: 284)."

Jay Oh's translation, however, seems to turn a blind eye on these elements, cutting up the sentences into more concise, simpler structures, foregoing the spoken quality and the intimacy of the narrative voice. The effect completely eludes Hwang's refined craftsmanship as a stylist and a storyteller--in the way he handles narrative distance, in the way he uses imagistic details to flesh out a character and his state, while at the same time maintaining strict control over the reticent, repressed voice. It is either that the translator (or the editor who would have contributed to the polishing of the manuscript, as is the norm in U.S. trade publishing) is unaware of the aesthetics of the original text, or, perhaps that he/she lacks the capacity to render Hwang's highly literary prose into English. The problem, in other words, is "not whether to translate in verse or in prose, but knowing how to translate in verse (Berman 2009: 13)."

As mentioned earlier, Hwang's style of literary prose is rooted in lyrical realism, which, in the Korean language, was polished over a century following the influx of Western modern literature, as observed in "Record of a Consummation." This is to say that, in terms of craft and aesthetic devices, there are very few in *The Old Garden* that do not translate into English; in fact, most would have originated from Western fiction-writing techniques. In the essay quoted earlier, Frame writes that "the main point in translating Voltaire is [...] to keep out of his way [...] since in my opinion he speaks excellent English (Frame, 1989 80)." The same could be said of Hwang's

prose.

A review of *The Old Garden* in *The New York Times* commented that the translation "feels too youthful and distinctly American (Meyers 2009)," and ridiculed its "Valley Girl tone," pointing out expressions or speech patterns like "24/7" or "you know." However, as mentioned above, much of the problem with its tone is rooted in the very construct of the sentences, not just diction, and also from how the narrator's personality is interpreted. Oh is "a static character who protects and preserves the memories of aspirations that have now turned old (우찬제 2003: 306)," and his moving account of retracing his past and the events that passed him by during his 15 years of incarceration must be told in a voice that resonates with his quiet but intense emotions, not just in Korean but in any other language.

Critic Jo Jae-ryong has observed, in his analysis of French and English translations of author Cho Se-hui's novel, an "obsession over readability" and the disastrous consequences of translations that "are devoid of interpretive perspective (조재룡 2011: 205)." Unfortunately, *The Old Garden* seems to be another similar case, failing on both the ethical and the poetic criterion of evaluation, according to Berman, which perhaps speaks for the state of Korean literature in the U.S. publishing market today.

3.3. *Song of the Sword (칼의 노래, K'aleui norae)*

Edith Grossman, the acclaimed translator of *Don Quixote*, writes in her book, *Why Translation Matters*, of her belief "that the sum of a fine piece of writing is more than its parts and larger than the individual words that constitute it... I think this kind of longing to unravel aesthetic mysteries lies at the heart of the study of literature. It surely is the essence of interpretation, of exegesis, of criticism, and of translation (Grossman 2010: 74)." My own endeavors as a translator start out from a similar longing, and for each project that I take on, I require a strong sense of what draws me to the book, as a

reader, admirer and translator.

Kim Hoon's *칼의 노래 (K'aleui norae)* was a work that I found compelling from my first reading, a novel that made me want to study the text further and deeper, in search of its "aesthetic mysteries" and to explore how these mysteries could be recaptured in English. Despite its subject matter--the events of a historic war against Japan that have been told so many times in Korean writing--the novel made the story of Admiral Yi Sun-sin new and relevant for readers in the 21st century. What pulled me in immediately was the deeply interior voice of Yi as narrator, so austere yet charged with intensity. It was a voice that quietly demands attention, suppressing an undercurrent of conflict, doubt and rancor, its emotional resonance far-reaching and timeless.

Kim had constructed this voice in a tone that is subdued and grave; the style of the prose terse and spare, yet rich in sensory details and lyricism; the pace of the narrative swift and cinematographic. As a result, Kim had breathed new life into the national hero Yi, recreating him as a character of psychological depth and existential awareness, capable of seeing beyond his medieval values. In the novel, Yi accepts his responsibilities as a soldier but questions the inevitability of war; he is a bold and brilliant strategist but also a tormented soul in the face of pain, both his own and his enemies'. And it is only through his inner voice that Yi is able to confront these contradictions and express his anguish and agony as an individual at war.

