Interpreting for Korean overseas adoptees: A case study of undergraduate student interpreters working for adoptees and its implications*

Won Jun Nam
Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Korea
wonjun_nam@daum.net

ABSTRACT

The present study argues that undergraduate T&I programs and the T&I community as a whole should turn their attention to serving Korean overseas adoptees, and also suggests that nurturing those who would perform dialogue interpreting, the most dominant form of interpreting in this context, may serve as a significant educational objective for undergraduate T&I programs. This paper supports these assertions by examining the history of overseas adoption in Korea, investigating what adoptees go through from their childhood to adulthood, describing my experience of supervising undergraduate T&I students interpreting for Korean overseas adoptees, looking at the difficulties interpreters face when working under this particular context, exploring the role of the interpreter as an advocate of adoptees, and discussing the implications of enabling undergraduate T&I students to interpret for adoptees. Assuming the role of a participant observer (as an organizer and liaison between my department and adoptee organizations, and as a supervisor of students), I describe the experiences of my student interpreters working for adoptees based on their accounts of what happened at interviews with TV program producers, talks

* This work was supported by Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Research Fund of 2011.

with adoption agencies, searches for birth families at police stations and other public offices, and reunions with birth families. The paper concludes by emphasizing that the role of the interpreter working in this context far exceeds that of interpreters working in other fields. Interpreters who work with adoptees not only serve as aids of inter-lingual communication, but also as guides, companions, moderators, and advocates.

KEYWORDS

Korean overseas adoptees, adoptees' community in Korea, undergraduate student interpreters, dialogue interpreting, the role of interpreters

1. Introduction

The present study argues that undergraduate T&I programs and the T&I community as a whole should turn their attention to serving Korean overseas adoptees, and also suggests that nurturing those who would perform dialogue interpreting, the most dominant form of interpreting in this context, may serve as a significant educational objective for undergraduate T&I programs. Nam (2011b: 67) reports that the war-torn nation of Korea, after the three year long Korean War (1950-1953), began to garner wealth not only through exports of manufactured goods, but also exports of its children, especially those who had been orphaned and left without any means of survival. According to statistics, "over 150,000 Korean children have been placed in families overseas"(Donnell 2009: 109) since 1955. Most of these children were adopted to Western countries, and once adopted, they were raised under Western cultural influences. Thus, it's only natural that many of them have grown up confused about their identity; they feel as if they are a "Twinkie (yellow on the outside, white on the inside)" (111). They discover that they cannot become a

fully accepted member of either the white community in the country they were raised or the Korean immigrants' community there; so, they return to their motherland in search of their roots. In recent years, NGOs have been established to assist these Korean overseas adoptees during their visits to Korea, and one of the pivotal areas that calls for special attention is interpreting, because these adoptees, in almost all cases, cannot speak Korean and have come to their motherland for the very first time since being adopted. Interpreting is conducted for adoptees in the following situations:

- reunions with birth parents;
- interpreting for TV (e.g. interviews and special programs for finding adoptees' birth parents);
- when visiting adoption agencies, etc.;
- when visiting government agencies, etc.; and
- miscellaneous: visa applications, banking, etc.

In order to assist Korean overseas adoptees especially in the area of interpreting services, the Department of English Interpretation & Translation (EIT) at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS) has been working in collaboration with Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (G.O.A.'L) and Holt Children's Services (Holt). This paper offers an overall description and analysis of the experiences we have had in the past three years.

2. Korean overseas adoptees

2.1. Overseas adoption in Korea

The Korean international adoption program has enjoyed great

success in the past half century or so. The program began as an emergency measure in the mid-1950s and grew from a small, post-war rescue operation peaking in the mid-1980s[1]. During its prime, over 8,000 children per annum were sent for adoption abroad with most of them being sent to the U.S. It is perhaps no wonder that Korea has earned the nickname of an “adoption exporting country”. According to the *2006 International Korean Adoptee Resource Book*[2] published by the Overseas Korean Foundation[3], 157,145 children have been adopted overseas between 1958 and 2005. Korea’s Ministry of Health and Welfare reports that a total of 163,696 children (69% of overall adoption) have been adopted as of 2010.

Table 1 Korea’s domestic and overseas adoption
(Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare of Korea[4])

	Total	Until 1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Domestic adoption	74,409 (31%)	57,791	1,686	1,770	1,694	1,564	1,641	1,461	1,332	1,388 (52%)	1,306 (51%)	1,314 (54%)	1,462 (59%)
Overseas adoption	163,696 (69%)	143,338	2,360	2,436	2,365	2,287	2,258	2,101	1,899	1,264 (48%)	1,250 (49%)	1,125 (46%)	1,013 (41%)
Total	238,105	201,129	4,046	4,206	4,059	3,851	3,899	3,562	3,231	2,652	2,556	2,439	2,475

