

# The Ambilaterality of Fluency in Translating Literature in Peripheral Contexts\*

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## ABSTRACT

Translation history shows that linguistic ethnocentrism and cultural hegemony have influenced translating from antiquity to today. One of the prominent results of such influence is fluency in translating literature. As Venuti points out, in British, American and European contexts, fluency in translating foreign texts has prevailed over other translation strategies, constituting a melting pot where heterogeneous elements are melted together into harmonious ones which are acceptable to dominant cultures. In the process, the differences and the identity of other cultures are erased or reduced so as to be almost invisible. As an ethical strategy against such violence on the source culture, literalism or foreignization has been proposed among Western scholars. In peripheral contexts, however, literalism may not be an ethical strategy but instead may actually inflict violence on the source culture. When translating from a minority-status language culture to a dominant culture, for example, it may produce potentially unreadable texts, increasing the risk of readers being excluded, and thereby confining texts within the national border by closing off the possibilities of texts being circulated throughout the world. These peripheral contexts have rarely been discussed in translation studies. What does fluency strategy mean in peripheral contexts in the case of translating from a minority-status language culture to a dominant target language? What would be the

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\* All English translations from Korean source texts in this article are my own unless otherwise specified.

influence of this strategy on the source culture beyond national borders? This paper aims to investigate these questions using the example of the Korean novel *Please Look after Mom*, a million-copy seller in South Korea, which was translated into English in 2009 and won popularity among English-speaking readers. It argues that fluency strategy constitutes a strategic progressive invasion into a dominant culture in peripheral contexts.

#### KEYWORDS

Fluency strategy, Foreignization, Ethical strategy, Minority-status language culture, Mimicry, Hybrid text, Stubborn chunks

## 1. Introduction. Fluency in literary translation: Western perspective

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (2004/2006: 5-6) states in his book *On Translation*:

The pretensions to self-sufficiency, the refusal to allow the foreign mediate, have secretly nourished numerous linguistic ethnocentrism, and more seriously, numerous pretensions to the same cultural hegemony that we have been able to observe in relation to Latin, from late antiquity to the end of the Middle Ages and even beyond the Renaissance, in relation to French in the classical era, and in relation to English today.

Translation history reveals how such linguistic ethnocentrism or cultural hegemony inflicted violence on foreign languages and cultures, by erasing or reducing differences and homogenizing various cultures, thus making their heterogeneity invisible, or distorting or falsifying their images.

During the Roman Empire, the Romans appropriated subject

matters of Greek culture without paying attention to the lexical or stylistic characteristics of the source text to enhance the aesthetic dimensions of their own culture while during the Renaissance period, translators expropriated the foreignness of the source-language text in order to revitalize their own language (Schulte & Biguenet 1992: 2). In European contexts, translation was used as a means “both of containing the artistic achievements of writers in other languages and of asserting the supremacy of the dominant, European culture” (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999: 4-6) as exemplified by Edward FitzGerald. FitzGerald accused the Persians of artistic incompetence and suggested that their poetry became art only when translated into English (cited in Bassnett 1991). He rewrote the Persian poet Omar Khayyam’s Rubaiyat “in a way in which he would have never dreamed of rewriting Homer, or Virgil” (Lefevere 1992: 8).

In this vein, Venuti (1995) points out that from the seventeenth century to the present day, the fluency or domesticating strategy has prevailed over other translation strategies in translating foreign literatures into English, and Hatim and Munday also state that “within the Anglo-American translation tradition, careful selection has ensured that only those texts which lend themselves to a domesticating strategy are included, while other texts which resist such a strategy are all but totally excluded” (2004: 193).

These fluency strategies are most noticeable in the manipulation school; Hermans, for example, argues that translating is a matter of manipulating a source text so as to “conform to the relevant correctness notion, which means conformity with the model embodying that correctness notion” (1996: 37). One such example is the translation of Czech writer Milan Kundera’s *The Joke*. In an Anglo-American context, “Kundera writes novels in such a way that they may be too difficult for the average English-speaking reader to

understand”, and they must be “made to read more like what the average reader (whoever s/he may be) is used to” (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990: 6). Thus, Kundera’s *The Joke* was manipulated and appropriated in the process of translation ‘for the benefit of the prospective reader’. The translator into English tidied narratives which are polyphonic, full of seemingly insignificant digressions and carefully crafted repetitions and thus removed an important theme which Kundera intended to explore, that is, to illustrate the fragility of culture (Kuhiwczak 1990: 124-126).

This Anglo-American tradition can also be witnessed in Spivak’s statement: “In the act of wholesale translation into English there can be a betrayal of the democratic ideal into the law of the strongest” (1992/2004: 371). Spivak (ibid.: 371-372) argues that without a sense of the rhetoricity of language, a species of neo-colonialist construction of the non-western scene is afoot, thereby creating ‘translateese’ whereby differences of ‘third-world’ feminist voices are erased and homogenized.

As seen above, translation involves the cultural interaction of one nation with another, where dominant cultures exercise their power over other cultures. In the process of a text transfer, heterogeneous elements are removed or reduced to produce a homogenous melting pot. Foreign cultural elements are melted together into harmonious ones which are acceptable to the dominant cultures in the form of fluency.