I wanted my translation to sound the way Yi Sun-sin sounds in Kim Hoon's rendition of him: This was my self-proclaimed mission and challenge, my project as translator. To do so, I would have to carry out the work of a ventriloquist, rendering the voice of this character in another language and transferring ("throwing") that voice onto a translated version of the character. The minute a real-life ventriloquist starts sounding like him/herself, or like a different puppet character, the audience's illusion is broken and we start seeing

the puppet as a puppet, not as a character. Sustaining the translated voice would be just as crucial in a translation: One small misstep--in diction, cadence, pace, connotation, sound, rhetoric, syntax--could pull the readers out of the narrative and leave them unconvinced. How convincing could one be in English, as the voice of a 16th-century Korean naval chief?

My strategy was to adhere as close as I could to the construct of Kim's taut and controlled prose, despite the great distance between the source and target languages. Steiner, in his study of an English translation of *Madame Bovary*, concluded, "Where language is fully used meaning is content beyond paraphrase... (The uniqueness of the writing is) determined by the conjunction of typographical, phonetic, grammatical facts with the semantic whole... When language is charged to the full, paraphrase is less and less 'like the thing itself (Steiner, 1998 394-395).'" The same was also true in translating *Song of the Sword,* for Kim's prose served as an accurate map that guided the translation to a version as effective and impressive in another language. The fully-charged language that Steiner speaks of is what renders the narrative voice so distinct in the novel, and often times, all I had to do as translator was follow the map of the original text.

1) 버려진 섬마다 꽃이 피었다. 꽃피는 숲에 저녁 노을이 비치어, 구름처럼 부풀어오른 섬들은 바다에 결박된 사슬을 풀고 어두워지는 수평선 너머로 흘러가는 듯 싶었다. 뭍으로 건너온 새들이 저무는 섬으로 돌아갈 때, 물 위에 깔린 노을은 수평선 쪽으로 몰려가서 소멸했다. 저녁이면 먼 섬들이 박모 속으로 불려가고, 아침에 떠오르는 해가 먼 섬부터 다시 세상에 돌려보내는 2) 것이어서, 바다에서는 늘 먼 섬이 먼저 소멸하고 먼 섬이 먼저 떠올랐다.

저무는 해가 마지막 노을에 반짝이던 물비늘을 걷어가면 바다는 캄캄하게 어두워갔고, 밀물로 달려들어 해안 단애에 부딪히는 파도 소리가 어둠 속에서 뒤채었다. 시선은 어둠의 절벽 앞에서 꺾여지고, 목측으로 가늠할 수 없는 수평선 너머 캄캄한 물마루 쪽 바다로부터 산더미같은 총포와 창검으로 무장한 함대는 또다시 날개를 펼치고 몰려온다. 3) 나는 적의 적의의 근거를 알 수 없었고 적 또한 내 적의의 떨림과 깊이를 알 수 없을

것이었다. 서로 알지 못하는 적의가 바다 가득히 팽팽했으나 지금 나에게는 4) 적의만이 있고 함대는 없다. (김훈 2001: 21-22)

1) Flowers blossomed on each deserted island. The islands, swollen like clouds as the evening sun lit the flowering forests, appeared as if they were about to undo the chains that bound them to the sea and drift beyond the darkening horizon. When the birds returned from this shore to their roosts on the dimming islands, the sparkling sunset hurried off to the horizon and died. At dusk, the remote islands were called into the shallow twilight and at dawn, they were the first to be returned to the world by the rising sun: 2) Out at sea, the furthest islands were always the first to die and the first to rise.

As the setting sun scraped the shimmering scales of light off the water, the sea blackened and surged with the tide, crashing against the cliffs, the rumble of the surf tossing in the darkness. One's sight line extended no further than the blackened bluff, and from the dark, immeasurable crest of waves beyond the horizon, the enemy fleet would swoop in once again, wings spread wide, bearing a mountain of guns and swords. 3) I had no way of fathoming the source of the enemy's rancor and the enemy would have no way of knowing the quivering depths of mine. The sea was taut, swollen with a rancor unknowable to either side, but 4) now I had no fleet, only my rancor. (Jung 2009)

Kim Hoon has written extensively about his use of language in *Song of the Sword*, and has specifically elaborated on the process of writing the novel's opening, the section quoted above, highlighting the very first sentence, which forced him "to confront the suppleness, or the vulnerability, of the Korean language (김훈 2008: 155)." He first composed the opening sentence 1) using the postposition "은" to mark the subject "꽃 (flower)," but after a few days of pondering, changed the postposition to "이." Both postpositions function as case markers for the subject in a sentence, but convey a different tone and rhetoric. While "이," Kim's final choice, simply marks the subject, "은," his first, singles out, or adds rhetorical emphasis to, the subject. If Kim had left

the postposition unchanged, the first sentence would have implied that flowers blossomed while nothing else did, or that flowers blossomed despite certain circumstances.