While poverty was the main reason for sending children abroad in the days when Korea was trying to rebound from the devastation of the Korean War, the escalating problem of single mothers has become a new source to blame for the continuation of overseas adoption in Korea. Former Korean Minster of Health and Welfare, Mrs. Jin, Su Hui, pointed out that the rising number of single mothers was the cause of 90% of adoptions in Korea in 2009[5]. In fact, five years earlier in 2004, all but one of the 2,258 children adopted overseas came from single mothers. While only 8.9% of

adopted children came from single mothers between 1958 and 1960, 98 to 99% were children of single mothers between 2001 and 2006. Jane Jeong Trenka, an adoptee to the U.S. herself, argues that Korea's "dependence on its international adoption program has stunted the growth of more appropriate government-funded social welfare programs as well as delayed the social acceptance of single-parent families"[6]. This is basically because of the insufficient welfare support for single-parent families offered by the Korean government. In recognition of this, the Korean government designated May 11 as "adoption day" and launched a campaign to promote domestic adoption in 2006. As a result, domestic adoption passed the 50% mark of total adopted children in Korea for the first time in 2007. Another factor that keeps Korea's overseas adoption program alive and well is Koreans' reluctance to adopt children who are physically challenged. Although more Koreans are now willing to adopt children than before, they are still shying away from adopting disabled children.

In summary, Korea's international adoption program has remained strong since the Korean War. Poverty and rapid industrialization were the main causes in the first three decades, while the growing number of single mothers was the main source in the latter two decades. Additionally, Koreans' unwillingness to adopt disabled children has also played a major part. The Korean government initiated a campaign in 2006 to reduce adoption across the board as well as better support single-parent families and adoptive families that raise disabled children; and to some extent, it has garnered some level of success. However, there is yet much to be achieved as many of Korea's children are still being given up for adoption.

2.2. The adoptee's experience

Most, if not all, Korean overseas adoptees suffer from identity crises: they possess complex identities. They feel as if they don't belong to the larger society in the adoptive country they were raised, which is one of the reasons why they choose to return to their country of origin. However, once they return, they discover that they don't belong to their country of birth as they had expected.

The majority of Korean children sent for adoption abroad are raised in Western countries. In the U.S., "nearly all of the adoptees are placed in Caucasian homes in predominately rural areas" (Donnell 2009: 109). Accordingly, for many adoptees, the first time they are exposed to a significant population of Asians is when they advance in college as they grow up in small suburban communities (ibid.). They grow up confused since they are raised by a white family under Western culture, while completely standing out from those around them because their physical appearances are different. A brief survey, for instance, of the *Journal of Korean Adoption Studies*, the very first scholarly journal of its kind published by GOA'L since 2009, reveals that adoptees oftentimes experience extreme difficulty developing a sense of belonging to the adoptive community they were raised in or their country of origin.

In their adoptive counties as a child, many of them seek to dissociate themselves with their minority group in order to blend into the larger society (Herløw 2010: 85). Such a tendency among adoptees is particularly apparent during childhood and adolescence as "most adoptees avoid association with other people of color (especially with other Asians), in an effort to blend in with their white peer culture" (Meier 1998: 147, recited from Donnell 2009: 108). However, as they grow up, things change and their attitudes towards

those with similar appearances change. In particular, when they advance to college, they are exposed to a larger Asian population and they try to fit in. Naturally, Korean overseas adoptees would go to Korean events such as seminars, conferences, or even clubs so as to find other Koreans and be *Korean*. Donnell (2009: 109-111) reports that such efforts made by adoptees, in most cases, are met with disappointment. Because they do not know Korean and are only barely familiar with Korean culture, they are readily rejected by Korean Americans. On the whole, overseas adopted Koreans discover that they are not "white enough" to be part of the larger society in their adoptive country, while they are rejected as being "too white" by the Korean community there. Hence, they feel as if they are a "Twinkie (yellow on the outside, white on the inside)" (111). Such a feeling of not being able to belong anywhere is best conveyed by an adoptee who said, "I'm not claimed by the people I am most comfortable with and I am not comfortable with the people I look like" (107).

After years of frustration and, not to mention, confusion, many Korean overseas adoptees finally decide to take a trip to their country of birth. Herløw (2010) conducted a study on adult Korean adoptees returning to Korea in order to examine "the motivation of adoptees returning to live in their birth country and how their return challenges their sense of identity and belonging" (71). Although there are many reasons why they choose to return to Korea and even stay for a long term, the most overwhelming motivation is "to familiarize themselves with the society and culture of their origin, and make it a part of their present life and identity" (83). However, life in Korea isn't easy for them. Everyday becomes a challenge, and most difficult is the language barrier. Difficulties in expressing oneself become even more daunting when everyone assumes they are Korean natives and

thus should be fluent in the language because of their ethnic Korean appearance (92). With such struggles, it becomes very natural to search for companionship; so, they turn to adoptee organizations for assistance in finding jobs, conducting birth family searches and reunions, and becoming familiar with Korean language and culture (79). And when adoptees visit adoptee organizations and meet others like themselves, their previous feeling of isolation are replaced by a feeling of relief as they can easily bond with those with similar experiences and struggles with their identities. Thus, they gather together in their own "third space" (Donnell 2009: 118).