Whether the fluency tradition in European or Anglo-American contexts stemmed from linguistic ethnocentrism (Venuti 1995), the pretensions to the supremacy of their cultures (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999: 4-6), the translator’s and publisher’s untested assumptions about the ability of the western reader to decode complex cultural messages (Kuhiwczak 1990), or, from the deceitful refusal to have the

language of reception subjected to the test of the foreign (Ricoeur 2006: 5), these approaches to translation result in the conscious or unconscious inscription of domestic values in foreign texts, thereby removing or reducing foreignness and otherness. As Venuti (1995: 18) states:

This relationship points to the violence that resides in the very purpose and activity of translation: the reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with value, beliefs and representations that preexist it in the target language, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality, [...] Translation is the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text with a text that will be intelligible to the target language reader. This difference can never be entirely removed, of course, but it necessarily suffers a reduction and exclusion of possibilities.

And, in power terms, fluency can “mean that somewhere, somehow, there is some exclusion of a reader (coerced to read in a particular way), an author (committed to oblivion) or a translator (doomed to be invisible)” (Hatim and Munday 2004: 93).

In order to address these problems, literalism has been advanced as an ethical strategy for others among Western scholars. Although, on the one hand, literalism has borne the stigma of ‘translationese’, that is, a stilted form of the target language derived from calquing the lexical or syntactic patterning of the source text, on the other hand, it has been considered to be an ideal strategy; for example, Benjamin (1923/2004: 81) argues that literalness allows the pure language to illuminate the original all the more fully. In this vein, Steiner (1975/1998: 208) also advances literal translation as the most difficult, but most desirable form of translation because it embodies that totality of understanding and reproduction, that utter

transparency between languages which recalls the ancient dream of humanity for a universal language. According to Simon, “literalism implies a desire to resist interventions, to avoid imposing extraneous interpretations or linkages. It manifests a polite refusal to take control of the other text, to subject it to projection, assimilation, or appropriation” (2012: 445). Thus, Venuti (1995, 1996, 2004) proposes foreignizing and minoritizing translation, and Appiah (1993) suggests ‘thick’ translation that gives a full revelation of the context in foreign texts. Venuti (1996: 93) says:

To shake the regime of English, a translator must be strategic in selecting foreign texts and in developing discourses to translate them. Foreign texts can be chosen to redress patterns of unequal cultural exchange and to restore foreign literature excluded by the standard dialect, by literary canons, or by ethnic stereotypes in the United States.

He (ibid.) further says that good translation is demystifying: it manifests in its own language the foreignness of the foreign text. The popularity of these foreignizing translations “clearly accords with the rise of multiculturalism and our new attention to ethnic difference; just as the melting pot has lost favor as a model for immigrant experience, so too assimilative translation is increasingly disfavored” (Damrosch 2003a/2012: 427), though Cronin argues, “In the context of powerful, hegemonic cultures to advocate a foreignizing, refractory or abusive approach to translation could be seen as a subversive, progressive practice which undermines the homogenizing pretensions of the dominant language and cultures” (2009: 170).

However, the advocacy of foreignization as the ethical strategy for others is mostly based on Western perspectives, specifically, a translation situation in which the target language is culturally

dominant, and “on the implicit postulate of an egalitarian relationship between different linguistic and cultural areas” (Jacquemond 1992: 140). Foreignization strategy has rarely been discussed in peripheral contexts, that is, a situation in which the target language is in a culturally minority position. Actually, the voice of minority languages<sup>1</sup> has rarely been heard in translation studies. In European contexts, “speakers of minority languages looking into the disciplinary mirror of translation studies can experience the troubling absence of the undead” (Cronin 1998: 145-149). This situation is worse in Oriental contexts. Indeed, the minority status of languages has rarely been a consideration in translation studies; as Cronin (2009: 169) puts it:

Translation theory anthologies rarely included contributions from minority language perspective, and little or no allowance was made for the fact that attitudes towards translation might significantly alter depending on whether the source or target language was in a majority or minority position.

Translation perspectives from the point of view of minority languages may not always be the same as those of major languages. Foreignization may not be an ethical strategy but may result in violence in peripheral contexts: in the case of translating from a culturally dominant source language to a minority-status target language, foreignization could make a minority-status target language “absorb and thus be undermined by source language textual practice” (Hatim and Mason 1997: 145-146), or it could ultimately lead to the disappearance of the language (Cronin 2009: 171). So, “if a domesticating strategy is adopted in the case of translating from a culturally dominant source language to a minority-status target language, it may help to protect the latter against a prevailing

tendency for it to absorb and thus be undermined by source language textual practice” (Hatim and Mason 1997: 145-146), and it could indeed provide more subversion or resistance than a foreignizing approach (Tymoczko 1999; Cronin 2009: 171). This means that a foreignizing strategy cannot be a universal ethical strategy but, conversely, could lead to “ethical violence” in peripheral contexts, to appropriate Judith Butler’s terms (2005).

As Damrosch (2003a/2012: 427) points out, foreignizing efforts are the translational correlate of the contemporary championing of ethnic identity. However, when minority languages try to enter the Anglo-American translation tradition “where those texts which resist a domesticating strategy are totally excluded” (Hatim and Munday 2004: 193), a foreignizing strategy may run the risk of readers being excluded, thereby closing off the possibilities of texts being circulated throughout the world. Indeed, from a perspective of a proponent of a more universalist view of world literature, “foreignness can be overdone, not only in producing potentially unreadable texts but also by creating a separatist mode of translation that undermines the reader’s sense of connection to a common human experience” (Damrosch 2003a/2012: 427). In some cases, such translations may be by their very nature elitist and deliberately marginalize readers who do not share the view of language (Hatim and Munday 2004: 97).