What Kim was after was a sentence that simply stated a fact, not an opinion or emotion, in the journalistic tradition of the work that inspired the novel, Yi Sun-sin's *Wartime Journals*, the admiral's own record of the war. In his essay "Reminiscence," Kim recounts the "shock" of encountering Yi's "bare and stoic (김훈 2008: 141)" prose, an experience so intense that the sentences stayed with him for decades and gradually grew into an idea for a novel. But it was only after carefully considering the two different case markers for the opening sentence that Kim was able to accurately define the tone and voice he wanted for his version of Yi's story, one that would be rooted in both the prose tradition of the Chosŏn dynasty and the contemporary first-person narrative, rendered in a style that is reminiscent of not only Yi Sun-sin but minimalists like Ernest Hemingway.

Case markers are a major challenge in translating from Korean into English, not only because the lexical category does not exist in English, like the verb endings we discussed earlier, but because their immediate effect is subtle, easy to overlook, yet can leave immense impact on tone.

A literal translation of Kim's opening sentence, faithful not only on a word-for-word level but in syntax as well, would read, "On each deserted island, flowers blossomed," and on the surface, it might appear quite accurate. But this syntax, in English, while staying true to the flow of the imagistic presentation of the source text, places more rhetorical emphasis on the deserted islands than on the flowers, which is closer to the effect of using the case marker "은"--what Kim specifically decided to avoid. When I tried "Flowers blossomed on each deserted island," I could see that the opening of the novel has to begin with this simple subject+verb construct, in order to allow Yi's voice, direct and journalistic, to be clearly heard from the start. This first sentence helped me gain a firm grasp of how Yi's voice should sound in

English, just as it had done for the author, and also of how I needed to control syntax to reflect Korean case markers in English translation, which was again applied to 4), where the noun marked with "만이," rhetorically stronger than "는," was pushed back to the end of the sentence in English for emphasis--"now I had no fleet, only my rancor."

As in "Record of a Consummation" and *The Old Garden*, verb endings determine the rhythm and pace of the prose in this novel, and thus had to be treated with care as part of my effort to recapture voice. 3) is a good example of how Kim Hoon uses the conjunctive ending "...고" to preserve the journalistic tone but at the same time enhance the rhetoric slightly by constructing a parallelism, a recurring pattern in his prose. In this case, the parallel structure would be best translated using the conjunction "and," which is rhetorically more neutral than "yet" or a colon. In 2), however, the verb ending "...이어서," which connects a cause and effect structure, is very hard to translate into a single sentence with a cadence as natural as in the Korean, and I opted to cut up the sentence and use a colon, a choice I try to avoid whenever I can.

The tightly-controlled prose in *Song of the Sword* does not leave room for many long, rambling sentences, but it does come with its share of modifying clauses, which is characteristic of Korean grammatical structure. The fourth paragraph of the novel ends, for example, with the sentence, "경상 해안은 목이 잘리거나 코가 잘린 시체로 뒤덮였다(김훈 2001: 23)," which reads, literally, "The coastline of Gyeongsang Province was blanketed with corpses that had either its neck or its nose cut off." Modifying clauses can sound lyrical in Korean but cumbersome in English, as in this case, and my strategy was to polish the prose in a way that highlights the content of the clauses, but at the same time keeps the structure light and the readers' imagination afloat. In this case, I was able to do away with the relative-clause structure, economize the language, and add rhythm, by using the pronouns "some" and "others": "The Gyeongsang coastline was blanketed with corpses, some with the head cut off,

others the nose."

Sometimes the rhythm of the original text has to be transformed into a completely different design in order to preserve voice in translation. The novel's third paragraph, depicting a long flashback, ends with the terse sentence, "내 백의종군의 시작이었다(김훈 2001: 23)," a mere 11 syllables. In English, however, there is no way to keep the sentence short, because the military term "백의종군," only four syllables and technically a single word, needs to be fully translated in order to render the sentence, and the entire opening scene, comprehensible to English readers. The first-person voice allows very little interception on the part of the translator, especially when it comes to what Berman calls "expansion," aimed at "clarifying the foreign (Berman 2005: 282)"--precisely because the expansion, unless handled in a style that is organic and seamless, will interfere with the narrative voice. After much polishing, my final version read, "It was the beginning of my sentence, to serve in the war stripped of rank and gear, wearing the white garb of a commoner." The terseness of the original sentence was compromised, but I tried to make up for the loss and maintain the controlled voice of the narrator with a touch of lyricism (alliteration and consonance) added to the construct of the translated details of his punishment.