Most significant, however, is the fact that many overseas adoptees come to Korea and bond with other adoptees because they all share the hope of reuniting with their birth families. Whether they actually meet their biological families is somewhat irrelevant. It is the hope of that happening that keeps them bonded to Korea. They can register their information for a birth family search at the Korea Central Adoption Resources agency (KCARE)[7] operated under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and Welfare since 1999, and KCARE will carry out the search on the adoptee's behalf. If a birth family search is successful, KCARE and other related adoption agencies arrange for a reunion with the birth family. At the same time, adoptee organizations such as GOA'L have been exerting efforts to assist birth family searches through the means of two online databases (one for adoptees and the other for birth families)[8]. GOA'L also published a search directory book in 2007 that features the profiles of 160 overseas adoptees. The Post Adoption Service Center run by the Holt Children's Services also offers online birth family search services[9]. If these searches are not successful, overseas adoptees can go to the media with the assistance of adoption agencies. For instance, YTN, a 24-hour TV news channel in Korea, selects several adoptees a week

and broadcasts their stories through the section *A letter from an adoptee*. KBS, a public broadcaster in Korea, also airs a program titled *I miss that person* on which an overseas adoptee is invited each week to tell her story. For them, volunteer interpreters are provided by GOA'L and other adoptee organizations, and in cooperation with those organizations my department has been able to send student interpreters to serve adoptees. One such journey by a group of adoptees to find birth families has been filmed and aired in the form of a documentary on December 20, 2008 by KBS through a program called *Documentary: 3 days*. There, the stories of the 42 participants of the 2008 First Trip Home event organized by the Overseas Koreans Foundation and GOA'L are told. It tells how their first trip home unfolds, how they feel to be back in their birth country after years of absence, and how much they want to reunite with their birth families. Among the participants, some were fortunate enough to be able to meet their birth families. One particular adoptee, after meeting her birth mother, was asked how she felt. She simply replied, "Complete". After their first reunion, adoptees are free to exchange contact information and keep in touch with their birth families. One instance of a story of reunited family members trying to rebuild their relationship has been filmed and was released in the form of a motion picture in 2009. The film *Resilience*[10], directed by Tammy Chu, tells the story of an adoptee sent to the U.S., who then returns to Korea and bonds with his mother. In the end, it shows how the two try to heal their wounds. In fact, reunions with birth families in themselves are just that: a healing process.

In summary, some overseas adoptees come to Korea angry and upset that their motherland has sold them like a product. On the other hand, others come with a disguise: they simply say, "I'm an American. I was only born in Korea". They can't understand why

Koreans would feel sorry for them (Interview with Kyung-Joo Kim). In a way, they may be trying to hide their feelings for fear of being hurt again by posing themselves as Americans. As has been described, these are the complex emotions and attitudes adoptees bring with them to Korea, which, to one degree or another, affects the interpreting situation (see 5.). But before moving on to interpreting, the process of and rationale behind forming a collaboration between EIT, HUFS and the overseas adoptee's community deserve mentioning.

3. Research method

As mentioned above, there are many occasions where T&I are required, from reunions with the birth family, to visits to the immigrations office, to interviews with the media, and so forth. In order to investigate the interpreting scene, I assumed the role of a participant observer, which is widely seen in ethnographic research. As a supervisor of my student interpreters, a liaison between my department and the adoptee organizations we were working with, a participant and sometimes a co-organizer of events hosted by adoptee organizations, and an occasional interpreter myself such as for reunions with birth families and other events, I was able to conduct interviews with the staff of adoptee organizations, perform surveys on adoptees, carry out interviews with student interpreters, meet and talk with adoptees, and observe and see what happens at various occasions.

After presenting several examples of ethnographic research in the classroom, David Nunan (1992: 56) suggests that the following are the shared characteristics found in his examples of ethnographic research.

> In the first place, the research takes place in context, with an attempt to minimize the disruption caused by the researcher's intrusion. The researcher does not attempt to control or manipulate the phenomena under investigation. The research is relatively long-term, taking place over several weeks, months, or even years. It entails the collaborative involvement of several participants, including the researcher, teacher, and the learners. Finally, generalizations and hypotheses emerge during the course of the data collection and interpretation, rather than being predetermined by the researcher.

As Hale (2007: 216) describes, research in community interpreting has "looked at different 'cultures' or 'groupings' such as the bilingual courtroom or the bilingual hospital" through the means of ethnographic research. For instance, Franz Pöchhacker (2000) conducted a survey on the self-perception and provider views of community interpreters; Claudia V. Angelelli (2004) surveyed conference, court, and medical interpreters in Canada, Mexico and the United States so as to find out what they thought about their roles as interpreters and whether their role were visible or invisible; and Kristina Mullamaa (2009) interviewed 14 interpreters and investigated how interpreters' views of their roles changed in a 16-year time-span in Estonia after it had gained independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union through today's democratic evolution and the rising of the market economy.