If so, what does fluency strategy mean in peripheral contexts in the case of translating from a culturally minority-status source language to a dominant target language? What would be the influence of this strategy on the source culture beyond national borders? This paper aims to investigate these questions using the example of the Korean novel *Please Look after Mom*, a million-copy seller in South Korea, which was translated into English in 2009 and won popularity among English-speaking readers, arguing that fluency strategy



constitutes a strategic progressive invasion into a dominant culture in peripheral contexts.

## 2. Korean Literature in World Literature

The wave of globalization throughout the world has had an extensive influence on Korean society since the 1990s, and has served to emphasize the significance of globalizing Korean literature as questions of cultural politics have appeared on the agenda. The Korean literary circle keenly felt the need for Korean literature to enter the world literature beyond the boundary of national literature so as to assert its identity abroad. In order to enter the world literature, Korean literature needed to go through a double process, as Damrosch also points out in relation to world literature: “first, by being read as literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin in translation” (2003b: 4-6), although, according to Guillén, a work only has an effective life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture (cited in Damrosch 2003b: 4).

Inspired by the fact that Kawabata Yasunari of Japan was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1968, the government-funded Korea Arts and Culture Service launched the Korean literature translation support project. In 1996, the Literature Translation Institute of Korea was founded by the Korean government with the aim of supporting the translation and publication of Korean literature, thereby promoting Korean literature abroad. These efforts have achieved some measure of success in Europe, especially in France: The publishing house Decrescenzo Éditeurs was established

exclusively for the publication of Korean literature (Jeong 2013: 18). However, Korean literature remains virtually unknown and unfamiliar to world readers.

Many Korean scholars have attributed the causes of such failure to the problems regarding the lack of a government-supported publishing policy, of consideration of more universal themes and of target text readers in selection of texts to be translated, along with issues concerning the training of translators, the selection of more recognized publishing companies for translated works, the promotion of Korean literature overseas, and the translation quality, among others (Yun 2012: 149-150).

Among these problems, poor translation has been always a focus of criticism among Korean scholars. More specifically, Yun (2012) points out the need for more flexible approaches to translation in order for Korean literature to enter the global market; she says that prescriptive norms of source text-oriented fidelity and readability in Korean translation circles are too restrictive to accommodate the specific needs of various cultures. As a way to improve the acceptability of Korean literature in the world market, she suggests that norms should encompass influential factors such as a literary polysystem, translational tradition, readership, ideology of target cultures, power relationships, economic factors, and familiarity with the source culture.

So, the recent success of the Korean novel *Please Look after Mom* in the world market caused ripples in the Korean literary world. The novel is written by Kyung-sook Shin, one of the most read writers in Korea and the winner of many Korean literary prizes, including the Manhae Literature Prize in 1996, the Dong-in Literature Prize in 1997, and the Yi Sang Literary Prize in 2001, as well as France's Prix de l'Inaperçu in 2009. It is a story of a mother and of her family who

search for her after she goes missing in a crowded Seoul subway station. Told through the four voices of her daughter, her eldest son, her husband, and finally, herself, the story shows us “an indelible portrait of a woman whose entire identity, despite her secret desires, is tied up in her children”.<sup>2</sup>

Originally serialized in a literary magazine, *Please Look after Mom* became a bestseller in Korea when it was published in book form in 2008. It was translated by Chi-young Kim to be published in English by Knopf in 2011 and has won critical acclaim internationally. It won the 2011 Man Asian Literary Prize and is popular in the review section of Amazon. The story has been also adapted as a stage play and musical in Korea.

The media in Korea have been scrambling to cover the success story and have attributed the success of the novel in the Anglo-American market to active publicity, the reputation of the publisher of the English translation, the universal story of human life and the excellent translation. As for the successful translation, fluency has been the focus of attention in those media.

The review section of Amazon<sup>3</sup> shows that fluency strategy was actually adopted in translating the novel. Evidence of this is the translator’s invisibility. According to Venuti (1995), fluency in translation makes translators invisible. Most reviewers talk about the storyline or theme of the novel, but not about its translation or its translator while some Amazon reviewers point out the fluent translation of the novel explicitly:

The translator, Chi-young Kim did an excellent job with the translation and made it seem as though it were originally written in English.

The writing is flawless.

It was very well written.

The book is beautifully written with a wonderful translation from Korean by Chi-young Kim.

The translation helps the book flow flawlessly.

In fact, fluency was the strategy that the translator of the novel intended. Chi-young Kim says “the most important element to consider in translating Korean literature is to make it read as if it were originally written in English while maintaining the atmosphere of the source text and the writer’s sensitivity”.<sup>4</sup> However, the fluency was, most of all, the result of the negotiation between the translator and the publisher of the English translation: Kim had to discuss with the editor of the English translation, Robin Desser of Knopf, for months about how to translate the dialect in the novel into an everyday dialogic style, and the editor had to ask the author Shin questions as many as 67 times in one year.<sup>5</sup>

Let us now consider in more detail what kind of fluency strategies are adopted in the novel and what their effects are.

### 3. Fluency in *Please Look after Mom* as a negotiation

Although “translation that takes a popular approach to the foreign text isn’t necessarily democratic” (Venuti 1996: 94), “the communicative function of language is emphasized by the popular aesthetic, which demands that literary form not only be immediately intelligible, needing no special cultural expertise, but also

transparent, sufficiently realistic to invite vicarious participation” (Bourdieu 1984: 4-5, 32-33; cited in Venuti 1996: 94).