Voice and style aside, no translation dilemma is as baffling and confounding as when there is absolutely no direct corresponding word in the target language. In Chapter 7 of the novel, in a scene where Yi's hungry soldiers are wolfing down a rare feast, Yi offers a philosophical observation of these men who have survived a horrific battle. The problematic word here is "목젖," meaning "Adam's apple," a detail Kim zooms in on to capture the soldiers' hunger and desperation. "Adam's apple" has the colloquial quality of the Korean diction, but the biblical reference was a problem. Since the novel is set in late 16th century, before Christianity made its way to the Korean peninsula, our narrator Yi has only a vague knowledge of the religion. In a later chapter "the faith of Yaso" is mentioned in connection with one of the

Japanese commanders, whose banner was embroidered with a pattern that resembled “the number ten in Chinese character,” which is “十.” There is no way a translator can let a first-person narrator use the name “Adam” when he does not even know the term “cross.” The Korean word “목젖” literally means “neck nipple,” which would be simply incomprehensible in English. Anatomically, the Adam’s apple does not indicate a specific bone, and most other English terms for this body part are abstract rather than concrete, as in “prominence” or “protrusion,” none of which fits the predicate that follows, “jerked up and down.” It took me many drafts to arrive at the following sentence, which I think has been saved from complete disaster by using the noun “lump,” as concrete and physical as “nipple,” and by adding rhythm through repetition: “The despair of those who had survived annihilation was carved on their necks, on the lumps that jerked up and down as they swallowed the meat.”

4. Conclusion: Between Impossibility and Imperfection

According to critic Harold Bloom, a literary canon--in this case the Western canon--“is there to be read by you and by strangers, so that you and those you will never meet can encounter authentic aesthetic power and the authority of...‘aesthetic dignity’ (Bloom 1994: 36).”

Literary translators, responsible for the transport of new canons to “strangers” whom the works will otherwise never encounter, therefore are faced with the challenge of transferring the aesthetic power and authority of these works. The job carries even more weight when this other literary tradition is one as unfamiliar and unknown to English readers as Korean literature. Translators must demonstrate, in a language more distant from Korean than many others, what makes the works aesthetically relevant and new as world literature.

"The new is a combination of various elements from the old, the non-canonized, imports from other systems... rearranged to suit alternative functional views of literature," writes Andre Lefevere in "Mother Courage's Cucumbers," his analysis of different English versions of Brecht, "this holds true for both the implicit and the explicit concept of a poetics, and for individual works of literature which are, to a certain extent, recombinations of generic elements (Lefevere 1982: 253)."

The aesthetic novelty of first-person narratives like the three works examined in the preceding pages lies in the distinct qualities of voices that have not been heard before in the English tradition. Voice is the sum of many aesthetic elements, associated not only with tone, style and personality, but with tradition, history and influences: Recapturing voice in translation helps fulfill the task of the translator, on levels both ethical and poetic.

The specific challenges in rendering voice in Korean-into-English translation, as observed in the preceding pages, can be summed up as follows:

- Reflecting the nuance and rhetoric of case markers.
- Retaining the pace and cadence created by the fluid use of verb endings.
- Revising modifying clauses into less jarring constructs.
- Replacing lyrical devices with other linguistic possibilities.
- Respecting the narrative devices in the source text.

The art of ventriloquy gives voice to other tongues through a method that seems deceptively effortless. Translators are too often left with only bad or worse choices, or even impossible ones, as we navigate the hermeneutic labyrinth, an endeavor that is far from effortless but must be made to appear so. The most difficult challenges inspire us to engage in this intense and satisfying creative process, and in the end, these impossibilities and imperfections, I believe, are what make a translated voice artistically and culturally fascinating, in its revelation of how diverse human language can be, despite all its limitations.

References

Baldick, Chris (2009) *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Berman, Antoine (2009) *Toward a Translation Criticism: John Donne,* trans. Massardier-Kenney, F. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press.