Following their lead, the present research attempts to launch a long-term study on the interpreter's role when serving overseas adoptees; and this paper reports the initial progress that I have made thus far. In doing so, this study follows the above description of ethnographic research suggested by Nunan (1992: 56). My department has been working with adoptee organizations since the fall semester of 2009, and I have begun to organize events, supervise

student interpreters, interview the staff of adoptee organizations and adoptees themselves, and observe what goes on at various occasions. In this process, I have been able to gain the cooperation of many involved, including the staff of adoptee organizations, student interpreters, and of course the adoptees themselves. We have found better ways in many occasions to organize events and better train and prepare our student interpreters. And along the way, I was able to draw a preliminary description of the role of our student interpreters when working for overseas adoptees (See 6).

As this paper reports the progress I have made so far along with the initial findings I have reached, and as other endeavors have yet to be completed, I will refrain from describing other facets or the findings from different methods used in this study (for example, I also surveyed adoptees on their views of the interpreters' contribution and role), and will rely mostly on the accounts made by my student interpreters.

4. Overseas adoptees' community & EIT, HUFS

4.1. Adoptees' community in Korea

As described earlier, language and cultural barriers are the biggest obstacles for overseas adoptees when wanting to communicate with their birth families. Herløw (2010: 97) reports that "Often the relationship with birth families was disrupted because of difficulties with communication over extended periods". Hence, there is a huge need for T&I services for adoptees and their birth families, which is why a collaborative effort was made between EIT, HUFS and the following adoptee organizations (Nam 2011b: 68-29).

4.1.1. Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (GOA'L, www.goal.or.kr)

GOA'L is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1998 by volunteers, and it aims to help overseas adoptees in the search for their birth families, in their quest to learn about Korean culture and society, and in their endeavors to visit and adjust to their country of birth. GOA'L strives to offer customized services to adoptees and regularly hosts the GOA'L Annual Conference and the First Trip Home events, which require the assistance of interpreters. At the same time, GOA'L provides the following types of services on a regular basis which need the assistance of interpreters and/or translators.

- Reunion with birth family: Without a doubt, this is the most emotional situation any interpreter can think of when working for overseas adoptees. No matter how emotional the participants may become, the interpreter needs to deliver the messages in a calm manner. Interpreters are advised to interpret every word of the participants even when one party has requested that such a portion should not be rendered as the adoptee's right to know takes precedence over any other value.
- Interpreting in the media: Adoptees oftentimes depend on the media to find their birth families. Regular TV programs such as *I miss that person* on KBS and *A letter from an adoptee* on YTN are broadcasted every week and require interpreting services.
- Letter translations: Once adoptees locate or reunite with birth families, they frequently exchange e-mails or post mails. For these occasions, translation is provided.
- F4 Visa: The majority of overseas adoptees need to apply for an F-4 Visa to extend their stay in Korea. Interpreting services are provided when these adoptees visit the immigrations office.
- Miscellaneous: T&I are required even in the most trivial situations such as when an adoptee needs to find a place to stay, purchase a mobile phone, get an identification card reissued, etc.

For these occasions mentioned above, the EIT, HUFS assigned a total of 40 students in 2010, and 9 students in 2011. Additional students will be assigned to work for GOA'L in 2012.

4.1.2. Holt Children's Services (Holt, www.holt.or.kr)

The Holt Children's Services was founded in 1955 when Americans Harry and Bertha Holt adopted eight Korean War orphans, and has developed into a professional and world-renowned organization that facilitates domestic and international adoptions. Holt, in particular, organizes the visits of overseas adoptees and their adoptive families to Korea. Generally, they stay for around two weeks during which time they reunite with their birth families. For Holt, the EIT, HUFS assigned 7 students in 2011 and 6 students in 2012. Each student is required to work for at least 30 hours a semester, and they usually interpret for reunions with birth families and translate letters between adoptees and their birth families.

4.2. T&I field training at EIT, HUFS

The inspiration to link T&I education with voluntary interpreting services provided for overseas adoptees first came to me when I interpreted for an event for GOA'L in 2000. Then, a birth mother, still searching for her daughter, spoke in tears in Korean and told how she regretted having given up her daughter for adoption. The audience was mainly composed of overseas adoptees, and everyone was in tears including the interpreters. That moment was powerful and suggested that such events and occasions would be where interpreters play an essential role. Drawing on that experience, my department began to work with adoptee organizations in 2009. However, I felt the need to invite more students and make our

collaboration more official. So, I launched a new course titled *T&I Field Training* for senior students at EIT, HUFS. After a year of preparation and a survey conducted on all students, a new curriculum was introduced in 2011, into which the new course was incorporated. Although the department had been working with GOA'L since 2009, this new course gave students the opportunity to gain real-life T&I experience and also earn academic credit. Nam (2011a) describes the new curriculum in detail and argues that *T&I Field Training* offers a rather rare opportunity for students to put into practice what they have learned in the classroom through voluntary work in the field. Through the course, students work for the Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (GOA'L), the Holt Children's Services, the Korea Arts Management Service (KAMS), Human Asia, and the Literature Translation Institute of Korea (LTI Korea). Through these programs, students are expected to not only acquire real-life T&I experience but also contribute to the overall efforts being made by those organizations they work for (62-63).