The English translation of *Please Look after Mom* shows “the popular aesthetic” to conform to the expectations of American readers who prefer to read foreign texts that read like English texts. The negotiation process in translation required to meet those expectations can first be witnessed in the cover page of the novel. When you pick up the Korean version of the novel, you encounter a portrait of a typical traditional Korean mother who silently prays for her family’s health, safety, happiness, and growth while devoting her whole life and sacrificing herself so that her children may pursue and realize their dreams. The picture on the cover page is Salvador Dali’s (1979) oil painting *Dawn, noon, sunset and dusk*, which is also reminiscent of Millet’s (c.a.1857-1859) *L’Angelus*, which depicts two peasants bowing in a field to say a prayer. The English translation cover page in the Vintage paperback edition, however, shows a more striking picture of a daughter. The publisher may have thought that the more striking image would appeal more to modern American readers. With this change, the focus of the story also changes from mother to daughter on the cover page.

This kind of change in the woman’s image, from the transparent watercolour image of a traditional Korean mother to the striking oil painting image of a more modern mother, also occurs in the text translation. The family of So-nyo (mother) search for a picture to be inserted in a flyer and find a recent family photo. So-nyo in the photo, which was taken to celebrate her husband’s seventieth birthday, is described in the source text, if literally translated, as wearing “an aquamarine *hanbok* with her hair done at a beauty salon, wearing a lipstick tinged with red” (Shin 2008: 13). The colours she wears symbolize her character: almost invisible, not asserting herself.

However, in the English translation, she is described as looking more ostentatious and as “wearing red lipstick” (Shin 2008/2011: 6). Probably this is the image of Korean - American or American old women with which American readers are more familiar. Combined with the image of a traditional Korean mother described in the story, this produces a hybrid image of a Korean mother which belongs to neither traditional nor modern perspectives.

Various other fluency strategies are employed to make *Please Look after Mom* read like an English text and flow flawlessly, in terms of theme, genre conventions, text structure, and culture-specific elements.

The first that is noticeable is adjustment,<sup>6</sup> that is, the re-ordering of a sequence of sentences to divide remembrance and the present situation in the text. The novel is composed of four chapters and an epilogue, and the first three chapters portray the life of the main character, So-nyo, according to the memories recounted in the voices of three members of her family: her eldest daughter, her eldest son, and her husband. This remembrance depends on the counter-memory of the characters (Byun 2013). *Counter-memory*, which originated in Foucault’s work (1977), refers to “the residual material that is not identical with the official meanings of the political public sphere” (Berlant 1991: 6); it is material that sinks or tends to sink into oblivion from official memory (Assmann 1998: 12).

The presence of So-nyo has never been seriously felt among her family members; they have been busy with their own lives and have taken her presence, love, sacrifice and dedication for granted. They keenly feel her presence depending on their fragmentary memories only when she is absent. These memories are about what they did not see, did not feel, did not realize, missed, and neglected in their daily lives while she was there with them. They remember those memories

with guilt and remorse. However, each memory is about a different aspect of So-nyo. No one's counter-memory is able to describe a complete portrait of So-nyo: they are all partial, fragmentary and incomplete, in accordance with what Foucault (1977) says about counter-memory.

However hard they try, they can never know or understand So-nyo as a whole. Only when those memories and So-nyo's narrative itself are combined like a puzzle, does So-nyo's complete identity emerge, as a mother of self-sacrifice and a human being who has her own desires and dreams. So the author seems to call the readers' attention to this limit of memory by interrupting remembrance, inserting the following paragraph between remembrances (Shin 2008: 17; Shin 2008/2011: 10):

How far back does one's memory of someone go? Your memory of Mom?

Since you heard about Mom's disappearance, you haven't been able to focus on a single thought, besieged by long-forgotten memories unexpectedly popping up. And the regret that always trailed each memory.

However, in the English translation, this paragraph is moved to the front of the remembrance section, and the effect that the author tries to convey is weakened in favour of the natural flow of the story.

Translation strategy to minimize the linguistic interference is also employed for producing the fluent flow of reading. The translation of the phrase "*eomma-reul-ireobeorin* (literally [we/you] lost Mom)" is an example. Here, the grammatical subject is omitted because it is a convention in the Korean language to omit the subject when you can guess it from the context, but the implied subject is "we" or "you". To

“lose” here has multiple connotations: physical and psychological death or loss, non-possession, oblivion, and non-perception. This source text phrase is an example of the cohesive device of recurrence to convey the theme of the novel: not only “we” (the characters in the novel) have physically lost Mom but also “we”, including readers of the novel, have been unaware of the presence of Mom in our daily lives. So the novel focuses on the process of recovering the presence of Mom who has been lost in our lives.

This cohesive device of recurrence also reveals traditional Korean family values. Traditionally, the family is a key element in Korean society; family members are bound to each other by strong family bonds, joint responsibility, and a common destiny. Every family member attributes the fault of one of his/her family members to themselves and feels equally guilty and responsible. Although it is actually So-nyo’s husband who lost her, all her family members feel responsible and guilty about losing her: they regret that they did not go to the Seoul train station to meet their parent, and they think they are “being punished” (Shin 2008/2011: 68). This Korean family’s values are conveyed by the subject of the cohesive device of recurrence, that is, “lost Mom” with “we” or “you”. Only the full recurrence of the cohesive device with the subject can provide the target text reader with access to the source text theme and Korean family values.