---------- (2005) 'Translation and the Trials of the Foreign', trans. Venuti, L. *The Translation Studies Reader,* Venuti, L. (ed) New York: Routledge.

Bloom, Harold (1994) *The Western Canon,* New York: Harcourt Brace.

Campbell, James (2011) 'The Pleasures and Perils of Creative Translation', *The New York Times.* June 6.

Desnos, Robert (2005) *The Voice of Robert Desnos* trans Kulik, W. Riverdale: Sheep Meadow Press.

Frame, Donald (1989) 'Pleasures and Problems of Translation', *The Craft of Translation,* Biguenet, J. & Schulte, R. (ed) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hirsch, Edward (1999) *How to Read a Poem,* New York: Harcourt.

Hwang Sok-yong (2009) *The Old Garden,* trans Oh, J. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Grossman, Edith (2010) *Why Translation Matters,* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kim, Hoon (2009) *Song of the Sword,* trans. Jung, H. (unpublished manuscript).

Lefevere, Andre (1982) 'Mother Courage's Cucumbers', *The Translation Studies Reader,* Venuti, L. (ed) New York: Routledge.

Levine, Suzanne Jill (1992) 'Translation as (Sub)Version: On Translating *Infante's Inferno*', *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*. Venuti, L. (ed) New York: Routledge.

Meyers, B. R. (2009) 'The Caged Bird Sings', *The New York Times,* Sept. 13.

Ortega y Gasset, Jose (1992) 'The Misery and Splendor of Translation', trans Miller, E. G. *Theories of Translation,* Biguenet, J. & Schulte, R. (ed) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Perrine, Lawrence (1977) *Sound and Sense,* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Salinger, J. D. (1978) *The Catcher in the Rye,* New York: Bantam Books.

Steiner, George (1998) *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Third Edition), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yi, Sang (1995) 'Record of a Consummation', trans. Fenkl, H. I. & Lew, W. K., *Muae: A Joural of Transcultural Production* Vol. 1. New York: Kaya Production.

김윤식 (2003)『어떤 신석기인의 글쓰기와 그 표정: 위대한 분노의 서『난중일기』와 그 편곡『칼의 노래』』,『문학동네』34 서울: 문학동네.

김철 (2008)『복화술사들』, 서울: 문학과지성사.

김훈 (2008)『바다의 기별』, 서울: 생각의 나무.

김훈 (2001)『칼의 노래』, 서울: 생각의 나무.

우찬제 (2003)『고독한 공생』, 서울: 문학과지성사.

이상 (1994)『날개』, 서울: 진화당.

조재룡 (2011)『번역의 유령들』, 서울: 문학과지성사.

황석영 (2000)『오래된 정원』, 서울: 창비.

[Abstract]

Translation as Ventriloquy: Recapturing the Narrative Voice in *Song of the Sword*

Jung, Ha-yun
(Ewha Womans University)

Voice is a challenging yet critical aesthetic element in the translation of narratives. This paper aims at establishing the concept of voice as a significant factor in the discourse on literary translation, and at searching for creative solutions to the many obstacles in recapturing voice in the translation of Korean fiction into English.

The properties that make up narrative voice can be categorized as tone, style and personality, which are analyzed here through examples of various narrative devices.

To explore the specific challenges in recapturing voice in Korean-into-English translation, the paper examines two published translations of Korean fiction--Yi Sang's "Record of a Consummation" and Hwang Sok-yong's *The Old Garden*--alongside this writer's own translation of Kim Hoon's novel *Song of the Sword,* all first-person narratives delivered by distinct and recognizable voices. The biggest obstacles, as observed in the three works, are posed by lexical categories that do not exist in English, including case markers and verb endings, and elements that do not translate well, or at all, into English, including heavy modifying clauses and lyrical devices.

These challenges, however, can be overcome by handling language in creative and inventive ways to reflect and retain the effect displayed in the original text.

It is all the more important for translators of Korean literature to seek

new linguistic possibilities for recapturing voice, considering that the aesthetics of Korean literature has yet to be defined in world literature today.

▸ Key Words: Literary Translation, Korean Literature, Narrative Voice, Style, Translation Criticism

정하연
이화여자대학교 통역번역대학원 번역학과 한영전공 교수
junghayun@ewha.ac.kr
관심분야: 문학번역, 번역비평, 번역의 미학적 지평, 번역교육

논문투고일: 2011년 07월 31일
심사완료일: 2011년 09월 02일
게재확정일: 2011년 09월 09일