5. Interpreting for adoptees

The general reaction from my students after working for adoptees was that adoptees seemed to look like Koreans only on the outside. That is, their appearance is the only thing that seemed to suggest that they were originally from Korea. Speaking with them, however, as my students have discovered, adoptees are anything but Koreans (interview with student interpreter So Yong Na). They not only speak differently, but also think and behave differently. Before students are assigned to adoptees, adoptee organizations and adoption agencies give orientation sessions so that student interpreters can prepare

themselves. Related to interpreting, for instance, they caution interpreters not to get too emotional when interpreting as this would only escalate tensions. Also, they ask interpreters to try to understand the sorrow, pain, and frustration of adoptees (interview with student interpreter Yeou Joo Lee). One word that holds a significant importance is *abandon*. Many Korean birth parents blame themselves for not having been able to take care of their birth child and having given her up for adoption. Thus, they express their sense of guilt by torturing themselves, in a way, by using the word "abandon" when they describe the moment they sent away their child. At the same time, old Korean adoption records would use the expression "the child was abandoned at XXX" to describe the place where she was found. Thus, interpreters are cautioned to change "abandon" to "relinquish for adoption" or "be found" when interpreting (Interview with Kyung-Joo Kim).

5.1. Interpreting at the KBS program I miss that person

Adoptees wanting to tell their story and search for their birth families on the KBS program *I miss that person* are required to be interviewed by the program's producers, who decide which adoptee would appear on the show. As a result, the interview with the producers is a crucial moment for adoptees. Generally, 3 to 4 producers sit on one side of a room and interview one adoptee at a time who's seated across the room. Many adoptees want to tell their story on the program, so the interview itself can be a nervous moment for them. Student interpreters meet the adoptees before the interview and ask about their past: for example, how they were adopted, why they want to find their birth parents, and how they feel about Korea. Once selected to appear on the show, the adoptee is

usually asked why she wants to find her birth family.

- TV show host: “When did it first occur to you that you should find your birth mother?”
- Laurie: “Because of my adoptive parents, I’ve been able to live without any difficulties. However, I always felt that there was something missing in my life. I always felt incomplete. I came to Korea to find the last missing puzzle in my life.”

(interview with student interpreter Yeou Joo Lee)

In these cases, student interpreters are the only companion adoptees have (Interview with Heon Sang Joo).

5.2. Interpreting at reunions with birth families

When adoptees and their birth families are reunited, they rejoice that they have been able to meet again and have a meal together. There, birth parents usually show old photos of the adoptee as a child.

- Birth mother: “Here’s a photo of you as a baby. I really missed you. You have become really pretty.”

Also, many Korean parents want to offer their long-lost child traditional Korean food. So, a lot of the talk revolves around the names, origins, and tastes of the dishes being served. In these reunions, one thing that needs mentioning is the contrasting attitudes of birth parents and adoptees. In most cases, it is the birth mother that would ceaselessly cry and be emotional. The adoptee's response tends to be rather dry and unemotional, which most translate as an attitude taken by adoptees to protect themselves from being too vulnerable to emotional roller coasters (interview with

student interpreter Bo Min Lee). The topics most frequently brought up in reunions with birth families are:

- Introduce oneself and family members ;
- Tell each other about their past ;
- Depict the characteristics of someone ;
- Describe the names, origins, and tastes of the food they're having, etc.

(interview with student interpreter Hae Jin Lee)

Family reunions are supposed to be pleasurable and joyful; and for the most part, it is exactly so. However, when adoptees and their birth families are brought together after years of absence, there are many wounds to heal. And in this process, tensions may escalate. For example, many adoptees believe that Korea had sold them like a product (interview with student interpreter Jeong Hyun Kim); Korean birth parents tend to force adoptees to abide by Korean traditional culture even when adoptees have lived outside its influence most of their lives. Additionally, some parents even want to have a voice in the personal lives of the adoptees. For instance, an adoptee was surprised to learn that her Korean birth mother didn't want her to date her Norwegian boyfriend (interview with student interpreter Jeong Hyun Kim). Sometimes, it can be a reunion not only between an adoptee and his birth parents, but also even among his or her birth parents and other members of the family. A lot of times in the past, married couples would decide to send their child away for adoption after they got divorced and when either one of them couldn't afford to raise the child. Because they have been separated for years, one might refuse to talk to the other, voices might be raised, one could leave the scene, and other things may happen that would not occur in other interpreted communication (interview with student

interpreter In Jeong Choi). All of this presents a challenge for the interpreter as she's there to assist the adoptee.