However, faced with this unconventional (from an American perspective) degree of recurrence, the lexical and structural variation, as opposed to the repetition of such a subject and cohesive device, is adopted to facilitate the fluent flow of reading:

It’s been one week since Mom went missing (Shin 2008/2011 : 3)



You decide to make flyers and hand them out where Mom was last seen (ibid. : 3)

at Seoul Station, which is where Mom vanished (ibid. : 8)

when your mom got lost in Seoul Station (ibid. :10)

Before you lost sight of your wife on the Seoul Station subway platform (ibid. : 122)

This lexical variation creates the effect of everyday dialogic style but sacrifices the multiple connotations of the term “lost”. The structural variation also shows the efforts made to bridge the cultural gap between Korea and the American world. From the Korean perspective, if a mother is miserable or missing, it is the fault of her husband and her children, but this idea is “completely alien” to American therapeutic culture. Maureen Corrigan,<sup>7</sup> book critic for NPR’s Fresh Air, says: “The weird fascination of *Please Look after Mom* is its message that if one’s mother is miserable, it is indeed the fault of her husband and her ungrateful children”. So the English translation tries to reduce this cultural unfamiliarity and make it fit with American family values by using the structural variation as opposed to “we lost mom”; this variation reveals the distance between mom being missing and the family members’ responsibility, reducing the importance of the theme of the novel and Korean family values.

Melodramatic genre convention is also reduced in the English translation. Just as several prominent U.S. critics panned the novel for its melodrama (which brought countering accusations of cultural deafness),<sup>8</sup> or described it as “a Korean soap opera decked out as serious literary fiction” and “manipulative sob sister melodrama”<sup>9</sup> when it arrived in the English translation, one of the elements that

took the Korean public's fancy was the melodramatic aspects, which are represented by descriptions of frequent scenes of tear-shedding or crying. However, the omission of such scenes in the English translation presents emotions as more controlled. For example, So-nyo's husband calls his daughter and shows regret and remorse for not being kind to So-nyo. The original text is: "Father was either away from home or, when he was home, sick. He seemed to be remorseful about that now. He sobbed more violently" (Shin 2008: 266). In the English translation, however, "He sobbed more violently" is omitted. Another example is the last scene, when So-nyo's eldest daughter is looking at Michelangelo's Pieta while she is travelling to Italy. The literal translation of the source text is (Shin 2008: 282):

"You are lost in looking at Holy Mother's lips. A teardrop rolled down from your closed eyes. You backed away, staggering, and left that place."

In the English translation, "A teardrop rolled down" is omitted: "You stare at the Holy Mother's lips intently. You close your eyes, back away, and leave that place" (Shin 2008/2011: 274).

Another translation strategy to enhance fluency is to reduce cultural strangeness. Cultural terms specific to Korea are omitted or translated into the terms more familiar to the target culture. For example, *agung-i* (Shin 2008: 27), which is a fuel hole to heat a traditional Korean room and also to cook rice, is translated as "furnace" (Shin 2008/2011: 20); *hobbang* (Shin 2008: 95), a steamed bun with red bean paste filling, is translated as "Chinese bun" (Shin 2008/2011: 88); and *mombbae* (Shin 2008: 227), which refers to loose fitting working pants for women, is translated as "baggy pants" (Shin 2008/2011: 218). Furthermore, some expressions embedded in

Korean culture, such as proverbs, are translated into more neutral ones: for example, the Korean proverb, if literally translated, would be “I cannot force you to be even a Pyeongyang envoy if you don’t like to” (Shin 2008: 227), but it is translated as “I can’t force you to let me help you if you don’t want me to” (Shin 2008/2011: 219).

In sum, as negotiation between the translator and the target culture publisher, fluency strategies in *Please Look after Mom* show the process used to achieve the target reader’s expectations in terms of linguistic, literary and cultural conventions. These strategies, in a way, fulfil the aim of a literary translation which Appiah claims, “aims at producing a text whose relation both to the literary and to the linguistic conventions of the culture of the translation is relevantly like the relations of the object-text to its culture’s conventions” (1993/2004: 397). In the process of re-producing the relevant relations, a hybrid text is produced where the traditional and the modern and East and West are mixed together as is seen in the English translation of *Please Look after Mom*. Although this approach may improve readability in the mirror of the target culture, it leads to reduced differences of foreign texts and cultures. Actually, the English translation of *Please Look after Mom* shows that the identity of the source text has been reduced in terms of its theme, genre conventions, and foreignness, and in the image of characters. This obviously falls short of fidelity in delivering the theme, style, foreignness, etc. of the source text, and constitutes a loss in translation, thus committing a disservice and violence to the source text. What influence, then, would this violence have on the source culture?

#### 4. Influence of fluent translation on the source culture

With regard to the relation of translations to the source culture, Toury states (1985: 19; cited in Niranjana 1992: 59-60):

From the standpoint of the source text and source system, translations have hardly any significance at all. ...Not only have they left the source system behind, but they are in no position to affect its linguistic and textual rules and norms, its textual history, or the source text as such.

However, translations may have an enormous impact on the source culture as exemplified in the case of India and other cultures. According to Niranjana (1992), “British translations of Indian writers have had an enormous reciprocal impact on writing and translation in India. Translation into English gives Asian/African/Latin American writing enormous prestige and influence, greatly influencing the source cultures” (cited in Gentzler 2014). Regarding these insights, I will next investigate how fluency strategies function beyond the national borders and affect the source culture.

