

PROBLEMS IN TRANSLATING A KOREAN LITERARY TEXT INTO ENGLISH: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PROFESSIONAL AND NOVICE TRANSLATORS

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Abstract. *This paper provides a comparative analysis of the problems encountered by professional and novice translators in the process of translating a Korean literary text into English. Translations of eighteen sentences selected from Son Won-pyung's novel "Almond", produced by four participants, were examined on the basis of Mathieu's classification. The results showed that the number of grammatical, lexical, rhetorical and pragmatic errors was considerably higher among novice translators than among professionals. The importance of a holistic understanding of the text, of selecting context-appropriate units and of revising the translation in literary translation is substantiated.*

Keywords: *literary translation, Korean language, English language, translation problems, lexical choice, grammatical error, pragmatic problem, professional translator.*

INTRODUCTION

Under the conditions of globalisation, translation is one of the principal means of ensuring the exchange of information between representatives of different languages and cultures. Munday interprets translation as the process of converting a written text in a source language into a written text in another language (Munday, 2016). This process, however, is not the mechanical replacement of the words of the source text with units of the target language, but requires the recreation of content, style, pragmatic purpose and cultural features. In a literary text in particular, since imagery, the author's style and implicit meaning are interconnected, a word-for-word approach often leads to a loss of content.

Observation shows that students who have only begun to study translation frequently start work without reading the text in full and rely on the first equivalent given in the dictionary. Such an approach leads to the incorrect interpretation of grammatical structure, word meaning, rhetorical devices and communicative intention. Baker shows that in determining equivalence at word level it is necessary to take context, the semantic



field and the norms of the target language into account together (Baker, 2011). Nida emphasised the correspondence of the receptor's response in translation (Nida, 1964), while Nord regards the function of the target text as the priority (Nord, 1997). Mathieu, for his part, divides the problems encountered in translation into lexical-semantic, grammatical, rhetorical, pragmatic and cultural groups (Mathieu, 2003).

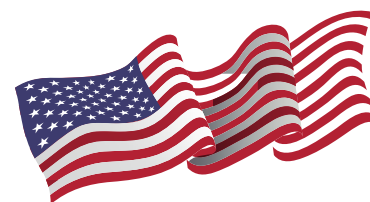
The aim of the research is to identify the types of translation problems on the example of a literary passage rendered from Korean into English by professional and novice translators, to compare their quantitative proportions and to develop practical recommendations that serve to reduce errors.

MAIN PART

The research was based on a qualitative approach and on the case-study method. Creswell describes the case study as a research strategy that makes it possible to study a particular problem in depth within a real context (Creswell, 2013). Eighteen Korean sentences from Son Won-pyung's novel "Almond" were selected as the material. Four female translators took part in the study: two professional translators (PT1, PT2) and two novice translators (NT1, NT2). The professional participants were specialists teaching in the field of translation, while the novice participants were students of a translation department who had been engaged in practical translation from time to time.

Chesterman and Williams note that the systematic comparison of source and target texts is an important method of qualitative analysis in translation studies research (Chesterman & Williams, 2002). On this basis the participants' translations were compared with the source text. The cases identified were coded according to the five criteria of Mathieu's classification – lexical choice, grammar, rhetoric, pragmatics and cultural units (Mathieu, 2003). The analysis took into account not only the presence of an error but also the extent to which it affected the content of the source text and the naturalness of the target text.

In assessing the quality of translation, House directs attention to the functional and pragmatic correspondence of the source and target texts (House, 1997). Waddington, for his part, shows that in evaluating student translations it is necessary to distinguish between translation errors affecting content and errors of expression in the target language (Waddington, 2001). The analysis carried out on the basis of these approaches showed



that a total of seven problems were recorded among the professional translators and a total of forty among the novice translators. No cultural problems were identified in either group. This situation does not mean, however, that the cultural factor is insignificant in literary translation; it means only that no distinct cultural unit occurred within the eighteen sentences selected.

Code	Level	Lexis	Grammar	Rhetoric	Pragmatics	Culture
PT1	Professional	1	0	1	1	0
PT2	Professional	1	0	1	2	0
NT1	Novice	8	7	3	2	0
NT2	Novice	6	6	4	4	0

Table 1. Distribution of translation problems by participant

The problem of lexical choice was the type most frequently encountered among the novice translators. When the contextual meaning of a polysemous unit was not determined, a variant that was lexically possible but inappropriate to the situation was selected. For example, the phrase “Eojenasireom, mupyoeonghage” was rendered by NT2 as “Like yesterday, emotionlessly”. Although this variant is grammatically comprehensible, the meaning “as always” of the phrase “eojenasireom” and the facial expression of the character are not reflected naturally. PT1’s variant, “Just standing there with blank eyes, as always”, conveys the context and the literary tone more precisely.

Grammatical problems were observed only in the work of the novice translators. They consist of errors relating to verb tense, word form, pronouns and sentence construction. Vinay and Darbelnet consider transposition – that is, changing the grammatical category while preserving the content – to be an important device in overcoming structural differences between languages (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995). In the translation of the sentence “Aideuri modu sarajin hu, naneun yuyuhui yuchiwon geonmureul ppajyeonawatta” as “After children have gone had gone, I wandered out of the kindergarden”, auxiliary verbs were added inappropriately and a spelling error was made. Since the syntactic systems of Korean and English differ, the direct transfer of the source-language order produced artificial constructions in the target language.

Rhetorical problems are connected with an insufficient understanding of figurative expression or stylistic colouring. When a metaphor or an implicit image in a literary text



is rendered word for word, it may create a strange or incorrect impression for the target reader. For this reason the translator must first determine the function of the expression within the text and then select a natural device that produces the same effect in English.

Pragmatic errors arose as a result of the incorrect interpretation of the communicative intention of the source sentence. The Korean unit “napgoldang” was translated by NT1 as “charnel house” and by PT1 as “mausoleum”. Although both units are lexically close, depending on the precise context and cultural situation the English variant “columbarium” may be still more appropriate. This example shows that professional experience reduces the number of errors, but that the need to verify specialised and cultural units remains for all translators.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the English translations of a Korean literary text showed that professional experience has a considerable influence on the number and scale of translation problems. Among the novice translators, problems relating to lexical choice and grammatical construction were particularly predominant, while rhetorical and pragmatic errors weakened the literary effect and the communicative purpose of the text.

In order to reduce errors, a translator should read the text in full before translating, determine the contextual meaning rather than the meaning of an isolated word, verify terms and cultural units against reliable sources, and revise the completed translation in grammatical, stylistic and pragmatic terms. In translator education, the parallel analysis of professional and novice translations, the classification of errors according to Mathieu’s criteria and exercises directed at justifying the solution selected produce effective results.

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