6. Role of the interpreter

6.1. Evolving views on the role of the interpreter

The clients see the interpreter as a 'language converter', not as someone who is concerned with communication; hence the model of a tap which can be turned on and off at will and which will produce language, any language. The interpreter is seen only in terms of language competence and, conversely, the assumption is made that language competence is tantamount to interpreting competence. Furthermore, the client's regard is likely to depend on the number of languages they believe the interpreter speaks! (Gentile et al. 1996: 38).

By all means, it was the conduit model like the one mentioned above that dominated for years when it came to discussions on the role of interpreters. In court interpreting, particularly, interpreters were always required to interpret faithfully and completely and at the same time be neutral and impartial (Mikkelson 2008: 82-83). Fortunately, however, such rigid and inflexible views have undergone changes in recent years as many dissenting voices have been raised to argue against literal or verbatim interpretation (84). Viewing the interpreted communication as a peculiar type of three-party talk and seeing the interpreter as an active participant of such talk, Wadensjö (1998) "argues that the dialogical model, which sees interpreters not just as mere 'conduits' but active participants in the communication and message creation, should be favored" (recited from Mullamaa 2009: 48). After having surveyed conference, court, and medical

interpreters in three countries, Angelelli (2003: 26) concluded that interpreters did not view themselves as invisible or conduit beings and that “they played a role in building trust, facilitating mutual respect, communicating affect as well as message, explaining cultural gaps, controlling the communication flow and aligning with one of the parties in interactions” (recited from Mikkelson 2008: 85). Additionally, after surveying 600 service providers in Austrian health care and social service settings, Pöchhacker (2000: 62-65) argues that “actual and potential users of community interpreting services expect interpreters to do much more than ‘just translate’.

As I have shown, views on the role of the interpreter have evolved from a mere and somewhat stubborn conduit to today’s argument that interpreters should assume the roles of clarifier, explainer, cultural mediator, helpmate, agent, and even sometimes advocate.

6.2. Roles of the interpreters working for overseas adoptees

Working for adoptees requires much more than what is usually expected for interpreters working in other situations. After having interviewed two staff members of adoptee organizations and eight student interpreters as well as having interpreted for birth family reunions myself, I was able to draw a preliminary classification of the roles of the interpreters working for overseas adoptees that go beyond serving as a “language converter”. They are: the interpreter as a companion, the interpreter as an informant, the interpreter as a moderator, and the interpreter as an advocate.

First, the interpreter serves as a companion for adoptees. Most importantly, student interpreters must have a sense that they are assisting the adoptees not only for inter-lingual communication but also for helping them have peace of mind. For instance, adoptees

show a strong tendency to return to the place where they were first found many times. Also, they tend to visit governmental agencies or adoption agencies numerous times so as to acquire information about their birth families even when they are turned down every time (interview with student interpreter Jeong Hyun Kim). The interpreter, in these cases, is the only friend an adoptee can rely on. And as mentioned earlier, adoptees wanting to appear on the KBS TV show *I miss that person* undergo a very stressful time when being interviewed by the show's producers, who are screening which adoptee should go on the show the following week. In the waiting room, adoptees become anxious and have a very hard time organizing their thoughts. In these cases, the accompanying student interpreter can become a companion and help them better prepare for their interviews (interview with student interpreter Heon Sang Joo).

Second, the interpreter is asked to serve as an informant of the adoptee's Korean birth family as well as Korea as a whole. In one case, an adoptee from Norway was reunited with his family, who had already been separated for years. The biological father divorced the adoptee's mother to marry his second wife, who later left him for another man and took all of his money as alimony. The father was then living with his third wife. Because of this, the elder brother of the adoptee did not want to speak to his father. The elder brother also has a daughter suffering from cancer. All of this made the reunion difficult, and members of the family were reluctant to talk about their lives. In this case, the adoptee turned to the interpreter to ask about his family's financial status. For example, he asked:

- Why are they living in the same neighborhood all these years?
- Are they still very much poor? Do they have to continue to live in a poor neighborhood to be eligible for government support?

- I want to offer financial assistance to my niece's education. What is the education system like in Korea? How much does the government support for a child's education?

All of these were questions he couldn't directly ask to his birth parents (interview with student interpreter In Jeong Choi). In addition, the adoptee would prepare a list of the questions she wanted to ask and would request the interpreter to go over her list so as to find out whether the prepared questions were appropriate and not considered to be rude according to Korean cultural standards because she did not want to offend her birth mother on their first reunion (My experience).