According to Hermans (1996: 37), a source text is adjusted and manipulated so as to make the target text conform with the relevant, canonized models and hence with a particular correctness notion, and in so doing, to secure social acceptance, even acclaim. *Please Look after Mom* reveals such a process, that is, the linguistic, thematic, cultural, and stylistic adjustment of the source text to align the target text with the fluent translation model in the Anglo-American world to secure social acceptance and even acclaim. The novel has been internationally acclaimed and favourably reviewed by *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Seattle Times*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Times (UK)*, *Globe and Mail (Canada)*, among others. It was chosen by Amazon as one of

its “Best Books of the Month: April 2011”,<sup>10</sup> and by Oprah Winfrey to be one of her “18 Books to Watch for in April 2011”,<sup>11</sup> while the author became the first woman to win the Man Asian Literary Prize.<sup>12</sup> As of 2012, the international rights to the novel had been sold in 32 countries. It was also serialized on the BBC’s Book at Bedtime starting June 2, 2011.<sup>13</sup> BBC radio even asked for an interview with the translator.<sup>14</sup> With this success abroad, the novel sold more than 2 million copies in South Korea alone, a rare achievement for a purely literary work.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, this novel had sold over a million copies in South Korea before it was translated into English, but as Knopf Vice President Robin Desser states, “Novels that are huge in one country don’t always translate to other cultures easily and with the same level of success”,<sup>16</sup> and this success was not purely achieved by the fluent translation of the novel. For example, the universal themes of motherhood, family dissolution and family love which the world readers would sympathize with, were also factors. As Professor David Parker of Hong Kong University, chair of the board of directors of the Man Asian Literary Prize, says, “*Please Look after Mom* is a deeply moving, humane and intricately wrought book, at once culturally specific and universal”.<sup>17</sup>

According to Damrosch (2003a/2012: 420), literary works which are so closely dependent on detailed culture-specific knowledge that they can only be meaningful to members of the originating culture or to specialists in that culture remain within the sphere of a national literature and never achieve an effective life in world literature. However, *Please Look after Mom* had both culture-specific and universal popular elements which could strike a chord in the hearts of the world readers.

The publicity for the English translation and the reputation of the

publisher of the translation also contributed to the success. However, the most important contributing factor was the translation. Actually, as mentioned previously, Korean literature has been actively translated into English and other languages since the 1990s with support from the Korean government to promote Korean literature abroad, but such efforts have not been successful. One main cause of such failure has been inadequate translations: the Korean literary circle has been bound by the prescriptive norms of faithfulness and readability in translating Korean literature, which make such translations too restrictive to accommodate the specific needs of various cultures (Yun 2012). They have only looked to translation “as a guarantor of diversification, as a way of maintaining identity through difference” (Cronin 2009: 171). They have not been flexible in translating to improve the acceptability of Korean literature in the world market; they did not consider influential factors on the global penetration, such as the literary polysystem, translational tradition, readership, ideology of target cultures, power relationships, economic factors, and the familiarity of the source culture (Yun 2012). The fluent translation of *Please Look after Mom* was the result of considering translational norms in the Anglo-American publishing market, and the strategy met the expectations of English-speaking readers.

With the success of the novel in the world market, Korean society came to have hopes for the possibility of making a Korean Wave in the world literary field. The term ‘*Korean Wave*’ refers to the popularity of Korean culture, which started with the spread of Korean dramas across East and Southeast Asia in the 1990s. Literary critic Hwa-young Kim said that this success is “a signal for the globalization of Korean literature”,<sup>18</sup> and a Korean newspaper commented:

[*Please Look after Mom's*] success, [...] is perhaps a sign that translated Korean literature is finally gaining the international recognition that literary circles here have long sought.

—*Korea JoongAng Daily*, December 15, 2010

The popularity of the book abroad also brought international recognition to the author, Shin. *Please Look after Mom* was her first book to be translated into English, and with the translation, she made a successful international debut.

The translator of the novel became also visible due to the popularity of the book. As Venuti points out (1992, 1995), translators are generally invisible, with their names often omitted from the title pages of their translations and with their name and work scarcely commented upon in reviews. Translators are doubly invisible in the case of fluent translation. The English translation of *Please Look after Mom*, proved to be such a case in the target culture: among 32 English book reviews, only 14 mentioned the translator's name and only 4 discussed the translation (Yi 2011) while the translator's name and her work are also rarely mentioned in the Amazon review section.

However, unlike this invisibility in the target culture, the situation is quite different in the source culture. After *Please Look after Mom* had succeeded in American market, its translator became the cynosure of all media in Korea: whenever the English translation of the novel was discussed, the translator and her fluent translation were mentioned, and she was interviewed by some Korean newspapers and TV channels about her translation. As newspaper said, "Translators seldom get recognition in the literary scene. But when it comes to translators of Korean literature into foreign languages—even dominant one like English—the pool is so narrow that a few names inevitably stand out".<sup>19</sup> Thus, unlike other cases,

Kim became a phenomenon for her translation:

Behind the international bestseller *Please Look After Mom* is Kim Chi-young, perhaps the most skilled translator currently working, certainly one of the most successful.

- *Yonhap News Agency*, December 5, 2011

Translator bridges 2 languages and cultures ...

- *The Korea Times*, May 5, 2011

신경숙 『엄마를...』 아마존 소셜 톱 10 이끈 번역자 김지영씨

(Translator Chi-young Kim, Who Has Led Kyung-sook Shin's *Please Look after Mom* into Amazon's Top 10 Novels)

- *JoongAng Ilbo*, April 9, 2011

Novelist Shin Kyung-sook[s]...book would not have made a sensational international debut without professional translator Kim Chi-young.

- *The Korea Times*, April 8, 2011

‘엄마를 부탁해’ 미국판 어제 출간... 숨은 주역들 있었다.

(*Please Look after Mom* American Edition Published Yesterday...There Were Hidden Stars.)

- *Chosun Ilbo*, April 6, 2011

[Chi-young Kim] is one of the few translators whose name alone, on a dustcover, would persuade me to purchase an unknown book.

- *Korean Modern Literature in Translation* (ktlit.com), July 6, 2010

In sum, unlike the western perspectives, in this instance, the fluency strategy has shown different aspects in peripheral contexts: the translation gained popularity in the Anglo-American market and due to that success, the novel came to be translated into many other languages; the author gained international recognition and the translator also gained reputation; and Korean society came to have confidence in entering into world literature.



## 5. Conclusion. Fluency as mimicry for global recognition and stubborn chunks

As Venuti (1995: 12-14) points out, the economic and political ascendancy of the United States has reduced foreign languages and cultures to minority status in relation to its language and culture. English is the most translated language worldwide, but the least translated into, a situation that identifies translating as a potential site of variation (Venuti 1996: 92). So the asymmetric power between the source culture and the target culture creates many problems in translation in the globalization era especially for minority language cultures. It is not easy for them to enter the dominant world protected by a strong fortress of linguistic ethnocentrism. Korean culture and literature is a prime example of this. During the last decades, Korea has supported source-text oriented translation, that is to say, foreignizing, in translating Korean literature into other languages in order to maintain Korean identity through differences. These efforts have proved unsuccessful.

The English translation of *Please Look after Mom* successfully entered the American market by taking a different approach from those used previously, in which the government selected and funded the Korean literature to be translated. The translation of the novel was initiated by a private agency, and the publisher of the target text got actively involved in the process of translation. In other words, in this case, the translation was planned to penetrate the American market from the start, as shown by the remarks of Shin's agent, Joseph Lee of Korea Literary Management. He said<sup>20</sup> that although he values high quality of literariness as well as commercial viability when he selects works to be translated, he considers the local market to be

the most important. He studies the trend of local markets by country and selects works to be translated which can appeal to each local market. He said<sup>21</sup> he was confident that *Please Look after Mom* would succeed abroad because it dealt with not only very Korean but also universal emotions.

So it is no wonder that the translation process was influenced by such attitudes. The English translation of the novel was skewed to conform to the expectancy norms of the target culture: norms “established by the receivers of the translation, by their expectations of what a translation (of a given type) should be like, and what a native text (of a given type) in the target language should be like” (Chesterman 1993). Thus, the translator adopted a fluency strategy whereby a translation reads like an English text as if it had been originally written in English in order to enter the American market. However, as Venuti (1996: 94) states:

Fluent translation may enable a foreign text to engage a mass readership, even a text from an excluded foreign literature, but it simultaneously reinforces the major language and its many other linguistic and cultural exclusions while masking the inscription of domestic values. Fluency in translation is assimilationist, presenting domestic readers a realistic representation inflected with their own codes and ideologies as if it were an immediate encounter with a foreign text and culture.

Even with these flaws, fluent translation may be unavoidable or may be effective for the peripheral culture to be accepted in the dominant culture; a foreignizing translation which relies on discursive heterogeneity may narrow or even exclude its audience in peripheral contexts. It is just like the case where a stranger emphasizes his affinity with other members of a society in order to be accepted, not

excluded. As Cronin (1998: 147) puts it:

Advocacy of non-fluent, refractory, exoticizing strategies, for example, can be seen as a bold act of cultural revolt and epistemological generosity in a major language, but for a minority language, fluent strategies may represent the progressive key to their very survival. Minority languages that are under pressure from powerful major languages can succumb at lexical and syntactic levels so that over time they become mirror-images of the dominant language.

But the fluency strategy is not assimilation, but a mimicry in peripheral contexts. As Lacan and Caillois both argue, “Contrary to common sense, mimicry, unlike adaptation, is non-instrumental and does not contribute to survival”: one finds in the stomach of birds, predators in particular, as many insects supposedly protected by mimicry as insects that are not (Lacan 1977, cited in Ryder 2005). Fluent translation as mimicry does not guarantee its survival in the target culture. It is “rather the demonstration of a certain capacity to perceive both the environment in which one is immersed, and one’s relationship of immersion in or distinction from that environment” (Ryder 2005). As Lacan argues, mimicry is “not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare” (Lacan 1977: 99). Homi Bhabha says in colonial contexts that “mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (1994: 86). If I consider this remark further, fluent translation as mimicry in a peripheral context is the desire for a recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. It is the technique of camouflage to enter the dominant culture and inscribe mottles in the target culture. The more

mottles there are, the bigger the interstices in the target culture for the inscription of future mottles.

In fluent translation, these mottles are made of ‘stubborn chunks’ which remain afloat after the source text has been swallowed up in the melting pot. As performance artist Gomez-Peña says, the notion of the melting pot has been replaced by “a model that is more germane to the times, that of the menudo chowder (chowder soup). According to this model, most of the ingredients do melt, but some stubborn chunks are condemned merely to float” (Bhabha 1994: 218-219).

In translation, these chunks are incommensurable elements which are untranslatable. When the fluent target text retains those chunks, the text becomes a hybrid text, which in appearance is similar to, but not the same as, the text written in the target language. These chunks make the readers glimpse at the identity of the source text and the source culture. The English translation of *Please Look after Mom* retains those chunks as shown in reviewers’ comments, with many reviewers on Amazon commenting that the translation provides insights into Korean culture.<sup>22</sup>

This book delivers great insight into the Korean culture and the interfamilial workings of a Korean family.