Third, the interpreter needs to also serve as a moderator. In the orientation sessions organized by adoption agencies hosted before family reunions, the staff there requests the interpreter to ask the adoptee on a regular basis whether she feels comfortable. In many instances, adoptees may feel uncomfortable and overwhelmed with too much emotion after having reunited with their birth family and might want to cease the reunion and probably save other discussions for another occasion. However, the adoptee cannot take the initiative and suggest to do so. Thus, it is the interpreter who regularly checks how the adoptee feels and evaluates how the reunion is going. Additionally, when someone reunites with her birth family after years of separation, it is very natural to have awkward moments. The parties can run out of things to talk about because they know virtually nothing about each other; they could be at a loss of words as the birth mother is too emotional to speak. All of this requires the interpreter to step in and take the lead so as to make the reunion more worthwhile (interview with student interpreter Hae Jin Lee). What is more, cultural clashes become an issue when adoptees

reunite with birth families as Korean families usually want the adoptees to abide by the Korean way of life. And it is in these situations where the experiences of adoptees and their birth families affect the interpreted situation to a degree that cannot be easily seen in other situations. For example, the family may be against her dating or marrying someone who is not ethnically Korean, they may be disappointed about the profession or career she has chosen and so forth. In these cases, the interpreter needs to dial down the tone applied by the speakers. For example, here is one way the interpreter worked his way around in what might have been an intense situation. (The following dialogues are from my experience.)

- Mother : What do you do in Belgium ?
- Daughter : I work as a receptionist.
- Interpreter : She works as what is known as a receptionist, who assists her employer organize meetings, set daily schedules and meetings, and prepare documents.
- Mother : Is she working as a secretary ? (show signs of disappointment)
- Interpreter : (the interpreter intervenes) No, she does much more than that.

- Mother : Are you seeing anyone ?
- Daughter : Not at the moment.
- Mother : I guess most men in Belgium are Westerners.
- Daughter : Naturally.
- Mother : I guess you may marry a Westerner one day. But a Korean man would be better. (shows signs of alertness and anxiousness)
- Interpreter : (the interpreter intervenes and dials down the tone) There must be many good Western men there, but keep in mind that there are many good Korean men as well.

- Mother : After I gave you up for adoption, I completely forgot about

you. Then, when the adoption agency called, the memories came back. They were painful memories. (The mother is in her 80s and has a hard time making herself clear.)

- Interpreter : (the interpreter intervenes) For all these years, the pain has always been there. And I tried to forget because of the pain. And when the adoption agency called, I could sense that the pain was still with me. It has been a hard time for me as well.

One interesting thing is the somewhat contradictory guidelines given by adoptee organizations and adoption agencies. Specifically, adoptee organizations request student interpreters to fully interpret every word, sentence, and message of the birth family. They want interpreters to translate even the dialogues between birth family members that are not exactly intended for the adoptee present. Birth family members tend to think that they could talk about the adoptee in front of her without her knowing what they're talking about if they speak in Korean. However, since adoptee organizations emphasize the adoptee's right to know, they want even those dialogues to be interpreted to the adoptee (interview with student interpreter Yoon Jeong Lee). Conversely, adoption agencies request that only parts of the original message be interpreted for fear of unnecessary misunderstandings. For example, Korean foster parents of adoptees (adoptees a lot of times wish to meet their foster parents that took care of them in Korea before being sent overseas) may make comments about the adoptive parents such as:

- The mother looks a bit cold. The father seems to care more about you (the adoptee) than your adoptive mother. I can tell that your adoptive father loves you.

Such comments are, without doubt, better when they are dialed down or are left un-interpreted (interview with student interpreter

Hae Jin Lee). So, when the birth family specifically asks that a certain message or dialogue not be interpreted, the interpreter needs to decide for herself how much of the message should be conveyed, which far exceeds what is usually conceived as the role of the interpreter. For instance, Pöchhacker (2000: 56) reports that two thirds of the respondents in his survey rejected the "suggestion that *[o]mitting utterances which are not to the point to avoid losing time* is part of the interpreter's task". Hence, the authority to dial down and sometimes even omit certain messages from the source message may be something distinctive in interpreted communication for overseas adoptees, particularly when the fact that such authority is actually sanctioned or even sometimes recommended by clients themselves (adoption agencies) is considered.

Fourth, the interpreter working for overseas adoptees assumes the role of an advocate. The interpreter acts as a guide to assist adoptees to visit adoption agencies, adoptee organizations, hospitals, police stations, and other public offices so as to locate their long-lost family. When doing so, the interpreted situation is very different to others in that it is the interpreter who takes charge in the dialogue between the adoptee and the staff at those organizations. The interpreter, for instance, listens to what the adoptee wants to know and other relevant information before arriving at those organizations and attempts to make an appeal on behalf of the adoptee. In these situations, the interpreter is the one talking the most and the adoptee becomes an observer and watches what goes on. The interpreter needs to create rapport with the staff at those organizations so that they could be more attentive to the adoptee's endeavors. And even when the adoptee is turned down repeatedly, she needs to tirelessly encourage the adoptee not to lose hope (interview with student interpreter Heon Sang Joo). Paying visits to

the same organization or place repeatedly is exhausting. However, in no case should the interpreter show signs of fatigue or express in any way that there's little possibility of the adoptee to find her parents, for the adoptee is emotionally invested in the search, regardless of the results. As an advocate, the interpreter should also be aware of her facial expressions. Signs of indifference, fatigue, or annoyance should all be avoided. Thus, when the interpreter conveys the message, her facial expression should also express what is being communicated (interview with student interpreter Yoon Jeong Lee).