It was also fascinating to read about Korean culture and history as it related to the family.

A great look into another culture.

came to appreciate the detail in depicting family dynamics, cultural values, food, landscape, and gender relations in contemporary Korea.

the story is a wonderful account of an extraordinary South Korean

family. Learned a lot about customs, traditions, food, etc. of this country.

an incredible moving portrait of what it means to be a mother, but also of the tradition and modernity of the family in South Korea<sup>23</sup>

This was the first time I felt I was seeing a voice from Korea itself with the potential to reach a very wide audience<sup>24</sup>

These stubborn chunks are culture-specific elements which resist translation. Their untranslatability challenges the homogenizing power of the hegemonic culture, squeezes into interstices, and makes cracks in the dominant culture. These cracks create a hybrid space where dominant and peripheral cultures co-exist. Greater hybrid space will allow otherness to be accepted as a whole in the future.

## NOTES

1. For translation studies, the concept of minority is always dynamic and never static. A language may be displaced from the public sphere and thus increasingly marginalized from use in various areas of life because of invasion, conquest or subjection by a more powerful group. (Cronin 2009, 170)
2. <<http://www.amazon.com/Please-Look-After-Vintage-Contemporaries/dp/0307739511>>, visited on May 15, 2014.
3. <[http://www.amazon.com/Please-Look-After-VintageContemporaries/dp/0307739511/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1398016241&sr=8-1&keywords=please+look+after+mom](http://www.amazon.com/Please-Look-After-VintageContemporaries/dp/0307739511/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1398016241&sr=8-1&keywords=please+look+after+mom)>, visited on June 15, 2014.
4. <[http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2011/04/06/2011040600237.html](http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/04/06/2011040600237.html)>, visited on April 15, 2014.
5. Ibid.
6. According to Nida (1964, 139), adjustment is re-ordering an entire sequence of sentences if the ST order of events does not match normal chronology.
7. <<http://www.npr.org/2011/04/05/135120998/please-look-after-mom-a-guilt-trip-to-the-big-city>>, visited on June 15, 2014.
8. <[http://www.cleveland.com/books/index.ssf/2012/05/kyung-sook\\_shins\\_please\\_look\\_a.html](http://www.cleveland.com/books/index.ssf/2012/05/kyung-sook_shins_please_look_a.html)>, visited on June 15, 2014.
9. <<http://www.npr.org/2011/04/05/135120998/please-look-after-mom-a-guilt-trip-to-the>>

- big-city,>, visited on June 15, 2014.
10. <<http://www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html?docId=1000670181>>, visited on June 15, 2014.
  11. <[http://www.oprah.com/book/Please-Look-After-Mom-by-Kyung-sook-Shin?editors\\_pick\\_id=29973#ixzz2n1euROt1](http://www.oprah.com/book/Please-Look-After-Mom-by-Kyung-sook-Shin?editors_pick_id=29973#ixzz2n1euROt1)>, visited on June 15, 2014.
  12. <<http://www.manasianliteraryprize.org/news/2012/3/15/south-korean-novelist-announced-as-first-woman-to-win-man-as>> visited on June 15, 2014.
  13. <<http://londonkoreanlinks.net/2011/05/30/please-look-after-mother-on-book-at-bedtime/>>, visited on June 17, 2014.
  14. <[http://article.join.com/news/article/article.asp?total\\_id=5322117&ctg=1700](http://article.join.com/news/article/article.asp?total_id=5322117&ctg=1700)>, visited on June 17, 2014.
  15. <[http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2012/04/24/2012042401175.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/04/24/2012042401175.html)>, visited on June 18, 2014.
  16. <<http://reviews.libraryjournal.com/2011/04/prepub/interviews/publishers-perspective-an-interview-with-knopf-vp-robin-desser-on-kyung-sook-shins-please-look-after-mom/>>, visited on June 19, 2014.
  17. <<http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Culture/view?articleId=99639>>, visited on June 16, 2014.
  18. <[http://blog.join.com/media/folderlistslide.asp?uid=jsh96&folder=2&list\\_id=11159254](http://blog.join.com/media/folderlistslide.asp?uid=jsh96&folder=2&list_id=11159254)>, visited on June 15, 2014.
  19. Seo, Dong-shin (May 25 th, 2007). Daughter Succeeds Mother's Job. The Korea Times. <<http://chiyoungkim.com/press/reviews/koreatimes25may07.html>>, visited on July 1, 2014.
  20. <[http://www.publishingjournal.co.kr/gnuboard4/bbs/board.php?bo\\_table=mba1&wr\\_id=33](http://www.publishingjournal.co.kr/gnuboard4/bbs/board.php?bo_table=mba1&wr_id=33)>, visited on June 15, 2014.
  21. Chosun Daily Newspaper April 6, 2011.
  22. <[http://www.amazon.com/Please-Look-After-Vintage-Contemporaries/dp/0307739511/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1398016241&sr=8-1&keywords=please+look+after+mom](http://www.amazon.com/Please-Look-After-Vintage-Contemporaries/dp/0307739511/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1398016241&sr=8-1&keywords=please+look+after+mom)>, visited on June 15, 2014.
  23. <<http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Culture/view?articleId=99639>>, visited on June 21, 2014.
  24. <<http://reviews.libraryjournal.com/2011/04/prepub/interviews/publishers-perspective-an-interview-with-knopf-vp-robin-desser-on-kyung-sook-shins-please-look-after-mom/>>, visited on June 21, 2014.

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