Therefore, the role of the interpreter serving overseas adoptees far exceeds the realm of that required for interpreters working in other contexts. She needs to be not only an aid of inter-lingual communication but also a companion, an informant, a moderator, and an advocate of the adoptee.

7. Concluding remarks

In order to argue for the need to turn the T&I community's attention to Korean overseas adoptees and to voice the idea that nurturing those who would perform dialogue interpreting may be a viable educational goal for undergraduate T&I programs in Korea, the present study has thus far examined the history of overseas adoption in Korea, investigated what many adoptees go through from their childhood suffering from identity crises to their adulthood searching for their birth families, described my experience of supervising undergraduate T&I student interpreters, and explored the role of the interpreter as companion, informant, moderator, and advocate of adoptees. Undergraduate students who work for Korean overseas adoptees obviously benefit greatly especially from an educational

perspective. Most, if not all, students who participated in our department's program to send interpreters to adoptee organizations were more than willing to return. Many of them registered as volunteer interpreters at those organizations after our program was concluded so that they could continue their service. In this sense, nurturing those who will serve in the field of dialogue interpreting can be a viable educational objective for undergraduate T&I programs (Nam 2011a). Unlike other terms denoting certain types of interpreting, such as conference interpreting, community interpreting, court interpreting and the like, all of which "reflect defined areas of social activity as well as actual professional categories"(Mason 2009: 81) dialogue interpreting refers to a group of activities that share a mode of interaction: dialogue.

Four characteristics of dialogue interpreting are (ibid.):

- DI involves dialogue, thus the interpreter is required to be engaged in bi-directional translation and constant code-switching;
- What is translated is, in nearly all cases, spontaneous speech;
- It is conducted face-to-face; and
- The mode of interpreting is mostly consecutive.

The student interpreters that were interviewed expressed difficulties having to be involved in constant code-switching, which is something neglected in today's undergraduate T&I education as most of the curricula in Korea, at least, have been modeled after postgraduate T&I programs, which are aimed at training professional conference interpreters. If and when dialogue interpreting is given more emphasis at the undergraduate level, it could provide society with the much needed talent that would serve in areas that suffer from a serious shortage of interpreters and are very much neglected by conference interpreters due to the usually low financial

compensation involved. Dialogue interpreting can be an area for which undergraduate T&I programs can serve as the exclusive source of this much needed talent.

By all means, the present study is far from its completion. The EIT, HUFS will continue to send student interpreters to the adoptees' community in Korea so that they can carry on their role of serving as advocates for adoptees. In this process, I will continue to conduct interviews with the staff of adoption agencies, birth families, student interpreters, and of course the adoptees themselves. Notwithstanding its evident shortcomings, I hope the present study not only sheds light on a very significant and sensitive area of Korea's past and present, but also enables us to explore the viability and possibility of doing future research in this area.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to the panel judges and the English reviser of this paper for their meticulous review and invaluable comments. Additionally, I would like to convey my deepest gratitude to the staff of the adoptee organizations my department works with for their continuous effort and cooperation. I also owe a great debt to the adoptees I met and those who filled out the questionnaire I distributed. And last but not least, I thank my students for their enthusiasm, commitment, and most importantly, their support.

NOTES

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2. Jinhyang HONG, ed. (2006): *2006 International Korean Adoptee Resource Book*. Seoul: Overseas Korean Foundation.
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5. In a speech made at the Fourth Life Forum on May 26 in Seoul.

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INTERVIEWS

Interview with Kyung-Joo KIM, Director of the Post Adoption Service Center, on May 21, 2012.
Interview with James ROSSO, Secretary General of GOA'L, on January 11, 2011.
Interview with Bo Min LEE, student interpreter at EIT, HUFS, on June 26, 2012.
Interview with In Jeong CHOI, student interpreter at EIT, HUFS, on June 26, 2012.
Interview with So Yong NA, student interpreter at EIT, HUFS, on November 8, 2010.
Interview with Yeou Joo LEE, student interpreter at EIT, HUFS, on November 8, 2010.
Interview with Yoon Jeong LEE, student interpreter at EIT, HUFS, on November 8, 2010.
Interview with Hae Jin LEE, student interpreter at EIT, HUFS, on November 8, 2010.
Interview with Heon Sang JOO, student interpreter at EIT, HUFS, on November 8, 2010.
Interview with Jeong Hyun KIM, student interpreter at EIT, HUFS, on November 15, 2010.

Received: June 30
Revised: August 2
Accepted: August 18